



FLITWICK TOWN COUNCIL
Minutes of the Flitwick Town Council meeting held on
Tuesday 15th April 2025 at the Rufus Centre at 7:45pm

Present:

Cllr J Roberts (Chairman)
Cllr A Snape
Cllr I Blazeby
Cllr H Hodges
Cllr T Harald
Cllr F Patterson
Cllr P Earles
Cllr T Parsons
Cllr L Bandy
Cllr D Toinko
Cllr A Crawford

John Tizard - Bedfordshire Police & Crime Commissioner
Janine Graham – Inspector, Bedfordshire Police

2 members of the public

Also present:

Stacie Lockey – Town Clerk & Chief Executive
Stephanie Stanley – Deputy Town Clerk & RFO

5791. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

It was **resolved** to accept apologies for absence from Cllrs Platt, Thompson, and Wilsmore (holiday).

5792. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

To receive Statutory Declarations of Interests from Members in relation to:

- (a)** Disclosable Pecuniary interests in any agenda item – none.
- (b)** Non-Pecuniary interests in any agenda item – none.

5793. TOWN MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Town Mayor commented that it had been a busy month of civic engagements, including:

- Flitwick Town Council (FTC) Quiz Night raised almost £600 for the Town Mayor's charities. The event was nearly sold out. The Town Mayor thanked the Officers for their hard work organising it and Cllr Thompson for being the Quizmaster.
- The Cost-of-Living Fair
- Sandy Town Council Civic Service

Tina Connell had resigned as Town Councillor. The Town Mayor thanked Tina for her hard work and wished her the best for the future.

Members were reminded about two upcoming meetings:

- Annual Assembly Meeting on 29th April
- Annual Statutory Meeting on 20th May which will involve the election of the Town Mayor and the Committee Choices process for the next civic year

5794. Leader Update

Flitwick Community Fridge

The Town Mayor's Charity had now fully funded the van project, which was to be discussed later in the meeting. Having the van would change operations, and the Leader was looking forward to doing the Food Hub pop-up sessions at Kingsmoor Lower School and the Roman Way area of Flitwick.

The Regional Director for Fair Share had visited the Community Fridge the previous week, and they had been very impressed and supportive of the initiative. The Director endorsed the project's open access model and the aspiration to continue assisting people in need.

Senior Living Accommodation Development – Steppingley Road

Ward Members Heather Townsend and Ian Adams had been pushing CBC Officers for information about the continued delays to the above development, and they had been advised only this week that the project was now delayed until October 2025. The move of Ferndale residents to the site would begin at this time. The Ward Members were advocating for residents as the construction project was causing a significant impact on the community, e.g., traffic issues on Steppingley Road and noise for nearby residents. The Leader commented that the consistent delays were unacceptable and that CBC needed to look at the performance of this contract and seek compensation. The Leader suggested contacting Farrans and discussing the social value elements of the contract.

5795. REPORTS FROM WARD MEMBERS

There was no report.

5796. PUBLIC OPEN SESSION

Mr Culman had attended the meeting regarding the report circulated on the Steppingley Field planning application. He read aloud the content relating to the impact on drainage and advised that the flow of water went down the side of the Leisure Centre, the side of Fry Grove, under the footpath and railway, then emerged onto Ampthill Road. He mentioned a blockage between Ampthill Road and the western side of the railway. He said that Cllr Adams was aware of this situation. Mr Culman advised the Council that elements about the flooding impact had been missed in the report circulated for this meeting.

Mr Culman wanted to ask the Council about their objections to the Steppingley Field application and how the FTC development was different concerning the impact of flooding.

Cllr Hodges explained that he had written the Planning Improvement Working Group (PIWG) report but was unaware of the further blockage in the drainage. Mr Culman stated that he could forward evidence of this matter. Cllr Hodges stated that he was unsure

about the second question raised by Mr Culman but assumed that the two developments would undergo separate assessments by the planning officers.

Cllr Snape mentioned that he and Mr Culman had exchanged extensive emails about this matter and that FTC had provided him with a response regarding the flooding impact for the land sale. Cllr Snape reiterated that the Council had contracted professionals to undertake the necessary assessments and that attenuation ponds were being included in the design. Mr Culman commented that when he approached the surveyors on site about this issue, the contractor did not appear to know about the problem.

Cllr Snape was unsure how else to explain FTC's position or clarify this matter further. Cllr Snape reiterated that FTC was going ahead with this application unless a professional contracted by the Council raised something to stop this process from continuing.

The Chairman explained to Mr Culman that he was entitled to his opinions and to continue to share his views with the Council. Mr Culman advised that he would possibly raise further matters in the second public session of the meeting.

5797. INVITED SPEAKER

John Tizard, Bedfordshire's Police & Crime Commissioner (PCC), apologised for his late visit to Flitwick and explained that the PCC's role was strategic and included legal responsibilities regarding the Criminal Justice System.

Cllr Crawford entered the meeting at 20:01.

In October 2024, the PCC published a plan to set the direction for the next four years. He explained the PCC's aims and responsibilities regarding seeking greater clarity on Government policy, setting the Police budget, holding the Chief Constable to account, and hearing the public's views.

Members were informed about statistics on court system wait times and reoffending rates for prisoners released.

The PCC's priorities were related to:

- Prevention of crime
- Reinvigorating local policing (including on-street policing)
- Tackling serious crime such as county lines and misogynistic crime against women and children
- Improving the Police service

The PCC stated that Flitwick was not a hotspot, but it did have crime, including antisocial behaviour, issues with cannabis, retail crime, and speeding, to name a few. The PCC asked FTC to explain their police priorities and how the Police could do better or operate differently.

Questions

The Chairman commented on the fundamental issue of Bedfordshire being funded as a shire county. He asked if the funding would address the imbalance. The PCC stated that this had always been an issue as the Home Office deemed Bedfordshire a rural county and therefore had the lowest funding of any police service. This was made up of 60%

Government grant and 40% through Council Tax. The PCC was pushing for a change in the formula and had conversations with the Home Secretary about this. He hoped for change, but there was a political challenge. The PCC hoped that the special grants accessible to Bedfordshire would be extended and rolled into the annual budget instead of being applied for each year.

Cllr Snape looked at the Flitwick crime statistics and cross-referenced these with the community's views in the annual residents' survey. He mentioned that residents feel there are crime issues in Flitwick, and there was a sense that people did not feel safe walking in the town centre at night. Cllr Snape asked about perception and if the PCC had ideas about combating this. Cllr Snape mentioned the improved CCTV had enabled the Police to track crime better, but he asked about the possibility of a combined campaign from the Council and the Police.

Inspector Janine Graham commented that perception was a huge part of this and that the Police's recent move to its Doolittle Mill base would help. She stated that there would be an increased Police presence with more vehicles passing through Flitwick due to this move. Inspector Graham provided some information about the number of officers from different departments who are due to be based at Doolittle Mill, and she explained that the response times for Flitwick crimes would be improved.

Cllr Earles asked if there were plans to increase the Police presence on the streets. Inspector Graham mentioned that the Police often parked up and patrolled areas of the town.

Cllr Bandy asked about the potential for more opportunities to offer young people with the Police cadets. Inspector Graham was unsure about the advertising done for Flitwick, but she would ask about increasing this. Members understood that the cadet sessions operated from Kempston.

Inspector Graham mentioned that the Police had tried to set up a Shop Watch scheme connected to CCTV to prevent and detect crime; however, there had been little interest from shop owners. She stated that the Police intended to try and launch the scheme again, but with a combined approach with Ampthill businesses. Members were informed that the Co-op and Budgens experienced crime, but this scheme relied on shopkeepers buying into the idea.

Cllr Snape asked if there were other areas the Council could look to extend its CCTV coverage. Inspector Graham mentioned that the Brookes Road shops location, Hinksley Road, Park/Roman Way, and St. Peter's Close would be helpful.

Cllr Earles asked about knife crime in Flitwick. Inspector Graham advised that not many instances of knife crime were reported, but there was a real concern about this for Bedfordshire as a whole. The PCC stated that the county was within the top ten knife crime areas (predominantly Luton and Bedford offenses). The statistics showed numbers decreasing, but the severity of attacks was increasing, which was a concern. The PCC commented that the Government needed to address this matter regarding the sale of knives.

The PCC stated that the statistics did not necessarily inform the whole picture, and that the new PCC anti-social behaviour strategy needed to be signed off by the summer. He added that the most significant cause of crime was related to drugs, including retail crime.

The PCC and Inspector Graham left the meeting at 20:34.

5798. MEMBERS QUESTIONS

Cllr Hodges asked whether a physical barrier previously separated the Village Hall car park and the Town Council car park beside it. The Town Clerk advised that there used to be barriers, but these kept being damaged or needing repairs. She added that the delineation was now in the form of a white line. Cllr Snape agreed to explain the background to this to Cllr Hodges separately.

5799. MINUTES AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF MEETINGS

- a. For Members to approve the minutes of the Town Council Meeting held, on **Tuesday 18th March 2025**, this meeting was held at the Rufus Centre.

It was **resolved** to approve the minutes of the Town Council meeting held on Tuesday 18th March 2025 at the Rufus Centre.

5800. MATTERS ARISING

- a. Minutes of the Town Council Meeting held on Tuesday 18th March 2025 – no items.
- b. Members to receive any updates from Officers – no items.

5801. OUTSIDE BODIES

Cllr Snape formally requested that the Deputy Town Mayor provide Members with an update on business at the Beds Association of Town & Parish Councils. He mentioned that this could be copies of meeting minutes.

Action: Town Clerk

5802. ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION

- a. **Planning application Land South of Steppingley Road, Flitwick CB/22/04108/FULL**

Cllr Hodges thanked PIWG members for taking the time to read through the information on CBC's website so that he could compose a response to the application. He mentioned that Members knew the application would return, but it had come back with some vigour. Last week, the PIWG met, along with other FTC Members, to discuss several issues with the proposed development.

The new application did not change the pressure on traffic in the area, although a new survey had been completed. There were no concrete plans to make improvements. The FTC's response to this application included an additional point relating to the proposed new leisure site in Stewartby, which aimed to attract eight million visitors per year. Other new subjects introduced related to the loss of agricultural land and the drainage impact.

The Chairman thanked Cllr Hodges for his work on this report.

Cllr Snape advised that he had attended the PIWG meeting to discuss this application, and he fully supported the groups proposed response. He mentioned that the proposed development did not meet the required targets for affordable housing. Cllr Snape had been trying to see a copy of the Head of Terms document between CBC and the developer but this had disappeared from the website. Cllr Snape requested that FTC formally request that the Head of Terms be made accessible as there was a requirement for this for a development of this size. He added that FTC needed to be fully appraised on the situation and that Ward Members had been updated on this.

Cllr Hodges commented that he had seen some information about Section 106 contributions and that it appeared to be quite generous.

It was **resolved** to object to planning application CB/22/04108/FULL as stated in the circulated PIWG report.

b. Governance Review

Members were reminded that an informal conversation had taken place about this item at the previous meeting. Based on that discussion, Cllr Snape had prepared a report that captured the views of all members. Cllr Snape commented that there had been a majority agreement to abolish the two parish wards (East and West) and for Flitwick to be considered one ward. It was proposed that the number of Flitwick Councillors be lowered from 17 to 13 because there was insufficient interest from the community to keep the membership at 17. The final element of the Governance Review related to conversing with Steppingley Parish Council about the boundary line between the two parishes.

Cllr Patterson questioned why FTC would lower its membership to below the current numbers. He also did not see why having vacant positions filled by co-option was problematic, and that reducing the number of Members to 13 would provide less opportunity for other residents to represent their community. Cllr Patterson was also unsure why FTC would want to lower its Membership to force an election.

Cllr Snape responded that the Council had a legal obligation to carry the seats. Cllr Snape was keen on a parish election and commented that the number of members joining the Council by co-option was disruptive and time-consuming, with the induction process, etc. Cllr Snape added that with an election, those interested in joining the Council must 'really' want to do it. He would be happy for FTC's membership to be at 15, but commented that maintaining this number had been challenging over recent years.

Cllr Patterson asked about the relevance of the General Power of Competence (GPC) and the number of current Members co-opted. The Town Clerk advised that this was not a problem currently, but two-thirds of the Members must be elected at the beginning of the next four-year Council term. Cllr Snape commented that without the GPC, FTC would struggle to operate.

Cllr Earles questioned what FTC was doing wrong, unable to maintain its members. Cllr Snape commented that this was a national problem, but mostly it was about work-life balance when people chose to leave the Council. Cllr Blazeby added that the business FTC transacts was beyond the usual scale of a Town Council of Flitwick's size. Cllr Blazeby believed having a membership of 13 would not detract from adequately representing the Flitwick community, but commented that Members did need to give up a significant amount of time to fulfil the role.

Cllr Roberts was concerned about filling the Committees with 13 Members and believed 15 would work better.

Cllr Toinko shared his views:

- He was in favour of Flitwick becoming one ward
- He believed 13 members was insufficient to fill the FTC Committees and added that reducing the membership too low would load more tasks onto fewer members
- He disagreed with the assumption that co-opted Members were more likely to resign, as this related to their personal circumstances at the time changing
- He commented that in recent years, elections were uncontested, and the one in 2019 was not very competitive

Cllr Snape advised that the Council could change the numbers associated with its committees.

Cllr Blazeby added that the frequency of meetings can be altered. For example, business meetings were now quarterly instead of monthly.

Cllr Hodges agreed with Cllr Toinko and mentioned the other roles to be filled, e.g. representatives on the Patient Group and the Police Priority Setting meetings. He asked about considering reducing Committee memberships to an odd number.

The Chairman asked Members to partake in an indicative vote regarding the number of members as part of the Governance Review. This vote showed:

- 6 members in favour of reducing the number to 15 Members
- 4 members in favour of reducing the number to 13 Members

It was **resolved** to ask CBC to do the following as part of the Governance Review for Flitwick:

- i) Abolish the East and West Wards and instate one Flitwick Parish Ward for the town
- ii) To reduce the number of Council Members from 17 to 15.

It was **resolved** that the Town Clerk and the Leader meet with representatives from Steppingley Parish Council to discuss parish boundaries between Flitwick and Steppingley.

Action: Town Clerk

c. Key Holder

Cllr Snape mentioned that Cllr Crawford had volunteered for the Community Fridge initiative for a long time and that having him as a key holder for the Rufus Centre would provide operational flexibility for facilitating food deliveries at weekends.

It was **resolved** that Cllr Crawford be made a key holder for the Rufus Centre.

d. Community Services Committee

It was **resolved** that Cllrs Bandy and Crawford be elected as members of the Community Services Committee.

e. Flitwick Community Fridge

Cllr Snape advised that it had long been a long-standing aspiration for the Community Fridge project to have its own vehicle. He provided Members with some background information about how using the Public Realm Team's trucks was now unviable and the limitations on how much food produce could be collected by volunteers using their own vehicles. This was affecting the project's ability to meet demand.

Fundraising had occurred through the Town Mayor's Charity, and £18,000 had been secured, which could be paid to FTC as a grant to purchase a van and install an electric charge point at the Rufus Centre. Cllr Snape explained the benefits of having an electric vehicle.

Members were informed that this proposal asked FTC to approve this idea and for the Council to pick up insurance and running costs for the van, which amounted to a 10% contingency from the Central Projects Fund (CPF).

Cllr Patterson supported the proposal and asked whether any electrical infrastructure would be required for the charge point. Cllr Snape confirmed that this was not necessary for 'trickle charging'.

Cllr Blazeby asked about where the charge point was to be installed. Cllr Snape believed this was an Officer's decision.

Cllr Earles asked about the make and model of the proposed van. Cllr Snape commented that the best option would be selected at the time.

It was **resolved** to:

- i) Authorise the purchase of a pre-owned electric van and install an electrical charging point at the Rufus Centre for the Community Fridge.
- ii) The project budget would be £18,000 (funded by the Town Mayor's Charity grant) with up to 10% contingency. Any contingency would be funded from the CPF.
- iii) The insurance and maintenance costs would be funded by the Cost of Living Earmarked Reserve in financial year 25-26, and incorporated into the revenue budget for subsequent years.

5803. ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

a. Finance Reports

The RFO explained that this item was included on the agenda in error. Finance reports were not due to be discussed at the meeting, as her team needed to complete the Year-End process before presenting any finance reports.

b. Delegated Authority Decision

Cllr Earles asked if she and Cllr Toinko could discuss this item, considering they were allotment holders. The Town Clerk explained that this item was only for noting.

Members noted the delegated authority decision to instruct Smith Jenkins to apply to the Secretary of State for consent to dispose of 'statutory' allotment land for £4,000.

5804. PUBLIC OPEN SESSION

Mr Culman was disappointed in the advertising the Council put out regarding the allotments site in Steppingley Road and the land sale project. He mentioned that the Council had previously stated that a public consultation would take place, but this consultation was now included in the Annual Assembly meeting. Mr Culman asked if residents would have sufficient time to ask questions about the proposed development if the consultation were done this way.

The Town Clerk stated that Snowdon Homes and Ascent would have a stand at the Annual Assembly, and representatives from both companies would be on hand to answer residents' questions before or during the meeting.

Mr Culman commented that the capital receipt that the Council would receive as part of the land sale would need to be spent to purchase allotment land or improve existing allotment sites. He mentioned that on the Council's paperwork, it was clear that there were intentions to spend this money to make improvements across the town, but he stated that, in his opinion, this would not comply with legislation.

Cllr Snape advised that the Council had sought legal advice from the National Association of Town & Parish Councils on this matter. He told Mr Culman that the Council would discuss possible improvements to the allotments, such as toilets, but these ideas

were yet to be debated formally. Cllr Snape explained to Mr Culman that there would be deductions from the land sale, which would reduce the capital receipt received.

Mr Culman commented that the Council should improve the allotments after receiving this income and that toilets would be welcomed as a start. He explained that allotment holders were losing roadways and plots as part of this project, and there was a bad feeling.

The Town Clerk mentioned that she and Mr Culman had previously spoken about this situation and that she had met with the affected allotment holders. She explained that the Council would be circulating information soon, but no allotment holders had approached Officers with any concerns.

Mr Culman commented that he had researched what Ascent Housing does and explained that, as a company, they do a lot of developments for asylum seekers. Mr Culman referred to the Council's paperwork and asked if the houses would be for local people (as advertised) or asylum seekers. The Town Clerk responded that she had not heard anything about this project being for asylum seekers and that the Council would work with CBC's Housing Team for allocations.

Cllr Snape stated that the split between affordable rent and shared ownership was currently unknown. The marketing would first be sent to people with a familiar link to Flitwick. However, ultimately, the affordable housing was decided by the existing allocation system, which was oversubscribed, and FTC would not have a say on this.

Cllr Snape explained that FTC was responsible for ensuring that the conditional contract detailed exactly what the Council wanted.

Another resident had attended the meeting and advised that she lived on Steppingley Road and was interested in the Council's discussions on the proposed development for Steppingley Field. The proposed flats were opposite her house, and they would encroach on her privacy, which made her want to leave the town she had lived in for over 30 years. The resident explained that Steppingley Road had undergone a significant amount of work during the last 10 years, being dug up multiple times, etc.

The Chairman commented that the Council had voted to object to the latest application for Steppingley Field development and this would be forwarded to CBC.

The two residents left the meeting at 21:26.

5805. EXEMPT ITEMS

The following resolution will be **moved** that is advisable in the public interest that the public and press are excluded whilst the following exempt item issue is discussed.

a. Confidential Report

The report was noted.

Pursuant to section 1(2) of the public bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 Council **resolve** to exclude the public and press by reason of the confidential nature of the business about to be transacted.

The meeting closed at 21:35.

Signed (Chairman)