



FLITWICK TOWN COUNCIL

Draft Minutes of Flitwick Town Council's Annual Assembly meeting held on Tuesday 28th April 2026 at The Rufus Centre at 7:30pm

Present:

Cllr J Roberts (Chairman)
Cllr A Snape
Cllr I Blazeby
Cllr C Thompson
Cllr H Hodges
Cllr L Bandy
Cllr M Platt
Cllr D Toinko
Cllr R Wilsmore
Cllr T Harald
Cllr P Earles
Cllr A Crawford
Cllr F Patterson
Cllr L Hart

Also present:

Cllr I Adams – Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC) Ward Member
Stacie Lockey- Town Clerk & Chief Executive
Stephanie Stanley – Deputy Town Clerk & RFO
Mathew Earles – Business & Facilities Manager
Beverley Jones – Communications & Marketing Manager
7 residents

1. APOLOGIES

It was **resolved** to accept apologies from Cllr Parsons (work).

2. MINUTES OF MEETING

It was **resolved** to adopt the Minutes of the Annual Assembly held on Tuesday 29th April 2025.

3. MATTERS ARISING

No items.

4. TOWN MAYOR CIVIC UPDATE

The Town Mayor, Cllr Roberts, advised that it had been another busy year and he had attended many civic events representing Flitwick Town Council. These events included ones organised by the Lord Lieutenant and the High Sheriff of Bedfordshire, the fellow Mayor's engagements and various commemorations, including Luton Borough Council's 150th Anniversary. Other events included the 'Best Bar None' celebration at Priory House, where a couple of Flitwick Public Houses were nominated. The Town Mayor commented that it had been an honour to attend all these events throughout the year.

The Town Mayor mentioned that he had hosted the Flitwick Town Council (FTC) Civic Reception and attended many FTC events, including Remembrance Sunday and the Family Fun Day.

The Town Mayor explained that his role was to maintain relationships in the town and at other civic events, and to chair the Council meetings.

The Town Mayor commented that it had been an impressive year for the Flitwick Town Mayor's Charity, raising £41,681. A large proportion of this had been generated via grant funding. Since the charity had raised over £40,000, the organisation was subject to an independent examination of its accounts.

The Town Mayor provided a brief update on Flitwick Community Fridge and advised that his chosen charities for the year had been the Mid Beds Citizens' Advice Bureau alongside the Flitwick Town Mayor's Charity. The Town Mayor advised that the Charity would provide further funding to local causes in May and that a list of organisations that had previously benefited was available on the Council's website. The Town Mayor commented that one of the best things about being in the role was to hand over fundraising to local causes.

This year, the Town Mayor introduced a Special Recognition Awards Scheme to recognise volunteers who contribute to the community. He mentioned that it was for those individuals who 'go that little bit further' for others. Five individuals received awards for their outstanding contributions at the recent Civic Reception. The Town Mayor hoped that whoever was in the role next year would continue this scheme and possibly expand it further.

5. LEADER UPDATE

The Leader, Cllr Snape, explained that the Town Mayor and Leader roles were created two years ago and outlined the responsibilities associated with each position. He advised that he would be stepping away from the role at the May Council meeting.

Cllr Snape gave the following updates:

- Inflationary pressures had been experienced across all areas, including the National Pay Award, which was still being negotiated. It had been an expensive year with a lot of capital works. The running of the large hospitality business left the café exposed to tough economic pressures, but the Business & Facilities Manager and his team had done a brilliant job.
- The Precept had been increased by 3% for the 2026-27 financial year.
- The Town Clerk & the Deputy Town Clerk had done a good job managing the cash flow and capital project of 3 Station Road's refurbishment, which had come in under budget. Cllr Snape commented that this was a major achievement since the project had been managed prior to the land sale capital receipt. He added that budget controls had been implemented mid-year, and that the Finance & General Purposes Committee had done a good job of overseeing the Council's cash flow.
- The refurbishment of 3 Station Road had been completed in June of last year and the Cottage Bakery became tenants of the retail unit in September. The bakery were pleased with their trading to date and it showed that high quality local businesses do work in Flitwick.
- The other unit had been fit out to a shell and core specification under the advice of the agent and the Council were continuing to work on securing a tenant. Cllr Snape highlighted the Council's aims to get the right tenant rather than progressing at pace with the wrong tenant. The vacant unit was not causing the Council a budget pressure at present.

- Some projects had been deferred to the coming year.
- The land sale project was continuing, and Cllr Snape provided an explanation on the affordable homes that would be made available there, including shared ownership properties. The Planning Officer would decide the application outcome, and the Section 106 agreement was in its final stage of completion. Cllr Snape advised that this project would deliver a significant capital receipt.
- Investment had been made in improving the town's public realm, including the carriage drive improvements at Manor Park. Cllr Snape commented on the residents' involvement at the site on the Action Day.
- Work had been done at the Millennium Park and the Skatepark. Access at the skatepark had been improved, and it was lovely to see so many young people there every day.
- Improvements had been made in the town centre, including grounds maintenance from the Town Council staff beside the transport interchange at the station. The Public Realm Team had done an amazing job so far. CBC were paying the Council to undertake this work. Cllr Snape noted that residents wanted the Council to take on more work like this, and Cllr Adams had been helpful in explaining how it might be possible to work together.
- The Community Fridge was Cllr Snape and several other Members' passion. He commented that it had been an amazing year, and a lot had changed. The project had donated 8.23 tonnes of food, demonstrating the scale of the initiative compared to similar ventures elsewhere. Cllr Snape mentioned the Household Support Fund, the work that had been undertaken to get to know the fridge's beneficiaries and the volunteers' efforts to reduce the reliance on Tesco to provide the produce. An impressive 150 collections were done per month, and a lot of work went on behind the scenes. This project had turned into something very big.
- The Rufus Centre continued to play an important role in the finances and life of the town. Last year it generated £890k of revenue and delivered a £111k surplus. The Rufus Centre generated valuable income streams that can be reinvested into the community. It supports high-quality local jobs and services for local businesses. There were 25 businesses that had tenanted office space.
- The Rendezvous Café generated £390k of revenue and a £9.5k surplus. The venue was important for providing a safe, affordable space for residents, thereby bringing them closer to the Council. Looking at the wider economic situation, the café did not perform badly last year, with a small surplus. Cllr Snape advised that, as long as the café was making a profit, it was good value overall, and commented on the challenges in improving on this level of surplus.
- The BFM had worked hard on office and commercial spaces in the centre, and Cllr Snape commented on the building remaining fully occupied by tenants. Tenant rent income generated a significant income for the Council. Throughout the year, several offices were refurbished as part of the rolling programme, improving the quality of the spaces and the building's attractiveness.
- National Theatre Live screenings had brought a different cultural event to offer for the community, and these had been going well, with good feedback.

6. RESIDENTS SURVEY FEEDBACK

Cllr Snape gave the following update:

- The Annual Residents Survey was started by Cllr Blazeby in 2022 so that Members could track how FTC compared to feedback generated as part of the Local Government Association's (LGA) national statistics. The questions aligned to the LGA's version of the survey.

- There were 370 respondents this year, and the responses were interesting for the Council.
- There were different remits for CBC and the Town Council, so a summary was provided about the Council's role in influencing other bodies to build residents' confidence with issues. The roles were blurred because residents saw 'the Council' as one organisation.
- A summary was provided about cuts at CBC in relation to the Fair Funding Review and the funding that was required at CBC for Adult Social Care and Children's Services.
- Cllr Snape spoke about the major challenges with highways and infrastructure, as well as expectations being higher post-pandemic. Issues were not being tackled
- AI had been used to provide insight into the data received from the survey.
- Residents consistently reported in the survey that they experienced difficulties contacting services or getting a response.
- Over 50% of the replies related to issues that the Police or CBC were responsible for.
- Flitwick remains well-regarded, and there was a sense of belonging; however, the confidence in the Council had fallen drastically since previous years.
- Cllr Snape talked through some of the specific numbers and compared these to the years prior and the national picture.
- The top issues related to visibility in everyday issues like parking, seeing more enforcement, speeding, litter and anti-social behaviour. There were other issues mentioned repeatedly in the responses, like dog fouling and vandalism, which were also mentioned in the comments.
- Safety concerns were not driven by overall crime levels for Flitwick. The town's crime rate was 37 crimes per 1000 people, 40% lower than the Bedfordshire average.
- Within the comments, there were specific issues mentioned that could be shared with the Police and CBC.
- The parks were part of what made Flitwick a great place to live and formed one of the highest rates of comments in the survey. Manor Park was highly valued, and the green spaces generally. The survey showed that people thought the town was clean and well-kept (except for hot spots), and some expectations were evident, such as the need for investment in Millennium Park and play parks in general. Cllr Snape advised that the Council had a plan to improve the parks.
- The Council needed to be more sensitive to gaps in the community events programme. The flagship events were highly valued, but a broader programme was required – particularly for older people.
- Flitwick was a town that people cared about, and there were a lot of opportunities for partnership working.
- The Council could build on the survey responses, and Cllr Snape pointed out that it was not just about doing more, but doing things a bit differently. He mentioned focusing more on what residents were seeing and experiencing because everyday concerns mattered.
- Cllr Snape commented that he did not know how to bridge the divide between the Council and its residents, but he stated that more listening was required. Steps needed to be taken to strengthen visibility and responsiveness. Cllr Snape touched on the recent social media post by Cllr Wilsmore about the Manor Park work being done, noting that it showed residents wanted to know about it. He went on to say that the Council needed to amend its communications strategy to improve perception.
- Cllr Snape talked about rebuilding and broadening the community offer and how the Council needed to lead locally by working with partners.

7. RESOLUTION AND QUESTIONS

A resident mentioned Cllr Snape's presentation and commented on his pledge for the Council to listen more. The resident stated that he took his kids to the skatepark and thought it was like a building site. The resident referred to the Council being proud of the recent extension of the skatepark, but this was his perception.

The same resident commented on the declining perceptions of the Councils and stated that there were big failures for everyone to see, such as the management of the older people's home.

The resident continued with the following comments:

- The presentations on the evening focused on how well the Council had performed, but more needed to be said about the failures – e.g. potholes.
- The relationship between performance and perception needed to be there.

A resident referred to the Tiny Forest at Hinksley Road, stating that she had emailed Officers to say she was the only volunteer left to maintain the site. The resident was elderly, and she commented that her ability levels had declined and she needed help from the Council's Grounds Team. She also mentioned that more trees were required at the site.

A resident commented on the lack of action taken by CBC to sort out the potholes in the town.

A resident asked if the Annual Residents' Survey responses were the same year on year. He went on to say that people generally would complain more than give praise and referenced the number of signatures generated opposing the Steppingley Road field planning application. He asked how many proportionate responses came from the survey.

Cllr Snape advised that originally the survey generated approximately 200 responses but this year's was closer to 400. He advised that this was a small sample and it was disappointing that more residents did not take part but it gave an insight into residents' views.

The resident asked if it was impossible to know from the sample if it was the same people taking part. Cllr Snape advised that the survey was anonymous so this would be impossible.

A resident commented that she did not go online and she did not know about the survey. She asked if it could be replicated in the Flitwick Papers. She mentioned that there were a lot of things that people did not know about if they did not go online and that these people often felt forgotten. She added that residents should speak to Councillors and attend meetings.

Cllr Roberts advised that the Council encourages residents to comment. He added that the survey was prompted in Flitwick Papers and that the Council would take on board the resident's comments.

A resident spoke about the dissatisfaction statistics shown in the survey responses and believed a lot of this was because there was no bank or Post Office in the town. She advised that there was a Post Office in Maulden Village Hall and therefore questioned why Flitwick could not have one.

Cllr Snape advised that the Council had looked seriously at providing a Post Office and went to deep level business case stage. However, results from an earlier Residents Survey showed that residents did not want the Council to subsidise the service. He added that the numbers made it unviable. There were prior aspirations

to include the service as part of the refurbishment at 3 Station Road, but due to the Post Office model, it would not work because it would not cover its costs. Residents were advised about the amount of time that had passed since the last Post Office in Flitwick and the trends that had emerged since. People now use other services, but Members recognised that it was inconvenient not to have a Post Office in Flitwick. The Council had done some work on a Banking Hub, but it eventually went to Ampthill because there were more small businesses there than in Flitwick.

A resident mentioned the Town Council's and CBC's accounts and said they were difficult to make sense of. He referenced the difficulty residents had with responses from the Council and clarified that this was due to the public communication. The resident stated that he was willing to assist with this. He mentioned that expenditure was detailed, but there was no categorisation with no links to budgets or cost centres in the 'Purchases over £500' documents published.

Cllr Snape responded that Local Government finances were not straightforward and there were different rules applied than in corporate finances. He stated that there were three levels of transparency. There was the Annual Governance & Accountability Return, which provides high-level accounts information on expenditure and the Precept. Budget papers were published in full online, and when the budget was adopted, this was accompanied by a full revenue budget document. Cllr Snape advised that FTC also had two additional cost centres relating to the traded service, and that this was transparent. The Council also published its 'Purchases over £500' documents.

The resident responded that it was impossible to make sense of this and that CBC's accounts had huge shortcomings. The resident said that this meant that residents were unable to see what was going on.

8. OPEN FORUM – MATTERS RELATING TO FLITWICK

No items.

The meeting closed at 20:25.