



FLITWICK TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of Flitwick Town Council's Annual Assembly meeting held on Tuesday 29th April 2025 at The Rufus Centre at 7:30pm

Representatives from Snowdon Homes & Accent Housing had attended the meeting to allow residents to view the proposed plans and ask questions about the development on land at the bottom of Steppingley Road allotments.

Present:

Cllr J Roberts (Chairman)
Cllr I Blazeby
Cllr D Toinko
Cllr C Thompson
Cllr F Patterson
Cllr M Platt
Cllr L Bandy
Cllr R Wilsmore
Cllr T Parsons
Cllr A Crawford

Also present:

Snowdon Homes Representative
Accent Housing Representative
Cllr I Adams – Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC) Ward Member
16 members of the public

Stacie Lockey – Town Clerk & Chief Executive
Stephanie Stanley – Deputy Town Clerk & RFO
Mathew Earles – Business & Facilities Manager
Beverley Jones – Communications & Marketing Manager

Cllr Blazeby welcomed residents to the meeting and advised on the order of business for the evening.

Each of the Committee Chairmen were introduced.

The Chairman thanked residents for attending.

1. APOLOGIES

It was **resolved** to accept apologies for absence from Cllrs Snape (holiday) and Harald (work).

2. MINUTES OF MEETING

Mr Culman (resident) advised that he had two corrections to the minutes presented:

- Mr Culman referred to paragraph 3 under item 6 and reminded Members that his question at the time was about ATMs. Therefore, the information about not relocating to 3 Station Road and leases for future tenants was irrelevant, so this should be removed from the minutes.
- The information about a toucan crossing on Dunstable Road (page 6) was incorrect because there was no such form of crossing at the location. This needed to be removed from the minutes. Mr Culman said there was no school crossing control there because CBC had not recruited anybody for this position.

The Chairman mentioned that his apologies for absence needed to be recorded.

It was **resolved** to adopt the minutes of the Annual Assembly Meeting held on Tuesday, April 30th, 2024, at the Rufus Centre as an accurate record with the amendments discussed.

3. MATTERS ARISING

Mr Culman asked if the Town Council could speak to CBC about the need for the school crossing patrol for Dunstable Road. Cllr Adams advised that he had written to CBC about this, but the response was that CBC did not have funds in the budget for this role. Cllr. Adams was happy to continue pushing for this provision, as he believed the role was necessary and felt that a letter from the Town Council would be helpful.

Action: Town Clerk

4. PRESENTATION & ANNUAL REPORT OF FLITWICK TOWN COUNCIL

The Chairman started the presentation by informing residents about the current membership of Flitwick Town Council (FTC). He advised that there were three vacancies available for residents interested in becoming a Councillor.

The Chairman advised on some of the civic engagements he had attended throughout the year and commented that it had been a privilege for him to serve the people of Flitwick. He added that the year had been positive, and the Council had done a lot to serve the interests of its residents.

The Chairman explained his role as the Town Mayor, including attending civic events, chairing Council meetings, and working with other Members and Officers. He added that he enjoyed attending Flitwick-based events, such as the Car Show, and his involvement in resident Mark Rankine's project, the Airmen Memorial.

Residents were informed that approximately £5,000 had been raised for the Town Mayor's Charities; Keech Hospice and the Town Mayor's Charity CIO. The Chairman commented that the amount could change, subject to remaining income and expenditure for the charity fundraising during April and the first half of May.

The Chairman highlighted the Council's key achievements from the year, including the refurbishment project at 3 Station Road, the Steppingley Road land sale project, and the ongoing work as part of the Community Fridge initiative. He updated residents on improvements to green spaces in the town, the extension of the skatepark project, and the upcoming Family Fun Day. The Chairman also referenced the Council's disappointment at having to cancel the Christmas Lights Switch On event due to adverse weather conditions.

The Chairman reminded residents that representatives from Snowdon Homes and Accent Housing were present to answer any questions about the Steppingley Road land sale.

5. RESIDENTS SURVEY FEEDBACK

Cllr Blazeby introduced the Annual Residents Survey and advised that this was its fourth year. He reminded residents why the Council did the survey and how it linked with the national survey produced by the Local Government Association.

Cllr Blazeby showed residents some statistics based on this year's responses and how these compared to the previous year's survey and responses from the national survey. There were questions about trust in the FTC, residents' satisfaction with the Council's work, and ratings on Flitwick as a place to live.

Residents were informed that the Council sometimes faced challenges in explaining the services it was responsible for and those that fell within CBC's remit. Cllr Blazeby stated that the Flitwick Papers listed the responsibilities in each edition.

Residents were advised that the information received as part of the survey was filtered to each of the relevant Committees. The responses provided insight into what resources the Council should invest in based on residents' wishes. The current survey showed that residents were most satisfied with the green spaces, the Rufus Centre and the Rendezvous Café management, play areas, and community events.

Cllr Blazeby advised that FTC were committed to improving communication with residents.

Improvements made to the Rufus Centre were presented, and residents were reminded that part of the building's purpose was to reinvest any surplus at the end of each financial year in the services of Flitwick.

Cllr Blazeby presented other Rufus Centre priorities, including the tenanted office space refurbishment programme, its community use, and the café.

Residents were informed about the responses relating to perceptions of feeling unsafe at night and how these did not correlate with the town's crime statistics.

The Chairman provided an update on the town's improvements to its green spaces, including the 27,000 trees planted at the Nature Park site. Residents were informed that the Council was waiting for the outcome of this planning application for further site development.

Residents were informed about the Food Hub's dedicated space at the Rufus Centre, which was made available as part of the Council's cost-of-living support.

A brief overview of the Flitwick Living History project was provided.

6. RESOLUTION AND QUESTIONS

A resident asked if Flitwick residents could have priority for the affordable housing as part of the Town Council's land sale project. The representative from Accent Housing explained that a Local Aims Plan included the point of prioritising Flitwick residents first, which was included in the Section 106 agreement. She added that after a period, possibly three months, the eligibility could be extended to Ampthill and other surrounding parishes before cascading. Residents were informed that CBC had advised that a high number of people in need had close connections to Flitwick.

A resident who attended the previous Annual Assembly meeting asked again why Ampthill had a Street Operative and Flitwick did not. This situation frustrated the resident, as Flitwick had a higher need for this service than Ampthill. He went on to

say that the litter gave a bad image for the town. Cllr Adams advised that this matter had been raised with CBC, and CBC had responded that the main road into Ampthill town centre was very narrow, which meant vehicles could not use this road, whereas Flitwick could have a vehicular service. CBC had advised that the service given to Flitwick was equal to the service provided in Ampthill. It was agreed that this matter needed to be challenged further.

The Chairman explained that he had seen the correspondence regarding the request for a Street Operative for Flitwick and that Cllr Adams had attempted to obtain answers. Cllr Blazeby reminded residents that the Council organised litter pick events and asked people to get involved. The resident who enquired about the Street Operative stated that he had helped at the litter pick events. Cllr Blazeby pointed out that the Council's Public Realm Team regularly picks up litter around the town as part of their work.

Mr Culman commented that he agreed with many of the things that FTC did; however, he did not agree with how the Council had handled the land sale project north of Steppingley Road allotments for various reasons:

- He believed that FTC had lied in the press statement in January about the impact this would have on allotment holders. Mr Culman said that when he had pointed this out, the Council stated that this project was going ahead anyway.
- He mentioned that his recollection of the information at the March Council meeting was that anybody on the affordable housing list would be eligible, and that priority was not given to Flitwick people.
- The impact on allotment holders was more significant than FTC had stated, since he believed that several partial and full-size plots would be lost, and parking/vehicle tracks would be reduced.
- He mentioned that FTC believed there would not be an effect on allotment holders; however, the boundary would be right against some plots. Mr Culman felt that the development impacted all 140 allotment holders in some form.
- He had not received a proper answer about the impact of chopping down trees and the effects this would have.
- Mr Culman referenced the Government's view on allotments being good for the environment and questioned FTC's alignment with this. He raised concerns about dust and noise pollution. He added that several FTC Members' website bios included environmental and green spaces interests, but this project did not align with that.
- Mr Culman referred to the sale price and how the figure in the published FTC Frequently Asked Questions document did not match the anticipated capital receipt.
- Mr Culman referenced the legalities with statutory allotment land and asked if the Council planned to improve existing sites or acquire additional land as part of this project. Mr Culman referred to the information given at the previous Council meeting, where he was informed that his understanding of the legalities was untrue. Having re-read the legislation, he believed this legal position remained factual. He requested evidence of the legislation permitting the Council to spend this income on other projects in the town and threatened to take this matter elsewhere if FTC did not provide this.
- Mr Culman referenced that FTC had objected to the Steppingley Field development due to the flooding implications; however, the proposed site for the affordable housing was in the middle of this flood area. Mr Culman mentioned that extensive improvements would be required to improve the water flow and that the railway embankment would be a big issue. Mr Culman did not understand how FTC could object to the Steppingley Field development but then make matters worse in their land sale.

In response to Mr Culman's points, the Chairman acknowledged that he could appreciate the strong feelings expressed regarding the land sale; however, he remained perplexed that Mr Culman continued to ask the same questions for which responses had already been provided. CBC had confirmed there was sufficient need from Flitwick residents, and the representative from Accent Housing confirmed that for someone to be on the CBC register, that person required a connection to Central Bedfordshire. From the beginning of this process, a commitment had been made that the housing would be prioritised and allocated to Flitwick residents first, and that these individuals would be sought out while the building work was underway.

The Chairman was at a loss for what else he could say in response to Mr Culman and mentioned that the capital receipt would bring many benefits to other Flitwick-based projects and services. Mitigation had been carefully considered so that the impact on allotment holders was minimal, and professional advice on factors such as flooding had been sought.

The representative from Snowdon Homes advised that she had met Mr Culman on site and that background work was happening to mitigate the concerns he had raised. Snowdon Homes was actively seeking to determine who owned the ditch.

Cllr Blazeby commented that the two sites Mr Culman mentioned were incomparable. He noted that the Steppingley Field development was a scalable project with a significant negative impact. In contrast, the Council's land was allocated for a much smaller proposal for much-needed affordable housing at a site next to some allotments.

Cllr Blazeby picked up on Mr Culman's point about the legalities and explained to residents that there was a third provision within the legislation about capital receipts funding other projects after improvements are made to the allotment site. Cllr Blazeby advised that the Council had yet to decide what it would spend the receipt on, but explained that it was untrue that the funds could only be used to make improvements to the allotments. Cllr Blazeby highlighted that the Council had sought thorough advice on this matter.

Mr Culman requested information about the mitigation measures included in the development to address the flooding impact. The representative from Snowdon Homes stated that there was a plan in place whereby the site would act like a tank, which would improve the current situation by storing water in pipes. Eventually, Accent Home would own the land and would be on hand to resolve any maintenance issues that arose.

Mr Culman commented that the attenuation pond was at the site's lowest point.

Cllr Blazeby stated that the Council had given Mr Culman answers to his questions on multiple occasions. Mr Culman commented that he would raise his concerns at the planning stage.

A resident enquired about the Council's decision to discontinue the Over 60s Lunch Club and raised concerns about the difficulties older people face with using Ticketsolve, the Council's online booking system. The resident commented on her mother's disappointment at these events stopping, noting that for many regular attendees, the Lunch Club was their only outing. The resident added that the new system incurred an additional booking fee, and that the attendees liked to be able to pay at reception.

Cllr Thompson, Chairman of the Community Services Committee, explained that the numbers for Lunch Club had been decreasing prior to the implementation of Ticketsolve. She added that the activity had become costly for the Council, and the

entry fee was not sustainable. Cllr Thompson commented that the Lunch Club took place in the Lockyer Suite, so there was an associated cost of not being able to utilise the room for conferencing. The Council had undertaken a review of the community events programme, which examined income ratios, social value, and where similar activities were already taking place elsewhere. The Lunch Club had been reviewed as an activity that made a loss, and there were alternative provisions locally offering similar options for residents. For these reasons, Lunch Club had been removed from the Council's activities, which Cllr Thompson stated had been a difficult, but necessary, decision.

The resident who asked the question said that attendees were willing to pay more for the Lunch Club to continue, and that a survey would have been good, to ask members how much they were willing to pay. Cllr Thompson responded that the option of surveying had been explored, but that this process was not deemed effective, and therefore, the Officers spoke directly to the attendees instead.

7. OPEN FORUM – MATTERS RELATING TO FLITWICK

No items.

The meeting closed at 20:51.