



FLEET TOWN COUNCIL

MINUTES OF COUNCIL MEETING

held on

Wednesday 5th February 2025 at 7pm

* Councillor Schofield (Chairman)

* Councillor Einchcomb (Vice Chairman)

L Councillor Chenery	* Councillor Richmond
* Councillor Fang	0 Councillor Robinson
* Councillor Holt	* Councillor Stanton
0 Councillor Hope	* Councillor Taylor
0 Councillor James	* Councillor Tilley
* Councillor May	* Councillor Wildsmith
* Councillor Neves	* Councillor Willcocks
0 Councillor Oliver	* Councillor Woods

* Present # Absent & No Apology Received 0 Apology for Absence L Late

Also in attendance:

Rita Tong – Executive Officer
Councillor Steve Forster – HCC
Councillor Adrian Collett – HCC
Councillor Stephen Parker - HCC
Mike Bye – Chair of Friends of Oakley Park

FC FEBRUARY 2025 ITEM 1

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Members received and accepted the apologies as noted above.

FC FEBRUARY 2025 ITEM 2

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Willcocks declared a pecuniary interest in Agenda Item 9 on the grounds he has children who use the bus service.

Councillor Wildsmith declared another registerable interest in Agenda Item 16 on the grounds that he is also a Councillor of Hart District Council.

FC FEBRUARY 2025 ITEM 3

QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

There were no questions from members of the public.

FC FEBRUARY 2025 ITEM 4

CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Cllr Schofield reported his attendance at the Friends of Oakley Park AGM on 1 February 2025. Cllr Schofield said the presentation was very good and thanked Mike Bye for their work.

The following reports were received from Hampshire County Council.

Cllr Adrian Collett (HCC)

- Devolution – Hampshire is on the list for the Devolution Priority Programme with Mayors to be elected by May 2026. Local Government reorganisation will follow. Town & Parish Councils will likely play a larger role in the future.
- Council Tax – Hampshire County Council applied to the Government for permission to raise council tax by 15%. This application was rejected and as a result there will be a loss of services.
- Ancell Farm School Bus Service – there was a constructive meeting held last month. Cllr Collett paid tribute to Cllr Willcocks for all his work on the matter. A temporary solution for the current school year has been brokered but a local solution is still required from September 2025 onwards.
- Ancells Farm Sinkhole – conflicting information has been received by Thames Water. TW have stated they have completed a survey, and nothing was found. HCC have requested copies of this survey. Highways will now undertake the repair of the footpath but the date for the works has not yet been determined.

Cllr Stephen Parker (HCC)

- Tesco/Aldi Roundabouts – in the process of purchasing and installing ‘No Right Turn’ signage.
- Budgets for Reading Road South Crossing is secured with work programmed for this summer.
- Beacon Hill Road junction – there is a meeting planned with Officers on Monday to discuss options for improvements.

Cllr Steve Forster (HCC)

- Ancells Farm Sinkhole – Cllr Forster also contacted TW on this issue and had also received conflicting information.
- Road Works
 - Church Road – pothole repairs scheduled for next week.
 - Upper Street - resurfacing works scheduled for next week.
 - Hitches Lane – work on the crossing scheduled for later this month. Once completed, resurfacing works will commence. New sewer pipes will be laid at a later stage and surface will be reinstated afterwards. There is a Residents Meeting scheduled to discuss what is happening at Hitches Lane – everyone is welcome to attend.
- Devolution – not all applications were approved by the Government. There is support from all parties for Hampshire to be involved in the devolution and local government reorganisation processes.
- Ancell Farm School Bus Service – Cllr Forster is pleased agreement was reached for 2024/25 and has contributed towards the funding of it (as has Cllr Collett).

Councillors Woods asked when the sequencing of the lights at the Fleet Road / Kings Road would be addressed as the situation had worsened. Cllr Forster requested reference numbers of previous logging of the issue to enable him to follow up.

Councillor Woods asked about Albert Road being closed when Upper Street works commenced. Cllrs Forster responded that Albert Street would only be shut when needed, so should be open most of the time.

Councillor Holt asked for further details on the Church Road works. Cllr Forster said he believed the permit was from 12 February and that the works were scheduled to take two days.

There was a fire evacuation at this point in the meeting. Cllrs Forster and Parker did not return to the meeting once meeting recommenced.

FC FEBRUARY 2025 ITEM 6

MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

The minutes of the Town Council meeting held on 8th January 2025 were approved and signed by the Chairman.

The Council received and noted the minutes of the following Committees:

- Development Control 13th and 27th January 2025

FC FEBRUARY 2025 ITEM 7

FINANCIAL MONITORING REPORT

Members noted receipt of the bank reconciliation and a list of payments for December 2024.

Councillor Stanton confirmed that the bank reconciliation and list of payments for December 2024 have been verified and signed off against the original bank statement.

RESOLVED

- 1) To receive and accept the bank reconciliation and list of payments for December 2024.
- 2) To accept the statement from Councillor Stanton that the bank reconciliation and list of payments for December 2024 have been verified and signed off.

FC FEBRUARY 2025 ITEM 8

CREDIT CARDS

The Council's [credit card policy](#) has set an overall limit of £6,000 and a maximum of 5 card holders.

In accordance with this policy, the Executive Officer requested approval to amend the credit card allocations as follows:

Officer	Current Limit	Proposed Limit
Executive Officer	Nil	£1,500
Harlington General Manager	£2,000	£1,500
Senior Duty Manager	£1,500	£1,000
Facilities & Open Spaces Manager	£1,500	£1,000
Project & Committee Officer	£1,000	£1,000
Total	£6,000	£6,000

RESOLVED

Members considered the allocation of credit cards and limits for each Officer and authorised the limits to be amended as proposed.

FC FEBRUARY 2025 ITEM 9

GRANT APPLICATION

Members considered the application for grant funding from Cllr Willcocks on behalf of Ancells Farm parents for up to £3,925 to cover the cost of running a school bus to the end of the 2024/25 school year.

Members noted the update from Cllr Willcocks that Hart District Council had no grant that this application met the criteria for so the full £3,925 was being requested. Cllr Willcocks also informed members that HCC couldn't take different payments from parents.

RESOLVED

Members considered the application awarded the £3,925 subject to the following conditions:

- This grant is an exceptional, one-off contribution, given the historical understanding that a school bus service would be provided due to the absence of a school being built when the Ancells Farm development was built.
- Hampshire County Council has had to withdraw from providing non-statutory school bus places due to financial pressures. The current funding arrangement, as agreed with Hampshire County Council, applies to this school year only.
- Fleet Town Council will act as the collecting agent for all agreed contributions and will make payment to Hampshire County Council once the full amount has been received. If the full amount is not collected, all received contributions will be refunded to the original payers.

Members noted that there was insufficient budget within the Grants cost centre to meet the full amount of the grant and determined that the remaining grants budget should be used with the shortfall coming from General Reserves.

Cllr Collett left the meeting at the end of this item.

FC FEBRUARY 2025 ITEM 10

STANDARDS AND CONDUCT CONSULATION

Members noted that the government is seeking views on proposals to introduce measures to strengthen the standards and conduct regime for local authorities in England. The proposals being consulted upon include:

- The introduction of a mandatory minimum code of conduct for local authorities in England
- A requirement that all principal authorities convene formal standards committees to make decisions on code of conduct breaches, and publish the outcomes of all formal investigations
- The introduction of the power for all local authorities (including combined authorities) to suspend councillors or mayors found in serious breach of their code of conduct and, as appropriate, interim suspension for the most serious and complex cases that may involve police investigations

- A new category of disqualification for gross misconduct and those subject to a sanction of suspension more than once in a 5-year period
- A role for a national body to deal with appeals

RESOLVED

Members authorised the Executive Officer to submit on the Council’s behalf that they believed a single uniform Code should apply across the country.

FC FEBRUARY 2025 ITEM 11

INTERNAL AUDITOR REPORT

Members considered the report from the Council’s Internal Auditor, Mulberry Local Authority Services Ltd, on an interim internal audit conducted on 10 January 2025 for the 2024/25 financial year.

Audit Point	Audit Findings	Proposed Council Response
I. BANK AND CASH	It is clear the council has a robust system in place to complete these key internal control checks, however I recommend the council amends its Financial Regulations to include reference to the bank reconciliation process and suggest using the NALC model Financial Regulation 2.6 as a basis for this, which states ‘At least [once in each quarter], and at each financial year end, a member other than the Chair {or a cheque signatory} shall be appointed to verify bank reconciliations (for all accounts) produced by the RFO. The member shall sign and date the reconciliations and the original bank statements (or similar document) as evidence of this. This activity, including any exceptions, shall be reported to and noted by the council {Finance Committee}.	<p>Agreed.</p> <p><i>Proposed wording to be incorporated in the Financial Regulations:</i></p> <p><i>Every month a member who is not a signatory to the bank account shall verify the bank reconciliations for all accounts. The member shall sign and date the reconciliations and the bank statements as evidence of this. This activity, including any exceptions, shall be reported to and noted by Full Council.</i></p>

RESOLVED

- a) Members considered the findings and recommendations outlined in the Internal Auditor's report and thanked Officers (particularly the Finance Manager) for their work that contributed to such a good report.
- b) Members agreed to amend the Financial Regulations as proposed.

FC FEBRURAY 2025 ITEM12

GROUNDS MAINTENANCE CONTRACT

Members noted that the Facilities and Open Spaces Manager (FOSM), in collaboration with the Parks & Open Spaces Working Group, is in the process of rewriting the grounds maintenance contract to facilitate a tendering exercise. While it was initially planned to complete the tendering process in time for the new contract to commence at the start of the financial year, the Working Group has taken the opportunity to conduct a comprehensive review of the contract's structure. This has extended the time required to finalise the tender documentation. As a result, the original timeline may no longer be achievable, and the FOSM is seeking approval to extend the existing contract by up to three months.

RESOLVED

Members authorised the extension of the current Grounds Maintenance Contract by 3 months.

FC FEBRUARY 2025 ITEM 13

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Members received and noted the following announcements:

- The Fleet Town Football Club lease is completed with both parties having signed as of 5 February 2025.
- The Gurkha Square Car Park lease was signed by Fleet Town Council on 24 January 2025 and submitted to HDC. A completed lease has not been received from HDC.
- The Executive Officer met with Emily Farnham on 30 January 2025 to discuss whether FTC is interested in developing a Digital Town Hub. The EO will arrange an online presentation for Members on this initiative.
- The Basingstoke Canal annual meeting will be on 19 February 2025.
- The Annual Residents Meeting will be on 11 March 2025.

FC FEBRUARY 2025 ITEM 14

DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Council is scheduled to be held on Wednesday 5th March 2025 at 7pm in The Harlington.

CONFIDENTIAL ITEMS – CLOSED SESSION

The Chairman stated that the following items for discussion relate to the engagement and terms of service in relation to employees and terms of tenders, and proposals and counterproposals in negotiations for contracts.

RESOLVED

That subject to the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 Exclusion of the public in accordance with Section 1(2) and by reason of the confidential nature of the business of the Town Council, the Public and Press will be excluded from the meeting.

Members received an update on tendering the grounds maintenance contract.

RESOLVED

Members resolved to delegate the finalisation of the tender documentation to the Parks and Open Spaces Working Group.

Members received the following update from the Chairman:

Members were reminded by the Chairman that it was previously agreed that the Harlington Lease, the land swap and the HCC/HDC/FTC sub-lease were to be signed concurrently. There is no legal requirement to do so but it was thought it would be expedient. However, whilst the Harlington lease has been agreed by all parties, neither the land swap transaction nor the HCC/HDC/FTC sub-lease are in a position to be signed. Therefore, the Chairman seeks Council authorisation to sign the agreements consecutively as they become finalised.

As stated above, the Harlington lease has been agreed. As the lease falls outside the Landlord & Tenancy Act, Fleet Town Council must formally acknowledge that it understands that there is no automatic right of renewal at the end of the lease period before it can sign the lease document. There are two paths the Council can take – a simple declaration which requires a 14 day stand down period or a statutory declaration in front of a Notary that once signed means the lease document can be immediately signed. The Chairman seeks Council authorisation to proceed with a Statutory Declaration and for either the Chairman or the Executive Officer to sign the declaration on behalf of the Council.

The draft HCC/HDC/FTC sub-lease has been reviewed by the Chairman, Executive Officer and the Council's solicitors. Whilst the main lease is between HCC and HDC meaning FTC do not have much influence regarding any of the clauses being changed, nothing was identified in the review that causes the reviewers any concern. The Use Classes mirror the Harlington lease and the access right of the Library have been addressed. The Chairman seeks Council authorisation to sign the sub-lease once received, on the condition that there are no substantive changes to the draft document already reviewed. The lease is to be signed in accordance with Standing Order 16.

The Chairman seeks Council authorisation to proceed with the land swap and for the transfer to be signed in accordance with Standing Order 16.

Members were advised that in relation to the Air Source Heat Pump, that the PSDS technical assessment had identified that due to the scale and complexity of the installation, it was not feasible to achieve the grant funding deadlines. The project would also require significantly more HDC funding (£1.4m). As a consequence, HDC took the decision not to proceed with the project.

The Chairman, Executive Officer and General Manager of the Harlington meet online with the business plan consultants to receive their initial findings. The presentation concentrated on macro elements and the consultants will now develop specific considerations for the Harlington.

RESOLVED

Members resolved to authorise the following:

- The Harlington Lease, the land swap and the HCC/HDC/FTC sub-lease be signed consecutively as they become finalised.
- That either the Chairman or the Executive Officer sign a Statutory Declaration that Fleet Town Council understands that there is no automatic right of renewal at the end of the lease period.
- That the contract with Burrell Foley Fischer for design architectural services be signed once the Harlington Lease is signed.
- The HCC/HDC/FTC sub-lease be signed in accordance with SO16 subject to there being no substantive changes to the draft document already reviewed.
- The land swap transfer documentation be signed in accordance with Standing Order 16.

The meeting closed at 8:36pm.

Signed.....
Chairman

Date.....