



## **FLEET TOWN COUNCIL**

### **MINUTES OF COUNCIL MEETING**

held on

Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> September at 7pm

\* Councillor Schofield (Chairman)

\* Councillor Einchcomb (Vice Chairman)

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

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

#### **Also in attendance:**

Rita Tong – Executive Officer

Councillor Stephen Parker – HCC

Mike Bye – Chair of Friends of Oakley Park

Mrs Powell – Co-Option Candidate

#### **FC SEPTEMBER 2025 ITEM 1      APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Members received and accepted the apologies as noted above.

It was agreed that the Executive Officer would make enquiries with Cllr Willcocks regarding the status of his special exemption.

#### **FC SEPTEMBER 2025 ITEM 2      DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

#### **FC SEPTEMBER 2025 ITEM 3      QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC**

There were no questions from members of the public.

#### **FC SEPTEMBER 2025 ITEM 4      CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

It has been 2 months since our last Full Council Meeting, and I trust that you have all had a good summer despite the recent break in the weather.

I would like to make amends for a failure to recognise and place on public record the long and committed service of Councillor Robinson who resigned on health grounds the day after

our June Meeting. Councillor Robinson served on virtually every committee including the Planning Development and Control Committee and confirmed our bank reconciliations for several years. Although politically aligned Councillor Robinson never brought politics into the Council chamber and always promoted the community's best interests. Councillor Robinson's support of the Council was undiminished despite failing health. I trust that you will support me in wishing Councillor Robinson well and thanking him for his long and committed service.

There have been a number of successful community events since our last meeting, Fleet Carnival, Oakley Park Summer Fair, VJ day commemoration and very recently Music on the Views, almost all of which failed to enjoy our exceptional summer weather.

Ancells Park sadly endured a traveller incursion and more recently Basingbourne Park. Both events were dealt with by the police to enforce an immediate eviction. More later.

There have been numerous meetings and comings and goings over the Harlington Development which will be dealt with later in the agenda.

The hot news is that we received a draft of the sub lease between FTC and HDC for the library area. The principal change secured by the Executive Officer is that the break clause cannot be introduced in the first 10 years and every 5 years after that.

## **FC SEPTEMBER 2025 ITEM 5      HCC/HDC ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The following reports were received from Hampshire County Council.

### Cllr Stephen Parker (HCC)

- Notified members that the consultation on the Reading Road South crossings was out for public consultation.
- Reported that additional traffic wardens are being deployed to address parking issues. He and Cllr Forster had reviewed parking around Velmead School in an effort to identify possible improvements.
- Advised that roadworks are currently taking place on Gally Hill Road and are expected to continue until around Christmas.
- Noted that recent changes to Stagecoach routes are causing confusion for users and that the company has been asked to publish clear details of the new routes.

Cllr Richmond observed that signage for the Gally Hill Road works was unclear and contributing to traffic issues. Cllr Parker responded that signage must comply with national guidelines and that, as the works progress along the road, any closures and diversions are only temporary. He invited Cllr Richmond to forward specific examples so that he could ensure they were passed to the relevant officers.

### Cllr Alan Oliver (HDC)

- Reported that a paper on Local Government Reorganisation for Hampshire has been published on the HDC website as part of the agenda pack for the extraordinary Overview and Scrutiny Committee scheduled for the following Tuesday.
- Provided an update on the *Pride in Place* campaign, which seeks to encourage residents and businesses to take pride in the district. The campaign will focus on the removal of unauthorised advertisements and unsafe banners, tackling graffiti, and

continuing enforcement action against anti-social behaviour such as littering, dog fouling, and smoking in smoke-free areas.

- Advised that food waste caddies will be delivered to all households during September, ahead of the commencement of weekly collections on 6 October 2025.
- Noted that HDC intends to construct a new recycling facility within the next 18–24 months to process items not currently recyclable.
- Local Plan – there is a call for sites, including pitches for Gypsy and Traveller permanent and transit sites.

Cllr Woods enquired about the meeting with Town and Parish Councils regarding the roll-out of the food waste collection, as referenced at the July Full Council meeting. Cllr Oliver undertook to follow this up.

#### Cllr Peter Wildsmith (HDC)

- Hart District Council are holding a job fair on 1 October 2025 at The Harlington (thanks to Fleet Town Council for hosting).

### **FC SEPTEMBER 2025 ITEM 6      MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS**

The minutes of the Town Council meeting held on 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2025 were approved and signed by the Chairman.

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

- |                       |   |
|-----------------------|---|
| • Development Control | 7 <sup>th</sup> and 21 <sup>st</sup> July 2025 and 11 <sup>th</sup> August 2025 |
| • Establishment       | 9 <sup>th</sup> July 2025   |
| • Policy and Finance  | 23 <sup>rd</sup> July 2025  |

### **FC SEPTEMBER 2025 ITEM 7      COUNCILLOR CO-OPTION TO FILL A CASUAL VACANCY**

Members received a presentation from the sole candidate.

#### **RESOLVED**

That Mrs Powell be co-opted as a Member of Fleet Town Council.

Mrs Powell duly signed the Declaration of Acceptance of Office and, having taken her seat, participated in the remainder of the meeting in her capacity as Councillor.

### **FC SEPTEMBER 2025 ITEM 8      FINANCIAL MONITORING REPORT**

Members noted receipt of the bank reconciliation and the list of payments for June and July 2025.

Councillor Stanton confirmed that the bank reconciliation and list of payments for June 2025 had been verified and signed off against the original bank statement. She advised that the July 2025 bank reconciliation had not yet been completed.

Members further noted that an invoice had been received for the second instalment of the Ancells Bus Service. Hampshire County Council has provided the service in good faith and now seeks payment. However, no monies have been collected from those who received the service. In accordance with Minute FC February 2025, Item 9, payment is not to be made unless the full amount has been collected. Although the invoice is made out to Fleet Town

Council, Members confirmed that the Council is merely acting as banker and is not a party to the contract.

### **RESOLVED**

- a) That the bank reconciliation and list of payments for June and July 2025 be received and accepted.
- b) That the statement from Councillor Stanton confirming the verification and sign-off of the June 2025 bank reconciliation and list of payments be accepted.
- c) That the Executive Officer be authorised to write to Hampshire County Council declining to accept the invoice, as Fleet Town Council is not a party to the contract for services.
- d) That Councillor Wildsmith contact Councillor Willcocks to offer assistance in obtaining payment from the parents to whom the service was provided.

### **FC SEPTEMBER 2025 ITEM 9      PWLB LOAN FOR SKATEPARK PROJECT**

The replacement of the skatepark is a long-held ambition of Fleet Town Council. With the recent ROSPA recommendation to close the facility, this project has taken on a sense of urgency. The tender for a replacement skatepark is currently underway and, as it is being procured on a fixed-price basis, the Council is now in a position to formally request a PWLB loan to cover the cost of delivery.

Members were reminded that the 2025/26 budget already includes provision for a six-month loan repayment based on a £600,000 borrowing envelope (to cover three capital projects, including the skatepark). Consequently, no increase in precept is required to service this loan.

In forming their decision, Members considered are the following documents:

- Business Case
- Annex A – Skatepark Presentation
- Annex B – Summary Budget and Forecast
- Annex C – Estimated Repayment Costs
- Annex D – Project Timeline

### **RESOLVED**

- a) To note the Business Case and supporting annexes demonstrating the need, financial sustainability, and community support for the project.
- b) To confirm that loan repayments for the skatepark project will be met from within the existing 2025/26 budget allocation for capital projects.
- c) To seek the approval of the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to apply for a PWLB loan of £250,000 over the borrowing term of 15 years for the replacement of the Skatepark at The Views. The annual loan repayments will come to around £24,200. It is not intended to increase the council tax precept for the purpose of the loan repayments.
- d) To delegate authority to the Executive Officer, in consultation with the Chairman of the Council, to finalise and submit the PWLB loan application and to take all necessary actions to progress the project to construction stage once approval is secured.

## **FC SEPTEMBER 2025 ITEM 10      ANCELLS FARM UNAUTHORISED ENCAMPMENT**

Between 12 and 18 July 2025, Ancells Farm playgrounds were subject to an unauthorised encampment. The Council incurred £1,150 in legal fees to commence eviction proceedings, although the trespassers were ultimately removed under Police powers rather than through the court process. In addition, £2,413 was spent on site clearance and reinstatement works, including the replacement of bollards damaged to gain entry.

Members noted a range of potential measures to help deter future incursions, all of which would involve cost implications and none of which could fully guarantee protection against determined trespassers. Options considered included:

- replacing wooden bollards with reinforced concrete bollards;
- installing a perimeter fence;
- defensive planting of shrubs/trees;
- constructing a soil bund/berm.

Members further noted that Hart District Council did not intend to apply for an injunction in relation to Gypsy and Traveller encampments, on the basis that they did not believe the necessary legal criteria could be met and that the likelihood of success was too limited to justify the cost.

Members also acknowledged that, unless permanent and/or temporary sites are provided for Gypsies and Travellers, such situations are likely to continue. At the last call for sites, no town or parish councils had been willing to put forward suitable land, and this position was not expected to change during the current process.

### **RESOLVED**

- a) To note the unbudgeted costs incurred in dealing with the unauthorised encampment at Ancells Farm playgrounds.
- b) To request that costed proposals for deterrent measures at each park be developed and brought back to Council for consideration.

Councillors Wildsmith and Parker left the meeting at the conclusion of this item (approx. 20.10pm).

## **FC SEPTEMBER 2025 ITEM 11      APPOINTMENT OF INTERNAL AUDITOR FOR 2025/26**

Members were provided with evidence in the agenda papers to enable them to consider and reach conclusions regarding the independence and competence of the Internal Auditor, as required. They were also provided a copy of the audit plan and engagement letter.

### **RESOLVED**

- a) To confirm satisfaction with the independence of the appointed Internal Auditor.
- b) To approve the proposed Internal Audit Programme of Work for 2025–26.
- c) To confirm satisfaction with the competence of the Internal Auditor.
- d) To note the previously approved Letter of Engagement with the Internal Auditor.

## **FC SEPTEMBER 2025 ITEM 12      ACCOUNTS SOFTWARE**

Members considered a report from the Finance & Administration Manager regarding the Council's accounting software.

The current accounting software is server-based. Given the likely relocation during the Harlington renovation project and the potential for staff to be based across multiple sites, Members agreed that there is a need to transition to a cloud-based system.

While the current provider offers a cloud-based solution, it is significantly more expensive than competitor products. Officers also reported that the existing system is dated and that customer support has deteriorated in recent years.

Of the two alternative providers reviewed, Members considered Xero to be the most suitable option for the following reasons:

- lower cost;
- intuitive and easy to use for non-financial staff;
- internationally recognised, making it easier to recruit staff already familiar with the system;
- innovative and therefore likely to continue improving functionality.

Members noted that a new nominal structure would be developed and referred to the Policy and Finance Committee for review. They also requested that indicative reports be presented to help build familiarity with the new system.

### **RESOLVED**

- a) To authorise the Finance & Administration Manager to give notice to Rialtas Business Solutions in accordance with the required six months' notice period.
- b) To confirm which price structure for Xero provides equivalent (or better) functionality than the current solution.

## **FC SEPTEMBER 2025 ITEM 13      CEMETERY UPDATE**

Members received an update from the Chairman on the Cemetery extension project.

### **RESOLVED**

To note the update from the Chairman.

Councillor Hope left the meeting at the conclusion of this item.

## **FC SEPTEMBER 2025 ITEM 14      HARLINGTON UPDATE**

Members received an update from the Chairman on the Harlington renovation project which included the following comments:

- The Council was not successful in its Arts Council grant bid.
- A draft business plan has been received but without appendices. The Chairman and Executive Officer have given initial feedback and are awaiting an updated report. Once the full document is received it will be circulated to all Members.

- BFF will be attending a meeting on site on 11 September 2025, and all Members are invited to attend.
- BFF need an urgent decision on which option the Council wants to proceed with. Delays in providing a clear direction will result in increased costs which may ultimately put the entire project at risk.
- The Chairman went through each design option noting whether it could be funded within existing precept levels and what the budget implications were based on the draft business plan.
- The option that made most cost / benefit sense was option 1+ - the Chairman has made himself available to any Member to go through the detail that supports this conclusion.
- There was general support for improvements to the front façade of the building and BFF will be consulted on a value engineered Option 1+ to include improvements to the entrance.
- Should Members still wish to pursue Option 2 then it may be advisable to do a public consultation as early as possible with residents to gauge public appetite for a precept increase.
- BFF have been asked to view the possible alternative venue to be used during the renovation project and advise on how to make the space suitable for its intended use and to minimise disruption to the neighbours.

## **RESOLVED**

- To increase the daily bank limit from £150,000 to £200,000 and to authorise the Finance & Administration Manager to effect this change to the bank mandate.
- To delegate decisions regarding design to the Harlington Working Group and for this group to comprise all Members of the Council.
- The Harlington Working Group must have a minimum of 7 Members present to be considered quorate and must achieve a minimum support level of 66% (two thirds) for any decisions taken.

Councillor Powell left the meeting at the conclusion of this item (approx. 21.05pm)

## **FC SEPTEMBER 2025 ITEM 15      ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The following announcements were made:

- Two staff resignations have been received. Both posts are currently being advertised.
- Councillor Richmond extended an invitation to Councillors and staff to join him in celebrating his forthcoming birthday.

## **FC SEPTEMBER 2025 ITEM 16      SILENT STORMS**

Silent Storms have relocated to Fleet Town Football Club with effect from September 2025. They have expressed their gratitude to the Council for its support.

## **FC SEPTEMBER 2025 ITEM 17      COMPLAINT**

Members were advised that the Chairman of the Council received a complaint relating to Fleet Cemetery. The matter was resolved to the satisfaction of the complainant, and

amendments to internal processes have been implemented to ensure that a similar issue does not occur again.

A noise complaint was received in relation to the Music on the Views festival. The Harlington General Manager has written in response to the complaint.

**FC SEPTEMBER 2025 ITEM 15      DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting of the Council is scheduled to be held on Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> October 2025 at 7pm in The Harlington.

The meeting closed at 9.20pm.

**Signed.....**  
**Chairman**

**Date:.....**