



**MINUTES OF THE BIGGLESWADE TOWN COUNCIL**  
**ANNUAL ASSEMBLY MEETING**  
**HELD ON TUESDAY 29<sup>th</sup> APRIL 2025**  
**AT 7.30PM AT BIGGLESWADE TOWN COUNCIL OFFICES**  
**THE OLD COURT HOUSE, 4 SAFFRON ROAD, BIGGLESWADE, SG18 8DL**

**PRESENT:**

Cllr M. Foster (Mayor)  
Cllr. I. Agnew  
Cllr. G. Barrett (Deputy Mayor)  
Cllr. P. Guilcher  
Cllr. J. Jones  
Cllr. M. North  
Cllr. S. Patel  
Cllr. M. Russell  
Cllr. A. Skilton  
Cllr. D. Strachan  
Cllr. C. Thomas

Mr P Tarrant – Town Clerk & Chief Executive  
Mr K Hosseini – Head of Governance & Strategic Partnerships  
Mr E Bour – Head of Finance & Deputy RFO  
Miss A Green – Committee Clerk

Members of the Public – 9 (1 online).

**Meeting Formalities:**

Following a reminder to meeting attendees that this is a formal meeting, the Mayor advised that members of the public will be given an opportunity to speak during public open session but not at other times. The meeting is being filmed and by being present attendees are deemed to have agreed to be filmed and to the use of those images and sound recordings. The Mayor advised that attendees should not disclose any personal information of individuals as this would infringe the Data Protection Rights of that individual.

**1. APOLOGIES**

Cllr. M Knight.

**2. MATTERS ARISING**

None.

**3. ANNUAL REPORT OF BIGGLESWADE TOWN COUNCIL**

The Annual Report as included in the agenda was presented by Cllr. M. Foster.

During his address, Councillor Foster expressed his gratitude for being elected to a second term as Mayor and thanked Deputy Mayor Councillor G. Barrett for his support over the past year.

Within his report, Cllr. Foster noted that despite continued opposition from Town and Ward Councillors to the proposed development of 416 homes on land north of Furzenhall Road,

On the 6<sup>th</sup> November 2024 the Planning Inspectorate, overturned the original refusal and granted outline planning permission for the development. He also noted that in December CBC's Development Management Committee (DMC) had approved a revised application with additional access routes via the Potton Road/Baden Powell Way roundabout: it is still unclear what will be constructed.

Cllr. Foster recognised the Town Council's efforts throughout the year: In October, the Town Council hosted its inaugural Business Forum. In attendance were local businesses, Members and Officers of the Town Council, Central Bedfordshire Council representatives and MP Richard Fuller. The event was a great success.

In November, the Town Centre hosted Remembrance Sunday and Armistice Day services and the Annual Christmas Light "Switch-on" event both of which were extremely well attended.

Cllr. Foster also expressed his delight, at being able to host the Biggleswade Civic Service, emphasising the importance of being able to engage with the community. He thanked Susan Lousada, HM Lord-Lieutenant of Bedfordshire, for her attendance.

Cllr Foster highlighted the Town Council's efforts to support the continuation of twinning Biggleswade with Erlensee and noted that some members of the Town Council will be travelling to celebrate the event with the Burgermeister and Stadtrat in Erlensee.

Cllr. Foster thanked all Officers and Councillors for the work that they do to help improve the lives of those who live in Biggleswade.

#### **4. REPORTS**

##### **a. Public Land and Open Spaces Committee**

The Public Land and Open Spaces Committee report included in the agenda was presented by the Chairman of the Committee, Cllr. M. North.

Cllr. North highlighted that this year has been a year of achievement for the Public Land and Open Spaces Committee (PLOS).

He informed Members the refurbishment of Kitelands and Brunel play areas have now been completed and that the committee is hopeful that phase two additions to Kitelands will be completed by the end of this year. He noted the refurbishment works at Kitelands are being funded by a generous contribution from Tritax Symmetry.

The PLOS committee have made efforts to make the Jubilee Recreation Area more accessible to residents of housing developments in the surrounding area. In addition, a Tiny Forest – with 600 trees - has been established to add to the amenity value.

Cllr. North recognised the continued efforts of the Public Realm team.

Cllr. North noted that a possible future challenge for the PLOS committee is the takeover of responsibility for the green spaces in Kings Reach.

He also referenced improvements to Flower Beds, Planters and Hanging Baskets, emphasising that the high quality of the displays achieved by Public Realm will be the standard moving forward.

Cllr. North also highlighted that Biggleswade Linear Wood is now under the Town Council's management and is being maintained by the Public Realm Team.

Cllr. North also noted continuing work at the allotment site, both BTC owned cemeteries, the Fairfield Road Recreation Areas and Drove Road Tennis Courts. Plans are in varying stages of development to improve the provision at these sites.

**b. Town Centre Management Committee**

The Town Centre Management Committee Report as included in the agenda was presented by the Chairman of the Committee, Cllr. J. Woodhead.

During his address, Councillor Woodhead expressed his gratitude for the opportunity to serve as chairman of the committee this year.

Cllr Woodhead highlighted the difficult economic climate over the last year, noting that the town has seen several retailers vacate from the Town Centre including a national chain – Peacock's - as well as some independent traders.

He noted Members of the Town Centre Management Committee (TCM) are concerned about the lack of banking facilities in the town, but the Town Council is committed to continuing to work with Cash Access and local Post Office's to look at the possibility of securing a banking hub in the future.

Cllr. Woodhead acknowledged the continued provision of events in the Town Centre, including the D-Day 80th Anniversary in June 2024, Biggleswade History Weekend in partnership with The Bigg Theatre in September 2024, the second Biggleswade Bus Running Day with the United Counties Preservation Society in October 2024, and the recently commenced monthly BIGG Eats initiative.

He also noted the success of Market Stall Days, the well-attended Remembrance Sunday Parade in November, and the popular Christmas Lights Switch-On.

Efforts by the Town Council to increase footfall, such as the Christmas reindeer visit, were recognised. Additionally, the introduction and success of new events—Artisan Markets, Flea Markets, and the Vegan Market in January —were highlighted.

Cllr Woodhead emphasised the success of the Easter Egg Hunt (held in Franklins Recreation Ground) and expressed his excitement for the upcoming Victory Day party on 5 July to jointly commemorate 80 Years since VE and VJ Day.

Cllr Woodhead informed Members that a ShopWatch scheme is in place within the town to combat shoplifting, and the Council maintain good links with the Biggleswade Policing Team esp. our local PCSOs.

With regards to parking, Cllr. Woodhead noted that the Council have now installed the new car parking machines.

Cllr. Woodhead finally thanked Deputy Chairman, Cllr. Patel, and Town Council Officers for their continued support.

**c. Finance and General Purposes Committee**

The Finance and General Purposes Committee Report as included in the agenda was presented by the Chairman of the Committee, Cllr. D. Strachan.

During his address, the Chairman thanked Officers for their efforts in managing the budget this year.

He provided an overview of the functions of the Finance and General Purposes (F&GP) committee and their relation to the management of the Orchard Centre and Grants process.

Cllr. Strachan noted the financial overview of the Town Council's financial performance for the year 2024/25 shows an overall surplus of £45,379 although this figure is yet to be confirmed in the end of year closedown.

He highlighted The Council applied for £408,000 in additional grant funding and has successfully accessed £174,000. The Chairman noted that the Town Council continues to pursue further grants and S106 funds from CBC. He explained that the Council had incurred unplanned spending to improve football pitches and support CBC in a planning enquiry for land north of Furzenhall.

In 2024/25, the Council used loan monies from the Public Works Loan Board (PWLb) to fund the first phase of several improvements to the Town's assets. This includes refurbishment of Playgrounds and the Cemeteries as well as upgrading the allotment provision in the town.

Cllr Strachan celebrated that this year the F&GP committee had awarded twenty-three grants totalling £21,807 to various charities and good causes that benefit the residents of Biggleswade, in addition to our ongoing support to fund the employment of a Community Agent by Bedfordshire Rural Community Charity.

He thanked Officers and Members for their continued support of the committee this year.

**d. Personnel Committee**

The Personnel Committee Report as included in the agenda was presented by the Chairman of the Committee, Cllr. M. Russell.

The Chairmen noted that the Biggleswade Town Council team has continued to evolve over the past year, with several staff members joining and leaving the organisation.

During the year, the Committee reviewed and agreed on a number of key policies, including:

- Capability and Absence Management
- Anti-Bullying and Harassment
- Health & Safety
- Grievance Procedure
- Dress Code Guidance

In addition, the Committee adopted a more formal Member Code of Conduct, following recommendations from the National Association of Local Councils and the Local Government Association.

Cllr. Russell also highlighted that another council-wide staff survey was recently conducted, achieving a 100% response rate.

The findings are currently being compiled into a report by the external firm, which will be presented at the first Personnel Committee meeting of the new municipal year in May.

### **Central Bedfordshire - Ward Councillor Update**

Cllr. G. Fage, Ward Councillor for Biggleswade East, presented Members with an update on CBC activities over the last year.

Cllr. Fage expressed that CBC is under a lot of pressure as a local authority. CBC are under financial constraints as they are currently down to 17 million in reserves. While they did manage to run a balance budget this year, they will need to ensure they replicate this in future.

Cllr. Fage noted that over the coming years there may be some changes surrounding strategic authorities. CBC's Leader is engaging with neighbouring councils e.g. Luton, Bedford, Milton Keynes, and Northampton to see what that strategic authority and new mayoral area may look like.

CBC has invested in Edward Peake School providing funding for a new hall and Muga pitch with flood lighting, similar investment will take place at Lawnside school.

He highlighted that it had been decided to expand Ivel Valley School, to an adjacent site. Cllr Fage stated that Members and the public will hear more on this in future. He emphasised the importance of considering the children's welfare as a priority when planning applications for the redevelopment of the school are made public.

Cllr Fage referenced the development of 416 homes on land north of Furzenhall Road and emphasised his unhappiness at CBC's decision to grant permission for the development. He apologised to Members and residents in connection to this issue.

He informed Members that the Call for Sites is now closed and that we will soon begin to see where those sites are located. He believes there is potential for up to 20 sites within Biggleswade.

He urged that all councillors should speak with one voice, if possible, as councillors owe that to the residents of Biggleswade.

## **5. Resolutions and Questions**

- a. Members thanked Cllr Fage for his update. They questioned why this was not included on the agenda. Members asked whether other Ward Counsellors were invited to make an update on behalf of CBC and how Cllr Fage was nominated to present the update.

The Town Clerk and Chief Executive explained that all Ward Councillors were offered the opportunity to speak as indicated by the agenda and Cllr Fage was the only individual who expressed an interest.

Cllr Foster agreed that the presentation could be included in Chairman's reports rather than the open forum.

- b. Sally Hacking Ferguson addressed the Council and thanked Councillor Woodhead for his ongoing support of veterans residing in Biggleswade. She noted that, this year, restorative measures have been enacted to reimburse those affected by the ban on gay people serving in the military between 1967 and 2000.

In light of this, she asked the Council to formally recognise LGBTQ+ veterans who were discharged due to their sexuality, to include them in the Remembrance Day parade, and to lay a wreath in their memory.

It was **AGREED** that Members would consider this motion at the next Town Council Meeting.

- c. A Member of the public questioned what measures the Town Council was taking to ensure members of the LGBTQIA + community feel safe and supported. During their address, they referenced the Chairman of TCM's acknowledgment that crime is a concern. The resident then recounted a recent incident in Hitchin involving the burning of a Pride bench. They questioned how the Council intends to reassure the community and clearly convey that such acts of intolerance are not welcome in Biggleswade, particularly in light of the recent decision not to fly the Progress Pride flag. They emphasised that the Council had an opportunity to support young LGBTQ+ residents and make them feel welcome and free to be themselves in Biggleswade.

Cllr Foster thanked the resident for his question.

Cllr Foster reiterated that the Flag policy had already been addressed by the Council and the recent changes to the policy, were intended to create greater consistency rather than to be intolerant towards any group.

Cllr Foster emphasised that he understood the importance of supporting the LGBTQ community. He suggested that moving forward the council would regularly review in what ways the Town Council could support the LGBTQ community. He noted that the Council would ensure the LGBTQ community was considered in all endeavours.

Members also suggested that when the Council receives its updates from the local policing team, Members will question whether there have been any incidents of hate crime as a result of the Council's recent flag flying decision. Members emphasised that they are committed to keeping all residents of Biggleswade safe including the LGBTQ+ community and are supportive of Pride within Biggleswade.

The Town Clerk and Chief Executive added that, in light of the introduction of Martyn's Law. Officers will be conducting academic exercises connected to how the Town Council can keep people safe for future events. Over the next few months, a paper will come to Council that is understanding of terrorism/hate-crime related activity & keeping people safe. This paper will help the Council put plans in place that protect people and recognise the risks that are local to Biggleswade. When Officers are making these plans, they will look to engage with a range of different stakeholders within the community from a range of different backgrounds to ensure the Council is cognisant of the safety needs of all the members of the community it serves.

- d. Cllr Skilton questioned whether considering recent changes in legislation the Town Council are considering changing their policy on who's allowed to use what toilets.

Cllr Foster responded that this was a legislative change and will be considered in due course.

- e. Rhiannon Barrows presented a motion from Biggleswade Pride Community. The Pride Community asked for the following:

- For the Town Council to provide material support to help ensure that this year's pride event is a success and demonstrate that the Town Council welcomes and encourages diversity and inclusion.
- The Town Council officially recognise Biggleswade pride and demonstrate its support by flying the progress pride flag during the event and sharing promoting the event through their social media channels.
- The Town Council rescind its recent decision to change the flag flying policy.
- The Progress Pride flag be purchased using capital reserves and flown during Biggleswade LGBTQ+ Pride.
- The Pride flag be raised Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> of June 2025 and be flown throughout the weekend (Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> & Sunday 29<sup>th</sup>) and this practice be continued for subsequent years to annually mark Pride Month.
- Officers utilise 2024/2025 UK Shared Prosperity Funding (UKSPF) to purchase bunting to distribute to local businesses within the town who wish to participate in the Pride celebrations and to support the overall success of the event.

It was **AGREED** that Members would consider this motion at the next Town Council Meeting.

- f. Members of the public provided an update on the Biggleswade Community Gardens and expressed their thanks to the Town Council for their continued support and the recent allocation of grant funding.

With the funding now secured, they plan to improve the area near the railway. This will include removing graffiti and creating a mural to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the railway. The mural project will run for a year and must be completed by the end of March next year. It will be a community-driven initiative with input from residents.

They also asked whether the Town Council could support the project through advertising, promotion, publicity, and assistance in engaging with community groups.

It was **AGREED** that Members would consider this motion at the next Town Council Meeting.

## 6. **OPEN FORUM – MATTERS RELATING TO BIGGLESWADE**

### a. **Ward Councillors**

A member of the public raised a concern about how the Council would ensure that residents of Lawrence Road are not disadvantaged by the new one-way system. She suggested that a better use of funding would be to improve road surfaces and fill potholes, rather than implementing new traffic systems.

Cllr Fage responded that he believed the scheme was final and, as such, it is unlikely that changes can be made. He acknowledged that there is no perfect solution, but assured the resident that her points were noted, and he would be happy to review the designs.

### b. **Town Councillors**

A member of the public raised a concern about the potential for harmful pollutants to enter the waterways in Biggleswade because of the housing development on land north of Furzenhall Road.

In response, members explained that Anglian Water is consulted on every planning application. The approval of the planning application indicates that any necessary environmental considerations have been addressed, and no further action is required at this stage.

**The Mayor closed the meeting at 8:50 pm.**