



MINUTES OF THE BIGGLESWADE TOWN CENTRE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE
MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 15TH JULY 2025 AT 7.00PM AT
BIGGLESWADE TOWN COUNCIL OFFICES
THE OLD COURT HOUSE, 4 SAFFRON ROAD, BIGGLESWADE, SG18 8DL

PRESENT:

Cllr. S Patel (Chairman)
Cllr. G Barrett (Deputy Chairman)
Cllr. M Foster
Cllr. M Knight
Cllr. M North
Cllr. D Strachan
Cllr. C Thomas
Cllr. D Albone (Ex-officio Member)
Cllr. J Woodhead (Ex-officio Member)

Mr E Bour – Head of Finance & Deputy RFO
Ms F Gumush – Deputy HR & Administration Manager
Mr I Campbell – Community Development Manager
Miss A Green – Committee Clerk

Members of the Public – 0

IN ATTENDANCE ONLINE:

Cllr. A Skilton

Meeting Formalities:

Following a reminder to meeting attendees that this is a formal meeting, the Chairman 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 Chairman advised that attendees should not disclose any personal information of individuals as this would infringe the Data Protection Rights of that individual.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

a. Apologies were received from the following Members:

None.

b. The following Members were unable to attend in person but were in attendance remotely:

Cllr. A Skilton

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

a. Disclosable Pecuniary interests in any agenda item:

None.

b. Non-Pecuniary interests in any agenda item:

None.

3. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Cllr. Patel opened the meeting by acknowledging that it was his first meeting serving as Chairman of TCM. He highlighted the success of the recent Victory Day event and expressed his appreciation to the staff for their efforts in making the celebrations a success.

4. PUBLIC OPEN SESSION

No members of the public were present either in person or online.

5. INVITED SPEAKER

- a. There were no invited speakers.

6. MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

- a. No questions were raised.

7. MINUTES AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF MEETINGS

- a. The minutes were **APPROVED** as an accurate record of the Town Centre Management Committee meeting held on **Tuesday 15th April 2025**.

8. MATTERS ARISING

- a. Pg. 9 of the agenda – Pg. 3 of the minutes of the Town Centre Management Committee meeting held on Tuesday 15th April 2025.

Item 9b: Business Forum Event

Cllr. Woodhead highlighted that the next Business Forum event is scheduled for Friday, 25th July 2025, and Members are looking forward to seeing how it unfolds.

- b. Pg. 10 of the agenda – Pg. 4 of the minutes of the Town Centre Management Committee meeting held on Tuesday 15th April 2025.

Item 9d: UKSPF Cultural Events Programme update - WadeFest

The Community Development Manager informed Members that planning for next year's WadeFest event had begun. Members of the events planning committee held their first inaugural meeting on Sunday the 6th of July. This year the event will not be funded by BTC, but Officers will continue to support the event and the organising committee to help ensure the success of the event.

Members sought clarification on whether the decision to support but not lead or fund the WadeFest event was made by the Members of the Council, the Committee or Officers.

Referring to the relevant section of the minutes, it was clarified that Members had agreed to support the event. Additionally, the Community Development Manager confirmed that the course of action taken by the Officers was based on the direction of the Town Clerk and Chief Executive.

9. ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION

a. Parking Update

The Community Development Manager outlined the report.

He acknowledged that the rollout of the parking machines has not been perfect and noted that stabilising the system with Flowbird has been challenging.

Reporting on the current state of the machines, he informed Members that the Dan Albone parking machines are completely off and covered, as they require an engineer's visit. The remaining machines at Rose Lane, Chestnut Avenue, and St Andrews are operational, but still have issues that Officers are working to resolve.

He stated that RingGo would offer significant benefits to the Council, describing it as a low-cost, largely fault-free system with reliability superior to the current offer and comparable operational costs.

Following the report Members raised the following:

- A key requirement when selecting a company to oversee parking provision was that the system must support cash payments, which remains Council policy. It appears Officers are suggesting that RingGo would become the primary method of use, which contradicts the Council's intentions.
- The parking machines represented a significant capital investment, and the Council should not abandon them without exploring all options.
- If Flowbird is unable to provide a reliable service, they should either resolve the issues or refund the Council and remove the machines.
- Flowbird's claim that poor signal strength is causing machine failures is incorrect and an excuse. Evidence suggests the issue lies with the hardware or configuration, not the network.
- Each machine failure results in lost revenue due to suspended enforcement. If the machines are out of order, enforcement would still need to be paused, as the car parks cannot operate solely with the app— as cash payment needs to remain an available option.
- Officers should create a log or tracker to record when machines go down, including the date and time of the downtime, the duration of the downtime, and the specific machine affected. This log will provide both Officers and Members with a quantifiable measure of machine unavailability, offering a clearer understanding of its financial impact.
- Will a pay by app system work with CBC's existing parking enforcement software.

Officers reassured Members that RingGo would be used in conjunction with the existing provision, and the introduction of an online or pay by app option would be to give residents more choice in how they pay for parking rather than an attempt to replace the existing offer.

In response to Members' concerns about lost revenue, the Head of Finance noted that Officers have already estimated the losses and raised the issue with Flowbird. Officers are currently trying to engage with Flowbird's Chief Executives but have received no response. Instead, they are frequently referred to the contract's terms and conditions. The maximum potential loss of revenue, based on the contract, is just under £300 over 12 months. Therefore, the only viable solution is for Flowbird to resolve the ongoing issues.

Members expressed strong reservations about the financial implications of the current contract with Flowbird. It was suggested that a detailed report should be brought before the TCM Committee to assess the financial consequences of the contract and to determine whether Flowbird had fulfilled its obligations.

Members emphasised the importance of protecting the interests of all users and ensuring that any system adopted does not disadvantage those who rely on cash payments.

While some Members viewed the RingGo proposal positively, acknowledging that it could offer convenience and flexibility for some users, they also recognised the validity of concerns raised by others. It was agreed that the Council cannot rely on a system that excludes certain demographics, particularly when the physical machines are not functioning. However, it was also felt that the idea should not be dismissed outright and that further exploration of its potential benefits was warranted.

Other members took a firmer stance, advocating for the termination of the Flowbird contract. They highlighted that local authorities like Bedford Borough Council successfully operate parking enforcement systems. If BTC decides to end the contract, it was suggested that the Council engage with a local authority using a reliable system and consider adopting a similar model, rather than continuing to trial systems that may prove unsatisfactory.

Following the discussion, Members **RESOLVED** to reject the proposal as presented.

The amended resolution reads as follows:

Members **RESOLVED** to instruct Officers to prepare a revised proposal that would deliver a parking solution accessible to all demographics, including options for cash, card, and online payments. Furthermore, the Council's retained legal advisors should be consulted to determine whether Flowbird may be in breach of contract.

b. **Run the Wade**

The Community Development Manager outlined the report.

Members praised the event's success and community engagement.

Concerns were raised about the feasibility of holding the event biannually, potential dilution of impact, and financial/staffing implications.

Members expressed that they would like to see evidence that hosting the event twice a year is viable. Emphasising that a change from an annual event to a bi-annual event is likely to have an impact on engagement and attendance.

Members also highlighted the financial implications of the event on the Town Council, BTC staff will need to claim overtime, which adds to the cost for the Council. If the organisers are making a profit, BTC should receive some compensation for staffing, administrative costs, and other associated expenses. Members requested to see a detailed breakdown of expenditure related to the event prior to any further action.

Noting the Community Development Manager's reference to a higher legislative burden if the event exceeded 499 people, Members inquired about the additional responsibilities and safeguards that would be necessary if the event's attendance were to increase in the future.

The Community Development Manager informed members that if more than 500 people were expected to attend, BTC would need to hire SIA-approved stewards to manage the event.

Members **RESOLVED** the following:

- Support the continuation and potential expansion of the event.
- Request a report on financial and legal implications, including staffing costs and safety requirements to be presented at the next TCM committee meeting.

c. **Twining Update**

The Community Development Manager outlined the report.

Members praised the success of the twinning events and the spirit of international cooperation, noting the planting of a ginkgo tree in Kitelands Park to commemorate the visit. They expressed support for exploring formal twinning arrangements.

Members **RESOLVED** the following:

- To note the programme of events.
- Explore and develop formal twinning links with Bailly and Noisy-le-Roi.
- Enable member and citizen participation in future twinning activities subject to available within the existing budget.

d. **Renaming the Town Centre Management Committee to the Town Management Committee**

A proposal to rename the Town Centre Management Committee was submitted by Cllr. Patel to better reflect the committee's broadening remit.

Members welcomed the suggestion and agreed with the justification for renaming the committee.

In addition to the alternative name "Town Management Committee" suggested by Cllr. Patel, several other names were proposed by other Councillors, including:

- Town Management Committee
- Community Services Committee
- Community and Business Development Committee

Members **RESOLVED** the following:

- Officers are to review the committee's remit and propose a list of suitable names, along with a draft version of updated terms of reference, for Members' approval at the next TCM meeting.
- Following approval by the TCM committee, a recommendation will be brought to the next Full Council.

10. **ITEMS FOR INFORMATION**

a. **Business Forum Update**

Members were reminded of the upcoming Business Forum on 25 July 2025 at the Orchard Centre.

Suggestions were made to broaden the event's appeal and improve communication with local businesses and larger businesses.

Members emphasised that there were 10 days remaining until the event, and officers should continue to push for attendance.

Members **NOTED** the report.

b. **Events Update**

An update was provided by the Deputy Administration & HR Manager on recent and forthcoming events organised or supported by the Town Council.

The Easter Egg Hunt, held in April 2025, was reported to have been a great success. The event benefited from favourable weather conditions and was well-attended.

Victory Day celebrations were also highlighted as a particularly successful occasion. Members noted the strong turnout and the positive community spirit that was evident throughout the event.

Looking ahead, the Mayor's Charity Quiz Night has been scheduled for 18 September 2025. Members discussed the potential to increase engagement by encouraging local businesses to enter teams, particularly those attending the upcoming Business Forum. It was suggested that promotional materials, including flyers and sponsorship opportunities, be distributed at the forum to raise awareness and boost participation.

Officers are progressing arrangements for Remembrance Sunday and the annual Christmas Lights Switch-On.

Members discussed the importance of effective promotion and communication strategies to ensure strong attendance and community engagement.

It was agreed that efforts should be made to broaden outreach, particularly to local businesses, and to explore opportunities for sponsorship and collaboration. The Council's existing business contact database will be utilised to support these efforts.

A further report detailing proposed events for 2026, including financial breakdowns, will be brought to the Committee in October for consideration and approval.

Members **NOTED** the update.

c. **Banking Provision Update**

Members **NOTED** the update.

d. **Biggleswade in Bloom – Best Garden Competition**

Members discussed the potential for a flower show or competition within Biggleswade.

Officers suggested expanding the competition into a larger event, similar to the Chelsea Flower Show, to include both residential and commercial aspects of the town. This would involve judging gardens for residents and decorative displays outside shops and public buildings for a business-focused engagement.

It was proposed that participants would apply formally to ensure fair judging and recognition.

The initiative was well received, with Members agreeing it could improve the town's environment, boost community spirit, and support local businesses.

A formal motion will be submitted at the next meeting, and Officers will be tasked with exploring logistics and potential categories.

Members **NOTED** the proposal.

11. **PUBLIC OPEN SESSION**

No members of the public were present either in person or online.

Members **RESOLVED** to go into the exempt session in view of the nature of the business to be discussed.

12. **EXEMPT**

a. **Exempt Minutes of the Town Centre Management Committee Meeting 15th April 2025**

The exempt minutes were **APPROVED** as an accurate record of the Town Centre Management Committee meeting held on Tuesday 15th April 2025.

b. **Market Square Vision**

Members **RESOLVED** that an update on the Market Square Vision will be presented at the upcoming Biggleswade Joint Committee meeting.

The Chairman closed the meeting at **8:15**