

Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting of Bletchley and Fenny Stratford held via Zoom (streamed live on You Tube) on Tuesday 20 April 2021 beginning at 6.30 pm

Minute Reference

- APM2021-1 **Welcome**
Cllr Ed Hume, Councillor for Eaton North Ward took the role of Chair and opened the meeting and thanked all for their attendance.
- APM2021-2 **Minutes**
The Annual Meeting of Electors did not go ahead in 2020 due to the Covid 19 Pandemic but the minutes from 2019 were agreed as a correct record of proceedings.
- APM2021-3 **Annual Report of Town Council**
The Chair introduced the Annual Report and draft Accounts of Bletchley and Fenny Stratford Town Council and highlighted aspects of the work that the Council had undertaken during 2020-21 and noted written copies of the report were available on the Town Council website, social media and from the main office.
- APM2021-4 **Reports from Ward Members of Milton Keynes Council**
The Chair noted that several Members from the Milton Keynes Council wards which included parts of Bletchley & Fenny Stratford had been unable to attend the annual Town Meeting but had all sent apologies.
- Cllr Alan Rankine spoke and thanked all the Councillors and staff from Bletchley and Fenny Stratford Town Council for their hard work and dedication over the last year. He also provided the following report.
- “The past year has been very difficult for the whole nation. Government and local authorities have had to think and act quickly. Organisations have had to do things from scratch that haven’t been done before. Guidelines have shifted constantly as new information has improved our knowledge and response. Under such a strain the risk of failing is high. The Bletchley and Fenny Stratford Town Council has faced a severe test. It is to their credit that Bletchley has come through this nightmare largely intact and ready to bounce back. A huge amount of thanks must go to the Town Clerk and her team and to Town Councillors and community groups for rising to the challenge, pulling everyone together and keeping the community going.*
- During this struggle we have also had the ‘normal’ things to contend with. I could write about the daily battles that we all fight to make Bletchley better. The ongoing struggle with Queensway parking and bad development. Progress has been slow but there are signs that our collective voices are being heard and we have had some wins on planning applications that do not fit with our strategic aims.*

This brings me to the point I would like to make; if we want Bletchley to benefit from long lasting positive change we need to act strategically. We need to design and plan our way to a better future. To make substantial and sustainable improvements to Bletchley we need to tackle the fundamental problems holding Bletchley back and grab with both hands the investment opportunities that will shortly be coming our way.

Bletchley is about to embark on a period of transitional change and Bletchley and Fenny Stratford Town Council will be at the heart of this change. The development of the East – West Railway is a massive opportunity for Bletchley and it is so important to understand how that development can be used to benefit all Bletchley residents.

Victorian Bletchley's prosperity was underpinned by its importance as a central rail hub standing at the confluence of four major cities – London, Birmingham, Oxford and Cambridge. Bletchley's fortunes declined when that status was lost. It stands to reason that Bletchley's reincarnation as a rail super hub is a game changer. This change will bring more visitors, business and jobs to Bletchley – almost without doing anything.

We already see the expansion plans for MK College, the new Institute of Technology and Bletchley Park. There are plans to upgrade Bletchley rail depot to maintain all of the new trains serving the East – West line. That will mean new high skilled jobs and new apprenticeship courses for the College. However, for real improvement, we need to think of Bletchley rail station as being an extension of Queensway.

Today, Queensway, like many high streets is in decline and is facing pressure from on-line competition. Stores have closed and others are just hanging on. Queensway needs a boost. Luckily, Queensway has the basic economic ingredients for success – some great shops and restaurants, a great location and a wide boulevard. Opening up the western access to a refurbished Queensway will reveal a new destination for visitors, office workers and students. Their increased custom would help fund future investment in shops, restaurants and social spaces to build an even better High Street that all Bletchley residents can enjoy.

To extract maximum value for Bletchley, visitors using the station must be able to see and feel the connection to our High Street and be attracted by its retail offer, its cultural space, its atmosphere and yes, its beauty. We have to make all of these things happen because that is not the case currently.

Simple solutions like a new eastern access to the Station and a set of steps and lift down to Saxon Street will have little impact. Our connection must have more vision and scale – a pedestrian fly-over, covered escalators to manage the height difference, small retail and restaurant outlets that lead the traveller on a journey from the station to a transformed Queensway. These things have been done elsewhere, therefore we need to be ambitious for Bletchley.

We must grab this opportunity to reshape the heart of Bletchley but this won't happen without prompt, deliberate and intelligent intervention. The Towns fund money is a bonus. It will kick start improvements and stimulate new ideas but much more investment is required to deliver the significant changes that Bletchley needs. Delivery of the neighbourhood plan is essential to flesh out a vision for the development of Bletchley. I urge council staff, town councillors, ward councillors and resident groups to get together, set the agenda, deliver the plan and kick start the process of change

Cllr Mohammed Khan also spoke about the challenges that were faced by all sectors last year and how well we all worked together with MKC. Small business also suffered throughout the year and were helped by the grants provided through MKC. The funds from the Town Deal will enhance the area along with the Neighbourhood Plan.

The Chair thanked Cllr Rankine & Cllr Khan for their reports and reiterated that apologies had been received from the other ward councillors.

APM2021-5

Questions and Proposals from Electors

No questions or proposals for discussion from electors had been received for this year's meeting.

APM2021-6

Date of Next Meeting

The Chair noted that the provisional date for the next meeting was 05 May 2022, he thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting.

DRAFT