

## Town Council funds minibus for homelessness charity UnityMK



UnityMK, a homelessness charity in CMK, has received a grant from the Town Council to help scale up the vital work it does in tackling homelessness in the city. The Town Council will fund a nine-seater minibus for three years, which will enable the charity to support more people out of homelessness and into safe accommodation. The minibus, which will be driven by volunteers, will transport those at risk of, or currently facing homelessness to the charity's welfare centre at Unity Park Station, opposite Station Square.

UnityMK previously relied on taxis to collect people from around MK and surrounding areas, which caused a significant financial and operational strain on the charity's already limited resources. Last year, Town Councillor Pete Lightfoot discovered Unity MK's situation and worked with them to apply for grant funding from the Town Council.

UnityMK Operations Manager, Robert Willford, later attended a Town Council meeting to demonstrate the impact a minibus would have on the daily operations of the charity. He explained how it would better support the charity's hundreds of guests by providing transportation to and from their night shelters, facilitating access to meaningful activities and appointments during the day, and assisting with moving them into longer-term accommodation, as well as helping transport general donations and equipment. The Town Council agreed it would have a major impact on CMK and the city as a whole, and we are pleased to say that the minibus has now been ordered and should arrive at UnityMK soon.

Robert Willford, Operations Manager at UnityMK, said: "We really appreciate the support of CMK Town Council. Going forward, the minibus will allow us to support more people and develop much-needed additional services. It will make a big difference to the daily operations of our charity and, most importantly, to our guests."

UnityMK relies heavily on volunteers to keep its operation going, and is on the lookout for people with a few spare hours to drive its new minibus. Those who are interested in this volunteering opportunity can email [operations@unitymk.org](mailto:operations@unitymk.org). You can also find out more about the brilliant work UnityMK does by visiting [www.unitymk.org](http://www.unitymk.org).

**UnityMK at a glance:**

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**200**  
people

access services at Unity Park Station each week
- 

**3036**  
meals

were served during their winter night shelter season 2023/2024
- 

**420**  
volunteers

support the running of their services throughout the year
- 

**1581**  
beds

were made during their winter night shelter season 2023/2024

## CMK Town Councillor raises over £1,500 for local charities

CMK Town Councillor Pete Lightfoot has raised over £1,500 for three local charities after participating in the CEO Sleepout at MK College's Bletchley Campus in November. Joining individuals from local businesses and charities, Councillor Lightfoot spent the night outdoors to raise funds and awareness for homelessness.

The money raised will support three vital organisations: UnityMK, The Bus Shelter MK, and YMCA MK, all of which provide

essential services to those facing homelessness and vulnerability in Milton Keynes. Councillor Lightfoot received donations from local businesses and residents alike, showing the community's generosity.

Reflecting on his experience, Councillor Lightfoot said: "Taking just one mercifully mild night to sleep outside in relatively safe conditions was enough to bring home the huge challenge faced by anybody permanently finding themselves in this position. We've



had an incredibly cold winter, and it's heartbreaking to know there are people without a safe and warm place to sleep. The money raised from the CEO Sleepout will make a huge difference and support three charities that do such brilliant work by supporting some of the most vulnerable people in our city."





CMK Green Gym, a volunteer-led group committed to conserving and enhancing open spaces in CMK, held conservation and gardening sessions almost every

week throughout 2024, dedicating approximately 900 hours of their time to improving CMK's green spaces.

The Town Council, along with other partners such as the City Council, funds the work of CMK Green Gym. The Town Council has renewed its commitment to help fund the group for a further three years.

In 2024, the group held 46 sessions across various CMK locations, including Fred Roche Gardens, Secklow Mound, Station Square, and North 11th Street. A significant focus last year was maintaining the planters along Silbury Boulevard, with approximately 200 hours dedicated to their upkeep.

The group's work is estimated to have an economic value of £11,600 across all sites, calculated using the Volunteer Value & Investment

Audit (VIVA) tool. This includes £2,500 attributed specifically to efforts on the Silbury Boulevard planters. Notable projects from 2024 included the replanting of two planters on Silbury Boulevard with drought-tolerant species such as Salvia, Thyme, and Lavender, supported by Milton Keynes City Council. Additionally, new spring bulbs were planted in planters near the library, enhancing the area for residents and visitors.

Looking ahead, CMK Green Gym will continue to hold weekly sessions in 2025, with activities typically alternating between Fred Roche Gardens and other sites in CMK. The CMK Green Gym meets every Tuesday morning from 10:45am to around 1:30pm, and volunteers are always welcome. For more details, visit their website at: [cmkgreengym.org.uk/volunteer/volunteer](http://cmkgreengym.org.uk/volunteer/volunteer)

Town Council Chair, David Stabler, said: "We're proud to continue to support CMK Green Gym for the next three years and recognise the value of their work in maintaining and improving CMK's green spaces. They've made a brilliant contribution in 2024, and we look forward to working with them as we head into 2025."

## CMK Town Council helps fund Centrecom's new year makeover

Centrecom, located on North Row near Secklow Mound, is the only dedicated community facility within CMK. The well-used centre recently received a boost thanks to a grant from the Town Council, which helped fund the installation of new signage and a noticeboard. These updates have given the facility a fresh and welcoming appearance, helping it better serve the local community.

With a versatile hall, kitchen facilities, and convenient car parking, Centrecom provides a vital space for groups from across Milton Keynes. It's where the Town Council holds its monthly meetings along with other groups including Diabetes UK, Macular Society, Voices MK, Keynes Crafters, and several faith organisations. Centrecom is also a certified marriage venue, hosting civil ceremonies on Mondays alongside its other activities.

The centre benefited from further improvements last year, including redecoration and new curtains, funded through Section 106 contributions from Milton Keynes City Council. These updates reflect Centrecom's continued importance as a welcoming and adaptable hub for the community.

The Town Council's grant for Centrecom was provided as part of its small grants scheme, an annual fund supporting community projects across CMK. Recent beneficiaries of this scheme include a defibrillator for the YMCA and new lockers for homelessness charity UnityMK. If you run a local community group or organisation and would like to learn more about the grants scheme, visit [cmktowncouncil.gov.uk](http://cmktowncouncil.gov.uk). For more information about Centrecom and its facilities, visit [centrecom.org.uk](http://centrecom.org.uk).





## Key planning appeals set to shape CMK's future

In our last newsletter, we reported on the City Council's rejection of plans for a 33-storey apartment block on the site of the former Jaipur restaurant. The developers appealed this decision, and the hearing was originally scheduled for October 2024. While the appeal began as planned, it was adjourned until 4 March 2025 due to significant unresolved disagreements between the parties involved.

The Planning Inspector determined that these issues required further clarification and preparation before proceedings could continue. Over the coming months, both sides will need to refine their arguments and present clearer positions on a range of contested matters.

This delay means March 2025 will be a pivotal month for CMK, with two major hearings scheduled back-to-back. Following the Jaipur site appeal, the redevelopment appeal for The Point is set to begin on 18 March 2025.

The outcomes of these hearings are expected to significantly influence the future look and character of CMK. If either appeal is successful, it could open the door to further large-scale applications, shaping the city's skyline and urban environment.

Residents who wish to stay informed can access the appeal documentation via Milton Keynes City Council's planning portal ([Register View](#)). As the hearing dates approach, materials will be available under the following application references:

Jaipur site: 23/01634/FUL

The Point: 23/02265/FUL

The Town Council will continue to monitor these developments closely.

## THE PLANNING SPOTLIGHT Hundreds more flats coming to CMK

New high-rise buildings are set for CMK, with plans to build nearly 400 flats being approved by Milton Keynes City Council's Planning Committee.

Developers have been given the green light to demolish Westminster House, the building opposite Saxon Court, to build 378 build-to-rent apartments in its place. The apartments will be housed in five separate but adjoining buildings, ranging between seven to nine storeys in height, with some spaces accessible to members of the public.

The Town Council lodged a formal objection to the scheme on several themes which will be familiar to anyone who has followed its planning strategy through recent newsletters. Inadequate parking provision, together with very limited private outdoor space available for renters were of concern. Only half of the proposed flats would have usable balconies, and, given that nearly 200 apartments are expected

to have two bedrooms, Town Councillors believe that families should have the benefit of a balcony and private outdoor space.

The theme of minimal affordable housing provision in proposed developments continues, and the Town Council questioned why developers didn't match the required affordable housing targets set by the City Council, or provide significant developer funding to enable affordable homes to be built elsewhere in CMK.

The developer's proposal was considered at the City Council's Planning Committee in December, where the Town Council's Vice Chair of Planning, Philip Murphy, spoke against the application. Despite this, the Planning Committee voted in favour of the scheme. The committee's view was that the scheme was considered to satisfy planning policy when judged as a whole. So, another large 'build to rent' scheme is set for CMK.



# Stricter parking rules for rental e-bikes and e-scooters

There are now greater restrictions for those parking rental electric bikes and electric scooters, with geo-fenced mandatory parking zones introduced throughout CMK.

Previously, Lime and Dott users could leave their e-bike or e-scooters on pavements and underpasses almost anywhere in the city centre, as long as they weren't causing an obstruction. This was difficult to manage and often resulted in poorly parked or knocked-over bikes and scooters blocking pathways. Milton Keynes City Council, in partnership with Lime and Dott, has launched parking zones to tackle the issue.

The new parking zones are geo-fenced, meaning there's a virtual geographic boundary, so users can only end their journeys by parking in designated cycle

parking areas, such as the many bike stands and street pods in CMK. The parking zones were launched in late 2024 and seem to be effective at reducing pavement riding and street clutter.

The operators are monitoring compliance and parking to ensure that bikes and scooters are parked tidily, and that there is always space available for anyone using their own bike. The operators are issuing warnings to people who don't park in the designated zones, and they have the option to fine those who repeatedly ignore the rules.

You can find out more about the e-scooter trials, along with information on how to report any issues, by visiting: [getaroundmk.org.uk/get-connected/go-electric/e-scooter-trials](http://getaroundmk.org.uk/get-connected/go-electric/e-scooter-trials)



Privately-owned e-scooters are illegal to use in public. They're classed as motor vehicles requiring tax, an MOT and insurance - which isn't possible. You can ride them only on private land with the owner's permission. Otherwise, you risk hefty fines and points on your licence. Stick to rental e-scooter trials like Lime and Dott to stay safe and legal.

# Dozens of people attend free Town Council-funded advice sessions



Between April to October 2024, nearly 50 CMK residents attended free Citizens Advice sessions that are funded by the Town Council. The fortnightly advice sessions, held at the Skills Centre in the centre:mk, are designed to help people with any worries they may have - ranging from housing, employment, benefits to debt.

In just six months, the sessions supported 49 residents with over 130 issues. Advice on welfare benefits was the most popular type of enquiry, and over £41,000 was claimed

in successful benefit awards. The sessions also saw over £20,000 of personal debt be written off and managed, £800 in charitable or hardship grants applied for, and nine fuel vouchers distributed.

These sessions have proven incredibly valuable in helping residents access vital support. We encourage anyone in need of assistance to attend. For more information and to book an appointment, visit: [www.miltonkeynescab.org.uk/get-advice/outreach-locations](http://www.miltonkeynescab.org.uk/get-advice/outreach-locations).

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**Scan here to visit CMK Town Council's website**, where you can find out more information on who we are and what we do. You can also download the application form for our 2023-2024 small community grants scheme.




[www.cmktowncouncil.gov.uk](http://www.cmktowncouncil.gov.uk)



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