

Cotton End Parish Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the Cotton End Parish Council held on Thursday, 12 February 2026 at 7.30pm in the Village Hall

Present: Councillors A Merel (Chairman), G Bangher, A Murray, L Seymour, A Simpson and K Watts.

Also Present : V W Hislop (Clerk), Cllr Middleton (representing Cllr Coombs) and two members of the public (residents).

26/013 APOLOGIES AND REASONS FOR ABSENCE

- i. Apologies were received from Cllr Stimson.
- ii. Cllr Stimson's grounds for absence were approved.

26/014 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

26/015 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 January 2026 were confirmed as a true and accurate record, and signed by the Chairman.

The Clerk reported that the estimate from CPM Playgrounds Ltd, tabled at the last meeting but not received ahead of that meeting, had now been submitted. Works in the sum of £1,020, including VAT, were **agreed. Action: the Clerk.**

26/016 PUBLIC SESSION

The residents present reported that troublesome gullies had now been cleared, and that they were pursuing the matter of a blocked ditch with its owner, Bedford Borough Council.

The Clerk raised a communication received from a resident, suggesting an additional bench be installed, at his cost, to commemorate the inauguration of the Parish Council on 1 April 2018. It was **agreed** to consider this at the March meeting. **Action: the Clerk.**

26/017 UNITARY AUTHORITY REPORT

A written report had been received from Cllr Gallagher (attached at Annex A) following the Clerk's email contact with her. She had confirmed that she is unable to attend meetings going forward, but would send reports. Cllr Middleton qua Cllr Coombs gave an oral report, the highlights of which were BBC's Administration's proposed Budget 2026/26 being voted down, and the inclusion within it that parish councils should take on the cost of speed camera maintenance and calibration, which is estimated at circa £5,000 per annum. It was **noted** that there had been no pre-precept-setting communication on this, or at all.

- 26/018 PLANNING**
i. New applications: 26/00059/FUL first floor side extension 31 Wood Lane. The Council had no objection, but it was **agreed** to draw the planners' attention to the Design Code in the Cotton End Neighbourhood Development Plan. **Action: the Clerk.**
ii. Applications decided by Bedford Borough Council: none.
- 26/019 FINANCE AND RELATED MATTERS**
i. To receive the bank reconciliation: it was **agreed** to receive the report. Cash at the bank was £29,890.70
ii. To approve accounts for payment: the following were **agreed**:
V W Hislop - net February salary - £425.85
Lyreco (via The Crown PH) - stationery - £32.21
(Retrospectively: JRB Enterprise; Royal Mail stamps; Npower - all reported under i above.)
- 26/020 CRIME STATISTICS AND SPEED CAMERA DATA**
The average speed cameras were now serviceable and the Clerk had obtained the data for December 2025 via Cllr Gribble and an officer. Cllr Murray observed that, in December alone, central government would derive funds of £564,000! Discussion returned to the Budget 2026/27 proposals, and it was **agreed** that Cllr Merel would try to attend full council meeting on 18 February 2026 to voice the PC's concerns and objections. **Action: Cllr Merel.**
- 26/021 REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE AND IMPROVEMENTS, AND PLAYING FIELD AND VILLAGE HALL MATTERS**
i. To receive any update re. the fence in Trow Close - there had been no response from the resident and it was **agreed** to approach the Land Registry. **Action: the Clerk.**
ii. Wood Lane ditch - to consider placing a purchase order for regular maintenance - it was **agreed** that Paul Simpkins should be asked to particularise the tri-annual works proposed. **Action: the Clerk.**
iii. Island outside the Bell PH - to consider replacing the grass with a maintenance-free surface - it was **agreed** to approach The Bell PH to request that they take on this maintenance. **Action: Cllr Merel.**
iv. To agree a date in March for any village litter pick - it was **agreed** to conduct Village Tidy Week from Saturday, 18 April, with Cllrs Merel, Seymour and Stimson leading, together with Bill Towns. Cllr Merel would seek to involve the School. **Action: Cllr Merel.**
- 26/022 HIGHWAYS RELATED MATTERS**
To receive any update/progress on the road safety issues reported to Bedford Borough Council Highways - Cllr Merel and the Clerk are due to have a 3.20pm site meeting with Mr Prigmore during w/c 23 February. Cllr Merel would liaise with Mrs Headland. **Action: Cllr Merel.**

26/023

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- i. Project Hawking (Cllr Murray's email referred). Project Hawking was aired and noted.
- ii. A request had been received from the Village Hall to hold a hog roast in a parking bay during May - there was no objection, subject to the necessary insurance(s) being in place.
- iii. Cllr Bangher reported on the poor job made of pot hole filling in Bell Lane. The Clerk would express the Council's dissatisfaction. **Action: the Clerk.**
- iv. Pre-existing brick bus shelter - Cllr Watts would attend to the graffiti.
- v. Replacement bus shelter - the Clerk to pursue mechanical polishing or replacement, or both, of the perspex panels. **Action: the Clerk.**

26/024

DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

12 March 2026.

The meeting concluded at 8.30pm.

Signed by the Chairman..... 12 March 2026

Monthly Report February 2026

Green Waste Collections

- As part of the Council's budget consultation, one of the options the Government asked the Council to consider was introducing a charge for garden waste collections.
- Although many councillors were not supportive of charging, the option was included in the consultation so residents could give their views.
- Following the consultation, the clear majority of residents did not support a charge, so the Council will **not** be introducing charges for green waste collections.

Open Space Management Charges

- The Open Space Management (OSM) charge is an extra £120 yearly charge that some households in Great Denham and Kempston West have been paying on top of Council Tax to help cover open space maintenance.
- The Council's intention has been to remove this extra charge, so residents in these areas are not paying more than other parts of the Borough for the same type of upkeep - nowhere else in Bedford Borough are residents asked to pay twice.
- This decision was called in a third time by members of the Council and sent back to the Executive to be reconsidered.
- If the charge is brought back, families in these areas could face the return of the £120 double tax.
- If the charge is passed onto Parish Councils, residents would still pay through higher Parish precepts. The Band D increases for the areas affected are as follows:
 - Great Denham's Parish precept will increase from £23.53 to £62.98
 - Kempston Town's Parish precept will increase from £56.48 to £68.63
 - Kempston Rural's Parish precept will increase from £41.98 to £149.09

GP surgeries

- In 2023, the Council set aside £9 million to "unblock" plans and get four key GP surgery projects moving in:
 - Wixams
 - Great Barford
 - Kempston
 - Wootton
- On the Wixams GP surgery, the Council, working with the local MP and local borough councillors, has been holding regular meetings with Urban and Civic (the site developer), alongside the NHS to push the project from discussion into delivery.

- We're now seeing real progress, including:
 - A proposed building of around 800m² on a vacant plot near Wixams Town Centre, close to Willow Grove Primary School.
 - A two-storey design, with all patient services on the ground floor.
 - Indicative costs and an initial delivery/construction timeline due by 26 February 2026.
 - A public consultation to take place shortly (date and venue to be confirmed).
 - A planning application intended by the end of June 2026.
- Further meetings and updates will continue throughout the year to keep momentum and support full delivery of the surgery.

Roads maintenance and Potholes

- In 2023, the local road network had a large backlog of maintenance built up over the past decade.
- Unclassified roads (the everyday streets outside homes, schools and workplaces) make up around 60% of the Borough's roads. In 2023, 38% of these were recorded as being in the worst condition. By 2025, that had fallen to 18%.
- Pothole repairs also increased substantially from 1,343 in 2020/21 to 6,308 in 2024/25 with the Council putting more focus on planned, preventative maintenance to reduce repeat problems.
- This work is supported by a £9.5 million highways maintenance investment by Bedford Borough Council.

Glass Recycling success

- Bedford Borough Council introduced glass bottle and jar recycling in orange-lidded bins on 1st December 2025.
- Early figures suggest it has proved successful with residents. In December 2025, the Council collected over 220 tonnes more recycling from orange-lidded bins than the same month the previous year, an increase of around 24%.
- As a reminder, before putting bottles in orange lidded bins:
 - Rinse bottles and jars.
 - Leave metal lids on.
 - Remove corks (put these in the black-lidded bin).
 - Remove plastic spray tops or plastic lids from jars, but these can still go in the orange-lidded bin separately.

David Lloyd Leisure Limited comes to Bedford Borough

- Bedford Borough Council has agreed to lease the Oasis Beach Pool site on Cardington Road to David Lloyd Leisure Limited, who plans to redevelop it into a modern health and racquets club.
- The Council is also working on a Community Use Agreement so there are clear benefits for local people, especially local schools, including access to facilities like swimming.

- The redevelopment is expected to support around 75 full-time jobs, as well as apprenticeship opportunities.
- Next steps are to finalise the legal agreement and then submit a planning application (with target timings during 2026).
- Separately, the Council has £600,000 set aside for free outdoor leisure facilities on land next to the site, and will ask residents what they would like to see there.

Food Waste Collections

- From Monday 30 March 2026, Bedford Borough Council will introduce weekly food waste collections for all houses and flats.
- Homes will get a small kitchen caddy and a larger outdoor food waste bin for weekly collection. Flats will receive a kitchen caddy and either use communal food waste bins or have local collection points set up where communal storage isn't available.
- Residents can line their kitchen caddy using ordinary plastic bags, paper or newspaper, or choose to buy liners (optional).

Government funding

- Councils across the country are under severe financial pressure because demand is rising fast for essential services they're legally required to provide. (Temporary accommodation, children's services and adult social care)
- The cost of providing these services has jumped around 25% and Government funding hasn't risen at the same pace. At the same time, Councils are being asked to do more, like rolling out separate food waste collections.
- For Bedford Borough, when you take all the pressures and new duties into account, we're around £1.1m worse off in Government support. By comparison, Luton is receiving around £139m more support this coming financial year.

Bellwin Scheme

- Dealing with the immediate aftermath of the Cleat Hill explosion cost the Council around £2 million.
- The Council asked the Government for emergency financial help to cover these exceptional costs under the Bellwin Scheme.
- That request was refused, which means the Council has had to fund the £2 million from its own budget, adding extra financial pressure to the Councils finances.

The CIPFA Review and Improvement Plan

- In 2025, an independent finance body called CIPFA reviewed Bedford Borough Council's finances and published its findings.
- A key point in the review is that many of the underlying issues built up over the past decade leading up to 2023, leaving the Council under severe financial pressure. Some of the main reasons are:
 - Council Tax income didn't keep pace with rising costs over many years. The review says this left a lasting hole in funding for day-to-day services.

- Reserves (the Council's "savings") were used up to plug budget gaps, leaving the Council with reserves below the risk assessed minimum in 2023.
- Staff reductions left some areas overstretched, leading to greater reliance on more expensive agency staff to keep services running.
- Demand/Costs for essential services like temporary accommodation, children's services and adult social care have risen sharply.
- To tackle the financial pressures, the Council has introduced an Improvement Plan aimed at closing a £59m funding gap over the coming years.
- In simple terms, the Improvement Plan will ensure tighter control of spending and income. Making sure the Council is run more efficiently so it can return to a stable financial position while protecting frontline services.