

Cotton End Parish Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the Cotton End Parish Council held on Thursday, 11 June 2026 at 7.30pm in the Village Hall

Present: Councillors A Merel (Chairman), A Stimson, A Murray, L Seymour, A Simpson.

Also Present : V W Hislop (Clerk).

26/072 APOLOGIES AND REASONS FOR ABSENCE

- i. Apologies were received from Cllr Bangher.
- ii. Cllr Bangher's reason for absence was approved.

26/073 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

26/074 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 May 2026 were confirmed as a true and accurate record, and signed by the Chairman.

26/075 PUBLIC SESSION

None present.

26/076 UNITARY AUTHORITY REPORT

Cllr Coombs had sent his apologies. An email with a written report had been received and is at Annex A. No report had been received from Cllr Gallagher.

26/077 PLANNING

- i. New applications: none.
- ii. Applications decided by Bedford Borough Council: none.

26/078 FINANCE AND RELATED MATTERS

- i. To receive the bank reconciliation: it was **agreed** to receive the report. Cash at the bank was £35,568.13.
- ii. To approve the accounts to be settled: the following were **agreed**:
 Clerk's mileage - £67.37
 Clerk's net June salary - £432.77
 HMRC PAYE - £126.59
 Reynolds Landscaping Services Ltd Invoice SI 2042 - £336
 Pandora Technologies Ltd - £2,754
 Lynn Lavender - £200
 M J Hughes - £805
 (Additional to the above, reported, the following were agreed:
 V W Hislop (Toolstation) - £22.09
 CPM Playgrounds Ltd Invoice 5753 - £156
 Simpkins Garden Services Invoices 31 and 32 - £250 and £65.)

iii. To receive the 2025/26 reports from the internal auditor and an oral report from the Clerk: the Clerk referred to the somewhat disappointing internal audit report, stating that the conclusions were primarily due to the gap in clerks/responsible financial officers in the summer of 2025, together with the, on the face of it, poor or incomprehensible, or both, website technology. Proceeding through the internal control objectives that had been marked 'NO', he observed as follows:

C. The 2024/25 Risk Assessment *had been* reviewed and agreed by the Council in May 2025, but this was not recorded in the May 2025 meeting minutes.

H. Again, the Asset Register *had been* reviewed and agreed by the Council during 2025/26, but similarly is not minuted.

L. The authority had not published agenda and minutes on its website due to the challenges experienced with that medium.

N. The authority had failed to comply with 2024/25 AGAR publication requirements. The current Clerk had commenced his duties from 8 September 2025 and had not been aware that the Completion Notice had not already been advertised (deadline was 30 September 2025).

O. Digital and data compliance - this refers to the same problems experienced with Control Objective **L.** above.

The Clerk had written to the internal auditor and observed, "...that just because there may be no minute relating to difficulties with the website, it does not follow that they do not exist. Indeed, during my time as Clerk - since last September - there have been several conversations with more than one member - and their own experience of using it - highlighting the challenges of it and that it must be resolved during 2026/27." The Clerk had also requested the Bedfordshire Association of Town and Parish Council's (BATPC) Chief Executive to circulate an email to all BATPC clerks offering a consultancy opportunity to any clerk skilled in the parishonline web platform.

A discussion ensued about the problems with the website over a long period of time, and it was **agreed** that the Clerk and Cllrs Merel and Murray would meet and, if there were no suitable resolution, the website should be replaced. **(The Annual Governance Statement and Accounting Statements 2025/26 must be published on the website before 1 July 2026.)**

26/079

CRIME STATISTICS AND SPEED CAMERA DATA

The single crime recorded was noted. The number of speeding tickets issued in January, February and March were 533, 590 and 687 respectively.

26/080

REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE AND IMPROVEMENTS, AND PLAYING FIELD AND VILLAGE HALL MATTERS

i. The completion of the installation of a new bench was noted, and it was agreed that an excellent job had been done. Cllr Merel would

write to Mr Potter, thanking him. **Action: Cllr Merel.**

ii. The quotation for Christmas lighting was approved, as were the locations of the motifs, and a switch-on date of 4 December. **Action: The Clerk.**

iii. It was **agreed** to instruct Reynolds Landscaping to undertake a light cut of the bushes along the footpath internal to the playing field. **Action: the Clerk.**

iv. The CPM quotation in the sum of £425 plus VAT was **agreed**. **Action: The Clerk.**

26/081 HIGHWAYS RELATED MATTERS

i. The Clerk had taken delivery of the speed indicator sign, the purchase of which was agreed at the last meeting, and had requested Andy Muskett to carry out the installation.

26/082 COMMUNICATIONS

i. Peter Simons' email of 19 May 2026 - he is to come back to Cllr Merel with proposals re. changes to signage and warning beacons, etc.

ii. Enquiry about hiring the playing field for a fun day - there was detailed discussion about the demands and risks on the PC of such an event, and it was recognised that, if agreed, it would be for 2027 rather than this year. In the past, inflatables had not been permitted. Cllr Stimson volunteered to meet with the potential organisers, but initially Cllr Merel would do some background research. **Action: Cllr Merel.**

iii. Harrows Close - refuse collection, and management of waste by residents - B/F to July meeting for discussion. **Action: the Clerk.**

26/083 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

i. Bus service - Cllr Merel reiterated the outcomes of his meeting with Richard Fuller MP, who had concluded that little could be done, as the Parish remained reasonably well serviced, relatively speaking.

ii. Designation signage for land owned by the PC - Cllr Murray referred to signs he had seen in Radlett - for substantive discussion and decision at the July meeting. **Action: the Clerk.**

26/084 DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

9 July 2026.

The meeting concluded at 8.35pm.

Signed by the Chairman..... 9 July 2026

ANNEX A TO
PARISH COUNCIL MINUTES
OF 11 JUNE 2026

Borough Councillor Report

Cotton End Parish Council

Cllr Leigh Coombs, Shortstown Ward | 11 June 2026

Good evening all. My update on borough matters relevant to Cotton End and the wider ward.

New Local Plan - this matters for us directly

The borough has formally started work on a new Local Plan (Local Plan 2050), partly to position the area for the arrival of Universal. The first public consultation on scope and early direction runs September to October 2026, and a “call for sites” is open from this summer to October, inviting landowners and developers to put forward potential development land. Given Shortstown ward’s recent growth history, I’d strongly encourage the parish to engage early and formally with the consultation. The timetable is on www.bedford.gov.uk/localplan2050, in libraries and at the Borough Hub in Horne Lane. I’m happy to help coordinate a parish response.

Universal works now on site

Work has officially started on site at the Universal theme park and resort off the A6 corridor. The Mayor and University of Bedfordshire have also signed a Civic Agreement on jobs, skills and economic development. This is the single biggest driver behind local housing and infrastructure pressure, so it’s worth us keeping a standing eye on what it means for traffic, school places and services here.

Bus services

The Stagecoach changes from 1 June have hit our corridor hard. Cotton End is served by the 9 group (9 / 9A / 9B), Bedford to Shefford via Shortstown. When relaunched in 2024 it ran every half hour and named Cotton End as a stop. It now runs every two hours, with the last bus at 10.30pm. Service 10 has gone entirely.

That is a significant downgrade for anyone relying on the bus for work, school or medical appointments. These are commercial decisions by Stagecoach, not the borough, but I am raising the Cotton End impact directly. I have a meeting with Stagecoach coming up, and I want to take your experiences into that room with me. If your journey has been affected, please tell me, because resident evidence is what moves these decisions.

Cabinet changes - what's behind them

You'll have seen the borough has reduced the Mayor's Cabinet from ten portfolio holders to eight. The Mayor frames this as a more efficient structure, but it follows three Conservative resignations from his Cabinet inside two weeks, which opposition groups have described as a crisis.

The third of those, and the one closest to home, was our fellow Shortstown ward councillor Sarah Gallagher. She resigned as portfolio holder for customer experience, leisure and culture, stating in her resignation letter that she could no longer serve in a Cabinet where she believed "unethical and corrupt behaviour" was being tolerated. Her letter raised serious concerns, including that the purchase of the former Debenhams building was, to her knowledge, never agreed at a Cabinet meeting, and that members were only informed after decisions had already been taken.

Our Liberal Democrat group leader, Cllr Henry Vann, responded that Cllr Gallagher is "finally discovering what many of us have been saying for more than two years," and that the council is being left in chaos. Separately, questions have also been raised about the Mayor declaring a pecuniary interest in East West Rail discussions, especially as he signed off on a £40,000 consultant spend to look at alternative routes (One right through our area that would have required Shortstown demolitions)

Other borough notes

Free Sunday live music runs through August at the Mill Meadows bandstand on the Embankment. The borough also secured prosecutions worth over £14,000 in an environmental crime crackdown covering fly-tipping and fly-posting. Residents can report issues at www.bedford.gov.uk/ReportIt.

Happy to take questions, and I'll bring anything raised tonight back to the borough.