

Cotton End Parish Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the Cotton End Parish Council held on Thursday, 9 July 2026 at 7.30pm in the Village Hall Social Club

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

Also Present : V W Hislop (Clerk).

- 26/085 APOLOGIES AND REASONS FOR ABSENCE**
 i. Apologies and a concurrent resignation had been received from Cllr Watts.
 ii. Approval of reason(s) for absence: not applicable.
- 26/086 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**
 i. Retrospective (at the time of that item) declarations of interest were made by Cllrs Stimson and Murray in respect of agenda item 26/091 iii.
 ii. Applications for dispensation: none received.
- 26/087 MINUTES**
 The minutes of the meeting held on 11 June 2026 were confirmed as a true and accurate record, and signed by the Chairman.
- 26/088 PUBLIC SESSION**
 None present.
- 26/089 UNITARY AUTHORITY REPORT**
 A written report had been received from Cllr Coombs, was **noted** and is at Annex A.
- 26/090 PLANNING**
 i. New applications: 26/00581/FUL 23 Wood Lane, amended/additional drawings: flood assessment. Cllr Merel reported that no application under that number now appeared on the planning authority's website.
 ii. Applications decided by Bedford Borough Council: none.
- (Cllr Bangher raised the existence of an apparent development at Gorse Farm, which the Clerk would investigate. **Action: the Clerk.**)
- 26/091 FINANCE AND RELATED MATTERS**
 i. To receive the bank reconciliation: it was **agreed** to receive the report. Cash at the bank was £33,353.31.
 ii. To approve the accounts to be settled: the following were **agreed**:
 ICO annual data protection fee - £52.00
 Clerk's net July salary - £432.77
 HMRC PAYE - £126.79
 Reynolds Landscaping Services Ltd Invoice SI 2090 - £336

CPM Playgrounds Ltd Invoice 5764 - £510

Andy Muskett Ltd Invoice 6226 - £71.40

(Additional to the above, reported, the following were agreed:

Reynolds Landscaping Service Ltd Invoice SI 2101 - £108

Andy Muskett Ltd Invoice 6246 - £594.00.)

iii. Christmas Gift Grants: It was **agreed** to award grants of £100 each To the Gardeners and Residents Groups. (£200 to be paid to the Residents Group, which would then give £100 cash to the Gardeners.)

Action: the Clerk.

26/092

CRIME STATISTICS AND SPEED CAMERA DATA

The latest crime data had shown no incident. The number of speeding tickets issued in May was 509, with one vehicle having exceeded 50 MPH.

26/093

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

i. The latest timber replacement by CPM Playgrounds Ltd was **noted**, and viewed as a good job done.

ii. Harrows Close refuse collection and residents' management of waste: the Clerk was requested to write to North Hertfordshire Homes, suggesting that the worker who does the stairways could be asked to see to the untidiness from refuse and waste also. **Action: the Clerk.**

iii. Maintenance work to the playing field boundary with Meeting Close garden boundaries, post the prescribed nesting season: It was **agreed** to obtain a quote from Reynolds Landscaping to undertake this work, together with the bushes near the bins and smoking shelter.

Action: the Clerk.

iv. Ownership designation signage: it was **agreed** to replace or modify the two signs in the park bearing the name of the pre-existing Eascotts Parish Council. **Action: The Clerk.**

26/094

HIGHWAYS RELATED MATTERS

The installation of the new speed indicator sign had been completed, and news had been received of planned alterations to the mini roundabout at Trow Close. The potential for a further speed sign would be considered at the August meeting. **Action: the Clerk.**

26/095

COMMUNICATIONS

The resident's email regarding the circumstances of the trampoline being "fly tipped" in the park, and the Clerk's reply, had been distributed to all Council Members. The clerk would follow up his reporting of the items to Bedford Borough Council. **Action: the Clerk.**

26/096

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

i. Pedestrian entrance gate to the park: the Clerk would action a decision made previously to repair or replace the gate. **Action: the Clerk.**

ii. Parish Council website: Cllr Murray and the Clerk reported that good

progress had been made with understanding and updating the website, and it was confirmed that it is fit for purpose.

iii. It was **noted** that it would be proper and appropriate for the Parish Council to be charged letting fees for the use of the social club, with effect from April 2026.

26/097 MEETING DATES

The following dates for full council meetings were agreed for the remainder of the 2026/27 Council Year: 13 August 2026, 10 September 2026, 15 October, 12 November 2026, 10 December 2026, 14 January 2027, 11 February 2027, 11 March 2027, 8 April 2027.

The meeting concluded at 8.18pm.

Signed by the Chairman..... 13 August 2026

ANNEX A TO
PARISH COUNCIL MINUTES
OF 9 JULY 2026

Borough Councillor report from Cllr Leigh Coombs to Cotton End Parish Council

July 2026

1) Buses: Petitions Heard and a Review Secured

Petitions calling for the return of lost bus services to our area were heard at Full Council on 1 July, and I spoke in the debate to set out exactly how residents have been affected. Members backed the motions and the Council has agreed to commission a review of the services affected.

The problems followed the changes that came in on 31 May. I told the meeting that while a school bus to Bedford Academy was secured, most of the Shortstown stops were removed at the same time without any announcement or consultation, and that Cotton End has gone from three services running through the village to far fewer. On the New Cardington Fields estate, hundreds of homes are still being built yet the nearest active stop is now more than a mile away, over four times the national planning standard of 400 metres that applied when permission was granted. One bus stop there has stood in place since spring 2023 without a single bus ever calling at it.

I gave the meeting real examples of the impact, including a partially sighted resident left to pay twenty pounds for a taxi home, and I pressed the Council on why ward councillors were not consulted and where the government bus funding has actually gone. The review is now agreed, and I will keep pushing for a clear timetable to restore services rather than a vague promise. If the changes have affected you, please tell me, as your experiences help build the case.

2) Post Office: Fighting to Keep a Service in Our Area

The Post Office inside the Morrisons Daily store on North Drive is set to close on Sunday 9 August 2026, after Morrisons confirmed it is shutting the store and taking the counter down with it. Because this is an “unplanned closure” driven by the shop closing, there is no formal six week consultation, which makes it all the more important that residents make their voices heard now.

The two nearest branches are London Road in Bedford (about 1.6 miles away, open seven days) and Elstow (about 2.1 miles away). I know that is no comfort to older residents, those without a car, and anyone who relies on cash or on doing things in person.

I am not letting this pass quietly. I have already been in touch with both the Post Office and Morrisons, and I have contacted local businesses to see whether a new branch could be hosted here in the village. I am pressing for a firm commitment and a clear timetable to

restore a service, with the needs of vulnerable and less mobile residents put first. Residents can add their voice by emailing comments@postoffice.co.uk or commenting at postofficeviews.co.uk, and any local shop that might host a branch can find out more at runapostoffice.co.uk.

3) A New Local Producers' Market for Our Villages

I am pleased to share an idea I have been quietly working on. NCEM, which I chair, owns the land at Beauvais Square in Shortstown, and I believe it would be an ideal spot to host a market once a month. My vision is for a genuine local producers' market, food and goods that are grown or made locally, not mass produced items shipped in from far away. Local producers would come first, with preference given to those from Shortstown, Cardington, Cople and Cotton End.

Because Bedford Borough Council holds ancient market charter rights by Royal Prerogative, which date back to Bedford's original charter in 1166 and place limits on markets held within the borough, this cannot simply be set up overnight. I have therefore been working with the Council's officers to secure the formal approval and permission needed to do this properly. It is early days, but I wanted the Parish Council to know it is in hand, and I will update you as things progress. If any Cotton End residents grow or make something they would love to sell locally, I would be glad to hear from them.

4) Full Council Update: No Confidence Vote in the Mayor

At Full Council on Wednesday 1 July, a cross party motion of no confidence in the Mayor was passed by 28 votes to 12. The motion stated that the council has no confidence in the Mayor and called on him to resign. The vote is not binding, and the Mayor has said he intends to remain in post until the mayoral and council elections in May, but the result reflects the strength of cross party concern about how the borough is being run. As I have reported before, this sits alongside a difficult budget process, rising borrowing and a Government ordered Best Value inspection. My focus remains on transparency, accountability and protecting the services our communities rely on.

5) A Community Asset for Cotton End: shortstown.co.uk

I want to put in a word for shortstown.co.uk, which despite the name is very much for Cotton End too, alongside Cople and Cardington. It is a genuine community asset, carrying local news, events, recipes and a free directory of local businesses and services. Much of the reporting behind this update, including the bus and Post Office stories, appears there first. It is a great way for residents to keep up with what is happening across our villages, and there is a free newsletter people can sign up to. I would encourage residents and this Council to make use of it, share it, and help it grow.

As always, I am here to support residents across Cotton End, and I am happy to be contacted on any of the issues above or anything else affecting the village. All contact is treated in the strictest confidence.