Cotton End Parish Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the Cotton End Parish Council held on Thursday, 10 September 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) and T Middleton qua Cllr Coombs.

26/114 APOLOGIES AND REASONS FOR ABSENCE

i. None.
ii. N/A.

26/115 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

26/116 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 August 2026 were confirmed as a true and accurate record, and signed by the Chairman.

26/117 PUBLIC SESSION

None present.

26/118 UNITARY AUTHORITY REPORT

Cllr Coombs had sent his apologies and was represented by Mr T Middleton. Cllr Coombs' report, when received, shall be at Annex A to these minutes. **Action: Mr Middleton.**
Following an intervention by Cllr Murray, it was **resolved** that the Clerk should again contact Cllr Gallagher to express members' disappoint- at the lack of reporting from her, only one report having been received since his last contact with her in March/April 2026. **Action: the Clerk.**
(Post-Meeting Note: since making contact a report has been received and is at Annex B.)

26/119 PLANNING

i. New applications: none.
ii. Applications decided by Bedford Borough Council: none.
iii. NPPF: changes from October: Cllr Murray reiterated what had been reported, at Item 26/118, that - from October 2026 - ward councillors shall no longer be able to call in applications.
iv. Neighbourhood Development Plan: review and update: Cllr Murray highlighted that for NDPs to be relevant in planning application terms, they must have a currency of less than 5 years. He requested that the NDP should appear on future agendas as a standing item. **Action: the Clerk.**

26/120 FINANCE AND RELATED MATTERS

i. To receive the bank reconciliation: it was **agreed** to receive the report. Cash at the bank was £29,207.88, with a £2,000 donation pending, as well as part 2 of the precept (£12,750.00) due on 14 September.

ii.To approve the accounts to be settled: the following were **agreed:**
Pandora Technologies Limited - £3,324.00
Clerk's net September salary (backdated pay award pending) - £432.77
Reynold's Landscaping Services Limited Invoice SI 2182 - £336.00
360 Graffix Ltd - £106.80
HMRC PAYE - £126.79
(Additional to the above, reported, the following were **agreed** retrospectively:
Simpkins Garden Services - £65.00
Blue Parrot Payroll Services - £18.00.)

iii. Website published AGARs 2023/24 and 2024/25: the Clerk reported that, as part of the external audit for 2025/26, the auditor had identified the fact that, on the website, the AGAR 2023/24 was an unaudited version and the AGAR for 2024/25 was missing altogether. The Clerk had managed to trace the audited version of the former and had obtained the latter from the external auditor's records; both are now published on the website.

iii. To note the NALC pay award 2026, effective 1 April 2026: the national agreement reached was **noted**.

26/121 CRIME STATISTICS AND SPEED CAMERA DATA

The latest set of crime data had shown two incidents. Camera data had been received direct from the police via the Clerk's contacts there. Cllr Merel agreed to write to both the Prime Minister and Richard Fuller CBE MP about the perversity of the potential for the costs of camera calibration/maintenance to be passed to parish councils in the unitary authority's 2027/28 Budget. **Action: Cllr Merel.**

26/122 REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE AND IMPROVEMENTS, AND PLAYING FIELD AND VILLAGE HALL MATTERS

i. To consider the purchase of a larger waste bin adjacent to the younger children's play area (Cllr Stimson): it was **agreed** that the Clerk should instead price the cost of installation of a second, similar sized bin. **Action: the Clerk.**

ii. To consider a quotation for improvements to village hall land outside the social club (26/103 iii (August) refers) (Clerk): phases 1 and 2 of the works proposed and quoted for were **agreed. Action: the Clerk.**

iii. The successful adjustments by a resident to the pedestrian gate to the playing field were **noted** and acknowledged with thanks.

26/123 HIGHWAYS RELATED MATTERS

i. It was **agreed** to locate the south facing speed indicator sign before the housing and just past the Cotton End village sign. **Action: the Clerk.**

ii. Extension of 30MPH zone to south of village: Cllr Murray proposed, and it was **agreed**, to approach the Borough Council to request an extension of the 30MPH zone to the south side of the Cotton End road turning at Herrings Green. **Action: the Clerk.**

iii. Public footpath to Shocott Spring: Cllr Murray proposed, and it was **agreed**, that the Clerk should remind the school of its responsibilities in relation to overhanging vegetation to both the Shocott Spring public footpath and the footway parallel to the school's west boundary. **Action: the Clerk.**

26/124 COMMUNICATIONS

The various pieces of correspondence at sub-items i. to iii. were **noted**, as was the Clerk's correspondence concerning 101 High Road.

26/125 ANY OTHER BUSINESS (Published with Agenda)

i. FEMTO (sic) cells: Cllr Murray enquired as to whether the unitary authority was trialling these, equivalent to wifi extender, devices. **Action: Mr Middleton/Cllr Coombs.**

ii. No Cold Calling Zone: Cllr Murray reported that there had been a lot of cold calling recently and questioned if more signage should be installed. **Action: All.**

(iii. Non-published AoB: Cllr Stimpson stated that the lamppost outside Rookery Farm was obscured with vegetation. **Action: the Clerk.**
Flower trough under Notice Board: Cllr Stimson to supply the resident's address to the Clerk. **Action: Cllr Stimson/the Clerk.**
Parish Councillor vacancy: Cllr Merel to speak to a prospective candidate. **Action: Cllr Merel.**
Playing field trees, etc. **Action: the Clerk.**
MacIntyre School parking: Cllr Merel to visit the site. **Action: Cllr Merel.**
Main school parking, etc. highway improvements: Clerk to chase the bringing forward of the scheme with Peter Simons. **Action: the Clerk.**)

26/126 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

15 October 2026.

The meeting concluded at 8.37pm.

Signed by the Chairman..... 15 October 2026

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

September 2026

1) Recycling Centre: Register Your Vehicle Before 1 October

A practical change every household should know about. From 1 October 2026, vehicles must be registered before they can use the Household Waste Recycling Centre at Barkers Lane. Registration is free and only takes a few minutes on the Council's website, and residents without internet access can register by calling customer services on 01234 267422.

Once registered, cars and pickups are covered for two years, vans for six months, and hired vehicles for 24 hours, and a small single axle trailer can be registered alongside a car. There is no need to book a visit once your vehicle is registered. The Council says the change is needed because the site has seen a significant increase in waste coming from outside the borough and from businesses that are not entitled to use it, which pushes up costs for local council tax payers and causes queues at busy times. My advice is simple: register in good time, before your first trip after 1 October, and please pass the message on to neighbours and relatives who may not see Council announcements online.

2) Post: Getting Our Deliveries Back on Track

Many residents will have noticed that post has been arriving late, sometimes very late, over recent weeks. This is not imagination. Royal Mail's own service data confirms serious delivery failures across the MK40 to MK45 postcodes, which covers every one of our villages, driven by staffing shortages and sickness absence at the Bedford delivery office. So called rotating deliveries mean some streets are going days at a time without any post at all, and residents have reported missed NHS appointment letters and small businesses losing out while mail sits in the sorting office.

My colleague Cllr Henry Vann has written to Royal Mail's senior management demanding immediate additional resources for the Bedford delivery office, an end to rotating deliveries, and a clear timetable for a reliable service to return. I fully support that call. Royal Mail has blamed a higher than usual number of vacancies and says outstanding mail is being prioritised, but a vital public service should not be allowed to fail like this. If late post has caused you to miss something important, a hospital letter, a bill, a legal deadline, please tell me, as real examples from Cotton End strengthen the case, and do also complain to Royal Mail directly so the scale of the problem is on record.

3) Have Your Say on the Future of Our Libraries

The Council has launched a consultation on its draft Library Strategy for 2026 to 2031, alongside three options for developing Bedford Central Library, with up to £4.5 million of Local Regeneration Fund money potentially available to support the work. Libraries matter enormously to villages like ours, whether for children, for older residents, or simply as warm, welcoming community spaces, so I would encourage residents to make their views known.

The survey is online at www.bedford.gov.uk/LibraryConsultation, paper copies are available in libraries, and there are drop in sessions at local libraries for anyone who wants to ask questions. The consultation closes at midday on 2 November 2026. No decisions have yet been made, which is exactly why now is the time to speak up.

4) Changes to planning decision making from 31 October 2026

The revised National Planning Policy Framework published in August introduces a national scheme of delegation which takes effect on 31 October 2026. From that date the ability of ward councillors to call applications in to Planning Committee is removed, and more decisions will be taken by officers under delegated powers. This is a significant change for parishes, as the councillor call-in route has often been the way a contested village application has reached committee. I will keep the Parish Council updated on how the Borough intends to operate the new arrangements, and would suggest the Parish Council makes sure its own comments on applications are as full and evidence-based as possible, as they will carry more of the weight.

5) High Road, Cotton End: removal of splitter island and resurfacing

Bedford Borough Council has confirmed a temporary road closure on High Road / Trow Close, Cotton End (numbers 26 to 113) to allow the removal of the splitter island by Trow Close and resurfacing of the carriageway. The closure is anticipated to run overnight from 20:00 on Friday 9th October 2026 to 06:00 on Saturday 10th October 2026. A signed diversion will be in place and access will be maintained for emergency vehicles. The closure extent and diversion route can be viewed at https://one.network/?tm=GB151389393. Enquiries about the works should go to the Borough Council on 01234 718003.

Tom Middleton and I have campaigned for this change for some time. The island has been a long-standing concern for residents, with HGVs regularly clipping the kerb and causing vibration to nearby properties, and larger vehicles overrunning the footpath, presenting a risk to pedestrians. Previous attempts by others to have the layout changed had been unsuccessful, so it is pleasing to see the works now scheduled. I have publicised the closure on local community Facebook groups and will report back to the Parish Council once the works are complete.

Monthly August

River Quality

- Bedford Borough Council is continuing to press for action over concerns about water quality in the River Great Ouse and across the Borough.
- While the Council is not the regulator responsible for river water quality, the Mayor and Council are seeking to work constructively with the organisations that are, including the Environment Agency and Anglian Water, to achieve the best results for residents and our local rivers.
- The Mayor has written directly to both organisations (Environment Agency and Anglian Water) seeking clear answers on:
    - What monitoring and testing is taking place locally.
    - What is causing poor water quality and what action is being taken.
    - Measures to prevent sewage and other pollution entering the river.
    - Planned investment in sewage treatment works, pumping stations and sewer infrastructure.
    - Action to reduce storm overflow discharges and improve water quality over the longer term.
- The Council has also established the Bedford Borough Water Management Alliance in February 2025. This brings together organisations including the Environment Agency, Anglian Water, Natural England, the National Farmers Union and others to coordinate work on water quality, flooding and the health of local waterways.

Public Toilets Update

- Bedford Borough Council is working to improve public toilet provision following the closure of the automatic toilets at Bedford Park and Addison Howard Park.
- The two toilets were more than 20 years old and had reached the end of their practical life. The company responsible for maintaining them no longer wished to continue servicing the units and replacement parts are no longer available.
- It is also important to put the closures in context. Bedford Borough previously had nine public toilets across its parks, seven of which were closed prior to 2023, leaving the two automatic facilities that have now reached the end of their life.
- The Council will look at practical options for improving toilet provision as part of its wider work to improve parks and facilities for residents.

Planning Update

- The Government has announced major changes to the national planning system, including a new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) aimed at increasing housebuilding and speeding up planning decisions.
- However, a number of councillors have serious concerns about the impact of the wider planning reforms on local democratic involvement, particularly the ability of borough, parish and town councillors to influence which applications are considered by elected councillors rather than decided by planning officers.
- The concern is that while more homes are needed, local communities must continue to have a meaningful say over where development takes place and whether the necessary roads, schools, GP services, drainage and other infrastructure can support it.
- The Mayor believes applicants should be encouraged to engage properly with parish councils, town councils, borough councillors and residents before major applications are submitted, rather than reducing local involvement in the planning process.
- The principle is simple, we need the right homes in the right places, supported by the right infrastructure, but local democracy and the voice of our communities must not be weakened in the process.

Library Consultation

- Bedford Borough Council has launched a public consultation on the draft Library Strategy 2026–31 and the future of Bedford Central Library.
- The consultation sets out three potential options for improving Bedford Central Library, including better accessibility, improved facilities for children and families, and more flexible spaces for learning, community activities and digital access.
- Up to £4.5 million of Local Regeneration Fund grant funding has been identified which could support improvements to the Central Library, subject to government funding requirements.
- No decisions have been made, and feedback from residents, library users and local organisations will help shape the final proposals.
- The consultation closes at 12 midday on 2 November 2026.
- More information is available at www.bedford.gov.uk/LibraryConsultation.

Crisis Resilience Fund

- Bedford Borough Council has approved a new Crisis Resilience Fund policy to provide practical, year-round help to residents facing financial hardship or an immediate crisis. The fund replaces the previous Household Support Fund and is intended to provide earlier support before problems become more serious.
- Support can include help with food, energy, essential travel and basic household costs, with crisis payments of up to £200 per person in a household. In some circumstances, assistance of up to £2,000 per household may also be available for essential white goods and household items.

- Priority will be given to residents most in need, including families with children, disabled or vulnerable people, those experiencing homelessness, victims of domestic abuse, care leavers, veterans and households affected by emergencies such as fire or flooding.
- Residents can apply online, by telephone or through a referral from a support organisation, with the Council aiming to make decisions within two working days once all necessary information has been received.

Overhaul of homelessness services

- Bedford Borough Council is updating its rough sleeper services to better reflect current demand and place greater emphasis on preventing homelessness.
- Homelessness charity SMART will cease operations on 2nd October 2026, but the Council will continue providing rough sleeper outreach, welfare support and night accommodation, with many SMART staff transferring to the Council.
- As part of the changes, the Prebend Day Centre will close and overnight camp beds will be replaced with self-contained rooms, giving people a safer and more private place to stay with cooking and washing facilities.

Crime update

- There has been an encouraging fall in recorded crime across Bedford Borough in the latest fortnightly figures (at the time of writing).
- Between 29 July and 11 August, recorded crime fell from 847 offences to 696, a reduction of almost 18%.
- There were also notable reductions in:
    - Violence: down 21%
    - Public order offences: down 24%
    - Criminal damage and arson: down 29%
    - Vehicle crime: down 24%
    - Town Centre crime: down around 32%, from 116 offences to 79
- However, there is no room for complacency, and the Council will continue to work constructively with the police.

50th Anniversary of the Child Development Centre in Kempston

- The Child Development Centre in Kempston is celebrating its 50th anniversary, marking five decades of supporting children, young people and families across Bedfordshire.
- The Centre provides assessment, therapy, educational support and family guidance, including support for children and young people with SEND. It is delivered in partnership between Bedford Borough Council and local NHS organisations.
- It is important that we continue to recognise the important work of staff past and present and the difference the Centre has made to generations of local families.
- The Council remains committed to working with its NHS partners to ensure the Centre continues providing high-quality, inclusive support for children and families.

Bedford Council Hosts Regional Summit on Universal

- Council leaders from across the region met in Bedford with Tourism Minister Stephanie Peacock MP and representatives from Universal to discuss how local communities can maximise the benefits of the planned Universal UK resort.
- Bedford Borough Council has established a Socio-Economic Taskforce to help prepare the local workforce and businesses for the opportunities created by the development.
- The Universal resort is expected to open in 2031, with projections of around 28,000 jobs and almost £50 billion of economic benefit to the UK.
- This was the first regional roundtable of its kind, with further meetings and collaboration between Government, Universal and local authorities expected as the project progresses.

Fostering for Bedford Borough Council

- Bedford Borough Council is looking for more local families to foster, helping some of our most vulnerable children grow up in a safe, supportive home environment.
- If you are considering taking on this important role, you can find out more information at https://www.bedford.gov.uk/social-care-and-health/fostering/who-can-foster or contact us fostering@bedford.gov.uk