

Minutes of a Meeting of Staploe Parish Council Held at 7.45pm on Wednesday 17th September 2025 at Wyboston Village Hall.

Present: Cllr. J. Ibbett, Cllr. J. Thomson, Cllr. P. Yockney (for the first 15 minutes of the meeting), L. Crawford (Clerk) and Morag Clark (candidate for cooption) and one member of the public.

Apologies for absence: Cllr. E. Meola and Cllr. G. Meola.

2025/070. Declarations of Interest and Registers of Members Interests.

There were no declarations of interest.

No updates to the registers of members interests were made.

2025/071. Cooptions

Morag Clark was nominated as a candidate for cooption to fill the vacancy created by the resignation of Damian Smith and Roger Arnold was nominated as a candidate to fill the vacancy created by the resignation of Veronica Zwetsloot. Both were nominated by Cllr. J. Ibbett and Cllr. J. Thomson. **It was resolved to coopt them as members of the Parish Council.** The decision was unanimous.

Cllr. P. Yockney left the meeting.

2025/072. Open Forum

A resident suggested that we write to ask Eastpark Energy about the Legacy Fund. The Clerk will contact them. Councillors suggested that the fund could be used for insulation of the cabins, upgrading the play area and a new village hall.

Cllr. J. Thomson and Cllr. J. Ibbett reported that there is a damaged sign which needs repair and a number of potholes in Honeydon. The Clerk will report these to the Highways Department.

2025/073. Approve the Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting held on 20th August 2025

Having been previously circulated the minutes were approved as an accurate record of the meeting. Proposed by Cllr. J. Ibbett and seconded by Cllr. J. Thomson.

2025/074. Borough Councillor Sira's report

Monthly Report September 2025

Current Position of Bedford Borough Council

• I was somewhat disappointed, although not surprised, by the recent email sent to Parish Councillors from a political party of Bedford Borough. I have always maintained that parish councils should not be about politics but local issues and local people. The email referred to both the Borough's financial position and the Local Plan 40. The financial position is challenging, and the administration is working with Officers on a stability plan and an improvement plan to tackle the forecast overspend. Regarding the Local Plan 40, I have also set out the facts. I have to agree with the Inspector that the plan should be withdrawn, and we should quickly get another, more suitable plan underway. We unfortunately have fallen below that 5-year land supply, so we need to get a new plan in place as quickly as possible. I've set out below some of the facts on the various issues

Summary: Local Plan 2040 and Key Developments

- Bedford Borough submitted the Local Plan 2040 in April 2022, but in November 2023, the Inspector found critical issues, including:*
- Lack of certainty in funding and timing for major highway infrastructure.*
- Overly optimistic housing delivery rates for new settlements.*
- Housing growth is planned mostly after 2030, with little flexibility for delays.*
- Heritage concerns at the Abbey Field site. The Council attempted to fix the plan, costing £1m+, and the examination was paused. Universal Studios was agreed upon during this pause, which seriously affects the plan's deliverability and*

soundness. In June 2025, the Inspector advised that the current plan was overtaken by events (like Universal), recommended withdrawal, and highlighted unresolved issues in spatial strategy and evidence. Legal constraints mean the Council cannot start a new plan until the current one is withdrawn. There is a risk of speculative development without a 5-year land supply; the Council will manage this risk through planning and engagement. 1 If the Council doesn't withdraw the plan (already effectively rejected twice), the Inspector will have to formally issue an unsoundness report.

Borrowing

- CIPFA finds that the Council's borrowing remains proportionate and affordable. Financing costs are currently under 10% of net revenue, and even at their projected peak by 2031/32, they remain well within CIPFA's definition of safe levels.

Financial Information:

Please see below the financial information to help clear up any misunderstandings regarding the CIPFA report and Reserves.

CIPFA and Council Finances

- The Borough Council commissioned independent experts, the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA), to conduct an independent review of Bedford Borough Council's finances.
- In brief, CIPFA has found that the Council's financial difficulties are not new; they are the result of issues around poor governance, financial controls, and short-term decisions that impacted the Council negatively in the long term. Some, but not all of the issues identified in the report include:
 - **Council Tax:** CIPFA states the Council kept its Council Tax artificially low when compared to the Government's funding formula. While this decision would have been popular at the time, this has left a permanent funding gap. CIPFA estimates £24 million in lost income in 2024/25 alone, undermining services like adult social care, housing, and children's services, and areas of discretionary spend such as the Council Tax Reduction Scheme.
 - **Cost Pressures in Social Care and Housing:** Like councils across the country, Bedford is struggling with rising demand for adult and children's care services, and temporary accommodation costs - all of which are pushing the budget further into the red.
 - **Weak Internal Systems:** CIPFA identifies significant weaknesses and capacity risks in Bedford Borough Council's commissioning, procurement, and contract management functions. These issues stem largely from past savings decisions that reduced staffing and 2 resources in core corporate services such as Finance, Procurement, and Legal. As a result, these functions are now overstretched, limiting their ability to provide effective oversight and governance across high-risk, high-spend service areas.
 - **Difficult Savings Expectations:** CIPFA states that over the past ten years, Bedford Borough Council has already delivered most of the easily achievable savings - what it refers to as "low-hanging fruit." These include straightforward efficiency measures and reductions in back-office and corporate functions such as finance, procurement, and legal services. While these steps helped close previous budget gaps, they have now exhausted simpler savings options, and in some cases, weakened the Council's internal capacity to support financial oversight and decision-making. This creates a more difficult financial environment going forward. CIPFA warns that delivering the level of savings required for 2025/26 and 2026/27 will be "extremely challenging." The scale of the projected overspend and the limited remaining scope for efficiencies means the Council must now look to more complex measures
 - **Council Tax Reduction Scheme:** CIPFA's review notes that Bedford Borough Council operates a Council Tax Reduction Scheme that is considered generous compared to neighbouring authorities and recommends that the Council do so to assess whether the current scheme remains fair, effective, and aligned with its financial capacity.

General Reserves

- General Reserves are split into two different reserves that are used for two different purposes.
 - **General Fund Balance/Reserves** - A savings buffer for emergencies, unexpected costs, risks, or overspends.
 - **Earmarked General Fund Reserves** - specifically set aside for known costs agreed in advance, such as flood defences, public health, or major repairs.
 - Below are the movements of the reserves from 2019 to 2024

March 31st	General Fund Balance/Reserves
2019	12,859 million
2020	16,316 million
2021	17,775 million
2022	17,675 million
2023	10,076 million
2024	11,183 million

- During the 2022/2023 local election year, the Council's General Fund reserves - set aside for financial emergencies - fell by £7.6 million to just £10.076 million, dropping below the risk-assessed minimum level.
- Some of the emergencies this money was used on were:
 - £2.2 million was used on roads and pavements
 - £0.600 million used on the Climate Change Fund
 - £0.100 million used on the Town Centre Priority Fund
 - £0.800 million used on Members Ward Fund
- Only £1.605 million was used on overspends with the rest used on "outturn adjustment". which essentially means the final tweaks to balance the books.
- After the 2022/2023 election year, the Council was left with very low reserves, which left it little room to manoeuvre around any financial shocks or emergencies.

Lloyds Bank Building

- The Council is postponing the planned purchase of the Lloyds Bank building on Bedford High Street, given the financial pressures facing the Council in light of unprecedented increases in costs and demand for adult social care, temporary accommodation, and children's services.
- For reference, the Lloyds Bank building was identified as a strategic regeneration opportunity, with potential for mixed-use redevelopment (office, retail, and residential).
 - The purchase was being considered as part of wider town centre regeneration ambitions. • Additionally, the CIPFA Review revealed the Council has a significantly weakened financial position inherited from previous financial decisions with the last 14 years.
 - Proceeding with the purchase now would tie up capital at a time when funds are needed to maintain financial stability and protect services.
 - The Council remains committed to regenerating the town centre and will continue to progress deliverable schemes and pursue external funding.
 - The Lloyds Bank building will stay under active review. If market conditions improve or a more favourable opportunity emerges, the Council will revisit the proposal, subject to full due diligence and clear value-for money.

Chewing Gum Taskforce

- A targeted chewing-gum removal programme is underway in Bedford town centre, supported by a nearly £30,000 grant secured by the council.
- The Chewing Gum Task Force will be using specialist equipment, with support from Keep Britain Tidy and major gum manufacturers (e.g., Mars Wrigley, Perfetti Van Melle) to deliver intensive cleaning with behaviour change messaging to encourage responsible disposal.
- Works have started on Midland Road (River Street to Silver Street), with Mill Street, Silver Street, and areas around Bedford Bus Station being next on the list of targeted areas.
- The programme will be running now through to the end of October 2025.

Universal

- At Full Council last week, Bedford Borough Council unanimously approved its consultation response to the Universal Destinations & Experiences Special Development Order.
- The response has a strong resident-first approach on parking controls, including the option to roll out Controlled Parking Zones (CPZs), active travel planning, robust noise monitoring, and potential measures to prevent an Airbnb free-for-all that could hollow out communities.
- With the response now agreed, the Council will continue to work with the Government and the developer to ensure Bedford Borough receives all possible benefits from this investment.

2025/075. Planning.

- It was resolved to object to the following application at Little Staughton Airfield (under Cambridgeshire County Council:

Application number	Type	Description	Location	Deadline	Link
CCC/25/035/FUL	Full Planning Application	To continue the existing use of the land as an end of life vehicle facility, and the demolition of existing buildings and construction of eleven buildings.	Five Acres Moor Road Great Staughton St Neots Cambridgeshire PE19 5BJ	18 th September	Summary of the application

It was resolved to make the following comments:

“We are concerned that the proposed huge increase in the built area of the site suggests a far greater increase in capacity than that proposed in the planning statement (which says there will be an increase from approximately 1500 cars per year to 2500). At present a significant number of HGV’s serving the site access it via the Bushmead Road and Little Staughton Road and this will inevitably increase if the site expands. There is no way of preventing vehicles from Bedfordshire approaching from the south and west or of forcing them to travel via Great Staughton and Moor Road. We do not believe that the Bushmead Road or Moor Road are suitable for a significant increase in large vehicles. Bushmead Road is particularly busy at the moment as a result of the works on the Black Cat roundabout. We don’t believe it is possible to police / enforce a planning condition which would limit the traffic, the direction of access or the capacity of the site.

We are also concerned about the risk of surface water flooding as a result of the significant increase in the built area of the site.

We believe that it would take years to screen these 9m high buildings from view of the numerous footpaths which surround the site and many of the footpaths are accessed from roads which will be used by the large vehicles which will be serving the Five Acres site which will increase the risk to pedestrians and those using the bridleways.”

Proposed by Cllr. J. Thomson and seconded by Cllr. J. Ibbett.

2025/076. Social Events

- Fish and Chip night Saturday 15th November 6.30pm for 7pm meal at Colmworth Village Hall. The Clerk will advertise this on the website and Facebook.

2025/077. Consider projects for the ward fund

- It was resolved to apply for funding to refit the cabins.** Proposed by Cllr. J. Thomson and seconded by Cllr. J. Ibbett. The Clerk will chase the quotes for refitting.

2025/078. Community Cabins and Playing Field

- Cess pit cover damaged. R. Squire has kindly offered to fill in the cess pit but meanwhile someone from the football club has recovered the pit.
- Fire safety. No progress since the last meeting. The Clerk will sort this before the next meeting. The difficulty is that without insulation the cabins overheat in the summer and cause powder extinguishers to discharge.
- Repairs to the safety surfacing. **It was resolved to apply for Lottery Funding – Awards for All for CPM Playgrounds to replace the surfacing for £6,150.** Proposed by Cllr. J. Thomson and seconded by Cllr. J. Ibbett.

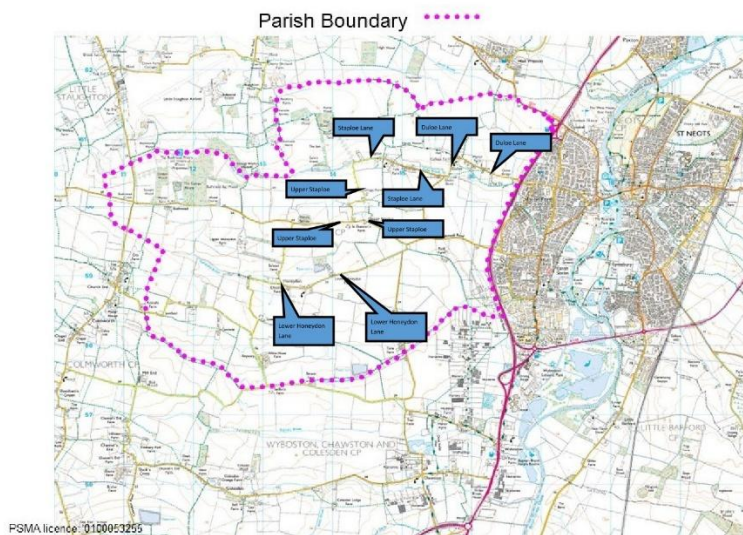
- Decking treatment. The football club will treat it. The Clerk has bought the treatment and it should be done in the next week or two.
- Tree inspections Playing Field and Common. These have been conducted by Cristina Pinta of AV Landscape for £350. Several trees need some work and the Clerk has asked several tree surgeons to quote.
- **It was resolved to offer to cover all costs for maintenance of the Playing Field (eg. grass cutting, hedge cutting, tree inspection and works, maintaining fences, hall hire for meetings of the charity and sundry other expenses.** Proposed by Cllr. J. Ibbett and seconded by Cllr. J. Thomson.

2025/079. Neighbourhood Plan

- Report from the Clerk. The plan has been submitted to Bedford Borough Council and the Regulation 16 consultation is due to start shortly for 6 weeks. Documents will be available online and in the ex phone box (Hamlets Exchange in Staploe).
- It was resolved that Cllr. J. Thomson and Cllr. J. Ibbett will send thank yous to all the regular volunteers who worked on the plan. These were Tom Tagg, Ged Meola and Kate Abrahams.

2025/080. Highways and Rights of Way

- Check grit bins. The Clerk will ask residents to check the grit bins at Duloe Butts; Honeydon Triangle; Manor Farm Lane, Honeydon; and Honeydon Road.
- There has been no action from the Highways Department about the corner at Two Brewers. It was resolved that the Clerk should escalate this to the Mayor. Cllr. J. Thomson suggested that a street light on the junction might help. The Clerk will investigate options.
- The Clerk will chase the road name signs.



2025/080. Finances

- Receipts and payments are presented on p6. The invoices were examined against the schedule of payments and approved for payment by Cllr. J. Thomson and Cllr. J. Ibbett.
- The bank reconciliation was examined against the bank statements by Cllr. J. Ibbett and is presented on p6 and the balance of reserves is presented on p7

Transactions for Approval at Staploe Parish Council Meeting on 17th September 2025				
Payments				
Payment Ref	Date	Supplier	Description	Total
069	20.08.2025	Anglian Water Business	Water & sewerage for Community Cabins	£50.36
070	25.08.2025	SSE Energy	Electricity for street lights	£54.73
071	01.09.2025	Starboard Systems	Accounting software	£43.20
072	02.09.2025	Anglian Water Business	Water & sewerage for Community Cabins	£6.84
073	17.09.2025	Falcon Commercial	Energy Performance Certificate Duloe Cabins	£235.00
074	17.09.2025	AV Landscape	Tree Inspections	£350.00
075	17.09.2025	Lucy Crawford (L. Crawford)	Clerk's expenses	£39.00
076	24.09.2025	Lucy Crawford (L. Crawford)	Clerk's salary and WFH allowance Q2	£1,296.66
077	24.09.2025	Lucy Crawford (L. Crawford)	Clerk's pension Q2	£418.82
080	16.09.2025	EDF Energy	Electricity for Community Cabins	£27.97
Payment Ref	Date	Customer	Description	Total
079	09.09.2025	Bedford Borough Council	Second half of precept	£7,755.00
078	08.09.2025	Barclays	Interest on Barclays savings	£9.70

- Results of audit. The Parish Council accounts have been externally audited by Mazars. They state that:
- *"On the basis of our review of Sections 1 and 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return, in our opinion the information in Sections 1 and 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return is in accordance with Proper Practices and no other matters have come to our attention giving cause for concern that relevant legislation and regulatory requirements have not been met."*
- However, they also state that:
- *"Other matters not affecting our opinion which we draw to the attention of the authority:*
- *In undertaking the review of the 2024/25 Annual Governance and Accountability Return it came to our attention that in 2025 the Council has not met the requirements of the 2015 Accounts and Audit Regulations to provide electors with a period of exactly 30 working days to inspect the accounts. The Council should ensure that in 2025/26 they comply with the Regulations and respond "No" to assertion 4 in its Annual Governance Statement as the assertion is retrospective and refers to compliance during the relevant financial year rather than in respect of it."*
- The external auditor e-mailed the Clerk with the following explanation:
- *"There were two very minor issues, the first of which is an "other matter" with regards to the Electors Rights period. This must be exactly 30 days however in this case it was 31. The other issue was a "closure memo point" just with regards to the notice period for the Electors Rights not being announced as soon as possible after the AGAR was approved. With these points, the Council should ensure that in 2025/26 they comply with the Regulations and respond no to assertion 4 in its Annual Governance Statement as the assertion is retrospective and refers to compliance during the relevant financial year rather than in respect of it. Apart from these very minor points, everything else was great so thank you very much again for all of the hard work you have clearly put into this."*
- The Clerk will ensure the electors rights period is exactly 30 working days next year and that the notice period is announced as soon as possible after the AGAR is approved.

2025/081. Policies

- Review standing orders. These were reviewed without amendment.

September 2025

- Check minute book. Minutes are kept in a looseleaf lever arch folder as requested by Bedfordshire Archive. This was examined by Councillors.

The meeting closed at 8.45pm and was followed by the AGM of Staploe and Duloe Playing Field Trustees.

17 September 2025 (2025-2026)

Staploe Parish Council

Prepared by: LUCY CRAWFORD Date: 17/9/2025
Name and Role (Clerk/RFO etc)

Approved by: [Signature] Date: 17/9/2025
Name and Role (RFO/Chair of Finance etc)

Bank Reconciliation at 17/09/2025			
	Cash in Hand 01/04/2025		35,190.42
	ADD Receipts 01/04/2025 - 17/09/2025		19,160.64
			54,351.06
	SUBTRACT Payments 01/04/2025 - 17/09/2025		22,618.77
A	Cash in Hand 17/09/2025 (per Cash Book)		31,732.29
	Cash in hand per Bank Statements		
	Petty Cash 17/09/2025	0.00	
	Barclays Main Account 17/09/2025	10,978.14	SL
	Barclays Payments (Debit Card) A 17/09/2025	2.30	SL
	Barclays Savings Account 17/09/2025	2,931.98	SL
	Unity Trust Savings Account 17/09/2025	18,952.27	SL
			32,864.69
	Less unrepresented payments		1,132.40
			31,732.29
	Plus unrepresented receipts		
B	Adjusted Bank Balance		31,732.29
	A = B Checks out OK		

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**Staploe Parish Council
Reserves Balance
2025-2026**

<u>Reserve</u>	<u>OpeningBalance</u>	<u>Transfers</u>	<u>Spend</u>	<u>Receipts</u>	<u>CurrentBalance</u>
Earmarked					
CIL Tally Ho	1,978.69		1,978.69		0.00
CIL Goodwick Farm	5,000.94		5,000.94		0.00
CIL Upper Goodwick	3,818.05		3,818.05		0.00
CIL Honeydon Barn					0.00
CIL (New)	3,359.33		304.16		3,055.17
CIL Total	14,157.01		11,101.84		3,055.17
Village Hall Rebuilding Reserve	8,792.90	1,500.00			10,292.90
Tree works & inspections	789.00	453.00			1,242.00
RAIDIUS funds	706.41				706.41
Street light inspection & repairs	764.50	300.00			1,064.50
Decking savings					0.00
Election fund	464.56				464.56
Dennybrook campaign funds	386.75				386.75
Grass & hedge cutting field and common	671.50	75.00			746.50
Deposit for football club	100.00				100.00
Social events	121.70		58.50		63.20
Play area assets	53.38				53.38
Literature & information	30.86				30.86
Gov domain	55.00				55.00
Neighbourhood Plan Grant	1,888.00		1,888.00		0.00
Community Cabin maintenance	125.00				125.00
Defibrillator parts & maintenance	50.00	235.00			285.00
Freedom of Parish	150.00				150.00
Insurance claims					0.00
Asset replacement (office)	378.00	125.00			503.00
Total	29,684.57	2,688.00	13,048.34		19,324.23
TOTAL RESERVE	29,684.57	2,688.00	13,048.34		19,324.23
GENERAL FUND					10,666.70
TOTAL FUNDS					29,990.93