

Minutes of An Extraordinary Meeting of Staploe Parish Council Held Online at 7.45pm on Thursday 6th August 2020 on Skype

Present: Cllr. V. Zwetsloot (Vice Chair – chaired the meeting until 8.33pm), Cllr. J. Ibbett (Chair – chaired the meeting from 8.33 to 9.20pm), Cllr. R. Squire, Cllr. D. Smith, Lucy Crawford (Clerk) and 12 members of the public.

Apologies for absence: Cllr. J. Thomson, Cllr. E. Meola and Cllr. G. Meola as they are on holiday.

2020/065. Declarations of Interest

Cllr. R. Squire declared an interest as a landowner. He is taking advice and may be submitting some sites to the “call for sites” for development. He has no plans to change Falls Farm in Staploe or College Farm in Duloe but may submit some land for development at Cottage Farm, Upper Staploe (the site with the red barns), a site west of the A1 opposite the water tower and a site west of the A1 opposite the Eaton Oak near the B645.

2020/066. Approve the Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting held on 23rd July 2020

Having been previously circulated the minutes were approved as an accurate record of the meeting. Proposed by Cllr. R. Squire and seconded by Cllr. D. Smith.

2020/067. Public Open Forum

Parishioner 1. from Staploe submitted the following response prior to the meeting:
Document 1: Notes on the Local Plan Review

General

- *Due to COVID-19 Bedford Borough Council are unable to hold the usual public consultation sessions. The use of online information and submissions prevents those in society unable to use these methods from being able to participate in the process. The process is therefore unfair and undemocratic. It should be postponed until all in the community can take part and have their say.*
- *Due to COVID-19 Staploe Parish Council are unable to hold the usual public consultation sessions. The use of online meetings prevents those in society unable to use these methods from being able to participate in the process. The process is therefore unfair and undemocratic.*

The summary leaflet

Brown - Urban based growth

Commenting on the extension to St. Neots:

- *The area shown on the map appears to cover the parish of Staploe, Duloe and Honeydon. This is an area of fertile farmland interspersed with small rural villages.*
- *This is not an urban or brownfield area at all.*
- *The A1 provides a physical barrier between the town of St. Neots and rural Bedfordshire. Any development in Bedfordshire close to the A1 would be blighted by the significant noise and air pollution that the traffic on the road causes.*
- *There is no infrastructure in the area:*
 - *Roads. The roads are narrow, minor and rural. They are unsuitable even for the current low level of heavy goods vehicles (mostly farming related) and are dangerous for cyclists and pedestrians. They receive little, if any, investment for*

maintenance and upgrade to modern standards. There are no roads suitable for any developments in the area.

- *Public Transport. There is no public transport in the area, other than one bus each Thursday allowing a 2 hour visit the St. Neots on market day.*
- *Schools. There are no schools in the area. Children are transported by bus or private transport to other Bedfordshire villages and towns, e.g. secondary schools at Sandy and Sharnbrook, so children experience up to a 45 minute journey to school, twice a day. There is insufficient capacity in the existing Bedfordshire schools at all levels to support even limited development in the area.*
- *Some children use schools in St. Neots. Given the significant developments already taking place in St. Neots, where additional schools are being, and are planned to be, built, there is no capacity for any additional children from any development in Bedfordshire.*
- *Medical facilities. There are no doctors surgeries or pharmacies in the area. The nearest in Eaton Socon is already totally overwhelmed with a 3 week wait for appointments, so many people travel to use acceptable facilities further afield (e.g. Great Staughton, Kimbolton)*
- *Post Offices. There are no post offices in the area. The nearest is in Eaton Socon.*
- *Shops, pubs and other facilities. There are no shops, pubs and other facilities in the area. The nearest are in Eaton Socon/St. Neots.*
- *Any new development in this part of Bedfordshire would either have to rely on existing facilities in St. Neots, which are wholly insufficient to cater for the increased demand, or would have to include complete new infrastructure, services and facilities in the development.*

Bedford Borough Council stated Pros – advantages:

- *The area is situated 13 miles from Bedford and will receive no support from services, facilities and businesses in Bedford town centre. This is not an advantage.*
- *This is not an urban area – it is totally rural and has no infrastructure to support development. Residents almost exclusively use private transport. There is therefore no potential for residents to make sustainable travel choices (walking, cycling and public transport). This is not an advantage.*
- *As there is effectively no public transport in the area, any development would require a significant investment for public transport to become viable. This is not an advantage.*
- *The land in the area is not brownfield, nor is it underused. It is fertile farming land that supports a broad environmental diversity including some of the rarest species in the UK. This is not an advantage.*
- *Growth in this area would require significant investment in infrastructure and services, far in excess of making use of, or expanding those in, or adjacent to, existing urban areas. This is not an advantage.*
- *There are very limited employment uses in the area and there would have to be significant investment in infrastructure, direct business creation and associated retail and leisure to create viable opportunities. This is not an advantage.*

Other identified Pros – advantages:

- *None*

Bedford Borough Council stated Cons – disadvantages:

- *Growth in the area would be adjacent to St. Neots and beside the A1. Properties would be blighted by the noise and pollution from the road, especially if capacity increases in the future. Fertile farming land would be lost and growth would impinge on existing villages. This is a disadvantage.*
- *Very high density schemes would be totally out of character and would negatively affect local distinctiveness. They would create noise and air pollution in an area of peace and clean environment. This is a disadvantage.*
- *Growth would totally overstretch existing services and facilities in adjacent St. Neots and the existing local infrastructure would be totally overwhelmed. This is a disadvantage.*
- *It is not known if St. Neots would support expansion in Bedford Borough adjacent to St. Neots, but given the existing total lack of infrastructure, services and facilities and the reliance that would be placed on St. Neots for these, it is unlikely that St. Neots would support this proposal. In fact it is absolutely surprising that such a proposal even be made without Bedford Borough Council apparently having the knowledge of St. Neots' view on this! This is a disadvantage.*
- *As noted under "Pros- advantages" above, there are no advantages to this proposal, so this rural location would not miss out on any perceived benefits associated with growth.*
- *There are no details provided in terms of site sizes, so it is not possible to comment on whether restricted site sizes can restrict scheme options and opportunities to mitigate risk for investors.*
- *Any development in this area will cause poor quality air issues. This is a disadvantage.*

Other locally identified Cons – disadvantages:

- *A high pressure gas line runs through the area that will limit development potential. This is a disadvantage.*
- *Without significant investment in infrastructure, development in this area will encourage car use and create resulting levels of pollution. This is a disadvantage.*
- *Development would require improved connections into existing urban areas in order to access facilities. This is a disadvantage.*
- *Strategic-scale growth would have a huge visual impact on local landscapes. This is a disadvantage.*
- *It would take a long time to plan and build a new settlement in this area, leading to short to medium-term housing supply shortages. This is a disadvantage.*
- *Development would lead to an adverse impact on local landscapes, loss of agricultural land and countryside. This is a disadvantage.*
- *Significant new infrastructure would be required to accommodate growth. This is a disadvantage.*
- *Development would lead to a loss of green environment and biodiversity. As examples, the area currently supports the following:*
 - *The extremely rare Bath Asparagus, found only in two locations in the UK - this area and Bath.*
 - *Water voles, one of the 10 rarest mammals in the UK. o A large population of sky larks.*
 - *Barn owls and Little owls o Kingfishers o Large populations of buzzards and red tailed kites.*
 - *Roosting bats o Great crested newts.*

Development in this area would destroy many of the habitats enjoyed by these species. This is a disadvantage.

- *Due to the prevailing South Westerly winds and open countryside, the area enjoys clean fresh air. Development would lead to pollution of this clean air. This is a disadvantage.*
- *There are no opportunities for employment in the area. Residents of a new settlement would have to travel for employment, which without a major investment in public transport, would be by car, increasing car use. Should residents work in London they would have to travel to either St Neots station or a new East-West rail station wherever that may be situated. The station carpark at St Neots is already full at 9am and has no capacity for residents from a new development in Bedfordshire adjacent to St Neots. Travel to these stations would again be by car, again increasing car use. This is a disadvantage.*

Parishioner 1 e-mail 2 after further reading of the draft housing strategy and issues and options paper:

*First, the consultation should be postponed until normal public consultation sessions and processes can be used. Due to COVID-19 Bedford Borough Council (BBC) are using online information and submissions which prevents those in society unable to use these methods from being able to participate in the process. **The process is therefore unfair and undemocratic.** Similarly Staploe Parish Council are relying largely on online communication which excludes those unable to use these methods from being able to participate in the process.*

1. 2020/068 Draft Housing Strategy 2021-2026.

- Referring to the Bedford Borough Council (BBC) Draft Housing Strategy 2021-2026 (paragraph references in [])
 - [5.2.1.] A Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) was produced in 2016 in support of draft Local Plan 2035 and updated in 2018 to take into account a change of plan period to 2030. [5.3.1.] The Council will need to update the SHMA to provide data on housing needs such that it can reliably inform future housing strategies, policies and for the Local Plan review. A new Local Housing Need Assessment (LHNA) will be required to provide the housing needs evidence base for the new Local Plan.
 - [5.3.2.] The demographic information contained within this Housing Strategy is based upon the census data collected in 2011. A new census will be undertaken in 2021 and it will be necessary to consider the updated information it provides and establish whether and how changes in demographics impact upon housing objectives and incorporate into housing strategies as they are renewed and updated.
 - **It is therefore hard to see how the Local Plan review can be carried out with any certainty when the Council do not have current information or forecasts on which to confidently base the review? The consultation and Local Plan review should be postponed until the results of a new SHMA, LNHA and the 2021 Census are available? BBC estimate that they will not consider these results until 2022/23!**
- Delivering the Vision for the Oxford-Cambridge Arc:
 - [6.3.3.] In its Budget 2020, the Government announced its intention to examine and develop the case for up to four new Development Corporations in the Arc at Bedford, St Neots / Sandy, Cambourne and Cambridge to accelerate new housing and infrastructure development. Geographically located at the centre of the Arc, the Council will need to be a key partner in considering the potential for growth and ensure its best interests are represented - including in discussions regarding the potential formation of a new Development Corporation covering the Borough.

- **What is known about these Development Corporations? Who will be their members, how will they be funded and what powers will they have? Will they be required to follow planning policy/rules and comply with the Local Plan, or will they have more extensive powers?**

2. **2020/069 Local Plan Review Issues and Options Paper.**

- **As stated in my email yesterday; We are horrified by the “Brown – Urban based growth” proposal contained in the document and wish to register our total opposition to this proposal.**

There are NO advantages to the Brown option and I have identified at least 15 major disadvantages.

- **Should the Brown option proceed then it will completely destroy our parish and our way of life.**
- **The scale of the proposal needs to be understood; this is not a few houses on a new estate, but a massive urban development. BBC state that they need to make new housing allocations for between 5,000 and 15,000 additional new dwellings over a plan period to 2040. The Brown option splits these new houses between Bedford, adjacent to Rushden and our parish. We could therefore see a development of up to 5,000 new houses in our parish – this larger than the St Neots Loves Farm (1,200 houses) and the new Winteringham (2,800 houses) developments combined!**
- **There is no infrastructure, services or facilities in the parish to support any new development. Reliance would have to be put on existing facilities in St. Neots, which are wholly insufficient to cater for the increased demand, or would have to include complete new infrastructure, services and facilities in the development. It seems incredible that in making this proposal that BBC do not even know if St. Neots would support expansion in Bedford Borough adjacent to St. Neots.**
- **A key advantage for the Loves Farm and Winteringham developments is their proximity to St Neots railway station. A major unknown in this plan is the route of the East-West railway and the location of its new stations. There are significant advantages in developments being situated close to railway stations or other existing infrastructure, allowing new residents to make sustainable choices about transport (e.g. walking, cycling). The “Yellow” and “Pink” routes offer these major advantages. It would be foolhardy to develop a new Local Plan without correct consideration of the new East-West railway and its stations.**
- **The “Yellow” and “Pink” routes also offer the major advantage of employment opportunities in existing areas or creation of high-tech employment associated with the East-West railway.**
- **Risks.** I envisage the following risks, that would encourage acceptance of the Brown option:
 - Support from St Neots for the scheme.
 - Indifference or a laissez faire attitude from the local Parish/community.
 - Land owners offering land for use.

The remits and powers of the new Development Corporations.

- **Parish Council actions.** I would propose that the Parish Council consider adopting the following actions:
 - **A strategy of total opposition to the Brown option** supported by all the lack of advantages in the Brown option compared to other options (e.g. Yellow and Pink) and the long list of disadvantages. **There should be no offer of partial support** by offering some area for housing – once development starts west of the A1, it will just expand (the thin end of the wedge) and the parish will be destroyed by development.

- *Set up a campaign of opposition to the Brown option.*
- *Understand the positions of St Neots and landowners and encourage their opposition to the Brown option.*
- *Monitor the new Development Corporations.*
- *Maximise parish responses of opposition to the Brown option in the consultation.*

3. *2020/070 Neighbourhood Plan*

- *A Neighbourhood Plan is primarily about the use and development of land and buildings. So it must be first decided if the Parish wishes to develop land and buildings, before embarking on a Neighbourhood Plan.*
- *Preparing a Neighbourhood Plan is a very significant, long-term (2 years) exercise. **Does the Parish have the capacity and capability to do this?***
- ***Personally, I would prefer to maintain the status quo, without further development.***
- *However if it were demonstrated that there is a local need in the parish for some additional housing for local families, then I could probably support a Neighbourhood Plan.*
- ***I would totally oppose a Neighbourhood Plan if this were in support or facilitation of the Brown option in the Local Plan review.***

Resident 2 from Staploe highlighted that the maps in the Local Issues and Options Paper lacked any detail and this made it impossible to give adequate feedback. The Clerk explained that the Borough planners had told her this was intentional as they are just putting forward general ideas at the moment rather than specific proposals.

Resident 1 from Staploe felt that the Parish Council should focus on objecting to the brown strategy primarily. He pointed out that the brown urban based development would mean approximately 5000 houses in the parish. Loves Farm and Wintringham Park in St. Neots combined amount to 4000 houses. These are close to the railway on land which was previously underused so there are options for sustainable transport. He pointed out that our parish has no infrastructure or sustainable transport and all services and infrastructure would need to be provided which would be very expensive. The local doctors surgeries are oversubscribed and it is difficult to get a parking space at St Neots station.

Resident 3 from Staploe expressed concern that the brown option states that it would support services, facilities and businesses in Bedford Town Centre. She questioned whether this was correct since our parish is 13 miles from Bedford. She felt that this proposal had been written with Bedford in mind and the advantages did not apply to our parish and could not be extended to our parish. Also, it states that the option “reduces the need for growth in rural areas” and yet we are a rural area. She also said that building on brownfield sites was not an advantage ecologically because brownfield sites can sustain a lot of biodiversity.

Resident 4 from Staploe suggested we need a campaign against large scale development in our parish and that we should mobilise St. Neots, our MP and Borough Councillor. He highlighted the lack of sustainable transport as an issue.

The Clerk pointed out that our MP may feel somewhat torn as many villages in his constituency will have competing desires to avoid development in their areas but she has already made contact with St. Neots Town Council about this.

Cllr. V. Zwetsloot suggested that the yellow and red options (for Wyboston Garden Village) are also a risk as they all propose large scale development this side of the A1 and close to our parish.

Resident 5 from Staploe agreed with the concerns expressed about the brown option and felt that we should campaign against this option. He supported the idea of a Neighbourhood Plan so that parishioners could have an influence on any small scale development in our area and maintain the character of the area and in the unfortunate event that a larger scale development was imposed on us we would have some say in the planning conversations.

The Clerk gave her personal view that the best campaigning tool would be a Neighbourhood Plan as it is a legal document with concrete evidence and the Borough Council have to take note of it. She suggested that if the parish were to do a housing needs survey and it was demonstrated that we needed a small number of houses and we allocated suitable sites for those houses then we would be in a stronger position to campaign against large scale development. She also suggested that parishioners would be able to use a Neighbourhood Plan to protect certain pieces of land which were valued as open space.

Cllr. V. Zwetsloot gave her personal view that she favoured the grey option for development to be disbursed throughout the Borough with each settlement building some houses in proportion to their size. She felt that our hamlets could sustain a small amount of extra houses without it damaging the character of the parish.

Resident 6 from Staploe agreed with Cllr. V. Zwetsloot.

Resident 7 from Staploe suggested that the Spiked Star of Bethlehem / Bath Asparagus (*Ornithogalum pyrenaicum*) should be protected as it is a rare wildflower. We could use this as an argument against development.

Resident 5 agreed but suggested that our roadside nature reserves were not as significant as a Site of Special Scientific Interest and therefore might not afford the same degree of protection.

Cllr. R. Squire explained that he had submitted some sites in the “Call for Sites”. One for 3 or 4 houses at Cottage Farm in Upper Staploe, a second site on the piece of land near the A1 opposite the Eaton Oak (but he was not sure of the implications of flooding as Duloe Brook sometime floods part of that piece of land) and a third site on the piece of land near the A1 opposite the water tower. He explained that he did not own the land along the roadside in Duloe or around Duloe Butts. He pointed out that development in Staploe would be constrained by pylons and a gas main.

Resident 8 from Honeydon agreed with the objections previously made about the brown option and suggested that all of the pros listed are actually disadvantages in our parish. I.e. we are too far from Bedford to support services there, we are not an urban location so people can’t make sustainable travel choices, we are a greenfield site not a brownfield site, and it would mean growth in a rural area. She explained that Honeydon had no infrastructure or roads to support development. She felt that the three points of access into St Neots are all under pressure. She suggested that the grey option would be best.

The Clerk pointed out that the challenge for Bedford Borough Council in supporting the grey option was that when a developer builds 500 houses they are obliged to provide a primary school. In the dispersed option there would be few settlements large enough to support the construction of significant new infrastructure.

Resident 1 from Staploe expressed his objection to landowners becoming rich at the expense of the parish by putting forward land in support of the brown option. He suggested finding out what landowners plans were. I explained that the result of the call for sites would be made public. This

would be in September at the very earliest but was more likely to be later than this. The Borough have explained that the time taken to publish it depends on how people submit their applications. The more paper applications there are vs. online applications the slower it will be.

Cllr. R. Squire explained that he didn't want the brown option but his sites could support the yellow option of development along the A421 and along the A1.

Resident 6 from Staploe offered the services of a member of his family who is an ecologist.

Resident 3 from Staploe asked what the next steps would be. The Clerk explained that the Parish Council would formulate their response tonight and the Clerk would send it without further consultation with parishioners as there is insufficient time for further meetings.

Resident 8 from Honeydon asked for some support writing her response to the Borough and the Clerk explained that she will publish the minutes of the meeting as soon as possible and include all the information submitted to the Open Forum and the Parish Council's response by the end of next week so that parishioners can formulate their own responses before 4th September deadline. She encouraged everyone present to respond directly to the Borough Council.

Resident 1 from Staploe explained that our hamlets are not even classed as settlements in the Local Plan 2030 – we are just open countryside.

Cllr. V. Zwetsloot explained that the traveller site was opposed by Bedford Borough Council on the basis that it was in open countryside and it was important to preserve the view across the rural landscape.

Resident 4 from Staploe suggested we include a reference to the number of listed buildings in the parish and the ancient monument at Basmead Manor.

The open forum closed at 8.33pm

2020/068. Consider how to respond to the consultation on the Draft Housing Strategy 2021-2026
<https://www.bedford.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/have-your-say/consultations/draft-housing-strategy-consultation/>

It was resolved to write to our MP Richard Fuller to express our concerns about large scale development in our parish and request that the government review the standard method for calculating housing need as a matter of urgency and request that the method be based on 2018 figures, not 2014 figures. This would reduce the additional homes needed in our Borough from 1305 per year down to 800 per year.

It was resolved to respond to the strategy in the following way:

Theme 1. Understanding Housing Needs. The Parish Council disagree. We feel that the household growth projections should be based on 2018 figures, not 2014 figures when calculating the number of homes required by the standard method (5.3.1). This has very significant implications for the Borough and should be challenged as a matter of urgency as the government is reviewing this method before the end of 2020. We note in the Local Plan Review Issues and Options Paper on p16 that "*the Government has announced that it intends to review the standard methodology in its entirety in the course of this year*" so we believe that Bedford Borough Council should challenge this and campaign for the method to be based on the more recent figure.

In addition, we believe that there was insufficient transparency in signing the Borough up to the Oxford – Cambridge arc which is likely to commit the Borough to supporting additional housing beyond the figures proposed in this Local Plan Review.

Theme 2. Delivering the Homes Required. The Parish Council disagree. We would like further information about the impact of 6.3.3 – the four new development corporations and also 6.3.9 to understand why Bedford Borough Council have not adopted the requirements for improving space standards. We would also like to understand whether recent planning policy developments from the government and recent shifts in the economy as a result of Covid-19 might allow office, retail and commercial property to be repurposed for housing.

Theme 3. Making the Best Use of Housing. The Parish Council agree.

Theme 4. Meeting the Housing Needs of Vulnerable People. The Parish Council agree but we suggest inclusion of a strategy for providing accommodation for those fleeing domestic violence and for refugees and we suggest that consultation be improved with affected residents when reviewing garage sites (8.3.3).

Proposed by Cllr. V. Zwetsloot and seconded by Cllr. D. Smith. Councillors were unanimously in favour.

2020/069. Consider how to respond to the consultation on the Local Plan Review Issues and Options Paper. Deadline 4th September. Of particular interest is the brown option for “Urban Based Growth” on p18 of the paper which sees a large, high density urban settlement covering our parish.

<https://www.bedford.gov.uk/planning-and-building/planning-policy-its-purpose/local-plan-review/>

Cllr. R. Squire declared an interest and did not participate in the discussion or voting.

It was resolved to respond in the following way:

Question 1. Do you agree with the proposed scope of the local plan review? If you think that other areas of existing policy should be updated or new policy areas added to the list, please explain what they are and your reasons for wanting them to be included in the plan.

Staploe Parish Council are concerned that holding this consultation during the Covid-19 pandemic will exclude those unable to access digital technology. Many of our residents have no internet access or extremely poor internet connections eg. in Upper Staploe and Honeydon. This means that they are unable to participate in local parish meetings and consultations and download large documents. We appreciate that Bedford Borough Council have been given a deadline to review the Local Plan by January 2023 and that it is vital to have a valid Local Plan in place but we feel Bedford Borough Council should request an extension beyond the January 2023 deadline in view of the pandemic. This would also enable them to gather results of the SHMA, LNHA and the 2021 Census.

We would also like you to include an aim to ensure that 100% of properties have superfast broadband within the next 5 years.

Question 2. Do you have any comments on the draft vision? If you think that it can be improved, please tell us how.

Staploe Parish Council would like you to include a vision for high speed broadband to be available to 100% of properties including existing ones within the next 5 years.

Question 3. In line with Government policy, the shortest plan period would be 2020 to 2040. Do you agree with this plan period? If you think the plan period should be longer, what plan end-date would you suggest and why?

Staploe Parish Council agree – it is to be hoped that the number of houses required will be based on the lower population projections from 2018 rather than the higher numbers from 2014 when the government reviews its standard methodology later this year and that the affordability ratios may fall thus reducing the number of houses the Borough has to supply. Therefore we would support the shortest possible plan period. Although we would like the Borough to be given more time to review the plan in view of Covid-19 so that parishes can consult with all their residents. This would require an extension to the three year deadline to review the plan beyond the current deadline of January 2023.

Question 4. Having considered the potential locations for growth illustrated above, and the pros and cons in Table 1, which one(s) if any do you support? It may be that the local plan strategy will need to combine elements from more than one of the locations to achieve the scale of growth required. Can you suggest other locations?

Staploe Parish Council object in the strongest terms to the suggestion in the brown option that our parish is a brownfield site or under utilised land. Our whole parish is classed as open countryside for planning purposes. Our three tiny hamlets are not even classed as a small settlement in the Local Plan 2030 definition (6.21) and we are therefore defined as open countryside. We feel that describing the brown option which would see the majority of our parish covered in a large scale, high density, urban development as using brownfield or under utilised land is very misleading. We believe this could compromise the validity of the consultation as those responding would logically propose development on brownfield or under-utilised land over greenfield sites.

We believe the pros and cons list for the brown option is very inaccurate for our parish. A large development in Staploe parish would not support services etc in Bedford – we are 13 miles away and people would use services in St. Neots which are already under pressure due to large scale development on the eastern side of the town. There would be very little potential for residents here to make sustainable travel choices – we have one bus on Thursday and it would require huge investment to improve public transport. This would not reduce the need for growth in rural areas – we are a rural area and it proposes building all over our parish. Development in our parish would not improve viability of retail and leisure in Bedford Borough. People would go to St. Neots.

We object to the brown, the yellow and the red options because they all propose large scale development in the countryside which will dramatically alter the character of the countryside with no new provision of sustainable transport.

We would support the grey, dispersed option as development would be in proportion to the size of the settlement and we feel that most settlements can sustain some additional development without dramatically changing their nature. Staploe Parish Council would

support a small amount of development in our parish in response to locally identified needs under the direction of a neighbourhood plan. We propose to prepare a neighbourhood plan which will include a housing needs survey.

We feel that there is too much uncertainty about where the East West rail stations will be to deliver the houses needed in time and the orange option may not be possible as the northern parkway station is certainly not confirmed and little more than a “nice to have” on Bedford Borough Council’s wish list at the moment.

We are particularly concerned about any proposals for large scale development in our parish for the following reasons:

1. **We are open countryside.** Development here is against policy guidelines. Our parish is classed as open countryside. According to the Local Plan 2030 the following policies apply to development in the countryside. Policy 65 - Reuse of rural buildings in the countryside ii. Policy 66 - The replacement and extension of dwellings in the countryside. iii. Policy 67 - Affordable housing to meet local needs in the rural area. iv. Policy 68 - Accommodation for rural workers. v. Neighbourhood Development Plans which have been ‘made’ by Bedford Borough Council. None of these would permit a large scale urban development in the countryside such as that proposed in the brown option.

The Local Plan 2030 states: “6.18 In considering the location of development in rural areas, the distinction between settlements and areas of countryside is established by defining Settlement Policy Areas. The aim of the local plan is to direct development to within the defined Settlement Policy Area boundaries and specific site allocations. **Within the countryside it is the intention to maintain the existing open nature, prevent the coalescence of settlements and resist the encroachment of development into the countryside.**”

The brown option would mean that development would not be within a Settlement Policy Area, it would not maintain the existing open nature of the countryside and it would deliberately cause the coalescence of settlements (St. Neots, Eaton Socon, Duloe and Staploe) and encourage the encroachment of development into the countryside.

The land in our parish is fertile farm land. The draft vision of your Issues and Options Paper on p13 states that “Tackling climate change and adapting to and mitigating against its effects will be at the heart of new development throughout the borough **including facilitating sustainable food production.**” Building on fertile farm land will not facilitate sustainable food production.

The A1 has been a clear line delimiting the higher density development in Huntingdonshire from the rural nature of our parish in north Bedfordshire for 50 years.

2. We have no infrastructure and development would not be sustainable

Our three tiny hamlets of Duloe (approx. 40 houses), Staploe (approx. 60 houses), Honeydon (approx. 30 houses) have no village hall (it is about to be demolished), pavements, schools, doctors surgeries, shops, or post office.

There are no sustainable travel options. There are no pavements into St Neots, the roads are not safe enough for cyclists – they are narrow and the edges are often in poor repair. We have one bus per week which goes to St Neots for two hours on a Thursday. Everyone is dependent on car use and the roads are narrow and often single track with sharp bends. Children have to travel for around 45 minutes to get to secondary schools in Bedfordshire and there are very few places in the schools in St. Neots.

Broadband is extremely poor in parts of the parish – along the Bushmead Road, in Upper Staploe and in Honeydon and it is not particularly fast in much of Staploe.

3. St. Neots does not have capacity to serve a large scale development in Bedfordshire

Any large scale development would inevitably add pressure to existing services in St. Neots. St. Neots already has large scale development to the east in the form of Loves Farm and Wintringham Park which amount to around 4000 houses. We would be very surprised if St Neots Town Council supported a large scale development in our parish.

It can take weeks to get an appointment at the local surgery in Eaton Socon and there is fierce competition for school places in St Neots and Eaton Socon. Those from out of county are naturally bottom of the list. We believe any large scale development would require the construction of primary **and secondary schools** which would be expensive.

Residents would inevitably use St Neots station. As there is no public transport and the station is on the opposite side of the town residents would drive and the station car park is already full.

There are already restrictions to accessing St Neots from the west in the form of the A1 and the river with limited access points creating serious bottlenecks. Traffic accessing the town from our parish would have to travel through residential areas leading to increased congestion and pollution.

4. There are specific issues which make development unsuitable in our parish

There is a high pressure gas main running through the parish and a large network of pylons and overhead high voltage power cables.

There is a flood risk from Duloe Brook – particularly west of the A1 near the junction with the B645.

Our ecology:

- We have a nationally rare wildflower called *Ornithogalum pyrenaicum* throughout much of the parish which is recognised in our extensive roadside nature reserves but which is also distributed on footpaths and field boundaries throughout the parish. It is only found in one other area in the UK near Bath.
- Also present are the rare plants Crested Cow Wheat (*Melampyrum cristatum*) and Sulphur Clover (*Trifolium ochroleucon*).
- Water voles – one of the 10 rarest mammals in the UK
- An exceptionally large population of skylarks
- Barn owls and little owls
- Kingfishers, buzzards and red tailed kites
- Many roosting bats

- Great crested newts

5. Development near the A1 will lead to noise, air quality issues and may reduce options to upgrade the A1 in situ.

Houses built close to the A1 will be subjected to noise from the road and poor air quality.

Staploe Parish Council feel it is important to retain the option to upgrade the A1 in situ – without having to build a whole new road further to the west. If houses are built close to the A1 this option will no longer be available.

6. We value our tranquil hamlets, clean air and historic buildings

People choose to live in our parish because it is a tranquil place. Almost every house backs onto fields and looks out onto rolling fields. Residents feel that major development would completely destroy the rural nature of our parish and our local landscapes.

We have 16 grade II listed buildings in the parish and three scheduled monuments:

- Duloe: The Anchor (5, Duloe Lane), The Thatched Cottage (39, Duloe Lane), the Dovecote (49, Woodhouse Lane), Maye Cottage (53, Woodhouse Lane).
- Staploe: Walnut Cottage (35, Staploe Lane), Old Farm Cottage
- Bassmead (Upper Staploe): moated enclosure (scheduled monument) and Basmead Manor Farmhouse
- Honeydon: Dairy Farmhouse (Begwary Lane), Chestnuts Farmhouse (Lower Honeydon Lane)
- Staploe Road on the way to Wyboston: Eaton Tithe Farmhouse
- Bushmead Road: The Camps and Fishponds (scheduled monument), The Grotto, Cottage East of Bushmead Cross,
- Bushmead: Bushmead Priory (scheduled monument and the Priory building is also listed), The Coach House, Bushmead Priory House, Blaysworth Manor

Large scale development would damage the setting of these historic buildings which are valued by the local community and as a national historic asset.

7. Large scale development in our parish could not be delivered quickly

Due to the level of infrastructure required and negotiations needed across county boundaries, and with Highways England regarding the A1 and with East West Rail (due to go just south of our parish) any large scale development would require careful planning and take a long time. This could lead to short to medium term housing shortages.

8. Lack of employment

There are no employment opportunities in the area. Residents of any new development would have to travel for work and this would likely be by car leading to increased car use. As previously mentioned St. Neots rail station car park is already at capacity at busy times.

9. Cross border concerns

In addition to concerns about schools and transport already mentioned there are further concerns about how a large development adjacent to St Neots would be managed. Our parishioners already experience issues accessing services such as police. Cambridgeshire police will not attend and Bedfordshire police take a long time to arrive, argue that we are not in Bedfordshire, don't know where we are, and we have very few patrols because we are on the edge of the Borough. Much of the antisocial behaviour and suspected drug dealing we see in our parish is suspected to be cross border, probably from St. Neots but we see little evidence of cooperation between Cambridgeshire and Bedfordshire police to tackle the issue. This would be exacerbated if there was major development in the area.

We are served by Sandy fire service rather than St. Neots with the inevitable delays that this causes.

We are not supposed to use the local recycling centre in St Neots as it is in Huntingdonshire, we are expected to drive to Bedford 13 miles away.

The swimming pool in St Neots is at capacity and experiences frequent long queues at popular times. It is funded by local council taxpayers in Huntingdonshire. A large development in our parish would put additional pressure on such services funded by Huntingdonshire taxpayers.

Any Community Infrastructure Levy funds from the development would go to Bedford Borough Council but services in St Neots would be put under pressure with no additional money for infrastructure,

We believe the cross border nature of our area could make administration of a large scale settlement very difficult and lead to delays in its delivery.

Question 5

Infrastructure needs building in from the start to ensure new development is suitably accessible and supported. What infrastructure do you consider is key to the delivery of growth in Bedford borough?

- Primary AND SECONDARY schools
- Doctors
- Public transport
- Improved roads and traffic calming / average speed cameras
- Park and ride schemes – particularly north of Bedford.
- Safe cycling and walking routes
- Superfast broadband to all properties

Question 6

More employment sites will need to be allocated alongside housing growth. Where do you think new employment sites can be located in Bedford borough?

Close to urban centres such as Bedford but not in open countryside and with good access to public transport.

Question 7

Connectivity to other economic centres, including Oxford and Cambridge, will improve with East-West Rail. How do we capture the benefits of this greater connectivity to these economic centres, to improve and increase the value of the economy of Bedford?

A parkway station north of Bedford would be a huge benefit to local residents capturing the benefits with access to employment in other regions of the Oxford Cambridge arc. Access to superfast broadband will be key for businesses and residents.

Question 8

Do you have any further views to add to those listed in the Town Centre Plan (see Consultation Responses above)?

No. Although it is possible that some retail and office space may become available to be repurposed for housing as a result of changes in ways of shopping / working since Covid-19 struck.

Question 9

Do you agree that the Council should produce further guidance for developers on how to respond to climate change? If so, what should be included in it?

We feel that electric charging points and solar panels should be included as standard. There should be more cycle lanes. Ensure office developments over a certain size have showers available so people can cycle to work. Improve broadband and office space in homes so people can work from home.

Houses should be well insulated and developments should maintain the character of the area.

Question 10

The Government is developing new house-building standards to be implemented through building regulations. Is there any local evidence or need to go beyond national standards?

See response to Question 9

Question 11

What do you think would encourage people in Bedford borough to make greater use of sustainable modes of transport?

Park and ride schemes and dedicated busways. Dedicated well maintained and debris swept cycle lanes. These should not be shared with cars as cyclists need to feel safe in order to increase confidence. Showers at work. Bike hire schemes such as those in London.

The above response was proposed by Cllr. V. Zwetsloot and seconded by Cllr. D. Smith. Unanimous.

2020/070. Consider whether to commence a Neighbourhood Plan

Cllr. R. Squire declared an interest and did not participate in the discussion or voting.

Neighbourhood Plans set out planning policies for the neighbourhood area which would be used to decide whether to approve planning applications. They are written by the local community, the people who know and love the area, rather than the Local Planning Authority. They are a powerful tool to ensure the community gets the right types of development, in the right place. A neighbourhood plan means that we can ensure more of the money for infrastructure improvements goes to the parish (25% vs 15% without a Neighbourhood Plan). This could be used for a new village hall, play equipment, speed reduction infrastructure, pavements etc. They cannot be used to block development set out in the Local Council Plan. At the moment Bedford Borough Council's Local Plan 2030 does not propose and development in Staploe Parish. Grants of £10,000 are available to support the development of a plan.

It was resolved to commence the creation of a Neighbourhood Plan in order to have some say in determining how much development is needed (if any) in the parish, where it might occur and what type of development takes place. It was agreed to designate the neighbourhood area as the whole parish of Staploe. Proposed by Cllr. V. Zwetsloot, seconded by Cllr. D. Smith. Unanimous.

Cllr. R. Squire proposed that the Parish Council fund more hours for the Clerk. Cllr. J. Ibbett seconded this. The Clerk explained that there would be funds available from Locality to prepare the neighbourhood plan including funds for her extra time spent on it.

The next meeting will be on Thursday 17th September at 7.45pm online.

The meeting closed at 9.20pm