

Meeting of Staploe Parish Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group held at 7.45pm on Monday 14th September at Victoria Cottage, 33, Staploe PE19 5JA

Present: Tom Tagg (Chairman), Kate Abrahams, Ged Meola, and Lucy Crawford

NP 2026/01. Consider whether to update the Staploe Parish Neighbourhood Plan made on 1st July 2026.

Background: the current Neighbourhood Plan does not allocate any sites for development. At present there is a presumption in favour of sustainable development in Bedford Borough because there is a lack of a 5 year housing supply. John Shortland (previous head of planning at Bedford Borough Council) had advised that a Neighbourhood Plan with sites allocated for housing could offer increased protection against unplanned development (ie. Development that was not in Bedford Borough's Local Plan). Lucy asked Sonia Gallagher (Senior Planner in Planning Policy at Bedford Borough Council) some questions which are shown below with Sonia's answers in red.

1. Is it still the case that our Neighbourhood Plan would be more robust if we allocated a small site for development? **It is difficult now with Neighbourhood Plans and our lack of five year housing land supply. We recently had a refusal decision overturned by a Planning Inspector in Wootton where they had a large number of housing allocations in their Neighbourhood Plan as we don't have a five year housing land supply. Having allocations does help in directing development to the preferred locations in the parish.**
2. If we were to review our Neighbourhood Plan I imagine we would begin with a housing needs survey which we can do ourselves. Then I presume the next steps would be:
 - i. Put out a "call for sites" which meet the needs of the housing needs survey. **Yes, that would identify which sites are available for development.**
 - ii. Could Bedford Borough Council assess the suitability of the sites and if so would you charge for this? If you can't help can you recommend anyone we could use? **Unfortunately we cannot assess the sites, but can direct you to our previous criteria for site assessments and our draft site assessment for the next Local Plan. I don't know of any consultants that can carry this out for you, but know that AECOM used to undertake this work when their was neighbourhood plan funding available and they completed quite a few for parishes in the borough.**
 - iii. At what point would we consult residents on the suitability of the sites (before or after a formal assessment or both?)
 - iv. If your call for sites for the Local Plan receives some submissions in our parish that meet these needs could we use your call for sites and your site assessments to evidence our choice of a site? **Yes, we can share this with you when we process the call for sites, but that won't be until later this year.**
 - v. Would we need to update any other documents in our Neighbourhood Plan (it was only "made" in July and I don't think anything else has changed). **It would depend on what you are planning to include and if you are including any new policies which might need evidence to support this.**
 - vi. Then once we had chosen a site I assume we just resubmit everything, go through the consultation process again and go to referendum. **The process for the NP review will depend on the changes to the plan. A referendum is only required if there are material modifications which change the nature of the plan E.g. significant allocations of new sites for development**

Ged expressed the view that if we were to do a housing needs survey and allocate, say, one or two sites for 5-10 homes to meet an evidenced local need, that would actually give us a stronger planning argument that we had planned positively and local housing needs have been met. This could discourage further speculative growth as it would undermine the development plan.

Lucy said she thought that a number of people who responded to the last housing needs survey had assumed that they would have priority for any affordable homes given that they lived in the village but after completing the survey she was told by Bedford Borough Council that this was not the case. She will check this with Bedford Borough Council as that was 5 years ago.

It was unanimously resolved to complete a housing needs survey (but we should make it clear whether residents would have any priority in allocating any affordable homes). Once we have the results we will decide whether to proceed to a call for sites. It was resolved that this should be a much simpler version than last time. I.e. Do you or a member of your household have a need to move house in the parish or for a family member to move into the parish? If so please describe your needs. Size of property, type of tenure eg. rented, or freehold, approximate price bracket, when you anticipate needing the new home, whether you would be moving from your existing home and if so what size property it is.

The meeting closed at 8.15pm