

Meeting of Staploe Parish Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group held at 7.30pm on Friday 17th January 2025 at Victoria Cottage, 33, Staploe PE19 5JA

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

NP 2025/01. Declarations of Interest.

None

NP 2025/02. Receive and Approve the Minutes of meeting held on 4th June 2024

Having been previously circulated the minutes were approved as an accurate record of the meeting. Proposed by K. Abrahams and seconded by T. Tagg.

NP 2025/03. Update regarding the risk of unplanned development in Bedford Borough due to the lack of a 5 year housing supply

- There have been recent changes to planning laws introduced by the Labour Government under a revised [National Planning Policy Framework \(NPPF\)](#) (12 December 2024). This includes a new housing target for Bedford Borough and in summary the changes indicate that:
 - Bedford Borough's annual target for housebuilding has reduced to **1,202** and its base requirement over the next five years (with a 5% "buffer") is therefore **6,010 homes**. BUT very importantly for our area over-delivery in previous years can no longer count.
 - The Borough's currently identified deliverable supply over the next five years is **4,371** which means there is a shortfall of **1,940 homes** against the requirement.
 - So, from 15th January 2025, the Council will be able to demonstrate a housing land supply of only **3.46 years**.
 - When a Local Authority is unable to demonstrate a housing supply of 5 years planning rules mean that there is a presumption in favour of sustainable development in assessing planning applications. This is sometimes known as "tilted balance" where the balance is tilted in favour of sustainable development. This has significant implications for our parish. Bedford Borough Council's Local Plan would normally mean that development in areas classified as "Open Countryside" would not be considered suitable for new housing development and our whole parish is classed as open countryside. However, under a tilted balance situation the Local Plan holds less importance and national policies take precedence. Much of our parish would still be considered an unsustainable location due to the lack of facilities, services and public transport but the risk of unplanned development is greater.

NP 2025/04. Consider whether to allocate a small site for development

- Borough Council officers have confirmed that Neighbourhood Plans "do offer some protections" in some circumstances, in particular where the Neighbourhood Plan "became part of the development plan five years or less before the date on which the decision is made" and "the neighbourhood plan contains policies and allocations to meet its identified housing requirement." Our housing requirement figure identified by Bedford Borough Council is zero but we have been advised that allocating a small site may still improve the protection from unplanned development that our Neighbourhood Plan can offer.

- **Consider risks and benefits**

L. Crawford spoke to Sonia Gallaher (Neighbourhood Planning lead at Bedford Borough Council) today. Sonia said that the protection offered by Neighbourhood Plans when there is zero housing requirement figure is a bit of a grey area. She said that it could offer additional protection, however, it could also be regarded as an unsustainable location for development as there are many more sustainable locations in Bedford Borough so the sites allocated could be rejected by the inspector. If we do decide to allocate sites we would need to do an updated Housing Needs Survey (HNS) because it is likely that ours would be more than 5 years old by the time the plan was made and we would then need to do a call for sites based on the results of the survey. Otherwise we could be challenged regarding the evidence for any decision to allocate sites eg. why a site for 3 houses not 30? Why for barn conversions rather than development in open fields? Why didn't we give residents an opportunity to submit their land for assessment? Etc. Repeating the HNS, doing a call for sites and assessing the sites before allocating them and adding them to the plan would take time and would be likely to take us past 31st March which is the deadline on which we need to repay our Locality Grant. If we repay the grant we then need to wait for grant applications to open which can take months before being able to resume the process. This could create a delay of several months during which we would be without any Neighbourhood Plan. If we go ahead with the existing plan it should at least provide some protection eg, of our green spaces, strategic gaps and any development would need to meet our design codes.

It was resolved not to allocate sites for development in order to avoid delays. Proposed by T. Tagg and seconded by G. Meola. Unanimous.

NP 2025/05. Consider whether to include strategic gaps in the Neighbourhood Plan and where.

- **Cannot be extensive – typically one field in size**
- **Cannot be between an existing development and a potential new one – that would be green belt**
- **Can be between two close existing settlements to prevent coalescence**

It was resolved to propose strategic gaps between Duloe and Eaton Socon on Duloe Lane, between Staploe and Duloe on Duloe Lane / Staploe Lane and between Begwary and Colmworth on Honeydon Road in order to retain the distinct character of the separate hamlets and prevent sprawl. Proposed by G. Meola and seconded by K. Abrahams. Kate will send photos of the gap between Begwary and Colmworth.

NP 2025/06. Consider the draft neighbourhood plan version 2.

It was resolved to approve this with minor amendments. Proposed by T. Tagg and seconded by G. Meola. The revised plan will be submitted to Sally Chapman (Neighbourhood Planning Consultant) for further comment.

L. Crawford will ask Sally Chapman if she could prepare the executive summary for the plan, do the presentation for us of the plan at the pre-submission consultation launch event and assist us in handling the questions and amendments after the consultation.

NP 2025/07. Review the budget and forecasts to 31st March 2025.

Neighbourhood Plan Budget for 2024-25			
Item	Budget (cost ex VAT)	Forecast to 31st March	Comments
Planning consultant fees for writing plan	5668.4	5668.4	Sally Chapman
Planning consultant travel expenses			Included
HRA Screening Report			£700 - excluded because we have applied for technical support for this
Parish Online annual subscription	48		
Printing & graphic design	357	500	For mapping tools, printed flyers and newsletters & design of final survey
Stationary and print cartridges	20		
Mileage for members / project manager eg. deliveries / publicity	20		
Postage	50	10	For return of questionnaires and other correspondence
Hall hire	120	50	
Refreshments at public meetings	100	50	Tea, coffee, cake etc.
Survey Monkey Account	204	75	For one month
Total budget for 2024-25	6,587.40	6,353.40	
Total spent Apr 2020 - March 24	7,546.11	7,546.11	
Remaining funds available from £18K maximum grant	10,453.89	10,453.89	
Remaining Grant available less budget	3,866.49	4,100.49	

Date of next meeting

To be determined - when the plan is ready to be endorsed.

The meeting closed at 9.30pm