

Minutes of a Public Meeting Chaired by Staploe Parish Council with the Mayor of Bedford to discuss Bedford Borough Council's Draft Local Plan at 7.30pm on Monday 2nd August on Zoom.

Present: Dave Hodgson (Mayor of Bedford), Gill Cowie (Manager for Planning and Housing Strategy), Cllr. J. Ibbett (Chair of Staploe Parish Council), Cllr. V. Zwetsloot (Vice Chair), Cllr. G. Meola, Lucy Crawford (Clerk), two residents of Honeydon: (Darren Edwards, and Maggie Turner) and Graham Fry (resident of Staploe)

1. Could the Mayor explain a bit more about the data on which the housing targets are based and why Bedford Borough Council can't challenge the government housing targets?

GC Explained that the government have developed a policy to deliver 300K dwellings per year. The government has prepared the "standard method" to calculate the housing need for each local authority to deliver those houses. It is based on household projections and affordability and this produces a number of 1275 houses per year for Bedford Borough Council. Only in exceptional circumstances would the government permit the use of a different method. Bedford Borough Council have considered whether there are any exceptional circumstances that apply to the Borough and they have not found any. They are not told what exceptional circumstances might be considered in the guidance.

Cllr. J. Ibbett – there has been a lot of development in Bedford Borough and surrounding areas already so is the standard method reasonable?

DH – he doesn't think it is reasonable but the government set the targets and if the Borough don't deliver the number of houses set by the standard method then the plan would be considered unsound and then developers can make speculative planning applications and there is a presumption in favour of development and we would get the development in an unplanned way. If everyone was delivering houses at the rate we are in Bedford Borough per head of population then the nation would be building approximately 450K houses per year. The figure in Central Beds is even higher and they did challenge the numbers and found a fault in the ONS household projections. Bedford Borough Council employed the same consultants that Central Beds used to check their numbers and there are no faults in their projections so they have decided to use the standard method.

Those areas with a lot of growth are getting more growth. He feels we have had our fair share. Part of the problem is that we are not getting the right sort of houses which are affordable for people so taxpayers are paying a lot to keep people in

temporary accommodation. In Bedford Borough's response to the consultation they made it clear that they did not think it was a good or fair method.

GC – the government published a planning white paper last year which contained a new “mutant algorithm” which would have resulted in a requirement to build even more houses. However, this proved unpopular as it led to very significant increases in the number of houses that would need to be built and so it was withdrawn. The government went back to the standard method based on the ONS data and asked the 20 largest towns and cities to build an additional 35% on top of the standard method calculation in order to top up the numbers.

LC – is the calculation based on ONS 2014 household projections or 2018 projections which are lower?

GC – still based on 2014 projections rather than 2018 but the government have an end target of 300K homes per year that they want to build so they fit the formula to match the end target.

DH – he believes it is ludicrous to use data that is 7 years out of date

2. Could the Mayor explain how he views the future of the Oxford Cambridge Arc and Bedford Borough's position in it.

The Mayor encouraged those present to respond to the [consultation](#) on the Arc Spatial Framework – the deadline is 12th October. He suggested that the questions were all rather obvious – do you want better houses, alleviate flooding, better infrastructure and to look after the environment? But he suggested we should respond anyway.

He thought they had managed to get the civil servants to move away from the Lord Adonis and the National Infrastructure Commission goal of 1 million houses within the arc to 2050. Within the arc the authorities local plans are for several hundred thousand less than 1 million. The local authorities do not want to build the extra houses that would be necessary to reach 1 million. What many miss in the national infrastructure report is that it is about economic growth. There is overheating in the economy in Cambridge and Oxford and the part of the arc's aim is to spread some of that economic benefit to areas outside of Oxford and Cambridge. He thought they had managed to move away from house numbers to developing growth and prosperity across the arc. But at the last meeting he thinks they moved back to talk of housing numbers. The last lot of civil servants moved to Scotland and they are having to educate the new lot again that it is economic growth and not housing growth that is really important and that it is vital that existing residents collectively see a benefit from the strategy. He wants to ensure that quality of life for the new people **and** existing residents improves. The existing residents have had to put up

with the growth over decades. He believes they can try to reduce the housing numbers and it's worth looking at that. Their timetable for the spatial framework is about the same as for our local plan so they should be publishing something in 2023 which will come into effect in 2024/25. It is clear that one major objective of the government in the arc is economic growth but beyond that it is less than clear what their objectives are. Whether they see housing growth as a driver for economic growth or whether they see economic growth being delivered by improving productivity for companies he is not sure.

Housing costs in Cambridge and Oxford are much higher than here but starting a business in Oxford or Cambridge is also 3x higher than here so he hopes to benefit from that. For example Marshall Aerospace are looking to move from Cambridge to Cranfield. Part of the decision is because their land in Cambridge is worth an awful lot for housing. Companies are spilling out of Oxford and Cambridge. Improved connectivity in the arc will help spread the economic benefits. He is talking to both the universities as centres for excellence and entrepreneurship and high value companies to try and attract them.

It doesn't help us that it is running in parallel to our timetable for the local plan. It makes some nervous that all the work they are doing on the Local Plan may suddenly be written off by a government dictate. They have repeatedly asked the government if they can delay the Local Plan until the arc spatial framework has been formulated but the government have refused.

GC – the government think it will set a precedent and other Local Authorities in the arc will stop writing their plans and wait for the framework to be finalised. We have a policy in the Local Plan 2030 that says we have to submit a revised plan by Jan 2023. We would like to wait for the arc spatial framework to make some progress because the whole point of reviewing the plan straight away after the 2030 plan was adopted was to pick up the work on the arc. But the arc spatial framework has been delayed – and more so because of covid.

DH – thinks the arc spatial framework will fall even further behind but there are a lot of civil servants working on this so it is important to the government. It is one of the Prime Ministers top 37 projects that he wants to be briefed on once per month.

The South East, the East of England and London are the only three regions which are net contributors to the UK economy. If you want to grow the economy the thought is that you will get more bang for your buck if you put it into places that are already generating prosperity and the arc is that area. They need to generate the economic growth to pay for the "levelling up" that they talk of – along with other things – most notably the pandemic.

Lord Adonis saw in the National Infrastructure Commission the lack of connectivity as an issue for the area. In order to get from Oxford to Cambridge you need to go into London and out again. Successive deputy Mayors of London have noted that in the northern tube routes 10% of the passengers are people coming in and going out

again because there is no way to go across from east to west. The idea is that improved connectivity will spread some of the “hothousing” of the economy at either end (Oxford and Cambridge) out through the arc.

He finds they have to educate each round of metropolitan based civil servants working on it to realise that there are not 24 hour buses and some villages are a 9 mile cycle from a town.

DE – is not convinced of the benefit of connecting two science based universities together. He doesn’t know of an example where that has increased productivity. If it was two manufacturing towns who were sharing parts then he could understand it but in this case he believes it is just an enabler for more housing.

DH – he agrees it is and that it is important to fight back on housing. He said that Harvard and Yale are linked by rail. He feels that the additional connectivity is a benefit. He also says that as Mayor if the government makes a decision which he has to live with he tries to make the best of it for local people. The extra connectivity may mean that people working in those cities live in Bedford and in time when they decide to start their own business they might do so in Bedford because it is cheaper and closer to their house. They see that with a number of consultancies which have been started here by people who used to work in London.

LC – to whom can we write to ask for an extension to the Local Plan process until the Ox Cambs Arc Spatial Framework has been developed?

DH – encouraged us to write to the Secretary of State, our MP, and a senior civil servant (details to follow) and to put this in our response to the Local Plan and to the Arc consultation. He will send the relevant contact details to use. He suggested we could share this with the Borough Council first as they may be able to make some suggestions to our arguments.

LC – there is a risk that the housing numbers could go up instead of down if we wait for the framework.

DH – yes that is always a risk.

MT – where did the number of 970 houses per year for the 2030 plan come from?

GC – before the standard method there was an objectively assessed housing need figure which was 970 houses per year. Now with the standard method it is 1275 per year.

MT – does the policy specify what types of houses are needed?

GC – the government tells us we have to cater for all different types of households. After the Local Plan has been adopted we will drill down to what houses need to be built. The [National Planning Policy Framework](#) (NPPF) is the basis for this. They have to work out the level of affordable housing required – it is likely to be around 30%

GM – how can you decide to build eg. 970 or 1275 homes per year and not know the size of households you are catering for ie. whether they are one bedroom flats or 5 bedroom houses?

DH – there will be a lot of work to determine this after the Local Plan is drawn up. In part it will depend on what the market will take. No developer wants to build houses that won't sell.

GC – if they are building in a region with a lot of young people in their 20's they would build more small properties, if older people then they tend to build more properties suitable for them, even bungalows. Developers don't like building bungalows because they are land hungry but they always sell well.

DE – where are 30K people coming from to live in Dennybrook? Is it from London, Luton or local demand?

GC – some of each.

DH – there are likely to be some people of a younger age moving out of town to start families and some moving from Luton or London as well as people moving within the Borough. We have a duty to cooperate with neighbouring authorities and may need to support London overspill. Growth is needed in the country.

3. Why a greenfield site on high quality agricultural land when largely brownfield sites such as Twinwoods are available? We understand that it is difficult to mitigate issues on the A6 but this has been a problem for years. Developing Twinwoods would provide an opportunity and funding to resolve the issues and a parkway station could be provided. It wouldn't engulf any existing communities and may well provide extra facilities to nearby communities.

DH. Twinwoods – 70ha out of 500ha of the site is brownfield land. But the A6 is a big problem – there are queues at Manton Lane and the Great Ouse Way. Finding a solution is not easy. They have looked at locations for growth and floated an option for a parkway station in the north with Network Rail when drawing up plans for E-W rail but it wasn't included.

GC – in the analysis for the 2030 plan, out of the four new settlement proposals, Wyboston Garden Village had the highest proportion of good quality agricultural land. [Note added after meeting – best and most versatile agricultural land is grade 1, 2 and 3a <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/category/5954148537204736> select Eastern Region.]

MT – Wyboston and Honeydon have very high quality agricultural land which is why it was selected for small holdings after the war – Honeydon is home of the frozen pea!

LC – surely the development of a new settlement is the ideal time to get the infrastructure funds to resolve the issues with the A6

DH – the Borough Council have asked the promoters of Twinwoods to propose mitigations for the A6. Noone has yet proposed a suitable solution.

GC – the A6 will always be an issue north of Bedford

DE- only 36% of agricultural land is croppable. Dennybrook consists of 318ha of croppable land. This contravenes government guidelines to use brownfield sites not good quality agricultural land. There are no dual carriageways here, the trains to London are overcrowded, the roads in Honeydon are unsuitable for HGV's. Twinwoods is more suitable. What does the Borough propose to do with Twinwoods if it is not selected for the plan?

DH – the Borough Council do not own Twinwoods. They are in discussions with the promoters of the site.

DE – why doesn't Twinwoods appear in the options in the consultation leaflet?

GC – the Development Strategy Topic Paper explains all the options and how the 4 preferred options were selected because they were considered the most deliverable. Some of the other options include sites north of Bedford and you can still comment on these.

DE – the consultation is misleading. It shows Dennybrook as 2.5K houses at Wyboston not the first phase of a 10.8K town.

GC – it is clear from the call for sites that the site can take much more than 2.5K houses.

GM – she does not feel it is clear, she thinks it is misleading and it is only when you have read everything – which most people will not do - that it becomes clear. It feels like it is hidden and she feels let down.

DE – the only reason people are aware that it is part of a larger scheme is because he has raised awareness with radio interviews, put up banners and printed leaflets. The leaflet is misleading in terms of numbers and options.

DH and GC – “we hear you” and will reflect on this perceived lack of clarity

LC – if traffic on the A6 is such a problem then why was Bedford Borough Council so supportive of the new East West Rail station being in the middle of Bedford? Surely this will generate extra traffic into Bedford on the A6. What traffic modelling has the Borough Council done to support E-W rail being in the middle of Bedford if all the modelling for additional houses north of Bedford suggests you can't increase traffic on the A6.

DH – the station in the middle of Bedford is not the only one. There is St Johns and there is quite a bit of brownfield development there and they are promoting a new

E-W station between Kempston Hardwick and Stewartby which will take a proportion of the passengers. They are also committed to doing the Wixams station on the Thames Link line so this will take people from the south of Bedford. They are looking at car parking access in the north and west. There are issues with the police architectural liaison officer who says they can't use some of the routes because it's dangerous so they have some work to do but they are working to improve the connectivity of the four train systems that will be operating (East Midlands train Corby commuter line, the East Midlands inter city, the fast midland mainline trains, east west rail and the Thameslink line). The aim is that it will become a rail hub which offers businesses connectivity.

There is no way you can build the number of houses we have to without increasing traffic and that is the big challenge. We need the government to invest in infrastructure because there has been an infrastructure deficit for decades. Once they know what the land take is for E-W rail there may be an opportunity to build houses around the station quarter in Ashburnham Road for example where there would be little need to own a car.

LC – surely the development of a new settlement at Twinwoods would provide the infrastructure funds to sort out the A6. It's been a problem for years. You are going to max out development south of Bedford and need to move north and you are going to have a new rail station in Bedford so surely this is the opportunity to resolve the A6 issues.

DH – no one has come up with a model on how to sort out the A6.

GC – Twinwoods promoters are looking at options.

Items 4 and 5 were combined

- 4. Have Bedford Borough Council considered the implications for flooding in St Neots given that there are 5 watercourses which run from the Dennybrook site into the Ouse just upstream of St Neots; they all flood in winter (see photos) and St Neots experienced extensive flooding in winter 2020/21. The agricultural land in the Dennybrook area held a lot of water during December and January.**
<https://photos.app.goo.gl/9hmnhfY7mN2a2J3X6>
- 5. Have Bedford Borough Council considered the implications for highways. The proposed access points and the internal roads within the site are narrow country roads, many of which cannot be enlarged as they are roadside nature reserves. The northern access point takes you down Bushmead Road past a primary school in a residential area who already complain about the traffic. Getting to St. Neots on foot or bike is not straightforward – there is the A1, the river and potentially the E-W rail. We are concerned that a lot of infrastructure is being crammed into a very narrow corridor near Roxton and it will be difficult to make the necessary road improvements due to lack of space with the Black Cat, A428, E-W rail etc.**

<https://photos.app.goo.gl/ggMtjsqT5Ygv7eKN9>

DH – Dennybrook and Little Barford – the plans that promoters have submitted are way short of what he would have hoped for. As it is it is not fit for purpose. Can't have 10.8K houses go through the roads they are suggesting. The EA are looking at the flooding in St. Neots. Some of the flooding was from surface water not just rivers. Bedford Borough are having to design in additional flood prevention and so they will have to make sure there is mitigation.

DE – do Bedford Borough Council employ a hydrologist?

GC – yes they do and they have already prepared one flood risk assessment to inform the Local Plan process but very recently the government have issued some new climate change data and this means that Bedford Borough will have to revise the work and employ consultants. If Dennybrook were to go ahead there would need to be a much more detailed site-specific flood risk assessment.

DE – developers will promise the world but who will check they are complying?

DH and GC – Internal drainage board and own officers of Bedford Borough Council. They will check and won't sign off until it is completed as per the plans. The infrastructure for flooding must be in place before building starts. Also need to do a huge amount of work on highways – not fit for purpose yet.

MT – how do the sites get selected for the short list if not fit for purpose.

GC – the vision document produced by Taylor Wimpey is their “first go” – just an indication. If Dennybrook to go in the Local Plan there is a lot of detail and work to be done. It is an opening gambit. Access into the site is not suitable and this was the feedback given by the Council for the smaller site submitted for Wybsoton Garden Village in the 2030 plan. Even then the Council were saying that the access to the site from the local roads was not suitable.

DE – why is it in 3 / 4 of the preferred options if it is not fit for purpose?

GC – because Taylor Wimpey now have an opportunity to show how they can make it work.

GF – is it a fair summary to say that the promoters of Dennybrook have a lot of work to do on highways and flooding and the promoters of Twinwoods have a lot to do in terms of the A6.

GC – yes and that goes for a lot of the development sites because it would be rare for a site promoter to have done all of the work necessary to support a site through an examination process at this stage. Work will still be going on during this local plan process. It is not unusual to be in this position at this stage. This goes for some of the smaller sites as well.

GF – you seem to have decided that the A6 will be more difficult to resolve than the issues at Dennybrook

GC – we know a lot about the A6 from the previous plan and nobody has yet come up with a solution to the problem.

DH – the proximity of Dennybrook to the A1 and the A421 should in his view make it easier to get onto the strategic road network than from the A6 which is not part of the strategic road network. But they haven't seen that from the work Taylor Wimpey have done.

GF – second question – you are consulting on up to 2.5K houses at Wyboston / Dennybrook so what is the status of this 10.5K. Is that just a developers pipe dream?

GC – the site that has been put forward is for 10.8K homes. The 2.5K in the Local Plan is a best estimate of what they think can be delivered by 2040 which is the end date of the Local Plan that they are working on. So the remainder would be built after 2040. She takes the point that has been made this evening that that could have been made clearer on the leaflet.

DH – we will take it away and look at it

DE – will that mean another document is going to be sent out to everyone?

DH – we will take it away and look at it but cannot commit to that

GC – in any future document we will make sure it is very clear

GM – the closest town to Dennybrook would be St Neots. There is a duty to cooperate with neighbouring local authorities but she is concerned that everyone will go to St Neots for doctors, facilities etc. So how will you assess the highways issues that will arise on the Bushmead Road and Duloe Road going into St Neots from Dennybrook? There are schools on both those roads. Neighbouring authorities will also be delivering their housing targets which will also have an impact on the roads.

DH – the existing local roads are not suitable to serve a housing development of this size. There will have to be new roads to serve the new development. They also need to be talking to the community about these issues if the development goes ahead.

- 6. Have Bedford Borough Council considered the implications for getting to St Neots main station for those wanting to commute to London. Pre-pandemic the trains and car parks were full with standing room only. Not all residents of Dennybrook will want to go east west.**

DH - There will be a new station on E-W rail somewhere south of St Neots. He would expect most if not all of the trains to stop there. He has looked at capacity into London following our last meeting – it will be important to look at frequency and the amount of rolling stock well in advance of the development if it goes ahead. There is a 10 year lead

time to get new rolling stock so if this is going to go ahead you need to look at how to get passengers into London without needing to stand. He is concerned that there is not a clear plan for an easy access by road, car free cycle routes, buses etc. to get to those stations yet.

GM – could you clarify – are you saying that in addition to the E-W rail station south of St Neots there will be new station to London in addition to the existing one?

DH – I believe so yes.

GC – yes there will be an interchange with the east coast main line

DE – with Dennybrook and a potential large development at Tempsford you are talking about doubling the traffic on that line.

GC – that is the challenge with strategic growth – you need to deliver the big infrastructure to go with it which is part of the Oxford Cambridge Arc focus. Tempsford is another large potential development. It is key to get infrastructure in before the people.

JI - What are your thoughts on the potential new development of up to 7K homes at Tempsford and have you contacted Central Beds? Second question is how will you manage the bottlenecks on the A1 at Sandy and Brampton.

GC – the transport model for the Local Plan models transport across boundaries – there is an overlap. They have held discussions with Highways England about the development and they have not raised any issues re the Dennybrook development. They have spoken to Central Beds and Huntingdonshire District as part of the duty to co-operate.

DH – supports getting rid of the roundabouts on the A1 and Bedford Borough and Central Beds support diverting it to the east where necessary.

7. If Dennybrook were to go ahead can you give us some examples of mitigations that the community might be able to request and when / how these should be requested.

DH – that is up to the community to come up with ideas and propose them. Might not get them all but you can ask. Average speed cameras, green space / trees between existing properties and the new development planted early so they have time to grow by the time the development starts being built. Get GP's and schools in early.

LC – this is not a formal request but some residents are saying they don't want to stay if the development goes ahead. Is it feasible for existing residents who don't want to stay to sell to the developer at development land prices so they can move? I.e. they don't want to find the site boundary is fixed in stone and they can't sell.

GC – residents can talk to the developer about selling their land to the scheme or ask for significant green buffers. She recommends that we talk to Taylor Wimpey.

VZ – Jo, Lucy and I met with Taylor Wimpey. They were good salesmen but she was not sure how it would translate on the ground. They were rather vague about access and they described the high density areas at the centre of the village centres being three storey town houses. She doesn't feel this is in keeping with a rural setting – it would be a town and visible from a long way away. The useful information they gave was the timeline – they thought the first residents would move into the site in 2029.

GC – there is a lot of work to do on the plan before we get to the point of determining house height. The timeline depends on the market. In a strong market this could be achievable but if there was an economic down-turn 2029 could be optimistic.

DE – people don't want to live on a building site for 20 years. They are traumatised. They moved here for the peace and quiet. There will be construction traffic etc.

LC – we expressed our concern to Taylor Wimpey that when you read the vision document it is as if Honeydon and Begwary don't exist. Wyboston and Colmworth are mentioned but Honeydon is just engulfed and we suggested that was not good planning. Taylor Wimpey said that they would address that.

8. Will there definitely be another public consultation on the Draft Local Plan before submission and if so when? Will we be able to make meaningful comments or will it just be a question of “is it sound and is it legal?” and if we say it's not then we risk delaying the process and the Borough lose control of the development process?

There will be a consultation in 2022 asking “is it sound and is it legal”. You can make other comments at that stage. But this is the main consultation. There is no space in the timeframe for another regulation 18 consultation such as we are having now.

Look at [local development scheme](#) for timeframe.

Other Points

GM – in the issues and options paper we were described as urban – we are not urban we are rural. She feels that there is a risk we will be second class citizens on the edge of the Borough. Developments in Bedford won't benefit our residents.

DH – no Dennybrook would have its own elected representatives and would still be an important part of the parish. It will have a lot of facilities of its own but residents are likely to use St Neots, Bedford and Cambridge.

DE – will there be additional hospitals

DH – no the NHS are trying to reduce the number of hospitals but there would be some money for hospitals and police.

GC – were there any other issues we want them to pick up with Taylor Wimpey following the meeting

VZ – will they guarantee the green spaces and biodiversity? Will they be squeezed?

DH – Wootton there were some wide green spaces and corridors – some of which form part of the Marston Vale Forest – guaranteed for life. Could get the green spaces transferred to the PC with a commuted sum for 25 years maintenance. Those negotiations can be hard. Can end up with a roof tax on the residents to run it for ever. DH prefers the option where they give the land and some money to the PC to run it. He recommends we talk to Wootton, Stewartby and Wilstead. Wixams used to be part of Wilstead but ended up separating because all PC meetings ended up being about Wixams. The Wixams developers paid for BPHA to put in a full-time community manager at the start and that turned out to be a great asset.

DE – how advanced are the talks with landowners?

VZ – Taylor Wimpey have signed options on the land to buy it at a certain price if they get planning permission.

The meeting closed at approximately 9.30pm