WOOTTON PARISH COUNCIL

LOCAL COUNCIL AWARD SCHEME GOLD

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Minutes of the **Neighbourhood Development Plan Steering Group** meeting held on Thursday 3rd September 2026 at 7pm at Wootton Community Centre, Harris Way, Wootton, MK43 9FZ.

Agenda no	Agenda item title	Resolution	Action	Power
Open Forum	There were several members of the public who wished to observe the meeting, including one who had expressed an interest in becoming a Resident Member of this steering group. There were no other members of the public or press present and so the meeting continued without adjournment. BBCllr/Cllr Wheeler wished to state for the minutes Bedford Borough Council's need to adopt central government's National Scheme of Delegation, scheduled for its Full Council meeting on 7th October 2026. The scheme comes into force on 31st October 2026, after which it would no longer be possible to 'call in' planning applications as per current practices. Fuller details can be found here.			Public Bodies (Admissions to Meetings) Act 1960, s1(1).
Present	Cllrs O'Dell (in the chair), Bygraves, Hensher, Lloyd, Noakes, K. Randell and Wheeler. Cllr Wheeler is also Borough Councillor for Wootton and Kempston Rural. Resident Members (RM) Baker, Newland and S. Randell. In attendance: Clare Manders and Olivia Griffin – Representatives of Hyas Associates Ltd.			
Absent (no apologies received)	None.			

Agenda no	Agenda item title	Resolution	Action	Power
NDP26/024	**Apologies for absence.** RM Procter. Sue Edgar Playford (Clerk to the Council and Responsible Financial Officer) was not in attendance.	Noted for the minutes.	Clerk to keep on file.	Local Government Act 1972, Part V, s85 (1+2) & Sch 12, Part VI, p40.

NDP26/025	**Disclosure of local and/or disclosable pecuniary interests.**	Cllr Bygraves declared a pecuniary interest in all discussions/proposals involving the Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity (NDP26/035) and planning application 26/00750/MAO – Land West of Wotton Upper School, Hall End Road (outline application for up to 66 dwellings with all matters reserved except access – NDP26/037) – BRCC and the landowners being clients of his accountancy practice.	Clerk to keep on file.	Localism Act 2011, Ch 7, s31.
NDP26/026	**To consider any dispensation requests received by the Clerk in relation to local and/or disclosable pecuniary interests, not previously recorded.** No requests received.	N/A.	N/A.	Localism Act 2011, Ch 7, s33.
NDP26/027	**To elect Resident Members (if applicable) of the Neighbourhood Development Plan Steering Group.**	Resolved to appoint the following as a Resident Member of this steering group: • Julia Willett. Proposed: Cllr O'Dell. Seconded: RM S. Randell. Resolved by all present.	Clerk to take forward.	Standing Orders.
NDP26/028	**Report from outside organisations – for information only.** None.	N/A.	N/A.	N/A.
NDP26/029	**List of correspondence received (copies of correspondence can be requested from the Clerk) – for information only.** None.	N/A.	N/A.	N/A.
NDP26/030	**Minutes of the previous meeting.** *Minutes are published on the Wootton Parish Council website: https://wootton-pc.gov.uk/parish-council/minutes/.* Members of the Neighbourhood Development Plan Steering Group are asked to receive and adopt the minutes of the Neighbourhood Development Plan Steering Group meeting held on 3rd June 2026.	Resolved to receive and adopt. Proposed: Cllr Noakes. Seconded: Cllr K. Randell. Resolved by all present.	Clerk to keep on file.	Local Government Act 1972, Sch 12, Part VI, p41 (1).
NDP26/031	**Matters arising from the minutes – for information only.**	N/A.	N/A.	N/A.

	None.			
NDP26/032	**Chairman's report – for information only.**	Cllr O'Dell detailed his report in September's edition of the Wootton Newsletter, noting the current Neighbourhood Development Plan was robust but vulnerable due to land banking within the borough.	Clerk to keep on file.	N/A.
NDP26/033	**To receive a short presentation from Hyas Associates Ltd following the Planning Inspectorate Appeal Decision (appeal allowed – planning permission granted) relating to Land North of Hall End Road (24/02439/MAO – Erection of up to 90 dwellings with public open space, landscaping and sustainable drainage system (SuDS) and vehicular access point. All matters resolved except for means of access) and to make recommendation to Full Council as necessary.**	Refer to Appendix One.	All to note.	Town & Country Planning Act 1990 & subsequent.
NDP26/034	**To consider next steps in relation to the ongoing baseline review of Wootton's Neighbourhood Development Plan and to make recommendation to Full Council as necessary.**	After detailed discussion it was resolved to continue with the Neighbourhood Development Plan review and to make the same recommendation to Full Council. Hyas Associates Ltd agreed to produce a basic road map detailing next steps and costings and to advise further on changes to the current Neighbourhood Development Plan that would not require a referendum. Proposed: Cllr Noakes. Seconded: Cllr K. Randell. Resolved by majority vote. RM Newland voted against this proposal.	Hyas Associates Ltd to take forward.	Town & Country Planning Act 1990 & subsequent.
NDP26/035	**To consider the response from Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity in relation to their potential support for any survey**	As the Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity was unable to offer the support needed at this	Hyas Associates Ltd to take forward.	Town & Country Planning Act 1990 & subsequent.

	process and to make recommendation to Full Council as necessary.	stage, Hyas Associates Ltd agreed to establish what help they could offer as an alternative.		
NDP26/036	**To consider the current Neighbourhood Development Plan's focus on and policies relating to open green countryside and protection of open green spaces and to make recommendation to Full Council as necessary.**	After detailed discussion, a proposal was made for Wootton Parish Council to undertake a 'Call for Greenspace' consultation with residents to identify local green spaces for inclusion in the reviewed Neighbourhood Development Plan. Proposed: RM Newland. Seconded: Cllr Bygraves. Resolved by majority vote NOT to take this proposal forward. No recommendation necessary for Full Council.	Clerk to keep on file.	Town & Country Planning Act 1990 & subsequent.
NDP26/037	**To consider a response to Hollins Strategic Land in relation to their request to meet with the Parish Council via Teams or a site walkover, to discuss their Planning Application 26/00750/MAO – Land West of Wotton Upper School, Hall End Road (outline application for up to 66 dwellings with all matters reserved except access) and to make recommendation to Full Council as necessary.**	Comments made by Cllr Ward (not a member of this steering group) were shared in his absence. After detailed discussion it was resolved Hollins Strategic Land be invited to an open, public meeting to be held at the Community Centre – on the understanding (and with their prior acknowledgment), any meeting would not be acknowledged as a consultation and to make the same recommendation to Full Council. Proposed: Cllr Lloyd. Seconded: BBCllr/Cllr Wheeler. Resolved by all present.	Clerk to take forward.	Town & Country Planning Act 1990 & subsequent.
NDP26/038	**To determine a schedule of future meetings of the Neighbourhood Development Plan Steering Group and to resolve a suitable course of action.**	Resolved the next meeting of this steering group be scheduled for Thursday 5th November 2026. No recommendation necessary for Full Council.	Clerk to take forward.	Standing Orders.

Meeting closed at 8.58pm.


Hyas
Wootton Parish Council
Neighbourhood Planning Group
Thursday 3rd September
Neighbourhood Plan

AGENDA

- Overview of last Neighbourhood Planning Group
- National Planning Policy Framework update
- Appeal: REF 6004689 - Land North of Hall End Road, Wootton, Bedfordshire
- Recent appeal examples
- Discuss options
  - Progress Neighbourhood Plan
  - Pause Neighbourhood Plan
- Vision for Wootton

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Overview

- Worked collaboratively reviewing previous feedback to feed into the content for the FunFest to help identify residents aspirations, opportunities and for the future of Wootton considering the following:
  - Universal
  - Growth: housing
  - Green space
  - Current position: out of date Local Plan

Responses from FunFest Survey

Key Themes

1. Strong Desire to Retain Wootton's Village Character
2. Protection of Green Spaces and the Countryside is a Priority
3. Concern About Growth and Development Impacts
4. Infrastructure and Service Capacity are Major Issues
5. Housing Needs Focus on Specific Local Requirements
6. Traffic and Movement Remain Important Issues

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National Planning Policy Framework updates

Key Headlines

- Stronger national control over development management policy.
- Faster, more digital and proportionate plan-making.
- Greater support for housing growth within settlements and near stations.
- More explicit expectations for housing delivery, density and build-out.
- Reduced local discretion on BNG, consultation and decision-making requirements.
- Continued environmental and heritage safeguards through clearly defined refusal policies.

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Wootton Appeal

Appeal Ref: 6004689 - Land North of Hall End Road, Wootton, Bedfordshire

Overview
Proposal: 90 dwellings, public open space, landscaping, SuDS and access arrangements on land north of Hall End Road, Wootton, Bedfordshire.
Main Issues Considered

- Whether the site was an appropriate location for development.
- The effect on the character and appearance of the area.
- The housing land supply position.
- Status of the Local Plan & Neighbourhood Plan

Other Considerations
Heritage
Highway and Drainage Matters

Benefits Identified by the Inspector
The Inspector attached substantial weight to the following benefits:

- Up to 90 new homes.
- 30% affordable housing.
- Improved pedestrian connectivity.
- New footways and road safety measures.
- Open space and green infrastructure.
- Approximately £14.6 million construction expenditure.
- Around 92 full-time equivalent construction jobs.
- Approximately £678,000 in CIL contributions.
- Biodiversity net gain.

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Planning Balance and Key Reason for Allowing the Appeal
Although the proposal conflicted with both the Local Plan and Neighbourhood Plan, the Inspector found:

- The most important policies were out of date because of the housing land supply shortfall.
- Paragraph 11(d) of the NPPF was engaged.
- Paragraph 14 (the neighbourhood plan "tilted balance") also applied, meaning conflict with the Neighbourhood Plan carried considerable weight, however the status of the Neighbourhood Plan (out of date) was also considered in the decision.
- Nevertheless, the severe housing shortage, outdated policy context, uncertainty over future housing delivery and the long delay before a new Local Plan is adopted meant the benefits outweighed the harms.

The Inspector advised: The adverse impacts of the development would not significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, despite the conflict with the Neighbourhood Plan. Therefore, permission should be granted.

Key Takeaway
This is a notable appeal because the Inspector acknowledged significant coalescence and landscape harm, but still allowed the scheme primarily due to:

- A very poor housing land supply position (around **2.38 years**).
- Limited weight being given to the ageing Local Plan strategy and out of date NP.
- Concerns that existing development plan allocations are no longer sufficient to meet current housing needs.
- The substantial public benefits arising from up to 90 homes, including affordable housing.

Appeal Examples

Appeal

Roxton (50 dwellings) – Appeal Allowed

Spatial strategy conflict
The site was:
- Outside the settlement boundary.
- In the countryside.
- Beyond the housing numbers anticipated for Roxton through the Local Plan.

Heritage harm
The proposal would cause:
- Less than substantial harm to the significance of College Farmhouse.
- Less than substantial harm to the Roxton Conservation Area.

Village Open Space
Part of the land was designated Village Open Space.
However, the Inspector found replacement public open space outweighed this concern.

Housing supply considerations
This appeal is perhaps the clearest example of housing supply driving the decision.
The Inspector found:
- Housing land supply was between 2.61 and 3.36 years and Local Plan stalled.
- Housing needs would continue unmet without additional sites.

The Inspector gave significant weight to:
- Up to 50 homes.
- Affordable housing.
- Self-build plots.

Planning balance
Harm
- Spatial strategy conflict.
- Countryside location.
- Heritage harm.
- Limited landscape harm.
- Loss of agricultural land.

Benefits
- Market housing.
- Affordable housing.
- Self-build plots.
- Open space.
- Economic benefits.
- Infrastructure contributions.

Decision Overview
The Inspector found that:
- Heritage harm was outweighed by public benefits.
- Spatial strategy policies carried reduced weight due to the housing supply shortfall.
- The adverse impacts did not significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits

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Appeal

Great Barford (180 dwellings) – Appeal Dismissed

The Inspector identified several issues:

Spatial strategy conflict

The scheme would undermine the adopted spatial strategy.

The Local Plan directed approximately 500 homes to a specific allocated site through the Neighbourhood Plan.

The appeal site was:

- Outside the settlement boundary.
- Outside the neighbourhood plan allocation.

Character and landscape harm

The Inspector found the site:

- Was more closely associated with countryside than settlement edge.
- Was not a logical extension of the village.
- Would cause moderate harm to local landscape character.

Affordable housing failure

This became the critical issue.

The unilateral undertaking (UU):

- Failed to adequately secure affordable housing.
- Did not provide a robust delivery mechanism.
- Was considered inadequately enforceable.

As a result:

- The Inspector concluded the proposal failed to comply with affordable housing policy.

Housing supply considerations

Importantly, Bedford still only had 3.46 years housing land supply and therefore the tilted balance was engaged.

The Inspector accepted:

- The spatial strategy was not delivering enough housing.
- The presumption in favour of sustainable development applied.
- The scheme would provide up to 180 homes.

Planning balance

Benefits

- 180 dwellings.
- Economic benefits.
- Biodiversity gains.
- Open space.
- Pedestrian connections.

Harm

- Conflict with spatial strategy.
- Conflict with neighbourhood plan allocation strategy.
- Landscape and character harm.
- Heritage harm.
- Failure to secure policy-compliant affordable housing.

Decision Overview

The Inspector explicitly stated that the failure to secure affordable housing was a significant factor.

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Appeal

Wilstead (149 dwellings) – Appeal Allowed

The Council's principal concern was the effect on the Local Gap/Strategic Gap between Wilstead and Wixams, protected through Policy AD42 and reflected in the Wilshamstead Neighbourhood Plan.
The Inspector found acknowledged the proposal would:

- The development would physically and visually diminish the gap;
- Harm the character of the gap
- Erode the separation between Wilstead and Duck End.
- It would harm the character, setting and identity of Wilstead.
- The proposal conflicted directly with Policy AD42 and the objectives of the Neighbourhood Plan.
- The Inspector also found conflict with countryside policy because the site lay outside the settlement boundary.

Key considerations

This appeal was heavily influenced by the housing supply position.
The Inspector noted:

- Bedford Borough could demonstrate only **3.35 years housing land supply**.
- The emerging Local Plan 2040 had effectively stalled/been withdrawn.
- The proposal would deliver around 126 homes within five years.
- There was also an acknowledged shortage of affordable housing.

The Inspector gave significant weight to:

- Market housing delivery.
- 45 affordable homes (30% affordable provision).

Planning balance

Harm

- Conflict with Local Gap policy.
- Conflict with countryside policy.
- Harm to local character.
- Less than substantial heritage harm.

Benefits

- Significant housing delivery.
- Significant affordable housing provision.
- Biodiversity net gain.
- Public open space.
- Economic benefits.
- Improved walking/cycling infrastructure.

Overview

The Inspector concluded that the adverse impacts did not significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits under paragraph 11(d)(ii). Although there was direct conflict with the development plan and neighbourhood plan objectives, the housing shortage carried greater weight.

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Option 1

Wait Until Bedford Borough Has an Up-to-Date Local Plan

Pros

- Provides clarity over:
  - Housing requirements.
  - Settlement hierarchy.
  - Spatial strategy.
  - Implications of Universal Studios.
  - Infrastructure requirements.
- Avoids the risk of preparing a Plan based on assumptions that later change.
- Ensures the Neighbourhood Plan can align closely with the adopted strategic framework.
- Allows the Parish Council to utilise updated evidence commissioned by Bedford Borough

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Option 1

Wait Until Bedford Borough Has an Up-to-Date Local Plan

Cons

- Bedford's Local Plan is likely to take several years to progress to examination and adoption
- During that period, speculative applications may continue to come forward
- The Parish Council may have less ability to shape development outcomes
- Opportunities to secure improved design, green infrastructure and community benefits could be missed.
- Residents may perceive that the Parish Council is not actively responding to anticipated growth pressures
- Universal Studios and wider growth pressures may result in development proposals emerging before the Borough's strategy is adopted
- Waiting does not remove uncertainty
- Accommodating some level of future growth.

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Option 2

Continue with a Neighbourhood Plan Review and Referendum Now

Pros

- Provides a locally-led framework for growth
- Opportunity to influence where development should go
- Potential to strengthen policies relating to green spaces, settlement character, design, biodiversity, infrastructure and community facilities.
- Demonstrates that the PC is planning positively for growth – can request a housing figure from the Borough.
- May provide greater protection and influence than an ageing Neighbourhood Plan
- Allows the community to have a direct say through a referendum
- Provides a basis for engaging with BBC and landowners, including discussions around Borough-owned land.
- Could help establish a clear settlement hierarchy and vision for growth
- May place the Parish Council in a stronger position at appeals
- Helps ensure that, if growth does occur, it delivers community benefits such as open space, infrastructure, connectivity and design quality.

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Option 2

Continue with a Neighbourhood Plan Review and Referendum Now

Cons

- Significant uncertainty over future housing requirements (where growth will be focused and whether PC's will be allocated a specific number).
- Policies could become out of date relatively quickly
- Uncertainty over BCC's Spatial Strategy (approach)
- The Parish may spend considerable time and resources reviewing the Plan
- Due to the Borough's housing land supply position, some Neighbourhood Plan policies may carry reduced weight
- The absence of an up-to-date Local Plan remains a challenge
- The Plan may need to make difficult choices regarding accommodating some level of future growth – impacting Wootton
- Risk WPC's policies are conflict with BBC's once adopted

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Current & Potential Risks

Risk 1: Housing Land Supply Shortfall

- Bedford cannot currently demonstrate a sufficient housing land supply, meaning the presumption in favour of sustainable development is likely to be an important consideration in decision-making.

Risk 2: No Up-to-Date Strategic Framework

- There is currently uncertainty over:
  - Future housing requirements.
  - Distribution of growth.
  - Settlements expected to accommodate development.
  - Infrastructure strategies.

Risk 3: Universal Studios may Change Growth Patterns

- The inspector has already recognised that the Universal project is likely to generate additional development pressure in the area.

This means:

  - More housing is likely to come forward;
  - More employment growth is likely;
  - Pressure on infrastructure will increase;
  - Wootton's strategic importance may shift

Risk 4: Appeals May Continue to Allow Development

- If housing needs remain unmet, inspectors may continue to attach significant weight to housing delivery considerations, particularly where proposals are considered sustainable.

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Questions
& Discussion

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