



Minutes of the meeting of BLETSOE PARISH COUNCIL held on Tuesday 29th January 2025 at 7.30pm in Bletsoe Village Hall.

MINUTES

Present: Cllrs Clare Goduti (Chair), Alison Field-Foster, Peter Margrave, Claire Woodward, Sue Binks, Philip Greetham, Borough Cllr Martin Towler, Mayor Tom Wootton, David Brough (Clerk), and 11 members of the public.

1 Public Open Session:

- Members of the public: A resident spoke in relation to the consultation at Bletsoe Village Hall for a planning application related to the extension of Biogen Westwood's operations.
- Mayor Tom Wootton was available for questions and spoke in relation to:
 - the borough council's recent in-depth review of the bus network, which has found that many rural routes are underutilised – further consultation with the public is expected
 - the permitted development application at agenda item 11c – covered at that item with input from Borough Councillor Martin Towler
 - the East West Rail project – awaiting the next statutory consultation in June, with concerns raised about the potential disruption due to work needed on bridges on the route
 - the continuation of free car parking at the borough council's car parks
 - the new Police hub at the bus station that is manned on a part-time basis
 - the purchase of a new machine to clear gullies (drains) that is due to arrive soon

2 Apologies for Absence accepted: Mark Abraham (Work commitment).

3 Declarations of interest in items on the agenda: None.

4 To approve the minutes of the parish council meeting held on 26th November 2024.

Resolved to approve the minutes of the meeting as an accurate record.

5 Clerk's report on actions

- Car parking issue on the informal layby on Coplowe Lane: Clerk met BBC Highways on site – they will block off the layby and consider whether to backfill and re-seed it, to return it to its former state as a verge. Order has been put in for the concrete blocks – no ETA.
- Ditch clearance on Coplowe Lane: BBC Highways were due to contact Bedfordia to request the clearance of their ditches along the road, but no action had been taken so the Clerk arranged a site visit; Bedfordia will look to clear/improve the ditches. BBC Highways have placed an order to carry out an inspection of the gullies following surface water flooding in September. This is expected later in the year as it can't be done when the gullies are full of water.
- Clearance of footpath running alongside the A6: Now that the hedges have been cut back, the Clerk is chasing BBC Highways for clearing/widening the footpath that has growth and debris on it. They have confirmed that an order has been placed and will chase for a date.
- Update on filling the tenancy for grazing on the Old Parish Field: the land had been advertised but no interested parties wished to take up the lease. Advertising will continue.
- Rights Of Way: Clerk had a meeting with BBC RoW team and reviewed the pictures of each path. They are willing to write to the landowner for Footpath 1 (Old Parish Field to A6) as the path had not been reinstated after ploughing. However, they were content with Footpaths 16, 6 and 12 and could not be convinced to take action.
- Drains/gullies clearance: Memorial Lane drain has been cleared, but the drain on The Avenue (near the Coplowe Lane junction) has not yet been done.

6 **Financial Matters**

- *To approve payments and note receipts, balances, and the budget variance report.*

The payments listed in the appendix were approved. The financial reports were noted.

- *To set the budget and precept for 2025/26*

Councillors reviewed the budget prepared by the Clerk, which was updated in line with current costs. This showed an increase to the precept was needed, mainly to accommodate the costs of employing a contractor to cut the New Parish Field due to a reduction in volunteers. It was agreed that the budget for Grants would be retained at the same level as the prior year, but if grass-cutting costs have been underestimated then it may be reallocated for this purpose.

It was **resolved** to increase the precept from £12,978 to £14,533. A Band D ("average") property would see an annual increase in the parish-council portion of council tax from £105.36 to £117.98, which is a difference of £12.62; a 12% rise.

7 **Public Space Protection Orders for dog control**

To consider a response to the borough council's request for potential additions/amendments to areas under dog control PSPOs: Dogs On Leads, Dogs Excluded.

Resolved to request that the New Parish Field (Behind the village hall) be added to the borough council's Dogs On Leads PSPOs to assist in reducing the amount of dog fouling on the field; cost of the signage to be covered by the parish council – expected to be under £100. It was agreed not to progress with a PSPO for the Memorial Garden.

8 **Drainage issue**

Proposal from Cllr Woodward: To consider actions required to resolve a potential drainage issue in Bletsoe between the New Parish Field pond and The Avenue.

Cllr Woodward explained that surface runoff had (more than once) been flowing above ground from the direction of the pond and down towards The Avenue, where there appears to be only one (restricted) route out towards the A6 and river. Mayor Tom Wootton offered the use of borough council resources to investigate whether there was a blockage causing this issue. Borough Cllr Towler offered Ward Funding if required.

9 **Full Fibre Broadband**

Proposal from Cllr Binks: To share any updates related to obtaining improved broadband in Bletsoe.

Cllr Binks explained that Gigaclear had confirmed that they would not be covering Bletsoe in their broadband rollout due to the relatively low numbers of residents. No response has been received from Openreach. Cllr Binks will take the next step of contacting MP Richard Fuller and looping in the Mayor.

10 **East West Rail**

To ratify the council's response to the latest EWR consultation ending on 24th January 2025.

Resolved to ratify the response prepared by the Clerk, which was a strong objection to the selection of Route E and advocating for a re-evaluation of all available routes. The full response can be found in the appendix.

11 **Planning applications**

- *To consider any applications received since the last meeting, including any received after the agenda has been published:*

APPLICATION NO: 24/02366/FUL Full Planning Application

PROPOSAL: Demolition of an existing two-storey dwelling and two outbuildings, and erection of one self-build two-storey replacement dwelling and one single-storey garage/car port.

LOCATION : The Roses Bourne End Lane Bletsoe Bedford Bedfordshire MK44 1QR

Resolved not to object or comment on this application.

- *To receive any updates from the borough council on the below application, to which the parish council previously objected.*

Status: Awaiting decision.

APPLICATION NO: 24/01239/COU Change of Use Application

PROPOSAL: Change of use to allow car auctions (sui generis use).

LOCATION : Coombelands Park Thurleigh Road Milton Ernest Bedfordshire MK44 1ZY

It was noted that car auctions had initiated without approval of the planning application, which is expected to be considered by the borough council's Planning Committee. Borough council Planning Enforcement have been requested to investigate.

- *To note a permitted development application:*

Status: Confirmed by BBC that these works do not require planning consent

APPLICATION NO: 24/02355/AGR

PROPOSAL: Formation of private way for agricultural purposes

LOCATION: Land At Milton Road Thurleigh Bedfordshire

It was noted that Thurleigh Parish Council had asked the Environment Agency to confirm that operations were in line with the licence for use of the slurry pit at this location, and that Planning Enforcement had visited and confirmed the site was within current planning regulations.

12 Information sharing – Proposal for 57 dwellings in Sharnbrook parish

To share information about a flyer circulated to residents by Bugler Homes “seeking thoughts” on a proposal for 57 dwellings in Sharnbrook Parish that does not yet have a planning application.

Cllr Goduti outlined that the flyer was “seeking thoughts” at this stage and did not yet have any planning application submitted. No actions recorded.

13 Business for future agendas (for noting, not consideration)

Proposal from Cllr Field-Foster: To request that the borough council create a Rights Of Way Policy to set out how, and in what situation, they intend to enforce the Highways Act to maintain passable footpaths.

Date of next meeting: 25th March 2025 – Bletsoe Village Hall

Date Paid	Category	Payee/Payer	Desc	Transfers	Receipts	Payments Gross	VAT	Cashbook Balance	Bank balance		
Natwest								£	23,629.53	£	23,629.53
02/12/2024	Repairs/Maintenance/Capital Exp	Clare Goduti	Expenses: New tree - Memorial Gardens			£	83.80	£	2.60		
09/12/2024	Village Hall Hire	Bletsoe VH				£	12.00				
09/12/2024	Payroll fees	Red Shoes	Qtrly payroll fees			£	15.60				
20/12/2024	Grounds maintenance - Central	H and G	MG035			£	195.00				
14/01/2025	Streetlights: Elect	NPower				£	217.38				
20/01/2025	Website running cost	Eyelid Productions	Annual support			£	100.00				
Not Yet Paid	Staff costs	N/A	Dec/Jan			£	479.91				
Not Yet Paid	Village Hall Hire	Bletsoe VH				£	12.00				
Closing balance								£	22,513.84		

2024/25 P&L (Adjusted for VAT) - As at Jan 2025

<u>Income</u>		YTD (Actual) Net	Annual Budget	Full year forecast	Variance
Precept Income		12,978	12,978	12,978	0
	Parish Field Rent	0	500	0	
	Wayleave Income	18	17	17	
	Grant income	2,145	0	2,145	
	VAT Reclaim	1,655	0	-	
Other Income		3,818	517	3,818	3,301
Total Income		16,796	13,495	16,796	3,301
<u>Outgoings</u>					
Employment Costs		3,809	4,805		
	Staff Costs	3,809	4,805	4,805	0
	Village Hall Hire	90	90		
	Payroll fees	52	110		
	ICO - Annual Data Protection	0	35		
	Memberships	105	105		
	Admin	20	50		
	Clerk Expenses	0	50		
	Internal Audit	155	150		
	Website running cost	100	200		
Admin		522	790	790	0
Insurance		1,281	1,500	1,281	219
	Smockers	530	800		
	Grounds maintenance - New Parish Field	1,600	0		
	Grounds maintenance - Central	3,195	3,390		
	Repairs/Maintenance/Capital Exp	4,399	200		
	Play Area Inspection	156	160		
	Streetlights: Maint	0	0		
	Streetlights: Elect	701	800		
Highways and open spaces		10,581	5,350	10,640	-5,290
					£3245 offset with grant income
Grants out		0	550	550	0
Miscellaneous		200	500	200	300
	Old Parish Field - deposit refund	200			
Total Outgoings		16,393	13,495	18,266	-4,771
Year To Date Net P&L		404	0		-1,469

2024/25 - Balance - Jan 2025

Natwest Current Account Current Balance (Forecast)

£
22,514

Allocation of Balance Sheet

BRA Reserve

4,217

Set aside

Asset Maintenance reserve

13,910

General reserve (Balancing figure)

4,387

Unallocated

VAT refund due in (Approximation)

1,041

To be reclaimed

Bletsoe Parish Council Response to East West Rail (EWR) Consultation

Subject: Objection to Route E and Advocacy for Reassessment of Route Options

23rd January 2025

To Whom It May Concern,

Bletsoe Parish Council registers a strong objection to the selection of Route E and advocates for a comprehensive re-evaluation of all available routes, ensuring a transparent and inclusive consultation process.

Environmental Impact:

- **Destruction of Countryside:** Route E threatens significant environmental degradation in North Bedfordshire, impacting areas such as Clapham, Ravensden, Renhold, Wilden, and Roxton. The proposed path would disrupt these rural landscapes, leading to irreversible ecological damage.
- **Government Environmental Targets:** The Office for Environmental Protection's recent report highlights that the government is largely off track in meeting its environmental goals. Selecting a route with substantial ecological harm contradicts national environmental commitments.

Community and Infrastructure Disruption:

- **Extended Construction Period:** The anticipated decade-long construction within Bedford town centre will cause prolonged disruption, deterring residents and visitors. This scenario risks diverting economic activity to neighbouring areas, adversely affecting local businesses.
- **Demolition of Properties:** The necessity to demolish homes, particularly in the Poets area and along the countryside route, is unacceptable and will have lasting social repercussions.
- **Impact on Healthcare Services:** Significant concerns have been raised regarding the detrimental effects on Bedford Hospitals NHS Trust, including potential conflicts over land use and financial burdens related to proposed infrastructure developments.

Comparative Advantages of Southern Route:

- **Topographical Benefits:** A southern route offers a flatter terrain, reducing the need for complex engineering solutions such as tunnels and viaducts, thereby lowering construction costs and environmental impact.
- **Alignment with Development Plans:** Historically, the southern corridor has been designated for development, encompassing brownfield sites. Utilizing this route aligns with sustainable development practices and minimizes disruption to untouched rural areas.

Unique Impact on Bedford:

- **Central Urban Disruption:** Bedford is uniquely positioned as the only town along the EWR line facing major construction through its centre. In contrast, other towns have mitigated such impacts by establishing parkway stations on their peripheries, preserving their urban cores.

In light of these substantial concerns, Bletsoe Parish Council urges EWR to reconsider the selection of Route E. We advocate for a full reassessment of all potential routes, prioritising environmental preservation, community well-being, and sustainable development. A transparent and comprehensive consultation process is essential to identify the most suitable path forward.

Kind regards,

David Brough (CiLCA)

Clerk & Proper Officer to Bletsoe Parish Council

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<https://bletsoe-pc.gov.uk/>