

Meeting:	Stevington Parish Council – Annual Meeting of Electors 23 rd May 2025 at 7.30pm
Council Members in attendance:	Cllr. Janet Day (JD), Chair Cllr. John Strutt (JS) Cllr. Gareth King (GK) Cllr. James Surtees (JSu)
Apologies received:	Cllr. Mouritz Botha (MB)
Non-attendance:	
Borough Council Member:	Cllr Robert Rigby Cllr Dylan Simmons
Clerk to the Council:	Rosemary Plum (RP)
Public Attendance	Mayor of Bedford, Cllr. Tom Wootton 6 x residents

MINUTES OF MEETING

1. Welcome
JD welcomed the Mayor of Bedford and introduced the procedure of events for this evenings' meetings.
2. Apologies for Absence
Apologies were received from
 - Cllr. Mouritz Botha
3. Declarations of Interest
The following apologies were received:
 - Cllr. Janet Day – Members of Barringer Trust
4. Matters Arising from Minutes of 2023 Meeting
Nothing to report.
5. Chairman's Report
See attached report which Includes updates for Stevington Social centre and Barringer trust.
6. Council Finances

Thanks given to the Clerk, RP for the positive progress following her taking over the role and for providing access to shared use of the Clapham Parish Council offices.

7. Stevington Social Centre Report
See Item 5 and attached report

8. Barringer Trust Report
See Item 5 and attached report

9. Borough Council Report
See attached report

10. Questions from the Floor
Thanks given to the Parish Council by a resident for all the work the Councillors undertake.
A resident requested an update on the bottle bank situation. DS advised he will be reporting on this in due course.

The meeting was closed by the Chair at 7.57 pm

Signed as a true reflection of the meeting:

Signed	
Dated	<i>Chair</i>

Bedford Borough Council Annual Report

It has been a year of change for the Council and Bedford Borough as a whole with a Council under the leadership of a new Mayor setting a new course for the Borough.

From a Council perspective we have successfully passed our budget for 2024/2025 with cross party support from Independent, 1 or 2 Green and Labour Councillors. This is a collaborative budget for the Council and residents across Bedford Borough that protects frontline services, manages spiralling costs and will start investing back into our Borough, residents and Council services.

Priorities include:

- Continuing the roll out of 4 hours free parking in Borough car parks, in order to encourage more people into our town centre
- A regular programme of town centre events, again to draw more visitors into town
- Funding for GP's
- An improved cleaning and maintenance regime in the Borough
- Improvements to the standard and accessibility of public toilets
- Money for school improvements across the Borough
- Better maintenance of trees in streets
- Improved recycling, including trials for doorstep glass recycling and food waste recycling
- And much more...

On free parking, the Council's 4 hours free parking trial at the Allhallows Multi Storey Car Park (MSCP) has been a great success with no negative impact on bus usage or air quality and an increase in footfall and car park usage. Allhallows MSCP will now offer 4 hours free parking permanently and the Council will be looking to trial another MSCP, Lurke Street, from October 2024.

As mentioned above Town Centre footfall increased significantly after years of stagnation and steady decline, with a substantial increase in footfall from 2022 to 2023, comparing April to December. This was an increase of 4,605,620 (20.16%) coupled with the number of new businesses opening in the past year reaching double digits, the future looks bright for the Town Centre. Other trials include the soon to begin glass recycling trial. This trial will be starting for selected areas, lasting for 9 months. This new trial aims to capture this missed glass and boost overall recycling rates.

The budget also committed to £9m to fund GP surgeries in Wixams, a new Health Hub in Kempston and Primary Care Services in Great Barford. These GPs are vital to the health of Bedford Borough's communities and aim to end the years of poor access to GP. Feasibility plans are being drawn up as the Council continues to work in partnership with relevant stakeholders to get these surgeries built as soon as possible.

Our leisure sites have also seen a significant boost in investment. After a survey had found that there were over 1000 issues, some which were health and safety related, built up over the last decade. The investment brought all of the leisure centres back up to a safe and reasonable standard. We have

also successfully switched our leisure provider from Fusion to GLL, under the Better Brand, facilities should be cleaner with many long-standing maintenances hopefully addressed. Other Council services have also seen a boost with 22 new staff members joining and undertaking significant training to support the Borough's homelessness service which had been left dangerously close to the point of collapse. Additional properties have also been purchased to improve accommodation, taken together this investment will decrease the overreliance on expensive agency staff and enormous hotel costs, bring expenditure back under control. Adult services have also seen a boost in investment and are currently interviewing staff to make sure we get the expertise needed.

New initiatives have also been put into place to improve educational attainment in the Borough including new supportive groups and training for Head Teachers to learn best practice and gain new skills to help our young people to make the most of their time in education. The Council will also be building a new £26million SEND school in Kempston at the former site of Robert Bruce Middle School and will have places for 200 children and young people from across Bedford Borough. The children attending this new school will predominantly have profound and multiple learning disabilities, severe learning disabilities and autism and will be open in phases and is on track to be delivered on time.

Additionally, for the last 13 years the whole of the Borough's bus service operations and routes have not been reviewed. Despite the financial pressure and historic lack of management, the current administration will be conducting a long overdue review of the whole bus service operations and routes. They are also looking at some new models of operation to see if smaller buses in the rural areas might be able to feed into more main routes.

Tennis courts will also receive a boost from £400,000 worth of funding from the LTA which will significantly improve the Tennis provision in Bedford Borough after our Tennis courts had been professionally assessed with 25 out of 30 (83%) of the courts being assessed as poor quality. Unfortunately, due to a motion passed by the Liberal Democrats and support by opposition members the funding is now under threat.

The Council is currently picking up pieces of the previous administrations Local Plan 2040 which had been rejected a 2nd time. The Inspector is concerned with the soundness of the spatial strategy as it is fundamentally linked to the deliverability of strategic infrastructure. He doesn't state that infrastructure won't happen but that the plan based its timescales on unreasonable expectations. Additionally, the assumed build out rates for Little Barford and Kempston Hardwick which the Inspector states much of the plans growth relies on are not based on justified assumptions. The inspector is also critical of the flexibility of the plan, relying on a standard 5-year plan review to respond to significant unexpected circumstances is not effective. The Council will focus on repairing this plan so we accurately and realistically address housing need, infrastructure and the needs of the Bedford public.

Lastly, EWR The Mayor commissioned research into an alternative route and held a special meeting on to discuss the report, these are available on the Council's website. After relentless pressure by the Mayor and Council, a consultation will be taking place this year on the proposed routes.

STEVINGTON PARISH COUNCIL



Ending on a more positive note, Universal discussions continue to proceed smoothly.

Universal will now be holding a period of public engagement where they will welcome feedback from our local communities, businesses and stakeholders ahead of preparing their planning application.

Stevington Parish Council Annual Report May 2023- May 2024

Parish Councillors:

Janet Day Chair

John Strutt

Richard Taylor resigned March 2024

Mouritz Botha

Gareth King coopted September 2023

James Surtees coopted September 2023

Vacant

Vacant

Clerk and Responsible Finance Officer to the Parish Council: Rosemary Plum

Governance

Following uncontested elections in May 2023 four councillors, Mo Botha Janet Day John Strutt and Richard Taylor were reappointed to serve. Janet Day was elected as chair in May 2023 with a vice chair to be elected in due course. The Council was pleased to co opt Gareth King and James Surtees as councillors at the meeting in September Councillor Richard Taylor resigned in March 2024.

Stevington Parish Council (SPC) would like to thank Pete Fisher who did not stand for re election for all his work on behalf of the parish over many years including with the Village Hall. Tasks were allocated between the councillors but following the resignation of Councillor Taylor there are again two casual vacancies which limits the work of SPC on behalf of the village.

Ward boundaries

Following May 2023 elections Stevington Parish is now in a new ward with Bromham Turvey and Stagsden. Councillor Jon Abbott is no longer the borough councillor for the parish and SPC would like to thank him for his interest and work on behalf of the village during previous years. We welcomed Borough Councillors Dylan Simmons and Robert Rigby as our new ward councillors and are appreciative of their support of the village.

Council Meetings

Council meetings have taken place bi monthly. Any parishioner is entitled to attend the meetings of Stevington Parish Council and there is no need to give notice of your intention to do so. The meeting calendar can be found on the parish notice board and our website <https://stevington-pc.gov.uk/your-parish-council>

Finance

The costs for the maintenance of the playing field and equipment and Parish Council assets have increased significantly. SPC are cognizant of this and will continue to monitor expenditure against budget over the next financial year. Parish accounts are audited annually and approved financial documents are available by request from the Clerk.

Planning

Bedford Borough Council is the Local Planning Authority responsible for planning in Stevington. SPC is a statutory consultee in the planning process and must be informed of all planning applications and amendments to applications within the parish.

SPC can only comment on planning applications in the same way as any other member of the public and cannot approve or reject planning applications. In reviewing all planning applications SPC takes into account of the Stevington Neighbourhood Plan which was accepted by a majority referendum in May 2021. There have been fewer applications this year.

Highways

The 7.5T Weight Limit in Silver Street has now been in place since August 2022.

The borough highways department decided a formal review was not required in August 2023 and the restriction will remain in place as it is. Anecdotal evidence would suggest there has been a reduction in the number of HGVs coming down the road. Incidents which occur can be reported and logged via the website.

The 20mph speed limit in the village centre has also now been in place since August 2022 and was not formally reviewed in August 2023. Again anecdotal evidence would suggest there has been a reduction in traffic speeds but not always to 20MPH.

Still outstanding is the extension of 40MPH limit at West End and the installation of village gates and dragons teeth road markings.

A Mobile Speed Indicator Device (SID) was purchased by SPC, this was mounted going up the hill to West End and has now been moved to Park Road. It was SPC's intention to move the SID to various locations around the village to inform drivers of their speed and to gather traffic data. However the logistics and risks of moving the device mean it will now remain in place on Park Road. A solar power unit has been added to remove the need to change batteries.

SPC would like to thank Richard Taylor for all his work and expertise on behalf of the village to achieve these traffic management results.

Footpaths

SPC has liaised with the footpaths officer and senior maintenance officers to ensure footpaths are kept clear. This was a challenging situation last summer due to the amount of growth including arranging access on one footpath which became very overgrown. Looking forward it would be helpful to set up a footpaths group who could work with the borough to maintain the footpaths throughout the parish.

SPC is aware of the current consultation on footpaths by the borough and would encourage residents to consider and respond to the consultation by 17th June 2024.

<https://www.bedford.gov.uk/your-council/have-your-say/consultations/rights-way-improvement-plan-consultation>

Environment

The Stevington Environmental Group, of which Councillor John Strutt is chair, is supported by SPC. It continues to provide a forum for the parish community to come together to learn about, discuss and debate actions that can be taken to reduce carbon emissions and increase biodiversity of the parish. The group have produced an Environmental Manifesto which will

support SPC decision making on environmental issues and a separate document providing specific guidance for residents on building community resilience to climate change and biodiversity loss. The group continues to organise talks on a range of energy and environmental issues related to local parish land and the river.

Following a visit to a SPC meeting by the forestry creation officer at Marston Moretaine the group supported the development of the newly planted woodland by organising a community tree planting event, and a guided walk around the site followed by a talk about the project. The Stevington Flood Group has been formed as part of an official community flood response and resilience programme organised by Bedford Borough Council. The flood group have now installed a new secure storage box, purchased by the parish council. Bedford Borough Flood Risk Officer has delivered flood response equipment for the Group, which is now securely stored and readily available in the event of a flood incident. The flood plan for Stevington is progressing, with some new risks emerging since high rain fall in January 2024. The updated official draft is ready for an initial desktop walk through with the BBC resilience team over the summer. SPC would like to acknowledge the work of BedsGOVET monitoring the water quality of the River Ouse. One positive outcome of the research last year was that the water at the sailing club was safe enough to swim in during the summer months. SPC would like to congratulate the group on the interest their research into water quality across various sites of the River Ouse has attracted.

Village Hall

The village hall is an important village asset which the longstanding executive committee have developed into an excellent venue for community and private events. The committee members stood down at the February 2024 meeting as planned. Prior to this the legal status of the charity was been changed to Charitable Incorporated organisation status (CIO). This removes any personal financial liability from trustees. Councillor J Surtees on behalf of SPC is working alongside the departing executive committee hall as they move to a new structure and new personnel. He has become a trustee as part of this process. A new position of Village Hall Manager has been advertised and is now filled, which will allow many regular tasks to be formally covered and also potentially expand use of the hall, creating a more stable future. The SPC would like to thank the members of the executive committee for their tireless work over many years and their continued support through this transition period.

Playing Field

We continue to monitor play equipment in the playing field. The play facilities are very popular and an asset used by Stevington villagers and others from nearby villages. There are significant maintenance costs to keep the equipment in good repair and safe to use. SPC would like to thank the ward councillors for their contribution towards the cost of repairing the fencing around the enclosed play area from their ward fund.

A contract was set up to manage the hedges around the playing field on a 3 yearly cycle. The aim of the plan is to manage the hedges whilst improving biodiversity as recommended in guidance from Natural England.

The main part of the field has continued to be mown by volunteers but at the end of the summer season last year the large mower finally broke down and alternative arrangements are now being considered. SPC would like to thank the King family for continuing to mow the main part of the field and the loan of a large mower until alternative arrangements are made

Stevington Windmill

SPC would like to see the windmill open again to visitors which has not been possible over the last few years. It is planned to revive the Friends of Stevington Windmill and Councillor King is now working with the Clerk and the Heritage Officer at Bedford Borough to facilitate this.

Policing Matters

Stevington remains a low crime area, particularly when compared to other locations within North Bedfordshire's Rural Community Policing area. Councillor Botha has liaised with the local officers and arranged for them to come along to coffee and croissants mornings for “coffee with a cop”

The William Barringer Charity

SPC has a representative trustee for the almshouses. Thanks to Daniel Norton for undertaking this role prior to moving away from the village. Councillor Janet Day is now the SPC representative for the charity.

Community Matters

SPC is aware of all the organisations and individuals who undertake activities on a voluntary basis in the parish. This includes those who undertake various tasks on behalf of SPC. All these activities enhance the quality of life for everyone in the village. The annual report is an opportunity for SPC to extend thanks to all volunteers and organisations. The report hopefully also reflects all the work of SPC over the past year and gives some insight into the challenges over the next year which will be better met once the two casual vacancies are filled.