

BBC/EWR Line Task Group – Minutes



BEDFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL

Date: Tuesday 2nd December

Time: 2 – 3pm

Venue: Hybrid

Attendees:

Craig Austin (CA)

Antigua Riley Corion (ARC)

John Molyneux (JM)

Sarah Combes (SC)

Jo Branson-Budd (JBB)

Margaret Birtles (MB)

Gavin Chinniah (GC)

Simon Joynes (SJ)

Dawn Staal (DS)

Anna Robbani (AR)

Ben Raza (BR)

No.	Discussion	Actions
1.	Apologies Paul Pace (PP)	
2.	Minutes from meeting on 21st November Minutes circulated for agreement.	Actions carried forward: JBB / SC to collate questions arising from EWR's 'You Said We Did' document regarding the non-statutory consultation completed in January 2025 and include them in the actions and issues log – to complete by next meeting. All to complete monthly timesheets for recharge, backdated to 29th July. First timesheets to be submitted by 5th December.
3.	EWR Licences for access MB advised that she met with EWR's Properties team on 1 st December. EWR has requested access to 108 BBC-owned assets, which BBC's Properties team has grouped into three categories: those in the safeguarded zone, those outside the safeguarded zone, and assets linked to BBC's capital receipts programme. MB has advised she has advised that	

	<p>EWR will need to provide a compelling reason for a licence for access to be granted for assets in this latter category.</p> <p>MB advised that EWR has not provided a definitive response when asked who the Council recipient was of the letter regarding the CPO of Charis House. A ‘template letter’ was offered.</p> <p>ARC asked Sarah Jacobs (EWR) about the letter regarding Charis House at the EWR engagement drop-in at the RAFA Club on Ashburnham Road yesterday. Sarah advised Antigua that she didn’t believe a letter had been sent to the Council regarding Charis House, but the only engagement that EWR had completed was with the manager at Charis House.</p> <p>MB has asked EWR to send all property-related information to her, but she has not received any.</p>	
4.	<p>BBC Engagement with numbers 2 – 20 Evens Ashburnham Road</p> <p>ARC confirmed that she attended EWR’s engagement session for residents, landlords and business owners at the RAFA Club on 1 December. ARC advised that she requested EWR’s forward plan of engagement activities, but this was not forthcoming.</p> <p>ARC confirmed she has arranged engagement meetings for renters and landlords in the affected properties on Ashburnham Road, taking place on the 9th and 15th December.</p> <p>ARC advised that Sarah Jacobs has mentioned rehousing compensation for renters, but no documents have been received regarding this support.</p>	<p>SC to share meeting agendas provided by ARC with the Task Group by 5th December.</p> <p>ARC to arrange dates for BBC engagement events with Poets residents and landlords for January 2026 – by next meeting.</p> <p>AR to provide outline of support available from BBC’s Housing Service by 9th December.</p>
5.	<p>Recruitment of EWR project team</p> <p>JBB advised the project role to be created and funded through the PPA is currently being evaluated by BBC’s HR team.</p>	

6.	<p>Communications</p> <p>BR suggested developing FAQs regarding EWR for BBC's webpage.</p> <p>Discussion around logging all instances where BBC has requested information, but it has not been provided and also recording every meeting that EWR has cancelled.</p>	<p>BR to draft and share FAQs ahead of the next meeting.</p> <p>SC to circulate log template for information / meetings that have not materialised by next meeting.</p>
3.	<p>Full Council Motion</p> <p>CA provided an update regarding the EWR update meeting held with the Mayor this afternoon. Topics discussed with the Mayor were the Motion to Full Council regarding EWR, the 'You Said We Did' document published by EWR, and the Task Group's actions arising from these.</p> <p>The Full Council Motion and BBC's actions arising from this are included as Appendix A below.</p>	<p>SC to contact Councillors, through Democratic Services, informing them that Council updates and actions are provided in the minutes of meetings and are published on the Council's EWR webpage.</p>
10.	<p>Date of next meeting</p> <p>Tuesday 16th December (Hybrid)</p>	

Appendix A

Motion to Full Council on East West Rail / BBC Actions

This council notes:

- *East West Rail's sudden and recent decision to propose the demolition of homes on Ashburnham Road.*
- *Residents and businesses have been shocked and upset by this decision.*
- *EWR failed to communicate these plans with local Councillors who would have advised a different approach*

This Council believes:

- *Demolition of those properties is not required for a final design of a new station for Bedford, even if it includes space for East West Rail trains, as shown by EWR's previous consultation documents, based on station designs they considered workable. Neither is demolition necessary for the process of building the new station.*

- *That faster construction is not sufficient justification for the demolition of people's homes, whether on Ashburnham Road or in the Poets estate.*
- *That outright opposition to building of East West Rail is not likely to convince the Department of Transport to take any course of action that will avoid demolitions of homes in Ashburnham Road and the Poets estate.*

Full Council Action	The Council Resolves:	BBC ACTION
1.0	To do all it can to support residents whose homes are proposed to be demolished.	With the lack of engagement from EWR and failure to be transparent BBC has chosen to develop an independent engagement plan for residents and businesses impacted by the emerging EWR proposals. An initial phase of engagement has commenced focusing on those properties within Ashburnham Road identified for CPO under the amended safeguarding notice zone, with other phases to follow. Meetings with Landlords and Tenants has been scheduled for 9 th and 15 th December and BBC has been engaging with the affected businesses and GP surgery on a One-to-one basis.
2.0	To investigate designs for Bedford station that will provide the most convincing case that even if East West Rail is built going through Bedford station, there is no need to demolish homes on Ashburnham Road.	As yet the Council has not been provided with the relevant 'technical note' which identifies EWR's justification for requiring the demolition of properties on Ashburnham Road. This was first promised to the Council in August 2025, and continues to be requested by the lead officers on this workstream, and it is a standing item on this Task Group's agenda. Officers continue to seek further clarity on the emerging designs for Midland Station, clarify the stage of option selection EWR has currently reached and to urgently request <i>again</i> that the 'Technical Note' be provided for review by BBC to understand the options that have been considered and discounted. To commission specialist rail consultancy support to analyse EWR's technical note, and identify any

		<p>viable alternative approaches to station design at Bedford Midland. Given the ongoing delays by EWR in issue of this 'key' information, this will delay the Council in providing the necessary assessment for this proposal which has been put forward by EWR. Officers continue to raise this point with EWR at relevant EWR meetings .</p>
3.0	<p>To also investigate options for the railway and construction that will similarly obviate the need to demolish homes in the Poets estate, even if East West Rail is built going north out of Bedford Station before heading east.</p>	<p>Officers continue to seek clarity on the service assumptions that EWR argues strengthen the case for their '6 tracks' proposal, following the announcement of Universal., and to present further challenge to the 6 track proposal. Officer will seek to commission a further review using specialist rail consultants (expected to start January 2026), exploring alternative approaches to track layout that would obviate the need for EWR's proposed additional tracks. Officers continue to raise this point with EWR at relevant EWR meetings.</p>
4.0	<p>To publish the results of such investigations before 30 January 2026.</p>	<p>Further updates will be provided as soon as they are available and on receipt of information with an aim to issue prior to 30th January if possible. Updates regarding EWR, actions relating to November 2025 Full Council will be published as part of the meeting minutes, uploaded to the Council's EWR webpage: https://www.bedford.gov.uk/parking-roads-and-travel/strategies-and-major-projects/east-west-rail-proposals However, it is important to note that this is based on how quickly/thoroughly key information is provided by EWR, enabling BBC to undertake the necessary assessment and feedback for the proposed rationale put forward. As a result there is a risk that this could delay BBC in providing clear advisory response on the current designs. Officers continue to raise this point with EWR at relevant EWR meetings .</p>

5.0	<p>When preparing a response to any consultation about the Development Consent Order that East West Rail propose to seek, or equivalent consent under new planning law, to oppose all demolition of homes proposed, but given the amount committed to the route outline, the council will not seek to oppose the building of East West Rail overall, nor oppose it taking a route that goes through Bedford's main station (without the need for trains to reverse in Bedford).</p>	<p>BBC will continue to oppose and challenge the requirement for demolition of residential properties and ensure the requisite BBC subject experts attend and suitably challenge EWR at the various EWR meetings as the designs evolve to query/challenge/critique/support as appropriate.</p>
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