

Bedford Borough Council (BBC) /East West Rail (EWR) – Minutes of Meeting



Date: Friday 19th September 2025

Time: 9.30am – 10.30am

Venue: Committee Room 1
Borough Hall

Invited parties		Attended
TW	Mayor Tom Wootton – Mayor of Bedford Borough BBC	Y
NG	Councillor Nicola Gribble – Councillor for Renhold and Ravensden, Portfolio Holder for Environment BBC	Y
AS	Councillor Andrea Spice – Portfolio Holder for Economic Growth Planning and Prosperity BBC	N
JBB	Joanne Branson Budd - Head of Capital Projects, Infrastructure and Sustainable Travel BBC	Y
GC	Gavin Chinniah - Head of Planning and Building Control BBC	Y
CC	Cara Cosson – Personal Assistant to Mayor Tom Wootton (Minutes) BBC	Y
DH	David Hughes – Chief Executive Officer EWR	Y
NW	Natalie Wheble – External Affairs Director EWR	Y
SJ	Sarah Jacobs – Senior Stakeholder Manager EWR	Y
MA	Mohamad Alserdare – Programme Manager EWR	Y

*NB These minutes are not meant to be verbatim, but a summary of the discussion.

No	Item
1	Apologies None received.
2	Welcome and Introductions Mayor introduced for all attending for BBC DH, SJ, MW and MA introduced themselves.
3	Discussion 1. Dom Polski Club/ Polish Embassy TW Noted they had not met for some time and that yesterday he had met with the Polish Embassy in his office, who had travelled up from London regarding the Dom Polski Club (<i>located on Ashburnham Road Bedford</i>) who are very concerned. The Dom Polski Club is very precious to the community and people of Poland. Mayor noted, it is not very often we have a visit from the Polish Embassy in London. Request for EWR to please meet with Polish Embassy, the building has a lot of history, back from when the Polish people came to Bedford and were working in the brickworks. Mayor advised he visited the Dom Polski Club last night, and discovered the club is owned by an amalgamation of people, including the Polish government. ACTION: Mayor requested EWR to undertake to meet with Polish Embassy regarding The Dom Polski Club and EWR proposals on Ashburnham Road. DH Agreed they would follow up and speak to them, would go through CC re contact details for the Polish Embassy. (CC has sent contact details 22/9/2025)

TW Asked how much information can be shared from today's meeting?

NG Gave some background information – After 2nd World War, Polish General fought in the battle of Monte Cassino, his son lives in Renhold and is chair of the Dom Polski Club.

DH Noted, thinks he is meeting with this gentleman next Tuesday

NG Advised Monte Cassino aside there are a lot of memorials e.g. Tempsford so this is very important to the Polish people.

TW Noted he thought Tempsford would have been announced before now, asked when it would be announced.

2. Ashburnham Road

TW requested map of Ashburnham Road with the red line on it.

ACTION:

DH agreed to provide.

NG Asked if there were any more surprises, and how many more houses will be demolished?

NW Advised Ashburnham Road is part of the updated design, following feedback on proposals in January.

They are finalising the design proposals received from Stakeholder engagement and hope share in next month or so.

TW Asked if we could say before Christmas?

DH Summarised where they are: Non statutory consultation closed in January, since then evaluated feedback, amended designs where they think sensible to do and refining design.

Had planned to come out in the Summer, but has taken longer than planned, primarily because of Universal, need to design for right capacity now which has required more design work.

Plan is now to come out with a major and comprehensive update in Autumn - aim is October/ November on the design, changes made, plans for engagement over the next couple of years and changes the government are planning to bring in with the Planning and Infrastructure Bill (expected on Statute book by the end of this year).

All subject to government approval to announce and not entirely with EWR to say and may possibly have to fit around budget - end of November.

TW Autumn towards Christmas?

DH We are nearly there, do not like information coming out in dribs and drabs. Design has taken a bit longer because of Universal on the railway line of route.

Re NG question on surprises – we are continually redefining the design, don't anticipate that but it would be misleading to say as no certainty at this stage, narrowing down design and further you get along the design the less likely that is, but I don't have that certainty now, so can't say it wouldn't.

NG Asked what happened to the design to make this bombshell announcement re Ashburnham Road, what happened after months of saying Ashburnham Road was not in the red line, why has it now come in?

DH Turned to maps on slideshow to talk about the proposals.

Process is taken to a certain level of development, consult on it, all the time the design is taken to a level of maturity, and build understanding of how to construct, going from a line on map to start of major civic works in

a couple of years' time, and the requirement for land changes.

I understand it can be a surprise, the concerns, you used the word bombshell, this is how the design develops.

TW Asked if announce before Christmas, how do you see it progressing next year in an ideal world?

DH This statement assumes the Planning and Infrastructure Bill is on the statute book by the end of the year, government has said it wants East West Rail to be a pathfinder project, for the new processes. Government is intending through Planning and Infrastructure Bill is to speed up the process, in practice it changes the schemes like East West Rail consult and engage with stakeholders along the line of route. This does not mean less consultation, it means do it in a different way.

Existing legislation requirement is statutory consultation, which we had been planning to start in January (2026) if the (*Planning and Infrastructure*) Bill passes, there is no longer a requirement for schemes like East West Rail to conduct a whole of route statutory consultation – new legislation allows engage and consult in a different way.

What does that mean? Statutory Consultation, lots of designs over the whole route then

3 months statutory consultation period and then 6 months bringing all that information back – all done one hit. We interpret new legislation e.g. our thinking our proposals have changed around Bedford Station, lets engage with Stakeholders in Bedford without waiting and push to consultation and e.g. people in Bicester only interested in plans for level crossing, they are not interested in this and probably vice versa.

New legislation is more iterative and real time process.

We want to talk about Autumn to Local Authorities, stakeholders, communities a rolling consultation, but it absolutely does not mean less consultation, it's just a different way, more meaningful.

We will still do a line wide consultation but will be different in its nature and our interpretation is it will enable us to go quicker, which is what the government wants us to do.

CC Asked please could you explain in this way, how the public will be consulted and how their views will be taken back on the project?

DH From public perspective will look and feel same e.g. ready with design for Bicester now, the way we see working, could target consultation in Bicester in January, do that in a targeted way. There's a huge time costs in doing the whole consultation all at once, need to get everything to the same level of maturity, this is not really how the design process works.

JBB Was at workshop yesterday, lots of information shared, Planning and Infrastructure Bill mentioned but understood there would still be a consultation.

SJ Advised it's not statutory, we are still intending to do a consultation at the end to look at route wide issues and anything not covered in targeted engagement along the way, but wouldn't follow the same principles as what was historically referred to as statutory consultation.

JBB So still a consultation just not statutory?

SJ Yes.

DH Another word for Pathfinder would be guinea pig, this will be the first project off the block under the new process.

GC When will the consultation be, before Christmas?

DH Clarified, consultation will not be done before Christmas, the plan is before Christmas we will tell people how and when we are going to do it in 2026.

NG So this will be the plan with red lines?

DH No, not with plans/maps/red lines, the plan is before Christmas to tell you where we have got to in the process and this is what we have done with the feedback and this is how we plan to come out with the detail in 2026 and this is the process how we will consult with communities, under what we think will be the Planning and Infrastructure Act.

NG Sorry got mixed up I thought you said we would have something before Autumn Christmas.

SJ It will be detailed feedback.

NW We would like to come to Bedford, in December hopefully, with a public meeting to update, this is what we are planning to do but caveat on government decisions.

NG December?

NW Hopefully.

SJ Responses to non-stat consultation, maybe updated visuals.

TW We haven't had the feedback from our officers yet as the away day as was only yesterday.

3. Slideshow

MS Start with what went out to public on 3rd non statutory consultation – this did not include Ashburnham Road, numbers 2-20.

In 2021 our thinking was around whether we would need to acquire those properties, tried hard not to acquire, but because of feedback on the station concept and internal reviews, identified some non-desirable features of the station, e.g. pick up and drop off, access to and from the roundabout not ideal regarding queuing, other issues: distance from multi storey car park and accessibility to vulnerable users, it is not a station that reflects our ambitions on the project.

There is not a single reason why this all has changed - our thinking is to deliver a modern station and the ambition of the project and previous officers on the station concept. There has been a radical shift in how we are viewing Bedford Station as a whole.

Was going to show an artist's impression but will explain what has changed in our thinking: how to build and deliver a station to maximise growth, development opportunities and other opportunities you may see fit in your area – so the ball is in your court to influence the plan.

Feedback is for a more visible station that can be seen, from the bus station in the town centre.

We have moved the multi-storey car park from Ashburnham Road – this was a bone of contention from those who live there, we have moved it to be more tucked away and hidden, looking how to screen to make it look better.

Another new proposal is a western entrance to station – to enable additional access from both sides and sustainable transport, hopefully consult on this.

Also proposing an up fast platform, this is not necessary for the project route, but we do need it for the construction of the railway as it enables us to build quicker, reduce costs.

DH Advised the previous design we did not think was constructable in any way affordable, so giving ourselves the new design makes it easier for us to build quicker.

MS Showed slides.

Reviewing proposals, supply chain and sheer quantum of work in a constrained site without the 2 – 20 Ashburnham Road properties, although we would be able to build, we would not be able to build in an affordable and timely manner.

Building a transfer deck, super structure, in the vicinity providing access to all the platforms – Image shown titled: Phrase 1.6 Transfer Deck and new Station Entrance.

We are in a delicate position that we don't think we can build this railway in a timely manner unless we acquire these properties 2- 20 Ashburnham Road, the whole triangle, temporarily and permanently – working hard to update maps and safeguarding directive to give the clarity.

CC Asked how much time and money would be saved?

MS Can't comment on programme but it is a substantial saving.

DH Advised not practical to build from this constraint as would push programme out so many years, overall programme cost would be difficult to be exact, would push the whole programme out years and would make programme unviable.

JBB When asked previously we were told it would be 2/3years, snapshot in time.

DH Inflation impact with the delay, 3-year delay could cost a £billion.

NW Impact on residents would be suffering longer.

DH Context for overall programme, difficult to compare it would not be buildable, it's not about shaving money or time, not feasible.

NG Stating the obvious, that would have been perfectly apparent at the beginning.

DH Don't think that's fair.

NG It was, we have numbers of people there: Polish Club, residents, doctors' surgeries serving 4000 patients, council temporary accommodation, all will be affected.

MS As we said it's not a single reason that leads to this decision; in 2021 we did not have the transfer deck.

NW We recognise the uncertainty, and the intention was there to try to protect and minimise impact for the people in that area.

NG Do you feel sorry for them?

DH The process show the intent to take as little as possible, red line safeguarding process, trying to take as little as possible, but we cut too thin and now realise and we are sorry for that.

GC We have not seen the methodology to this point, missing and we will make our own assessment on. Need to know what you proposed before and how you came to this decision.

4. Hospital

TW Are there any other slides? That's the station the other area I have is the Hospital, how are you going to get through the Hospital. Their new Planning application is coming for new surgery.

DH We think we are largely in agreement with the Hospital.

MS We are there/thereabouts, towards a solution/ agreement, 5/6 points outstanding we are prepared to mitigate but would like more detail on their traffic and transport studies.

DH Meeting with Chair /CEO. Problem is we are trying to put our car park and their proposed new elective centre, trying to fit in on plan.

NG Is the plan to our satisfaction as well for traffic, access?

GC Haven't seen overall design yet. Design is block plan, 2 buildings but not showing detail/design.

TW Also Wyboston, gap, would like detail on Black Cat Roundabout and where it goes, some more detail on that would be very useful. Leading down to Tempsford

TW Can we have a copy of these slides?

ACTION: Mayor requested copy of all the slides shown

DH Will have to come back to you on that as outside your patch and MS patch.

NG to MS Read out issue from someone: Brewpoint having issues re access, concerns about traffic. I have asked about building demolition including Cauldwell Walk but got no answer. Was told new red line map won't be issued until next consultation, not sure how that leaves residents on Ashburnham Road regarding Compensation. How likely is it people on Palgrave Road will fall foul of revised plans?

MS Lot to unpack 4/5, work we have just started now on models in stages and develop to mitigate, congestion issues need to be quantified over next months. Safeguarding push in project re Ashburnham Road.

DH Going to Department next week. To amend the safeguarding it has to go through Secretary of State, must be done by DfT

MS Trying hard to get though, that allows people affected to apply to Statutory Blight scheme. This is one priority of the team to include these properties in the safeguarding directive. David tried to cover the point we are not expecting any further property acquisitions in Bedford, unlikely expecting additional impacts on properties in the area.

NG And that includes businesses in Cauldwell Walk?

MS Cauldwell Walk is affected business area but EWR have been having extensive engagements with residents and property owners, every week EWR property speaking to Cauldwell business affected to relocate the sidings.

NW EWR coming back to Ashburnham next week at Dom Polski, plus any other Ashburnham residents, we are also working with Bedford Borough Council Community Officer. Planning to come back a few weeks later, in between still emailing, property team engaging.

NG Unfortunately assuming 14 – 16 are rentals and they will get notice.

5. Bedford St Johns Slide shown

TW Asked MS to explain this.

MS Strategically incorporated most of BBC comments on Bedford St Johns station. Lot of concerns on previous proposals, pick up and drop off to east of site impacting on circulation, concern on connectivity east west across station.

NG Asked for clarification on the map shown.

MS Showed Ampthill Road, Cauldwell Street, proposed Hospital development.

TW Confirmed Britannia Road location.

MS Showed proposed EWR car park for lost surface car parking.

NG How many spaces is the new car park?

MS 880 - 1000 spaces, factored worst case scenario 1000 spaces but would like to see that number go down, if possible, but ball not in EWR court, will meet expectation required.

NG How many spaces are there now?

MS 880 spaces.

NG So that is the minimum needed.

MS That is not with EWR

DH We have designed to replace what is lost.

MS Would like to meet all aspirations to open up the area and put car parking in the area-coloured purple, opportunity for BBC to influence the plans.

TW That's the 2nd multi storey you are building, how big is the other one?

MS Thinking, 6/7 storeys high 1000-1200 spaces. Other update since last non stat consultation developed active travel proposals refine and reduce car parking provisions at stations and only providing what is necessary to drive numbers down, requires a lot of work.

TW Why would you do that?

MS Try to encourage sustainable transport.

TW I was a rural councillor for years whole of North Beds villages, everyone drives in, station is busy at 6.30am we have bus issues, not many.

NG That aside the only people really who will walk/cycle are within a mile or so.

DH If not something council want to reduce then we wouldn't do it.

TW We want more car parking not less, fact is we will have more growth, more houses more people.

DH Looking at planning for car parking especially Bedford to Bletchley, risk in terms of railway operations it will be a lot cheaper to park at our car parks than Universal. Need to think about how we manage the risk. Park and ride 3 or 4 stops away from theme park. Talked to Universal how much they will charge, and it will be a lot.

TW Mayor noted there will be much more demand for parking.

	Meeting ended 10.30am TW Can we have a copy of these slides? ACTION: Mayor requested copy of all the slides shown DH agreed to get these to us.
4	Next Meeting DH suggest regardless of where we are at meet again end of October. ACTION: CC to arrange

Minutes approved by Mayor and all attending BBC officers,