

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



Date: Thursday 30th October 2025

Time: 10am – 11am

Venue: Mayor's Office

Invited parties		Attended
TW	Mayor Tom Wootton – Mayor of Bedford Borough BBC	Y
JW	Deputy Mayor Councillor Jim Weir	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	N
CC	Cara Cosson – Personal Assistant to Mayor Tom Wootton (Minutes) BBC	Y
DH	David Hughes – Chief Executive Officer EWR	Y
JR	Jason Rodwell – Programme Manager EWR	Y
KC	Kate Campbell – Head of External Engagement EWR	Y

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

No	Item
1	Apologies Cllr Spice
2	Welcome and Introductions All introduced themselves, DH advised K would be joining shortly - apologies delayed.
3	Discussion Recap of last meeting JW Have the Polish Embassy been in touch? DH Yes, we had a meeting at Embassy in London next week, since we last met, we have met with Dom Polski, and we are looking after the club. NG What do you mean look after? DH Find them another place; very clear we will help them find another premises that meets their requirements. NG What about the doctor's surgery? TW I was going to ask about that – I think moving this doctor's surgery will be a problem for you. DH Good steer thank you, Kate hasn't met with them, again same as Dom Polski, how we compensate or if we help them find an alternative premises. We have encouraged Dom Polski

to appoint Legal advisors – which we will pay for of course. We have had good interactions with the hospital.

KC arrived 10.10am

DH Summarised: we have just been talking about Dom Polski, Mayor Tom and Cllr Gribble raised about the doctor's surgery.

KC Everyone has been met along that road with the Lands team, we are looking to meet again and will let you know when this is.

JBB We are keen to know about the levels of discussions, and we don't know what you are speaking to our residents about...?

KC Would it help if I summarised and sent over to you?

JBB Yes please

ACTION KC EWR Will send summary and types of issues raised so BBC have a vision of types of discussions held.

TW Raised the last house BBC had spent a lot of money on, brass plate noted, history it used to be for single mothers, bedroom / bathroom. It is now supported living so finding somewhere else to replace this is going to be hard.

DH Same principles apply as Dom Polski – our job is to make sure you are not out of pocket, costs to project and ensure affected parties are properly compensated.

TW Is there a plan B to using those properties (*on Ashburnham Road*).

DH The straight answer is no, starting with timeframes, they will not be needed until 2029, for context, so 4-5yrs away from acquiring for demolition. Last Month Mo shared slides, drivers to this plan is the outcome from the design we have developed for the town, access to town and front. Outcome based and design we had developed construction viability assessment, there wasn't a way of delivering works at Bedford that didn't push the programme out 3yrs, which would make it unviable, costs would be hundreds of billions. Little misleading if just presented cost is this and cost x costs this.

TW Who have you talked to in Bedford?

NG Isn't this back to front?

DH There is a cart and horse. Design and further work led us to the conclusion that design as was is not deliverable. At summer feedback from consultation and design, it got to point in mid late summer that we had a new design. The new design moved safeguarding and impact of those properties on Ashburnham Road. As soon as we had something to talk about from the "You said We did report" which took 6000 points of feedback from non-stat consultation, and we plan for major update on comms. This is subject to govt bill on Planning and Infrastructure, which we currently expect week commencing 11th November. The Budget is 26th November. The "You said We did" report has wide ranging updates, feedback on the non-stat consultation, Universal theme park, how we are planning to engage in 2026.

It's not fair to say we just cooked up a new design, we developed a design and concluded the design we had before was not viable, once we had a new proposal, the first thing we did was spoke to Bedford Borough Council and the residents.

JBB So in what format will the updates be provided /cascaded?

KC We are waiting for a grid slot w/c 11th November from govt, this is a slot communications have to have a grid system, and we have to fit into the process for an actual date.

“You said We did report, gives feedback from the non-stat consultation report and will be as detailed as possible, will show the changes and will be published online. Communications will go out to key stakeholders and will go live at midnight, so if it is the 13th November we will send link to the plan will share a digestible summary report.

DH We will be talking to the council as to what comes next, the next phase of consultation, we are having to feel our way with other stakeholders and local authorities, as we are the first scheme after the Planning and Infrastructure Bill comes into law. The govt want royal ascent so the next phase of consultation will be under the new bill- this project has been designated by the govt as pathfinder project.

We are trying to provide as much clarity as can as to how it will work. I suspect there will be clunkiness in it but we are trying to be open as possible, guinea pig is another word for it.

KC There is a Local authority forum next week, there are other projects but dedicating it to this project.

TW Who going from Bedford Borough Council.

JBB I will be attending and also Cllr Gribble – Tuesday 10am

DH Lets be candid, the govt has stated its intent is to enable what it deems nationally important to get to quicker. Our interpretation is that it should not mean less consultation, and we need to demonstrate we have carried out meaningful consultation – we will do every bit in a different way.

Previous process of statutory consultation was on whole scheme design of scheme, we freeze the design at a point which in this project would be hundreds of thousands of pages of documents, then we would have to filter all feedback. The Planning and Infrastructure Bill, assuming it passes into law by the end of November – would enable a targeted consultation; for example, in Bicester, they are only interested about the level crossing, they are not interested in anything else. So we are lining this up now, so we can put that into our report. We know there are contentious issues and challenges and we know there are 2/3 issues for Bedford.

KC Sarah Jacobs has spoken re Bedford, December is not a good time to start because of Christmas so we envisage it will start in January for Bedford.

NG Ford End Bridge is only way in and out of Queens Park – how are you managing traffic?

TW Yes and for information the local MP lives there

JW Not sure if you are aware but 85% of traffic uses that bridge

DH I don’t know but I will find out.

TW What about Black Cat? I asked for plans at the last meeting and haven’t received as yet – how are you dealing with that, queues/traffic? Are there any maps of Black Cat, how are you getting around the new road?

DH We are going over it.

NG External strategic stakeholders are National Highways, we met with them and they hadn’t got a clue what was happening in relation to this project and that road.

DH We talk a lot with National Highways, but they will be long finished by the time we come along – this is not Jason’s patch. People on ground are not worried about EWR they will be long gone and finished. We are not there until 2030.

TW They will be long gone, but we are meeting about Tempsford, growth, and this is 2 major roads, so where you are putting the road as people are trying to build houses? We really need to see some decent maps.

DH Homes England, DfT, have agreed location of station and govt announced in spring – so they are building the station on east coast mainline 2026/27 – east coast on mainline will be built first and then mid 2030s open EWR.

TW Anything you can share with us about the station will be lovely. Cllr Zerny, has he seen the plans for the station?

DH I haven’t been in a meeting where they have been shown, this will come out in 2 weeks time.

KC Grid slot pending.

DH There were 2 options at non stat-con – we have chosen the northerly of the 2 so a preferred option identified.

JW This directs workers to Cambridge.

DH It unlocks housing that will deepen the labour market.

JW We are the bit in the middle – not focussing enough in the middle (Bedford).

DH Fed back to Lord Vallance, Laura Church and I were at an event last Wednesday, with trade ambassadors and we were pitching the corridor and in particular the middle.

The railway creates a single economic region so creating an economic area that has the clout to compete on an global scale.

JW Set up a business board from all 6 authorities, but all we ever hear is Oxford/Cambridge.

DH Globally Oxford and Cambridge are global brands, trade ambassadors have said don’t change the brand.

TW Railway benefits Oxford and Cambridge – has anyone shown how it benefits Bedford?

DH Yes.

TW Can you share that with us? We can prove the effect of shutting one bridge. The economic chaos for Bedford is huge and we have the figures which how shutting Bromham Road Bridge affected the town.

DH We are working on ensuring minimising the effect.

TW History of Botley Rd Bridge, Oxford they couldn’t get people to listen.

DH Botley Rd Bridge has been a shambles, can’t defend it but it was not EWR. Got to do this in a way that minimises the impact on Bedford, we have got to demonstrate to you with how plans appear, the bit I quibble with is the town of Bedford is going to best connected - this is why Universal are coming here.

NG That’s fine, but tell that to businesses who will close, it’s not helping them.

DH I am optimistic, but we need to demonstrate that and where we have delivered major schemes and see the investment, e.g. Birmingham, Battersea.

TW Told how a transit van parked at top of Ashburnham Rd, backed traffic up all around Bedford.

DH That example illustrates just why we need a bigger compound to deliver the station.

JW If using that space you're saying you will not need to close the road?

JR Yes. In the non-stat-con, bridges need to be raised over 1metre, further survey and design means we don't need to do that anymore.

NG So you will drop the track?

JW Yes.

JBB Bromham Bridge, last time we asked the road would be closed 6 – 9 months, Hurst Grove and over the bridge, last time it was shut the impact was huge.

TW One bit of roadworks affects everywhere else in the town.

JW If we were to work on a scheme for people to come with cars, and we put it in writing would you be willing to look at it for funding more?

DH Yes, if you come to us with mitigations.

KC Are you talking about a park and ride?

JW Yes.

TW It works in Cambridge but depends on use.

DH We would love to work with you on that, we can't underwrite a park and ride in perpetuity but for the period we are building, then if the council put in additional bus routes.

2027 start, but we are first through new process, we don't fix that date too firmly as it depends on consultation feedback.

KC Say second half of 2027.

JR Is there someone in council that our t&t team can talk to?

JW Nicky (NG) is the portfolio holder.

NG We do need to get this formalised, there is lots happening around the periphery, but it doesn't seem to join up.

JBB True, it doesn't pick up on traffic modelling.

TW We have minutes of meetings.

JW Are you aware of council financial issues, if we undertake modelling, we will need to use officers, is there any up-front funding – if we write to and identified funding would you look at it?

DH Yes.

JBB Existing PPA, in place but in terms of what in pay taking up officer time, we are recording and documenting and will charge back to you.

JW It will be a genuine ask.

DH My instructions from the SoS is to get it done.

JW Can you drop in how poor we are.

TW Will you be telling her you can save £1bn if you go south?

DH No

TW and NG Why not go south?

TW Why do you want to regenerate our town when I haven't asked for it?

DH We can have those arguments again.

	<p>TW No we can't, because we never had them in the first place, there has never been a justification as to why you are going through the centre of the town, and are spending £1bn more, then why bugger about in Bedford and build a new station.</p> <p>DH Doesn't deliver anything like the same economic growth, we said during non-stat con, we would hear and respect views, but my marching instructions are to build the route on the alignment identified in 2023, and I'm not the person to have the discussion with.</p> <p>I don't think the govt will listen before or now.</p> <p>Place to challenge is at a planning enquiry.</p> <p>What I say to people opposed is I am not person to talk to about different routes, I encourage you to accept this route is going to be built on this alignment and I need to engage on the scheme I am being asked to deliver.</p> <p>TW Anything anyone else wants to ask or to raise today?</p> <p>NG Questions have been raised from others:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How will EWR reposition the hospital/ Britannia Road? ▪ Can you provide a map? ▪ Neither of two alternative locations of Stewartby station? ▪ Latest intentions on Stewartby site? <p>Question from Clapham:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Clapham tunnel and will it happen, ▪ Traffic survey before thinking about a carpark on Ford End Road, ▪ Detailed hospital plans and traffic management, ▪ Severance of Graze Hill Lane, <p>TW Anytime I go near Clapham, they want a tunnel.</p> <p>NG I will send all the questions:</p> <p>Why is Greys Hill Lane severed, why is a single-track road being severed?</p> <p>ELRG withheld public record from meeting demolition 2-20 -slides missing.</p> <p>TW Slides were shared but says confidential.</p> <p>ACTION DH will check.</p> <p>KC to NG I will give NG my email address and NG will send questions.</p> <p>JBB Cllr Spice also had questions as well – these will be emailed.</p> <p>TW to DH What is the meeting with the MP, what is the plan?</p> <p>DH We can ask MP Yasin to speak.</p> <p>KC We will have a Q & A session.</p> <p>DH Accept there is an element of kick back. We will arrange another meeting</p>
4	<p>Next Meeting</p> <p>DH suggested end November/beginning of December.</p> <p>ACTION: CC to arrange</p>

Minutes approved by Mayor and all attending BBC officers,