

GREAT DENHAM PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of The Great Denham Parish Council Meeting held on 2nd February 2026 at 7.30pm at Great Denham Community Hall

MINUTES

Present: Cllrs Jon Hannah (Chair), Chris Staite, Oliver Payne, Adam Firth, Anna O'Meara, Vivek Davda, Jim Weir (also Borough councillor), Robbin Brough (Parish Council Clerk).

- 1 **Apologies for Absence:** Cllr Joanna Szaub-Newton (unwell), Cllr Moran (previous engagement).
Resolved to accept
- 2 **Declarations of interest in items on the agenda:** Cllr Weir declared a local interest in agenda item 12 as he is a school governor.
- 3 **Public Open Session** - 3 residents in attendance
A representative from Carers in Bedfordshire attended the meeting to introduce themselves to the council and highlight areas in which they provide support in the community.
- 4 **Correspondence received since the last meeting (requiring council attention)**
A resident contacted the council requesting support with inconsiderate parking on the junction of Hazelwick Drive and Anglia Way. *This area is unadopted, the council will contact Vistry and Linden Homes to request the faded road markings are repainted.*
A resident emailed the council regarding the 20mph installation and whether more repeater signs would be installed. The same resident also raised concerns over inconsiderate parking on Greenkeepers Road and Downham Close. *The parish council raised the residents queries with BBC Highways and was assured the correct signage had been installed. The parish council will request a 20mph sign is placed by the bus gate entrance into the village.*
- 5 **To confirm the minutes of the parish council meeting held on 13th January 2026**
Resolved to approve the minutes as an accurate record.
- 6 **Co-option**
To consider coopting to fill the remaining vacancy – the total number of positions on the council is nine.
Resolved to coopt Vivek Davda to the council. (Proposer: Cllr Firth. Seconder: Cllr Payne).
- 7 **Clerk's report on actions not covered by agenda items**
 - To complete the necessary paperwork to complete the transfer of funds to various savings accounts. **Complete.**
 - To order the IT equipment needed to improve the Community Hall Wi-Fi. **Complete.**
 - To instruct the contractors who were approved to complete the lighting upgrades and building works at the Community Hall. **On-Going.**
 - To order the outdoor storage unit to be placed in the bin store near the Pavillion. **Complete.**
- 8 **Finance**
 - To approve payments and note income and balances.
Resolved to approve payments and note the balances – see appendix.
 - To note the Spend versus Budget variance report.
Report received and noted. See appendix.
 - To note the third quarter financial checks.
There were no issues highlighted, and the check was signed off by Cllr O'Meara.

Mrs R Brough, Clerk, Great Denham Parish Council
E-mail: clerk@greatdenhamparishcouncil.gov.uk

9 **Planning Applications:**

To consider any planning applications received since the last meeting – includes any received after the agenda is issued up to the date of the meeting.

No planning applications were received prior to publication of the agenda

10 **Borough Councillors Report**

Update from Borough Councillor Jim Weir.

See parish council website for full report.

11 **Great Denham Summer Fete 2026**

To receive a report from the working group, agree the date for the 2026 Great Denham Fete, and approve the event budget.

Resolved to hold the event on 30 August 2026 from 12.00 pm to 7.00 pm. It was further agreed that the working group would consist of Cllrs Staite, O'Meara, Payne, Firth and Davda. The budget was set at £5000.

12 **Grant Request from Great Denham Primary School**

To consider the request grant request of £367.10 to fund the purchase of two signs to discourage parents from parking on the grass verges.

Resolved to support the initiative to discourage parents from parking on the grass verges. The parish council agreed to purchase up to four signs for donation to the school.

13 **Parish Council Projects**

To receive an update from lead councillors on their project proposals.

It was noted that all councillors are awaiting quotations from external agencies before progressing proposals to full council.

14 **Parish Council Newsletter**

To agree the content and delivery timeframe of the newsletter.

Resolved to contact local organisations which provide services to residents on a not-for-profit basis, inviting them to submit a write-up for inclusion in the newsletter. The content will also include information on parish council projects, both completed and in the planning stage, together with parish council organised events. The Clerk will endeavour to have a draft newsletter prepared for council approval at the March meeting.

15 **Community Policing Priority Setting Meeting**

To receive a verbal report from Cllr Payne on a meeting recently attended.

Cllr Payne reported on the current pressure on resources within the Rural Policing Team, which covers 54 villages with two PCSOs and four police officers. It was noted that the northern villages are currently requiring a significant proportion of the team's time, and that the policing priority for this quarter has been set as a focus on car crime.

16 **Community Engagement**

Proposal by Cllr Firth – To consider other ways in which the parish council could engage with the community.

Cllr Firth expressed a wish to review how the council has engaged with residents in the past, to identify which approaches were successful, and to explore new methods the council could consider trialling. The parish council discussed the possibility of having a dedicated table at the summer fete to engage with residents and seek feedback on past and future projects. The option of holding an Annual Parish Meeting, at which local organisations and the parish council could present to the community, was also discussed.

17 **Highways Matters**

The clerk will provide an update to the council on any progress made relating to ongoing highways requests and projects.

No updates on highway matters had been received by the clerk prior to the meeting.

18 **Business for future agendas (No actions can be taken on items not on the agenda)**

- To discuss the impact on residents of Bedford Borough Council's decision regarding the Open Space Management Charge.
- To discuss and confirm the parish council's agreed priorities.
- To continue discussions on the parish council's Community Engagement Strategy.
- To agree which councillor will serve on the Staffing Committee.
- To agree a plan for reviewing the Neighbourhood Development Plan.

Date of the next meeting: 2nd March 2026, Great Denham Community Hall.

Great Denham Parish Council - Receipts & Payments - Feb 2026

							Bank reconciliation			
Account	Date	Category	Payee	Description	Type	Transfers	Receipts	Payments Gross	Cashbook Balance	Bank Balance
Unity Trust - Opening									14,739.14	14,739.14
	14 January 2026	Transfer	GDPC (Unity Savings)	Transfer from 20508951		74,000.00				
	15 January 2026	Membership/Affiliations	OSS	Open Spaces Society				45.00		
	15 January 2026	Transfer	GDPC TCBS			- 40,000.00				
	16 January 2026	Transfer	GDPC TCBS			40,000.00				
	27 January 2026	Staff costs	Direct Debit (NEST)	Direct Debit (NEST)				83.60		
	Not Yet Paid	GDCH expenditure	Ubiquiti	Expenses Clerk - GDCH IT Equipment				2,292.00		
									86,318.54	86,318.54
Unity Trust - Savings										
	Opening								181,829.01	181,829.01
	14 January 2026	Transfer	GDPC (Unity Current)			- 74,000.00				
	Closing								107,829.01	107,829.01
Redwood Savings										
	Opening								90,398.49	90,398.49
	No transactions									
	Closing								90,398.49	90,398.49
Hinckley & Rugby Savings										
	Opening								125,001.00	125,001.00
	No transactions									
	Closing								125,001.00	125,001.00
The Cambridge Building Society										
	Opening								85,000.00	85,000.00
	31 December 2025	Bank Interest	TCBS				998.69			
	15 January 2026	Transfer	GDPC (Unity Current)			40,000.00				
	15 January 2026	Transfer	GDPC (Unity Current)			- 40,000.00				
	Closing								85,998.69	85,998.69
						0.00	998.69	2,420.60		

GDPC - Balances - Feb 2026

	£
Redwood Savings 3.2% - 35 day notice	90,398
Unity Trust Current 0%	86,319
Unity Trust Savings 2.25%	107,829
Hinckley & Rugby Savings 2.1%	125,001
The Cambridge Building Society 1.55%	85,999
Total funds held	495,546

Allocation of Balance Sheet

Double yellow lines	10,000	
Pedestrian barrier	4,500	
Bus Shelter	4,650	
Give way markings	6,000	
Pedestrian crossing points	90,000	
20mph speed limit signs	20,000	
GD Community Hall landlord responsibilities	11,000	
GD Community Hall - Upgrades	7,000	
Defibrillator supplies	1,140	
Election costs	2,000	
New Playground Equipment	30,000	
Great Denham Youth Club	6,500	
GD History Memorial (School Project)	8,000	
Upgrade to paths in Country Park	150,000	
Bird Nesting signs for Country Park	1,000	
Open Space Maintenance	90,000	
Hanging baskets		
Interpretation boards	3,300	
VAT refund due	1,558	
General reserve	48,897	Balancing figure
Total allocation	495,546	

GREAT DENHAM PARISH COUNCIL

Feb 2026

Income	YTD (Actual) Gross	YTD (Actual) Net	Annual Budget 2025/26	Full year Estimate	Variance
Precept	41,901	41,901	41,901	41,901	-0
VAT reclaim	0	0	0	0	0
CIL Income	164,068	164,068	0	164,068	164,068
Bank Interest	7,738	7,738	4,889	7,738	2,849
Other income	0	0	0	0	0
Total Income	213,707	213,707	46,790	213,707	166,917
Outgoings					
Staff costs	13,502	13,502	16,055		
Staff costs	13,502	13,502	16,541	16,541	0
Christmas lights	6,631	6,631	2,500		
GDCH expenditure	5,766	4,805	3,600		
Community defib	0	0	200		
Open spaces & community facilities	12,397	11,436	6,300	11,436	-5,136
Audit	160	160	420		
ICO Annual Fee	47	47	40		
Insurance	4,824	4,824	4,581		
Payroll	270	270	230		
Hall hire	168	168	220		
Banking charges	54	54	96		
Information Technology	360	300	400		
Stationery	0	0	150		
Membership/Affiliations	1,116	1,116	1,031		
Training	0	0	500		
Admin - other	55	52	100		
Admin	7,054	6,990	7,768	8,096	-328
Newsletter	743	743	1,931		
Carol Concert	147	147			
Youth Club	12,500	12,500	6,250		
Fete	4,847	4,572	5,000		
Other	18,237	17,961	13,181	17,961	-4,780
GDCH Tea & Talk	772	772			
Grant: Community Hall Trustees	1,640	1,640			
Grant Rainbows	500	500			
Grant Brownies	500	500			
Grant: Hope Across Ages	660	660			
GDCH XMAS Event Grant	2,530	2,530			
Junior Park Run	0	0			
Grants	6,602	6,602	3,000	6,602	-3,602
Outgoings	57,791	56,491	46,790	60,636	-13,845
Kingwood Way Trees	2,000	2,000	0		
Noticeboard	1,519	1,309	0		
Outside budget	3,520	3,309	0	3,309	-3,309
Total Outgoings	61,310	59,800	46,790	63,945	-17,155

Monthly Report to GDPC January 2026

Special Area Charges & Call-in

The authority's implementation of Special Area Charges is strictly governed by Section 35 of the Local Government Act 1992. Rigorous consideration was given to the potential cessation of these charges. While discontinuing Special Area Charges would streamline the Borough's council tax system, establishing a single precept and eliminating volatility in future tax levels, such a change must be thoroughly tested against the statutory requirements of Section 35(d) before any action is taken.

In determining the allocation methodology for Special Area Charges for the upcoming financial year, the Council conducted a comprehensive review of options regarding open spaces maintained in the former developments of Great Denham and Land West of Kempston. These lands, held in trust and maintained by the Council, required a robust approach to cost allocation.

The Council, following CIPFA's expert recommendation, evaluated whether maintenance costs should be classified as Special Expenses. Under this framework, the Council would precisely identify and allocate costs to the three affected Parishes, Great Denham, Kempston Rural, and Kempston Town, based on the total area maintained within each Parish. This ensures a fair and transparent distribution of financial responsibility.

CIPFA's report mandates that the Council must "calculate the amount to be identified as Special Expenses for the three Parishes affected by dividing the total cost of maintenance by the total area maintained in each Parish. The proportion of the total cost is then allocated according to the area maintained." This methodology, applied to updated maintenance costs of £250,000, would result in substantial increases in the Precept per Band D equivalent property, as detailed below:

Parish	% of Area	Cost Shared (£)	Existing Precept (£)	Revised Precept (£)	Taxbase	Band D (£)	Current Band D (£)	Difference (£)
Great Denham	28%	70,258	41,901	112,159	1,781	62.98	23.53	39.45
Kempston Town	30%	75,314	350,000	425,314	6,197	68.63	56.48	12.15
Kempston Rural	42%	104,428	40,935	145,363	975	149.09	41.98	107.11

This option was decisively rejected, as it would impose an undue financial burden on residents of the affected Town and Parish areas.

The call-in on Tuesday, 27th, raised by 7 Liberal Democrat Councillors to object to the Special Area Charge report was as follows.

- 1) The report and decision are deficient, as they fail to transparently include the implication that the management charge area in Great Denham and Kempston West is not included, and therefore a cost that should be included by default is being excluded. This is also contrary to the CIPFA recommendation.
- 2) That the exclusion of the above cost puts an unfair burden on all other taxpayers.

In 24/25 and 25/26, the issue of the unfair charges to residents in Great Denham, Kempston West, and Kempston Rural was the subject of debate at both Full Council budget setting sessions. In both, budgets were agreed with the removal of the charges, reduced to £60 in 24/25 and full removal for 25/26. So, the general fund budget included these costs without imposing an unfair burden on a selected group of residents. The Parish Council may recall that I outlined a possibility that the Parish may be forced into taking on the costs of maintenance for the land that is allocated in the review of the “green space” exercise and update in Great Denham. As you can see, this is the recommendation of CIPFA but has been rejected in the report. This will now be part of the budget setting meeting in Full Council on Wednesday 4th February, where, for the past two years, the costs have been part of the General Fund Revenue Budget as approved by Full Council. Just also to clear up one of the points raised by the Chair, Cllr Hedley, regarding “background papers.” When the Mayor signed the decision, he had all the advice and papers available. The only additional paper was created by me on Monday, the 26th January – the day before the call-in. I created this to see what the cost and precept implications would be if the CIPFA recommendation were accepted. On the morning of the call-in, I asked one of the Borough's Finance Officers to check my assumptions and calculations, which he did and confirmed the premise, but with a slightly different figure in an upward direction. So, it is obvious that the decision maker did not have access to these papers, given that the decision had been made over a week before.

If the report is not accepted and somehow the CIPFA recommendation goes through, then

Great Denham would have an increased Band D precept of 168% with £70,258 costs.

Kempston Town would have an increased Band D precept of 21.5% with £75,314 costs.

Kempston Rural would have an increased Band D precept of 255% with £104,428 costs.

The full report can be seen using the link below.

<https://councillorsupport.bedford.gov.uk/documents/s79639/Item%2012%20Special%20Area%20Charges.pdf>

Government Funding

Councils nationwide are facing unprecedented financial pressures. Demand for legally mandated services, including temporary accommodation, children's services, and adult social care, continues to escalate. The cost of delivering these essential services has surged by approximately 25% in recent years, driven by inflation, increased placement and care

costs, and workforce challenges. Despite rising demand and costs, Government funding has failed to keep pace, resulting in a widening gap between statutory spending obligations and available income.

Additional responsibilities, such as the introduction of separate food waste collections, have further increased workload and costs, yet funding for these new duties remains insufficient. The Council has received approximately £1.1 million less in Government support, while neighbouring Councils such as Luton have received significantly more £139 million additional support this financial year. Consequently, Bedford Borough is left with inadequate resources to meet day-to-day service demands.

Bellwin Scheme

On 19 October 2024, a catastrophic explosion on Cleat Hill resulted in the tragic loss of two Borough residents. The Council responded immediately, collaborating with emergency services to secure the area, protect residents, and implement rehousing and safety measures. The total response and recovery costs amounted to approximately £2 million. Despite submitting a formal request for Bellwin Scheme support on 27 March 2025, the Government declined to provide assistance, compelling the Council to absorb these exceptional costs and exacerbating financial pressures.

Financial Facts and the Improvement Plan

In 2025, CIPFA conducted an independent expert review of the Council's finances. The review identified persistent financial difficulties stemming from weak governance, inadequate financial controls, and short-term decisions that have led to long-term challenges. Key findings include:

- Council Tax was maintained at artificially low levels, contrary to Government funding assumptions, resulting in a permanent funding gap. CIPFA estimates £24 million in lost income for 2024/25 alone, directly impacting services such as adult social care, housing, and children's services.
- Temporary inflation of reserves due to COVID-related grants was followed by a significant reduction, with the General Fund falling below the risk-assessed minimum.
- Weaknesses in internal capacity and systems, particularly in commissioning, procurement, and contract management, were exacerbated by staffing reductions in core functions. Reliance on agency staff has increased long-term costs.
- Most straightforward savings have already been exhausted, making future savings for 2025/26 and 2026/27 extremely challenging and likely to require complex decisions.
- Rising national demand for statutory services continues to intensify financial pressures.

To address these challenges, the Council has consolidated the Stability Plan, CIPFA Resilience Review, and other support initiatives into a comprehensive Improvement Plan. This plan is designed to close the £59 million funding gap over the medium term by:

1. Establishing a clear strategic direction and fostering a culture of improvement.
2. Ensuring the workforce and operational practices are future ready.
3. Strengthening financial management, including spending control, income collection, debt management, and reserves.
4. Enhancing change delivery through improved data, programme management, and
- 5.
6. governance.

Progress will be rigorously tracked through enhanced performance reporting, ensuring accountability and transparency. The Improvement Plan will also underpin any application for Exceptional Financial Support (EFS) from the Government.

Green Waste Collections

The Council confirms that there will be no charges for Green Waste Collections.

Food Waste Collections

Effective Monday, 30 March 2026, Bedford Borough Council will implement weekly food waste collections for all residential properties. Each home will receive a kitchen caddy and a larger outdoor food waste bin. Flats will be provided with kitchen caddies and access to communal food waste bins or designated collection points where communal storage is unavailable. Residents may line their kitchen caddies with ordinary plastic bags, paper, newspaper, or purchase liners if preferred.