

BURFORD NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN STEERING GROUP

Meeting Minutes — Wednesday, 19 August 2026

Attendees: Geoff Haines, Tom Williams, Ian Spicer, Jennie Craven, Jacqueline Neagle, Corinne Ash, Andrew Foster, Karl Morris, Ann Youngson

Apologies: Tony (Business/Economy Lead).

Minutes Prepared By: Burford NPSG

1. Executive Summary & Immediate Priorities

The Burford Neighborhood Plan Steering Group (NPSG) convened on 19 August 2026 to debrief on their recent consultation with the Brize Norton NPSG, establish a framework for Burford's upcoming community engagement, and plan a parallel Town Council strategy for capturing Section 106 developer contributions. Due to impending devolution to a unitary district council structure in Oxfordshire, the group emphasized the critical need to accelerate the drafting process and submit Burford's neighborhood plan as rapidly as possible.

Immediate administrative tasks include the completion of the Steering Group's formal *Terms of Reference* and a comprehensive *Communications Strategy* by early next week. The group also finalized a structured series of five focused public forum workshops in September 2026, culminating in a major town-wide public meeting on Thursday, 15 October 2026.

2. Deep Dive: Insights from Brize Norton Consultation

The Steering Group conducted a highly successful consultation with Les, a leading member of the Brize Norton NPSG. While Brize Norton's contextual environment and funding structures differ markedly from Burford's, several vital operational and strategic lessons were identified:

- **Timeline & Institutional Knowledge:** Brize Norton's process spanned five years, primarily because they initiated their project without local precedents. The Burford group is confident that by leveraging existing neighborhood plan templates and the resources of the Oxfordshire Neighborhood Planning Alliance, Burford can complete its plan in a fraction of that time.
- **Funding Disparity:** Unlike Brize Norton, which secured external neighborhood planning grants, Burford's NPSG is currently operating without designated annual budget funds. The NPSG's initial work is funded by a £1,500 reallocation from surplus Burford Bridge funds, which is strictly earmarked for facilities hire and public document printing. A consultant will only be appointed in Phase 2 once the initial community evidence is gathered.
- **Cooperating with Developers:** Faced with a state-mandated strategic housing expansion (growing from under 1,000 to over 3,000 homes by 2028), Brize Norton transitioned from a stance of pure opposition to

active, collaborative engagement. This cooperative relationship allowed them to establish strict green corridors and secure massive Section 106 contributions, including a brand-new community pavilion/hall, direct funding, and the transfer of substantial land parcels.

- **The Carterton Dispute:** The physical expansion of Brize Norton has triggered an ongoing administrative conflict with Carterton Town Council, which is attempting a 'land grab' to absorb the newly constructed residential areas into its boundaries to capture the associated council tax precept. Les is actively compiling extensive documentation to defend Brize Norton's historical and logical boundaries.
- **Public Engagement & Referendums:** Les stressed the mantra of '*consultation, consultation, consultation*' across all town demographics. To capture authentic community consensus, Brize Norton utilized printed large-scale documents at physical workshops and distributed physical paper surveys to every household. Les strongly advised against relying purely on digital forms, noting that physical surveys achieve significantly higher, more thoughtful response rates. Furthermore, Brize Norton's final referendum saw a 20% voter turnout (typical for such ballots). The group was greatly reassured to confirm that a neighborhood plan requires only a simple 51% majority of *those voting*, rather than a majority of the entire town population.

3. WODC Relations & Case Officer Mobilisation

The Steering Group discussed the historical and 'recognized hostility' of West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC) officials toward neighborhood plans. In particular, the group noted that WODC utilizes Phil Shaw (a highly dominant ex-planning officer) as a consultant. Shaw is famously and fundamentally opposed to the devolutionary power of neighborhood plans, frequently driving strategic council decisions through community meetings. To successfully navigate this resistance, Burford must ensure its plan is meticulously prepared and legally airtight.

The application for Burford's Neighborhood Plan Area was submitted last week and is officially under public consultation, with the final deadline for public representations set for 5:00 PM on Thursday, 24 September 2026. Once this six-week consultation window closes and WODC validates the area, a dedicated Case Officer will be appointed. The NPSG intends to utilize this Case Officer as an 'angel' to steer compliance, establish a robust planning framework, and help draft the formal brief to appoint a professional planning consultant.

Vision & Policy Formulation (The Thame Model) The group reviewed several successful neighborhood plans, single-out the Thame Neighborhood Plan as an exceptional, highly structured model. Although Thame's plan is extensive (196 pages), its strength lies in how it seamlessly builds from a highly concise vision statement down to specific, legally binding policy directives.

The Power of 'Must': Thame's plan utilizes explicit 'must' statements rather than passive, hopeful language. This grammatical specificity is crucial: WODC officers will actively seek to obfuscate and find flexibility to override local preferences. Explicit 'must' directives (e.g., specifying precise parking layout, driveway materials, and garage designs) bind future planning committees and developers to the community's exact vision.

Rejecting Woolly Vision Statements: The group examined WODC's draft local plan vision for Burford in 2041. The NPSG unanimously rejected WODC's draft as a 'woolly, page-long, AI-style bot output' filled with generic buzzwords like 'resilient' and 'inclusive' that could apply to any town. The group agreed that Burford's vision must be written in authentic non-AI speak, capturing the town's unique identity as a model of heritage-led sustainability where conservation and innovation walk hand-in-hand.

Consultation Methodology: To avoid leading questions (e.g., 'Would you like a free lunch?') that generate useless data, the NPSG will present personal, value-driven statements at workshops. To prevent respondents from choosing a lazy neutral middle ground, public voting at the forums will utilize a strict 4-point even scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree) with no middle option.

4. Section 106 & Traffic Parallel Strategy

The NPSG emphasized that Burford has historically been 'insufficiently savvy' in claiming Section 106 developer contributions from adjacent large-scale projects in Brize Norton and Carterton. Although these housing developments are outside Burford's parish boundary, they directly increase secondary demand on Burford's primary infrastructure — notably the secondary school, the local GP surgery, the historical high street, and regional road networks.

Karl Morris strongly advocated that tracking, claiming, and submitting formal bids for S106 funds from neighbouring developments must be established as a high-priority parallel Town Council activity. This administrative push is highly critical, with Karl noting it is 'more important than the neighborhood plan in many ways' as an immediate source of civic funding.

Traffic and Bypasses: A long-mooted bypass remains a financial impossibility, costing an estimated £10-20 million and requiring the town to accept massive, destructive housing allocations in exchange. Instead, the Town Council is actively pursuing the downgrading of the Burford-to-Stow road (A424) to a B-road to divert heavy HGV traffic. The group noted that while HGVs are noisy and heavy, the primary cause of Burford's daily gridlock is passenger car traffic and short-duration, London-based day-trip coaches.

5. September Public Forums & Statements

To build momentum for the overarching plan, the NPSG will host five public forum workshops in September 2026 at the Baptist Church, utilizing five distinct, personalized statements to prompt intense resident discussion and gather evidence. The agreed personal statements for each forum are:

- **Infrastructure Forum:** *'I want/I believe there should be adequate, accessible parking for residents, visitors, and parents.'* (Focuses on congestion, parking solutions, and separating Town Council business from statutory plan policies).
- **Wellbeing & Leisure Forum:** *'I want to be able to pursue my sport and leisure activities without having to travel to another town.'* (Focuses on the recreation ground, replacing the demolished sports pavilion, and introducing modern facilities like paddle tennis and pickleball).
- **Planning & Heritage Forum:** *'Burford needs more housing that leads to a diverse, inclusive community.'* (A deliberately provocative statement designed to prompt deep debate regarding housing density, affordability, and keeping Burford a living community rather than a retirement enclave).
- **Environment Forum:** *'I want connected, safe access to green spaces and the surrounding open countryside.'* (Focuses on footpaths, floodable pathways, and exploring local green energy, such as micro-hydro generation on Burford's two redundant mill races).

- **Economy & Business Forum:** *'The town should benefit from the high number of visitors, improving the experience for both residents and tourists.'* (Focuses on moving tourism upmarket, discouraging massive day-trip coaches, and capturing more local economic value).

The Steering Group resolved to modernize its internal and external communications, moving away from fragmented emails and uncompliant WhatsApp groups which present data protection (GDPR) risks and lack administrative control.

Internal Collaboration: The Town Council has purchased a business subscription of Microsoft 365. The NPSG will centre all internal calendars, teams communications, and document drafting on Microsoft Teams and OneDrive. Geoff Haines will upload all historical NPSG meeting minutes to the neighbourhood plan website. All emails to resident will append the URL to establish transparency and institutional professionalism.

External Resident Engagement (Spond App): Tom Williams will set up a trial of the free club-management app *Spond* with NPSG members. Spond could be utilized to coordinate public RSVPs for forums, distribute custom polls, send push notifications regarding weather cancellations, and manage communications with residents without exposing individual phone numbers.

6. Action Items & Responsibilities

The following immediate action items were agreed upon, with designated leads and firm deadlines:

Action Item Description	Lead Person	Target Deadline
Draft Burford's localized, non-AI Vision Statement and circulate for initial steering group review	Karl Morris	Early next week (w/c 24 Aug 2026)
Organize the Youth Forum in coordination with the Burford School administration and Helen Jenkins	Tom Williams	End of August 2026
Liaise with Tony and the Chamber of Trade to coordinate the Economy & Business workshop	Karl Morris/Geoff Haines	End of August 2026
Establish Spond test group and send email invitations to all NPSG members to trial RSVP and polling features	Tom Williams	End of August 2026
Confirm Baptist Church bookings for September workshops and inquire about Warwick Hall availability for October	Jennie Craven	End of August 2026
Draft formal Terms of Reference (using Brize Norton's 7-page document as a template) and the Communications Strategy	Jennie Craven	Early next week (w/c 24 Aug 2026)

Appendix: Confirmed NPSG Public Meeting Schedule

To ensure complete transparency and maximize community participation, the following public workshops and major meetings have been formally scheduled for Autumn 2026:

Date & Time	Forum / Meeting Name	Primary Topic & Focus	Venue Location
Wed, 2 Sept 2026 6:00 PM - 7:00 PM	Infrastructure Forum	Accessible parking, HGV congestion, and road infrastructure.	Baptist Church
Wed, 2 Sept 2026 7:15 PM - 8:15 PM	Wellbeing & Leisure Forum	Recreation ground facilities, tennis, and pavilion plans.	Baptist Church
Wed, 16 Sept 2026 6:00 PM - 7:00 PM	Planning & Heritage Forum	Inclusivity, affordable housing density, and architectural character.	Baptist Church
Wed, 16 Sept 2026 7:15 PM - 8:15 PM	Environment Forum	Green corridors, footpaths, and renewable micro-hydro power.	Baptist Church
Wed, 23 Sept 2026 7:15 PM - 8:15 PM	Economy & Business Forum	Upmarket tourism strategy, Chamber of Trade, and local businesses.	Baptist Church
Thurs, 15 Oct 2026 Afternoon & Evening	Major Public Town Meeting	Comprehensive public feedback review, vision & policy alignment.	Warwick Hall