

Meeting Notes
Burford Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group (June 10, 2026)

Attendance List

- **Consultants (Andrea Pelegram Ltd):** Lee Searles (Director/Policy Expert), Nick Pelegram (Planning Consultant).
- **Steering Group:** Jenny Craven (Lead/Town Councillor), Paul Newman (Town Councillor), Andrew Foster (Town Councillor), Tony Jones (Chair of Burford Chamber of Trade), Geoff Haines (Resident Representative).

1. Introduction and Consultant Strategic Expertise

Andrea Pelegram Ltd gave an overview of their company and its skills and experience. Lee brings over 20 years of strategic planning experience, including eight years as a town councillor and four years as a Cotswold District Councillor on the planning committee. Crucially, Lee's own ward was subject to 2,300 house allocations, providing "battle-hardened" expertise in managing large-scale development and campaign groups. Nick adds a developer-side perspective from his background in London-based consultancy, identifying how speculative developers exploit policy weaknesses. The consultants offer specialized experience in the Cotswold context, citing their work in Chipping Campden and Lechlade—towns facing identical infrastructure and heritage constraints. Their services include:

- **"Cradle to Grave" Support:** Comprehensive guidance from initial engagement through to the final referendum.
- **Empirical Policy Drafting:** Crafting "cunningly worded" policies that possess the legal weight to survive planning appeals.
- **Regulatory Resilience:** Navigating Strategic Environmental Assessments (SEA) and the Basic Condition Statement.
- **Advocacy:** Representing the town's interests against the West Oxfordshire Local Plan and speculative windfall applications. This professional oversight is vital for aligning Burford's ambitions with the shifting National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) to provide a robust defence against speculative development.

2. Planning Policy Strategy and Regulatory Advice

Discussed was the strategic necessity of meeting housing requirements to secure the NPPF's "5-year protection rule." Without a Neighborhood Plan that allocates sites to meet the local housing requirement—currently 120 houses by 2043—Burford remains vulnerable to the "Tilted Balance." Under this regulatory mechanism, if a district fails to demonstrate a five-year land supply, the benefits of housing almost always outweigh local heritage or environmental concerns. Furthermore, the NPSG must plan for resilience; while the current requirement is 120 houses, the impending transition to a Unitary Authority could see this number double to 240. However, they cautioned that site allocation is a "double-edged sword". It requires:

- A formal **"call for sites" methodology**.
- An objective **site assessment** using a traffic-light system (Green/Yellow/Red).

- Additional public consultation that can be **divisive for the community**.
- An extra **six to eight months** added to the plan's timeline.

3. Evidence-Based Defence and Infrastructure Challenges

The consultants emphasized using "informal evidence" to empower the community against "competent authorities" (e.g., Thames Water, Highways) who often provide short shrift to anecdotal concerns. By documenting the fragility of the Victorian system with empirical data, the NPSG can force authorities to reconsider development impact. The NPSG will focus on three "hard impact" areas:

1. **Traffic and Congestion:** Documenting HGV funnelling through medieval lanes and the degradation of the "Georgian set piece" character.
2. **Sewage and Water Infrastructure:** Compiling logs of water pressure failures and photographic evidence of flooding to prove the system cannot handle incremental "windfall" growth.
3. **Heritage Character Preservation:** Utilizing design codes to ensure that new developments do not compromise Burford's historic architectural integrity.

4. Operational Structure: Thematic Groupings and Engagement

To streamline policy development, ten initial topics have been consolidated into five thematic groups. To ensure consistency, the Steering Group will adopt a "top-down" oversight model, providing "straw man" policies to the sub-committees to prevent them from starting from a blank page.

- **Infrastructure:** Focus on traffic, HGV management, roads, parking, and mobility.
- **Community & Wellbeing:** Including sports, leisure, and intergenerational projects.
- **Planning & Heritage:** Focused on development boundaries, town character, and design codes.
- **Environment:** Addressing sewage, water pressure, biodiversity, and climate change.
- **Economy:** Supporting Burford's 100+ businesses and managing sustainable tourism.

5. Immediate Actions and Procedural Roadmap

The group is targeting a formal public launch on July 13th to build momentum.

Next Steps & Assigned Responsibilities:

- **Mayor's Reception (June 11):** Distribution of A5 flyers and recruitment for thematic groups via a sign-up list (Paul/Jenny).
- **July 13th Workshop:** A structured workshop at Warwick Hall. To avoid the "blank canvas" problem, the group will provide "A4 prompt lists" at flip-chart stations to guide resident feedback on the five themes.
- **Procurement:** The council will obtain three quotes for consultancy services to satisfy transparency requirements.
- **Empirical Evidence Log:** Residents will be recruited to start gathering logs of utility failures and photographic evidence of infrastructure strain.
- **Resource Sharing:** Joining the Oxfordshire Neighborhood Plans Alliance for peer-to-peer knowledge exchange.