

Borough Councillor Update for TPC– January 2023

Happy New Year

As we enter 2023 and the first PC meeting of the year, we are also entering the last four months of the municipal year and the end of the four-year cycle before the elections in May. It will be interesting to see how the public perception of national politics impacts what is happening locally. As I have continued to say throughout my tenure as your Ward Cllr national issues are for your MP and local issues with me. The only time that changes is when I – on behalf of residents – use our MP to get something done that the Borough are either reluctant or unable to do. A good example is – Monday 9th Jan – when Richard Fuller MP asked the following question in Parliament.

*“Thousands of my constituents are paying an additional “tax” if they are living in new developments. Estate Management agents – appointed by developers – are charging between 75-90% management/overhead fees for the limited service they offer. The system is set up in such a way that challenging the fairness of these exploitive charges is almost impossible. The Property Ombudsman can only deal with the complaint handling by the agents and not the exploitive aspects of the charging regime. **Can the Property Ombudsman TORs be revisited, and more powers be given to allow punitive action against agents and developers where this is happening? This is happening not just in one organisation but is systemic throughout the industry.***

A recent survey has placed all these companies with a very bad, or bad, overall satisfaction rating of 96%. Despite this the agents won’t engage in a constructive way with either residents or local Cllrs. It is plainly obvious to those on the receiving end of this system that legislation must be enacted to change the system and give residents some easier routes to challenge”

You can see the question and the response from the Minister for Planning & Housing on this link <https://fb.watch/i7t05Xi6Wg/>

Local Flooding & 41 Bus Service

<https://youtu.be/DcYEBave2iE?t=105>

Turvey relevance 1.45-10.24

I met with residents at The Mill on Friday 13th Jan along with Officers from Bedford Borough Flood Team and members of the Environment Agency. It was obvious that the EA team were not sharing the concern and stress that residents had been under for a number of days. The issue with the lack of maintenance and repair of the upstream sluice gates was again threatening imminent flooding of properties. I visited residents over a couple of days and saw them on the Saturday and shared with them what the EA were proposing. It would appear that they are now taking the matter seriously and as soon as water levels allow they will tackle the sluice gate issues. The link above is a clip of the questions I asked and the answers received at the Rural Affairs committee on Tuesday 24th Jan. My second question was about the 41-bus service and what were Bedford Borough going to do.

Proposed 25 House development off Carlton Road

Whilst the above proposed development is an identified site in the NDP – and therefore will be given more weight – it doesn’t mean that objections can’t be raised. We all know that the Carlton Road issues are a nightmare on a number of fronts. It may be that when reserved matters are put forward they can be conditioned to provide a better and workable solution to the safety issues around Carlton Road. I know that many residents and TPC are concerned that this will just add to the locally known issues.

Local Plan 2040 Ward Issues

At the last Full Council meeting on 11th January the Council voted to submit the 2040 Local Plan to the Planning Inspectorate. Of particular concern to KR residents was the proposal for Gibraltar Corner which was identified as a potential site for development. Whilst I think that the Gibraltar Corner site would be over development, I was concerned that if the plan didn't get presented in January – the absolute deadline – then it would mean the 2030 plan would be out of date and the Borough would not have its required 5-year land supply for the housing targets. This in turn would mean speculative applications would have more chance of getting through and the decisions passed to the Planning Inspector. In the years ahead when these proposals in the 2040 plan come forward there is an opportunity to challenge at the planning application stage. There will still be an opportunity to object to the plan when the hearing is held by the planning inspectorate.

Executive Decisions since our last meeting

2nd December - To award a grant of £3,790 to Cardington Parish Council towards the replacement and enhancement of the pathway along the West Green, subject to the project being fully funded and any legal requirements necessary for the completion of the project.

2nd December - To approve grant funding support which is provided under the Trees for Climate Programme for the land located at Octagon Farm North in partnership with the Forest of Marston Vale Trust.

5th December - To approve the proposed Rural Settlements List for 2023/2024.

9th December - To award Age UK Bedfordshire £20,000 to support their Get Set for Winter Campaign for residents who are struggling with the cost of living, energy bills and keeping warm.

9th December - The decision is to accept up to £2.3m awarded by Dept. for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities to deliver the High Street Heritage Action Zone.

13th December - To approve that arrangements to progress the Ravensden Neighbourhood Plan to the referendum stage of preparation are made.

16th December - To award Bedford Bowls Club £5,000 as a contribution to the purchasing and installation of an automated watering system for the bowling green located in Bedford Park.

19th December - To accept a grant of £69,509.50 from the Department for transport from the Transport Fund in respect of socially necessary bus services as set out in the attached report.

20th December - To approve funding a climate change fund for the application from Great Denham Community Hall to fund the installation of 71 solar modules on the hall roof and battery storage, in the sum of £20,000.

5th January - To accept funds of £66,058 from Active Travel England/Department for Transport for revenue funding to develop active travel scheme.

Financial Settlement

The Levelling Up Secretary Michael Gove has today (19 December 2022) confirmed an almost £60 billion package for councils in England for the next financial year. The settlement means councils across England will benefit from an additional £5 billion – a 9% increase on last year's settlement.

The agreement for next year includes a one-off Funding Guarantee that ensures every council in England will see at least a 3% increase in core spending power before any local decisions around council tax are taken.

Councillor Ward funds

There will be Ward Fund Allocations for 2023 – 25, actual figures have not yet been provided but it is suspected that the funds will need to be slightly higher than the previous allocation as we have had an increase in electorate across the Borough.

Bedford Council use Government funding to give thousands of Bedford Borough families shopping vouchers this Christmas

Funded through the DWP's Household Support Fund, Bedford Borough Council will continue to provide each eligible child £15 per week.

DFE funding accepted by Bedford Borough Council

The Council has accepted funding by the Department of Education, £9833.02, to support the development of a Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) employment forum to increase the number of young people (aged 16-25) benefiting from Supported Internships.

Dept. for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities funding accepted by the Mayor

The Council accepted up to £2.3m awarded by Dept. for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities to deliver the High Street Heritage Action Zone (HSHAZ) Government scheme. This will enable the Borough to deliver projects proposed in the UK Shared Prosperity Investment Plan for the period April 2022 – March 2025.

For example, the plan focuses on three key priorities with town centre improvements among them, projects such as the Midland Road regeneration are an example of this.

Bedford received grant from DFT and £2 bus fare.

The Council accepted a grant of £69,509.50 from the Department for Transport to protect socially necessary bus services from January to March.

Additionally, the Council has also accepted a further £66,058 from Active Travel England/Department for Transport. The funding will be used to develop an active travel scheme and development, public engagement on schemes and data collection and evidence. The funding also provides one full time Active Travel Officer for one year.

Additionally, residents across Bedford Borough are set to benefit from a £2 cap on single bus journeys from January to March 2023. This £2 fare cap is being made possible by a £60 million Government initiative that aims to protect bus services across the country.

Bedford Borough Council uses government funding to replace trees on residential streets

These replacement trees will be purchased via the Local Authority Treescapes Fund which is part of the government's Nature for Climate Fund. The funding will be used to reinstate historic tree pit locations across the Borough, who will receive £159,800.00.

Bedford Borough Council contribute to Age UK's "Keep well this winter"

Bedford Borough Council is giving Age UK Bedfordshire £20,000 to provide additional frontline services to older people who risk being overwhelmed by the current cost of living.

Potential charges for green waste collection left open

At Full Council the Mayor refused to rule out the possibility of a charge on green waste collection. Charges typically range from £35 - £45 for a single green bin, with a 1-year subscription plan.

Butterfly Bridge Refurbishment

Refurbishment works are planned at Butterfly Bridge, Bedford with the bridge closing from 9th January for up to 4 months.

Bedford Borough Climate change fund

Great Denham Community Hall is receiving funding for the installation of 71 solar modules on the hall roof and battery storage, in the sum of £20,000 from the Borough Councils Climate change fund.

The Climate Change fund 2020-2024 can provide up to 50% match funding (from £5,000 up to £20,000) for improvements that reduce carbon emissions and energy costs of community buildings within Bedford Borough. Projects can be made up of multiple building improvements up to the maximum grant available.

King Charles III Coronation

The UK will mark the Coronation of King Charles III with a three-day bank holiday weekend from Saturday 6 May to Monday 8 May 2022.

For the celebration Bedford Borough Council is waiving the usual administration fee for street party road closures.

For anyone wishing to hold a street party over the extended bank holiday weekend, the Council asks that applications are submitted by 1 April 2023. Residents can email road.closures@bedford.gov.uk to request a street closure

Local Plan 2040

A consultation took place between 15th June 2022 and 29th July 2022. A total of 1,449 individual representations were received from 595 respondents.

As a reminder the next Local Plan must be submitted for examination by January 2023. BBC concluded, following review, that nothing in the representations received has altered the conclusion reached by officers.

Representations were given received on the:

- **HOU13 land at Gibraltar Corner, Kempston Rural –**
 - Representations noted that this will have adverse impact on existing residents including traffic issues, highway safety, noise, drainage capacity / flooding, loss of farmland, rural land and greenspace, loss of views, impact on wildlife, not enough health and other services, already enough development in the parish / don't need more houses, danger of coalescence, query timing of masterplan preparation, historic environment impact. Petition 247 signatures.
- **HOU14 Kempston Hardwick New Settlement –**
 - Representations noted that there could be historic environment impacts, impact on County Wildlife Site, traffic and environmental impacts, Concerns about inclusion of reference to Kempston Hardwick station, concerns about type of employment proposed (reference to innovation uses) and need for development to await completion of strategic placemaking framework (Policy HOU12), scale of development too big, concerns about reliance on EWR, consider alternative access arrangements, lack of facilities to support scale of growth. Petition 256 signatures

A small addition to the Plan is the inclusion of two new settlements close to two new rail stations on the proposed East West Rail line at the former brickworks at Kempston Hardwick, and at Little Barford to the east of the Borough.

For brevity not all issues not be listed however, they can be accessed through the appropriate portals on the [council's website](#).

Council Tax for 2023/2024

As part of current budget setting process, the January Executive will consider:

- That a provision of 1.50% be made in the Council Tax Base in respect of losses on collection.

For further detail please view related documents via the council's [online portals](#).

Bin Collections

As a reminder, the holiday timetable will continue until 7th January, Saturday, after which the standard collection timetable will resume.