

Borough Councillors Report to Turvey PC – March 2023

Changes to Ward and Parliamentary boundaries.

As we know the Borough Wards are to change at the election on the 4th of May. Following on from that the Parliamentary constituency boundaries are also being reviewed. It looks presently that if re-elected then Turvey would be part of the new constituency boundary represented by Richard Fuller MP. Most will also know that I have offered myself as a candidate for the new ward of Great Denham and will therefore not be standing to represent Turvey as it too enters a new ward.

I wanted to say on a personal note – as this will be my last TPC meeting – to the Parish Council for making me feel welcome at your meetings and allowing me to represent you on many issues. I have also helped many residents of Turvey with housing, travel, health, planning, and financial matters and it has been my pleasure to do so. I have donated over £20k from my ward fund on a number of projects and it's pleasing to see the completion of all of them. I want to thank the Chair, David, and Sue the Parish Clerk for keeping me in the loop on issues of concern. There are still outstanding issues that I will continue to work on right up until the election. I am determined that before I leave, I will have an agreed date for the Grove Road squares footpath renewal. I also continue to push for work on the High Street and Newton Lane, both of which are in an appalling mess. Rectification of the sluice gate issues at The Mill rise is in hand even though they are taking time to resolve, and I will continue to lobby the Environment Agency for a faster response. Thank you.

Estate Management Charges will follow new development.

At Full Council on 28th February, I presented a petition calling on all local authorities to lobby the Government to abolish the current system of Estate Management Charges affecting Wilkinson Road Ward, Great Denham, Wootton, and Shortstown and put in place a fairer and more transparent scheme.

Richard Fuller MP and Councillor Sarah Gallagher and I have worked together to gather data that has now been used to raise questions in Parliament. Following the latest meetings Richard Fuller MP is pushing for a debate in Parliament and for the issue to be part of the King's Speech to tackle what he calls "Estate Management fees abuse". The Council agreed with my suggested course of action after presenting my petition of (currently 1,600 signatures).

Planning Application Mercia Road Great Denham.

The proposed 95 houses off Mercia Road have been approved by Lib Dem and Labour councillors despite the Parish Council and I pointing out to the Planning Committee that this would put too much strain on both the school and the GP surgery which were already operating at capacity. It would also perpetuate the system of Estate Management Charges!

It seems strange then that the Lib Dem are fighting on a platform locally about better GP facilities. The way to improve this is not to add to the problem by another 95 houses in Great Denham without additional provision but rather ensure that the developer and landowner provide funding that improves the current pressures.

TPC might want to explore its options when detailed planning is put forward for the sites in Turvey.

There is still time to push for more infrastructure, something I am continuing to do with officers at the Borough Council and the local Integrated Care Board (ICB).

Department for Work and Pensions Household Support grant continues to support Borough residents.

The Household Support grant has been used to help provide supermarket vouchers to thousands of families who are entitled to income-related free school meals. Additionally, following Government guidance, the Council has chosen to extend the Household Support Grant criteria to include those who face additional energy costs because of a disability, or they are living with a chronic illness. Under the changes, eligible residents may be entitled to claim £100 additional support.

Borough Council receives £149,403 from Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) to help improve Air Quality in Bedford Borough

The funding received from Defra will help ensure the Borough Council can continue its Active Travel work to communicate and inform the public of air pollution which encourages more sustainable ways of travel.

One way the funding will be used is to hire an Air Quality Officer who will be in charge of communication and improving residents' awareness of active travel options, air pollution, and quality, and much more.

Borough Council receives £385,183 from Department for Education

The Borough Council has received £5000 from the DfE to carry out work on their behalf. The money will be used to implement professional development activities to improve children's early communication and language, early maths, and Personal, Social, and Emotional Development outcomes.

Department for Education has also given the Borough Council a £380,183 grant which will enable the delivery of the Family Hubs Delivery Plan and the Family Hubs programme across Bedford Borough. The programme forms part of a national drive to ensure all families get the support they need to help babies and children to thrive. The help offered can support with issues such as infant feeding, mental health, and relationship building.

Business Rates to fall in Bedford Town Centre

Following plans announced by the government last year, business rates in Bedford Town Centre are set to fall overall for Retail and Hospitality premises from 1 April 2023.

The change has come after the Valuation Office Agency (VOA) revalued the rates that all businesses pay and the government chose not to increase rates by inflation. The Borough Council keeps 50% of business rates due to changes by this Government with 1% of that going to Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue.

Rate relief increase

Alongside the revaluation, recipients of the Council's Retail, Hospitality, and Leisure business rates relief will see their rate of relief rise under the scheme, increasing from 50% to 75% during 2023/24. This relief will be subject to a cap of £110,000 per eligible business.

Bedford received £69,509.50 from the DfT protect bus services.

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

At Full Council on Wednesday 1st Friday, the Conservative Group tabled a second amendment which switched £100,000 from the Communications Department to the rural Bus Service, this would be cost/revenue neutral.

The £100,000 would then be spent on helping to improve rural bus services which have been left underfunded and with reduced or heavily altered services. The budget amendment was defeated.

More of Bedford's young adults are living with their parents

More young adults are living with their parents which is a national issue. One of the main reasons is the cost of getting on the housing ladder.

House prices in Bedford have risen by an average of 71%, from £178,750 in December 2011 to £305,000 in December 2021. Back in August the average Bedford house prices increased more than East of England average.

New Active Wellbeing sessions for people suffering with long-term health conditions

Bedford Borough Council's Sports Development Team, in partnership with Be Active, are announcing the launch of a new physical activity programme called "Active Wellbeing". These weekly sessions will offer gentle physical activity for cancer prehab/rehab patients and anyone experiencing other long-term health conditions.

The sessions are set to start on Monday 27 February 2023 and more information can be found in the following link - <https://www.bedford.gov.uk/leisure-parks-and-sport/sports-and-physical-activity/active-wellbeing-sessions>

Central Government approve £11.3m of the Borough's Business Cases under Bedford Town Deal

Following a successful bid, Bedford Borough received £22.6 million from central Government for the Town Deal. Four of these business cases, which were submitted in 2022, have been approved by Central Government, giving the green light to start delivering the projects.

These projects include the Midland Road regeneration and public realm improvements, the regeneration and restoration of St Paul's Square, and improvements to the Greyfriars junction which total £11.3 million of the total funding. More information on the Town Deal can be found on the Councils website here - <https://www.bedford.gov.uk/business/invest-bedford/projects-and-infrastructure/towns-fund>

Cost of Living Grant Fund

Bedford Borough Council is working with Compass Wellbeing and the Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes Integrated Care Board to provide £210K of grants to community, voluntary and social enterprise organisations, or town and parish councils, which are supporting individuals and families during the current cost of living crisis.

Fly-tipping

The Borough Council has released its 11th Press Release on fly-tipping since November averaging 2.5 similar press releases on the topic over the course of these last 4 months.

The Council has been keen to tackle fly-tipping after data revealed incidents have increased since 2016/17 with 1000 more incidents in 2020/21 than the previous year. In 2020/21 Bedford Borough had 2393 (357%) more incidents than Central Bedfordshire.

Only 1 fine was issued in 2020/21 which totalled £200. Despite welcome progress rural residents have reported to Councillors that fly-tipping continues to be an issue.

Residents will need photo ID to vote in person at elections in May

Electors voting in person at polling stations will need to show photographic ID to vote at this year's local elections. Accepted forms of ID include a UK, European Economic Area (EEA) or Commonwealth passport; a UK, EEA or Commonwealth drivers' licence; and some concessionary travel passes, such as an older person's bus pass or an Oyster 60+ card.