

Monthly Borough Report August 2024

- **Wixams Station**

The new Mayor and Wixam & Wilstead Councillors have been working with Network Rail, supported by Parish Councils and Residents Associations, to get the Wixams station project over the line after 13 years of delays.

As a result of their pressure and money secured by current administration, on the 10th July 2024, the Council agreed to enter an agreement with Network Rail to construct a two-platform station at a cost of £62.6m with Network Rail signing an Order to start the station contract at Wixams. The station is expected to be opened in the second half of 2026, marking the end of a long wait for residents.

Additionally, if Universal project is approved, then a bigger station will be required which will then be funded by Central Government. The Council hopes to hear more about the status of the Universal proposed project later this year.

- **New Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy for Bedford Borough**

The Council, on the 10th July 2024, formally adopted a new Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy for Bedford Borough. The new strategy which runs from 2024-2029 and was agreed after a process of internal/external consultation. The new strategy is based on three core strands which are:

- Prevent homelessness as early as possible,
- Increase the supply of housing for those who are homeless
- Provide support to those who need it

- **River Festival**

The River Festival has been incredibly successful for the Council this year with the footfall over the weekend reaching approximately (429k), 63% higher than the weekend after (223k total for comparison) and 37% higher than the previous River Festival (312k total for comparison).

There has been lots of positive feedback on the cleanliness and variety of entertainment options at the festival which housed 140 acts/performances over the weekend and an enhanced cleaning regime which had 93 fantastic volunteers and collected 25.86 tonnes of waste.

In particular, there were a lot of positive comments given to Officers/Councillors or given directly to the Mayor on the family friendly additions this year. These changes included:

- An all-new family island at St. Mary's Gardens
- Green Earth Village on Castle Mound
- Schools being invited to play/sing on the community stages.

The festival generated an estimated £6 million for the local economy.

- **Town Centre vision**

The Council's Executive has adopted the Town Centres development programme for Bedford and Kempston with a range of projects to regenerate these centres.

Harpur Square has benefitted from some recent investment by opening up and providing a more usable space. Improvements in St. Paul's Square are due shortly, and a developer is being sought for a major

development of the Mayes Yard area, including the former Debenhams building. Regeneration of Greyfriars is also planned.

- **GP patients/North Bedford**

The De Parys Avenue Surgery will be moving to the renovated Enhanced Service Centre in Kimbolton Road from Monday 12th August 2024. The service centre is a modern, purpose-designed building with additional capacity which should improve the service provided to patients.

There will be no change in the way patients book appointments as a result of this move.

- **Bedford and Milton Keynes waterway**

On the 11th July 2024 the Council officially launched the Bedford and Milton Keynes Waterway project's delivery phase.

This phase will focus on constructing sections of the canal as funding opportunities become available. It is expected that, upon delivery, the canal will deliver economic growth through increased leisure opportunities, employment opportunities and environmental benefits. The Canal also provides an avenue for improved water management by potentially helping to remove water during floods and redistributing water during drought.

- **Leisure/Oasis**

In December 2023, the Council agreed to invest £4.9m across Bedford Borough's leisure facilities to address urgent health and safety issues at our facilities and essential replacement and repair works. Now that our facilities are back to a safe standard more work will be taking place to further redecorate existing sites to bring a brighter and more welcoming atmosphere.

Additionally, there has been a lot of feedback regarding the new operator of the Council's leisure facility (GLL). At the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the 18th July 2024, the Council heard from GLL's partnership manager about the positive customer comments on the facilities and further improvements coming down the line such as improved cleansing regimes.

- **Lurke Street Car Park**

Lurke Street's multi story car park will be trialling a switch to only cashless payments which started on the 5th August 2024. This was done to address ongoing reports of aggressive begging and to ensure the safety of car park users. Users will be able to pay via card or phone and the Council will continue to monitor the car park, with regular patrols by staff to ensure its safety.

Cash payments will still be accepted at all other Bedford Borough Council car parks in the town centre for users who prefer to use this payment method.

The Council is planning to review the impact of the switch to cashless payments in the next 6 months.

- **Bedford Academy**

Ashe Construction has been awarded a contract by Bedford Council to build 16 new state of the art classrooms along with changing rooms, a dining area and a community café at Bedford Academy. The project will take approximately 60 weeks to complete.

- **Green Flag Awards**

Four of the parks in Bedford (Bedford Park, Addison Howard Park, Priory Country Park, and Harrold-Odell Country Park) have again been awarded the prestigious Green Flag Award for 2024. This internationally recognised quality mark celebrates well-managed and welcoming parks and open spaces.