

Monthly Borough Report November

- **Cleat Hill**

There is an ongoing response and recovery proceeding in the area, a 100-meter cordon remains in place for the time being to allow investigations take place.

The Council is currently offering residents affected by the incident access to a quiet working space at Borough Hall, including free parking and Wi-Fi. The Council is working closely with relevant organisations to monitor and manage the situation.

Over recent days the authorities have been escorting residents to their own homes, enabling them to safely collect personal belongings and essential items.

- **East West Rail (EWR) update**

In the autumn budget (30th October 2024) the chancellor confirmed the Governments commitment to the East West Rail (EWR) project signalling there route will include plans for a partial electrification of the route with hybrid battery electric trains. In response to the budget announcement EWR Co has announced that there will be a 10-week non-statutory public consultation that will begin on the 14th November 2024.

Dates and venues in and around Bedford Borough include:

- 30 November (12pm-5pm) – The Grand Hall, The Sixth Form, Bromham Road, Bedford
- 6 December (2pm-7pm) – Lidlington Village Hall, High Street, Lidlington
- 9 December (2pm-7pm) – Bedford Swan Hotel and Thermal Spa, The Embankment, Bedford
- 11 December (2pm-7pm) – Wilden Village Hall, High Street, Wilden
- 13 December (2pm-7pm) – Stuart Memorial Hall, Church Street, Tempsford
- 7 January (2pm-7pm) – St Neots Town Football Club, Kester Way, St Neots
- 17 January (2pm-7pm) – The Summerlin Centre, Woburn Sands Station Road, Woburn Sands

- **Emergency Accommodation Units at Charis House**

To address the urgent need for emergency accommodation, the Council put together an £18 million capital programme to expand its emergency housing stock to ensure support is always available for residents who need it.

On the 21st October 2024, the Mayor and Portfolio Holder for Housing and Regulatory Services officially opened 8 new emergency housing units at Charis House on Ashburnham Road. The units feature their own Kitchen, lounge area and bedroom space.

- **GP Update**

Many areas in Bedford Borough lacked critical access to a GP.

In order to address this issue, in 2023, the Council created the Strategic Health Estates Board that would focus on the delivery of key GPs in areas such as Kempston, Great Barford and Wootton.

In 2024, the Council agreed to include £9 million of investment into the budget to help deliver plans that will see these GPs built.

Updates as follows:

Great Barford – The initial feasibility study has been completed which will see the GP practice moved to a new, purpose-built location on Silver Street. The Council is now working with experts to review the designs to ensure maximum efficiency.

Kempston – The Halsey Road Police Station has been identified as a potential site for Kempston’s multi-speciality community care centre (MCCC) that will consolidate the three existing GP practices under one roof. The Council has put an extra £2 million in the budget to support the potential purchase of the site.

Wixams – The Council is working with the ICB and Central Bedfordshire Council to get this surgery built as soon as possible. There is confidence a solution will soon be found to move this project forward.

Wootton – A high level feasibility study has been created to look at all options for moving this project forward.

- **Town Update**

The Council has made the decision to purchase the former Lloyds building to aid the Mayes Yard regeneration project.

The Mayes Yard project aims to turn this area into a vibrant, mixed-use space that combines residential, retail, hospitality, and cultural elements. Additionally, the purchase of Lloyds specifically facilitates the provision of a public square and can potentially provide other benefits such as increasing seating capacity for the Corn Exchange or potentially redeveloping the nearby library.

Previously the wider area was home to a number of anchor stores (Debenhams, Beals, M&S, Next) which vacated in the last few years, turning what was a prime shopping pitch into an area of large, unused empty shops that negatively impacted shopping and footfall.

The Council conducted an independent valuation of the property before purchase to ensure a fair price was paid – Council officers had negotiated the price down from its original asking price.

- **Council Invests in School Improvement**

To address the previous decade or more of low educational attainment in our schools the Council agreed to bolster the School Improvement Team from 2024/2025 onwards with a significant £200,000 of investment every year.

The boost will aim to increase standards in early years from KS1 to KS5 and SATS.

- **Bedford Borough's SEND provision and Key Stage 2**

A new report has highlighted, despite increasing demand and financial pressures, many positives in the Council's provision for students who have special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

For example, Bedford Borough Council manages 2,080 EHCPs (Education, Health and Care Plans), there has been a 46% increase EHCPs over the past 4 years. Yet the Council finalised 90% of EHCP's within the 20-week timescale, significantly outperforming both regional and national averages.

Bedford Borough's Key Stage 2 (KS2) performance has historically been below the national average, with the borough being among the bottom five performing Local Authorities (LAs) for a decade.

To combat this the Education Improvement Governance Group (EIGG) was established in Autumn 2022 to address low attainment, with focus on reading, writing, and maths. The Council also produced a new long-term education strategy aimed at continuing improvements across all key stages over the next decade.

These have led to recent improvements which have moved Bedford out of the bottom five, ranking 135th out of 152.

- **Damp and Mold partnership**

The Council is the lead partner in an innovative Health and Housing Partnership for 2024-2025 – collaborating with housing providers Grand Union, Peabody, and recently joined partner, BPHA Ltd.

This is a 3 year programme that is designed to establish housing as a fundamental component of health, focusing on critical issues like the impact of damp and mould. Key actions would include supporting housing association tenants with respiratory conditions who may be living with a cold or damp home. There is also an action called Project 'ADaM' (Asthma, damp and mould) looking at how we can join up data and insights to support improvements in housing association processes to tackle damp and mould and support vulnerable residents.

- **Christmas Light Switch On**

The light switch on will be taking place on Saturday, 23rd November in Bedford Town Centre.

There will be many activities starting from 12pm noon onwards, the Light Switch on is at approximately 5:45pm with live performances, crazy golf, a craft fare and a Christmas photo booth and more running all day.

There are more festive activities happening in the Town Centre though-out the weekends in December, please keep an eye for more information. Lastly, there are 4 hours free parking in Lurke and Allhallows multi-story car parks every day.

We hope to see you there.