Monthly Report May

- **Universal Developments/Wixams Station**

Bedford Borough has successfully secured a major international investment: Universal Destinations & Experiences will build Europe's first Universal Studios theme park and resort at Kempston Hardwick. This multi-billion-pound development will create approximately 20,000 jobs during the construction phase and 8,000 permanent roles in tourism, hospitality, and the creative industries. Alongside the resort, the area will benefit from significant infrastructure improvements, including plans for a larger Wixams train station.

The project is the result of close collaboration between Bedford Borough Council, Universal's global team, and various Government departments.

The development has received formal recognition from central Government. The Prime Minister has sent a letter of thanks to the Mayor and Council, highlighting Bedford's critical role in securing this investment and encouraging continued partnership as the project progresses. Additionally, the Department of Culture, Media and Sport has confirmed plans, in principle, to expand the Wixams station to four platforms, significantly enhancing transport links for the area.

Looking ahead, Bedford Borough Council is working to ensure that local people can benefit directly from the opportunities this project will create. Meetings are being arranged between Universal and local education providers, including sixth forms and Bedford College, to align training and courses with the skills Universal will require. Further business engagement sessions will also take place to help local enterprises prepare for growth alongside this development.

The Universal Studios resort is scheduled to open in 2031.

- **Paddington Pub**

Bedford Borough Council has formally agreed to surrender its leasehold interest in the Paddington property, located at 157 Midland Road, Bedford. The building, which had been leased in April 2022 prior to the local elections, was intended to reduce the cost of temporary accommodation for the Borough. However, subsequent detailed assessments revealed significant structural and fire safety issues that made the property unsuitable for occupation.

Initial surveys and fire risk assessments commissioned at the outset identified some required improvements, but further, more detailed inspections carried out in 2022 and 2024 exposed major safety concerns. These included serious issues with fire compartmentalisation, means of escape, ventilation, and drainage. As a result, the property was deemed unfit for use, and residents were relocated by early 2023. An intrusive survey later confirmed that parts of the building had not been constructed according to approved standards, necessitating extensive remedial works estimated at between £750,000 and £860,000.

Faced with high repair costs and ongoing financial liabilities associated with holding a vacant and unsafe property that would have cost an estimated £614,000, the Council negotiated lease surrender at a cost of £313,333 - approved on 4th April 2025 to minimise further financial exposure.

The surrender of the lease is funded through existing Council revenue budgets and removes a significant financial risk.

- **Stability Plan 2025/26**

Bedford Borough Council has launched a new Stability Plan 2025–2030 to address the financial pressures facing the Borough and a sustainable future. The Council is facing a projected £33 million funding gap over the next five years with significant increases in service demand, particularly in Adult and Children's Social Care, inflation, rising contractual costs, and the upcoming Government-mandated Business Rates Reset in 2026, which alone is expected to reduce the Borough's income by £10 million annually.

The Stability Plan sets out five main areas of focus: modernising service delivery to make services more efficient and resident-focused; ensuring value for money through comprehensive service reviews; maximising income and commercial potential; strengthening financial governance around projects and reserves; and investing in prevention and workforce development to reduce long-term costs. Key steps include reviewing non-statutory service charges, reassessing procurement and commissioning practices, and investing in technology to drive efficiencies.

The MTFS outlines the financial forecast through to 2030, confirming that while the situation is serious, it is manageable with disciplined action. Expert advice, including advice from Theresa Grant OBE, has helped to shape these plans to align with national best practices.

- **GPs**

Bedford Borough Council has approved plans to build a new, purpose-designed GP surgery in Great Barford to meet the needs of the growing local community and improve healthcare access in rural parts of the Borough. The new facility will be constructed on Silver Street, on the site of the former primary school, and will replace the existing surgery, which currently operates from a converted bungalow that is no longer fit for purpose.

The new GP surgery will be able to accommodate a larger patient list and offer modern, accessible facilities, including space specifically intended for training future GPs. The project is part of a wider programme aimed at upgrading primary care services across Bedford Borough, with similar developments progressing in Kempston, Wixams, and Wootton.

The estimated total cost of the Great Barford project is £3.43 million.

- **Commercial Services**

Bedford Borough Council has launched a new commercial food waste collection service to help local businesses comply with Simpler Recycling legislation. Starting in March 2025, the service enables businesses to separate food waste from general waste, supporting environmental sustainability.

Collected food waste will be processed at a local anaerobic digestion plant, generating green energy for the National Grid and producing organic fertiliser. This service helps reduce landfill use and carbon emissions, while offering businesses a more cost-effective waste solution.

- **Deichamann Opening**

A major investment has been secured for Bedford Town Centre, with Deichmann, Europe's largest shoe retailer, moving into the former Next building. This £750,000 investment marks another step forward in the ongoing regeneration of the Town Centre, supporting the vision of creating a vibrant and thriving Bedford for the future.