

Monthly Report

- **Local Plan 2040**

Following a recent letter from the Planning Inspector, it is now clear that the former Mayor's Local Plan 2040 cannot proceed. The Inspector found significant issues with the plan's underlying assumptions, infrastructure delivery, and overall soundness. Concluding that "It is hard to see a credible future for the Plan as submitted."

While efforts were made to address these concerns during the examination process, the issues were too embedded to be resolved through further modification. As a result, a recommendation has been made to withdraw the plan and begin work on a new Local Plan.

Should Council agree to formally withdraw the plan, the Borough will begin preparing a new Local Plan from scratch. This represents a significant opportunity to:

- Ensure growth is supported by robust infrastructure planning
- Reflect the changing local and national policy landscape
- Factor in the expected arrival of Universal Studios, which brings both opportunity and new planning challenge.
- Engage more closely and meaningfully with residents, communities, and parish councils.

We understand there is significant concern about speculative development, particularly in the absence of a 5-year land supply. We will do everything in our power to manage that risk through careful planning decisions and robust engagement.

- **Agency Costs**

A recent internal review of Bedford Borough Council's staffing and financial data has highlighted significant challenges stemming from workforce decisions made over the past 14 years.

Between 2010 and 2023 (for clarity the leadership at the Borough Council changed in mid 2023 after the local elections), the Council made over 1,000 redundancies across a range of departments. These redundancies led to £17 million in exit package costs, while also contributing to noticeable strain on core services.

To maintain service delivery, the Council increasingly relied on temporary agency staff to fill the gaps left behind. This approach, while providing short-term cover, came at a high financial cost. Records show that over £165 million was spent on agency workers during this period.

The Council is working to stabilise the situation.

- **Midland Road Reopens to Two-Way Traffic**

From Wednesday 11 June 2025, Midland Road in Bedford will reopen to two-way traffic following completion of a major phase in the area's regeneration. This milestone forms part of the wider Midland Road public realm improvements, funded through the £22.6 million Bedford Town Deal - a government-backed investment aimed at revitalising key parts of the town centre.

The temporary one-way system had been in place to enable construction work, which is transforming Midland Road into a safer, more attractive, and accessible route for pedestrians, residents, and visitors. The improvements are designed to enhance the look and feel of this key town centre gateway, supporting footfall and local business activity.

Led by Bedford Borough Council in partnership with the Bedford Town Deal Board and central government, the Town Deal includes several projects focused on economic growth, connectivity, and public space upgrades.

- **Update on the Closure of Bedford's Emergency Operations Centre (EOC)**

The East of England Ambulance Service NHS Trust (EEAST) has confirmed its intention to close the Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) located on Hammond Road in Bedford within the next 18 to 24 months. This forms part of a wider plan to reduce the number of EOCs across the East of England from three to two.

Under the proposal, the EOCs in Bedford and Chelmsford will close, while the Norwich EOC will remain operational. A new site in Essex is being considered as a long-term replacement for the two closing centres.

A recent meeting was held between EEAST senior leadership, and the Mayor of Bedford to discuss the plans. EEAST confirmed that they are currently awaiting reports on property availability and population growth across the region, expected in July. During the meeting, EEAST also stated that the Bedford site will not be sold and may be repurposed for other ambulance-related services in the future.

It was highlighted Bedfordshire's recent and projected population growth, especially due to Universal, as important considerations that should factor into the decision. Concerns were raised about the loss of local knowledge and the impact on staff, and EEAST has agreed to return to the Council's Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee with a more detailed business case.

- **New Local Link Road Opens as Part of A428 Upgrade Scheme**

The new road, Baron Way and Dove Farm Lane, has officially opened, providing a vital connection between Roxton Road and The Lane in Wyboston. This new link is designed to improve safety and access to the A1/A421 Black Cat roundabout, and will also help manage traffic from Nagshead Lane and Chawston Lane.

This forms part of the wider £1 billion National Highways project to upgrade the route between the Black Cat roundabout and Caxton Gibbet roundabout, including the newly opened Roxton Road bridge.

The overall scheme, which began construction in late 2023, will deliver a new 10-mile dual carriageway linking the A1 and A428, replacing the final section of single carriageway between Milton Keynes (M1) and the east coast ports, such as Harwich and Felixstowe.

Once completed (expected by spring 2027), the project will upgrade both Black Cat and Caxton Gibbet roundabouts into modern, free-flowing junctions, and introduce a new junction at Cambridge Road to improve access to St Neots and the railway station.