

Monthly Report March/April for GDPC

- **Kingswood Way Road Surfacing**

Despite a few hiccups regarding access to various addresses in Great Denham, the overnight working on Kingswood Way has finally finished as we say goodbye to the deteriorating surface and welcome the smoothed new approach to Great Denham.

- **Golf Course Closure 5th Anniversary Year in October**



Our beloved golf course and favourite watering hole closed nearly five years ago, and the landowners' agents Bidwells informed the parish council and me that they had no plans in the next 5 years about what to do with the site. Those interested enough will have followed the happenings since and the endless excuses of why it was closed. There are still policies in place that protect the use of the land and the buildings, so it will be both interesting and concerning as to what the landowners' proposals will be as we reach the 5th anniversary. Lack of engagement and poor land management have caused untold issues for residents, which doesn't appear to bother either the landowner or their agents.

- **Estate Management Legislation**

I learned the other day that while the "Leaseholder" side of the Freehold and Leasehold Legislation Bill has passed its secondary legislation, it appears that the same progress has not been achieved for the "Freehold" side of the bill. When this does go through its secondary phase, it would give householders more options for redress for unfair charges and poor service. I will be taking this up again with our MP Richard Fuller.

- **Leave of Absence**

Despite recovering from prostate cancer in 2020/21, it appears I now have another health tussle. Recently diagnosed with severe coronary heart disease, I will be entering Papworth Hospital for a bypass operation on 18/19th April. The recovery time is listed as 8-10 weeks. During this period, colleagues at Bedford Borough will receive my emails and respond to any requests from residents. Cllr Marc Frost will assume my Finance Portfolio and Cllr Jane Walker my Deputy Mayor responsibilities until my return.

- **Skylarks Support**



We are very fortunate that our Great Denham Country Park is home to some ground-nesting skylarks. As a Red-listed bird in decline, they need our protection. Please help them by staying on the paths and keeping dogs under close control/on a lead between the 1st March and 31 of July*. Hopefully we can all enjoy their lovely song for years to come. Thank you!

- **Converting Agency Staff**

Over the past decade, the Council's reliance on agency staff to fill vacant positions has placed a significant financial strain on its budget. As part of a broader strategy to improve service delivery and reduce costs, the Council is working to convert agency staff into permanent, full-time employees.

In line with this approach, Adult Services has successfully transitioned 37 agency staff in-house, helping to ease the financial pressure on the service area.

- **Free School meals**

The Council has been piloting a new scheme in which parents of children eligible for free school meals are automatically opted out rather than opted in.

This approach has proven successful, identifying an additional 750 eligible children and generating an extra £900,000 per year in pupil premium funding for our schools.

Going forward, parents will need to actively opt out if they do not wish to receive the free school meal offer.

- **Family Hubs**

Changes are underway in Bedford Borough to better support children and families through the expansion and transformation of Family Hubs.

From April 2025, services that were previously delivered separately through Children's Centres and other providers will come together under a single, more coordinated Family Hubs model.

These Family Hubs will offer easier access to a wide range of services – including parenting support, early years development, health advice, mental wellbeing, and community activities – all in one place or through digital and outreach support.

With seven main hubs and local 'spokes' across the borough, families will be able to get help closer to home and when they need it most. These hubs will be located at Pine Cones, Queens Park, Eastcotts, Cherry Trees, Daisy Hill, and Bluebells (Bromham).

The changes reflect a focus on making services more efficient, effective, and accessible.

- **Consultation on Public Space Protection Order (PSPO)**



The Council has begun its consultation on the proposed new Public Spaces Protection Order that aims to tackle anti-social behaviour in the Town Centre with a particular focus on drinking alcohol, aggressive begging, spitting and littering in public spaces, and using these places as toilets.

The consultation period will run from Monday, 17th March to 11.59 pm, Sunday 13th April, 2025. If you wish to share your thoughts, please visit: www.bedford.gov.uk/PSPO.

- **Financial position**

Like many Councils up and down the country, Bedford Borough Council faces increasing pressure on many of its demand-led services from adult social care, homelessness, and children's services. Coupled with the Council's core spending power decreasing by an estimated 10.8% between 2010/11 and 2025/26, and a 25% reduction in Government funding, the financial picture is challenging.

While Bedford Borough remains in a financially stable position, the Council's leadership has invited Theresa Grant OBE to advise them on some key steps that can be taken to ensure the Council's financial future remains sound.

In addition to this, the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) has been engaged to conduct a “resilience review” to stress test our financial and management performance.

- **Town Centre cleaning**

The Council continues to focus on extra cleaning, washing, and tidying up in the town centre to keep it looking sharp.

This forms a small part of the Council's efforts to encourage more visitors and businesses into the Town Centre with teams out daily, sweeping the high street.

However, littering and antisocial behaviour remain key concerns for the Council, and its leadership is continuing pressure on Bedfordshire Police to get these issues sorted alongside its PSPO.

- **Foster carer initiatives**

Bedford Borough Council, in partnership with GLL (BETTER), has shown its appreciation for the Borough's foster carers by offering free gym and swim access to them, their household members, and foster children at local leisure centres.

This initiative aims to support foster carers by promoting their health and wellbeing it is hoped the scheme will positively impact carers and their families.