

Borough Cllr Report 5th May 2026

Potential Destruction of our Local Green Space

- Everyone will be aware of the planning applications that have been lodged with the planning department at Borough Hall. If these somehow get past Planning and are allowed to proceed, we can all say goodbye to the 176 acres of green space, which will eventually be fully developed for housing. The protection of the land currently is because it only has a sporting designation, and should either of the two applications 26/00428/COU and 26/00596/OUT be approved, the change of use will open the land up for massive housing development. Despite the Great Denham and Biddenham PCs' past engagement with the agents for the landowner, we have not been able to get them to discuss options for the land.
- An important change to the planning system is coming into effect from 11th May 2026 under the Town and Country Planning (Consultation) (England) Direction 2026 that affects planning applications for 150 or more homes.
- Under the Government's new direction, where a local planning authority is **minded to refuse** an application of this size, it must first refer the application to the Secretary of State before a decision can be issued.
- In short, this means:
 - Applications for 150+ homes would require Government sign-off before refusal, giving Whitehall greater ability to overturn refusals.
 - Councils cannot issue a refusal until at least 21 days after notifying the Government, introducing delays and an additional layer of national oversight.
- This will restrict councillors' ability to scrutinise planning applications and create a system where decisions are increasingly controlled nationally.
- While the Council will continue to assess applications against planning policy and local considerations, this change means that some decisions, particularly refusals, will now be subject to further review beyond the local authority.
- The original design and planning that was consented was based on the provision of the land for a golf course. Without that, Great Denham's 2000 households would not have received permission. Whilst the closure of the course broke a number of local and national policy rules, the landowner went ahead anyway. I would urge all member of the community and the Biddenham community to make their concerns known at every level and to every outlet available and emphasise that we cannot lose our green space.

East West Rail (EWR) Update

- EWR has launched its final route-wide public consultation, running from 14th April to 9th June 2026. This is an important opportunity for communities to review the latest plans and provide feedback before final proposals are submitted to the Government in 2027.
- They are holding a series of public events, webinars, and an online consultation portal where residents can view plans and provide feedback. A local event will take place in Bedford on 23 May at King's House, Ampthill Road.
- What is being proposed:
 - A rebuilt Bedford station, including new platforms, improved access, a western entrance, and a public plaza
 - A new station at Bedford St. John's, relocated closer to Bedford Hospital

- Changes to infrastructure to reduce disruption, including potential avoidance of major bridge works
- A relocated multi-storey car park to the west of Bedford station (Ford End Road)
- Upgrades to the Marston Vale Line, including fewer, larger stations and improved services
- A new station at Tempsford, planned earlier than previously expected
- Up to four trains per hour, with a potential fifth service at peak times
- Longer trains to meet future demand
- Use of hybrid electric/battery trains to support environmental goals
- While EWR is presenting updated designs and revised construction plans, the core issues remain unchanged, and the local Conservative Group collectively remains opposed to the northern route in its current form due to a lack of a credible business case and scale of construction disruption over many years.
- Further information can be found here: <https://eastwestrail.co.uk/news/latest-stories/east-west-rail-announces-details-of-final-consultation>.

Highways Funding and Performance Update

- Bedford Borough Council has formally contacted the Department for Transport to request a correction to its current highway maintenance rating.
- The unverified data in the Department's Local Highway Maintenance self-assessment did not fully reflect the Council's level of investment. Updated and verified figures were provided promptly in early January 2026.
- The corrected data shows that a total of £9.528 million has been invested in highway maintenance. Based on the Department for Transport's own methodology, this level of investment would be expected to result in a significantly higher score than is currently recorded.
- The Council is therefore seeking an update to ensure the published rating accurately reflects the level of investment being made locally to avoid the spread of misinformation.

Food waste collections

- Bedford Borough's new weekly food waste collection service began at the end of March, supported by seven new purpose-built vehicles.
- Council teams have also been out in Bedford and Kempston speaking directly with residents, answering questions, and helping people understand how the new collections work.
- As with any new service, there were a few minor teething issues at the start, where missed collections have been reported, crews have been working to get back out and collect them as quickly as possible.
- Collected food waste can also be put to good use, helping to generate renewable energy and fertiliser.

Oasis Site (David Lloyd) – Public Consultation Update

- Positive progress is being made on plans for a new David Lloyd leisure facility at the former Oasis site in Bedford.
- The proposals would help keep the site in leisure use and support the delivery of modern health, fitness, and racquets facilities for residents.
- A public consultation is now open, giving residents the chance to view the plans and share their feedback.

- Online consultation:
 - Open until Friday 15 May 2026
 - <https://consultwithyou.co.uk/davidlloyd/bedford>
- Public drop-in exhibitions:
 - King's House, 245 Ampthill Road, Bedford, MK42 9AZ
 - Friday 8 May, 3 pm–7 pm
 - Saturday 9 May, 10 am–1 pm

Bedford Athletics Stadium

- This month, the Council has celebrated the official opening of the new track at Bedford Athletics Stadium - an exciting milestone for sport, health, and community life across the borough.
- The new track is already being put to good use with young athletes; however, this investment represents more than an improvement for local clubs, schools, residents, and future sporting stars.
- It is also about encouraging participation, supporting wellbeing, and giving people the facilities they need to train, compete, and achieve their ambitions.

Housing Update

- Bedford Borough Council has secured £5.9 million of government funding to help provide more council-owned temporary accommodation over the next four years.
- This funding will support the purchase and development of homes for residents and families who need housing assistance.
- Demand for temporary accommodation remains high, with 912 households currently in temporary accommodation across the borough. By increasing the number of council-owned homes available, the Council can reduce reliance on more expensive nightly-paid accommodation and provide more stable, suitable housing.
- Overall, this is a positive step that will help improve temporary accommodation for residents while also reducing longer-term pressure on housing budgets.

Town Centre Update

- Part of the former Beales unit, which has been vacant, is set to come back in use as it becomes the home of a new dance and performing arts facility, helping to bring fresh energy and activity into the town centre.
- This will make better use of an empty unit, improve the look and feel of the area, and support wider use of nearby spaces such as the Corn Exchange during quieter times.

Community Safety and Anti-Social Behaviour Update

- Bedford Borough Council has secured £65,000 of external funding to support additional work tackling anti-social behaviour during 2026/27.
- This funding will provide extra uniformed ASB Officers to patrol areas where there is the greatest need, helping to increase visibility and provide reassurance for residents, businesses, and visitors.
- The officers will work alongside Bedfordshire Police and existing Council teams to help address persistent issues, offer advice and signposting, identify environmental concerns, and support vulnerable people who may need help from other services.

- The Town Centre Task Force has also now been formally launched following a successful trial, delivered in partnership with Bedfordshire Police. This will provide a stronger visible presence in the town centre and support efforts to make public spaces safer and more welcoming.

Support for Unpaid Carers

- Bedford Borough Council is working with two new partners, Mobilise and Blue-Sky Carers Support, to improve support for unpaid carers across the borough.
- Mobilise offers free digital support, including practical online resources, wellbeing information, benefits guidance, online group sessions, and one-to-one support calls with a carers coach.
- Blue Sky Carers Support provides face-to-face advice and guidance for adult carers, including support for those who may not be confident using digital services. It will also continue the Bedford Hospital Carers' Hub, offering help in a safe and confidential setting when loved ones are admitted to the hospital.
- Carers will also be able to access the Blue-Sky Social Care Card, which can help them identify themselves as a carer and access practical benefits from participating businesses.

Mockingbird Fostering Programme

- Bedford Borough Council has launched a new webpage highlighting its Mockingbird programme, which supports fostering families across the borough.
- Mockingbird brings foster carers together in small support networks, known as "constellations". Each group is supported by a specially trained hub home carer, who provides guidance, practical help, and peer support.
- This creates an extended family-style network, helping foster carers feel more connected and giving children and young people greater stability, consistency, and a stronger sense of belonging.
- Bedford Borough now has three Mockingbird constellations, supporting dozens of families.
- Anyone interested can visit: <https://www.bedford.gov.uk/mockingbird>