

Borough Councillor Update for GDPC – October/November 2022

Estate Management Agents

Most if not all, will be aware of the charges suffered by a large majority of residents levied by the agents acting for management companies set up by developers. The charges are levied for a whole myriad of items but very rarely explained or justified when residents paying these charges ask for a breakdown. After dealing with 4 of these managing agents over the past few years it has become clear that services offered – maintenance of courtyards, bin stores, lampposts and electricity supply for the lampposts are only a small element of the charges. What is astonishing is that between 75% - 90% of the total charges is for the management of that maintenance. Most often listed are “H&S risk assessments”, “Insurances”, “Directors and Officers fees” “accounts fees” “Company Secretary fees” “reserves” and the biggest as ever in every single case “management fee”.

What is clear is the way the developer has set up the companies was to ensure that residents pick up all ongoing costs – no matter how effective or efficient the service - and thus avoid the necessity of providing large, commuted sums to authorities. The way the estate management agents are also set up is to ensure they both cover all the developer costs for the management company (the vehicle used to legalise the setup of forcing residents to pay) their own costs and make a healthy profit. In striving to maximise the profits through their spurious “management fee” they can ensure they will always be in profit. One of the managing agents told me that the developers place strictures on what they can and can’t cover which impacts the charges. I have asked that they share this, so I have a better knowledge of how to tackle the developers.

The TP1 document that gives legitimacy - by duping buyers and renters – calls for two payments at 6-monthly intervals. One is up front and the other in arrears, but this sometimes varies between different agents. A budget is set out for the year and the charges are based on these. The managing agents are always quick to point out that any underspend from the budget is given as a credit when the accounts have been finalised. So far in many cases any surplus seems to disappear under the entry “Supplementary charges to be raised”. There are also charges created by equipment replacement reserves as well as general reserves. In normal business creating reserves is a legitimate line in the accounts, but in normal business you can see what the reserves are specifically set aside to cover. Despite many residents constantly seeking to understand the accounts, the breakdown of the management fees and supplementary charges no meaningful explanations are received.

Neither the Government nor our own local authority see this as needing to be addressed urgently. Both Government and local authorities are quick to point out the financial crisis that faces residents and the higher mortgage costs, but this unfair and inequitable system is allowed to continue. Our local authority Mayor says “it’s a national issue and nothing to do with us” in the first part of his comment he is correct, but I fundamentally disagree with the second part of his comment it has everything to do with the authority. The main purpose stated by the Mayors executive is to “Ensure a better quality of life for residents of the Borough”. All Councillors should be raising this issue and lobbying for change. To say “its nothing to do with us” is simply wrong.

What I’m doing, is meeting with the agents and developers to point out – in detail – the poor service and communication. The unfair and unexplained charges and a better understanding of what is forced by developers on the agents? I’m also meeting with some resident’s associations in other parts of the Borough to gather more evidence of their concerns which on the face of it so far exactly mirror the concerns of Great Denham Residents. So far, we have had one success in using the Property Ombudsman after exhausting the agents’ complaints system. A compensation award was made but this took nearly two years to get over the line. I’m seeking a meeting with the Regional MD of DWH, the Company Secretary of the management

company set up by Bovis and futile as it may eventually be setting up a Borough wide petition to get these issues on our own authority's agenda.

Friday 11th November

Some people may wonder why a new parish like Great Denham would want to have a place where residents could pay tribute and honour those who died in the two world wars. Its obvious that residents from GD were not involved as it didn't exist then. But what is special is that our young citizens feel we should have a memorial and should remember that their family ancestry had family members who died in these wars. Great Grandparents and Great Uncles and Aunts perished, and the children feel they should be remembered. Whilst we are a modern and new community, we should also ensure we can help to continue paying tribute and remembering all those who gave their lives as the Children of GDPS did so beautifully last year and for all the years to come. I hope many who saw the social media invitation can make it to the memorial event on Friday and join with our junior citizens in the remembrance and tribute?

A poster for a Remembrance Day Service. The background is a solid blue color. On the right side, there is a large, vibrant red poppy flower with a green stem and leaves. The text is arranged on the left side. At the top, in a large, white, serif font, is the title 'REMEMBRANCE DAY SERVICE'. Below this, in a dark blue rectangular box with white text, is the date and time: 'Friday 11th November' and '1.45pm', followed by the location 'Great Denham Memorial'. Further down, in a smaller white font, is a paragraph: 'Great Denham Primary School head boys and girls, along with year 5 & 6 pupils will be paying their respects and will also be joined by special members of the British Legion.' At the bottom left, there is a small shield-shaped logo with a white border. Inside the shield, there is a white swan on the left and a white globe on the right, with a white torch in the center. To the right of the logo, in a white font, is the text: 'Members of the community are very welcome to join us on the day and we look forward to seeing you there.'

Great Denham Memorial just past Sainsburys.

Executive Decisions

10th October – To approve the reinstatement of the discretionary concessionary travel scheme as originally implemented from 1 January 2017, to take effect as soon as is practicable. The scheme enables residents of pension-age or with a disability who hold an English National Concessionary Travel pass to travel for a discounted fare of £1.00 on most local bus journeys within the Borough before 9.30am and after 11 pm on weekdays and to allow the companion of a qualifying disabled pass holder to travel free of charge at any time.

11th October - To approve the award of the grants as recommended by the Rural Affairs Committee to:

- i. A grant of £3,000 to Harrold Parish Council towards the cost of the repair of the Lych Gate at St Peter's church.
- ii. A grant of £3,085.42 to Odell Parish Council towards the cost of diverting two existing public footpaths which have been identified through the Neighbourhood Plan as being a major issue for residents who wish to use them.
- iii. A grant of £25,000 to All Saint's Church, Renhold towards the cost of the replacement of the floor within the church and enhancing accessibility for people with mobility difficulties.

Conservative Government fund Free School Meals Vouchers for Bedford Borough Children For School Holidays

Families across Bedford Borough, who are entitled to income related free school meals, will be given vouchers for the October half term and Christmas holidays.

Funded through the Conservative Governments Household Support Fund, Bedford Borough Council will continue to provide each eligible child £15 per week.

The current cost of living has affected many families and it is grants like these, that enable us to support our most vulnerable residents and children in Bedford.

To find out if you are eligible and to register for free school meals visit <http://www.bedford.gov.uk/.../educatio.../free-school-meals/>

Apply now for secondary and upper school places in 2023

If your child is due to start Secondary or Upper school next September, you need to apply by 31 October 2022 for the best chance of getting a place at your preferred school.

Bedford Borough Council's online admissions system is open to all parents and carers who live within the Borough and whose children are due to transfer to secondary or upper school in September 2023.

Parents and carers who have a child in year 6 at primary school or year 8 at a middle school will need to transfer their child to a secondary or upper school in September 2023.

The online admission system is available at www.bedford.gov.uk/onlineadmissions and will close for secondary and upper school applications on Monday 31 October 2022.

Bedford Borough Schools Go Gold for Sustainable Transport

Bedford Borough now has five schools that have reached Gold accreditation for their efforts to encourage and promote sustainable travel.

Castle Newnham School (South Site), St James' CofE VA Primary School, Westfield Primary School and Goldington Green Academy have all joined Shortstown Primary School as Gold standard schools.

The accreditation comes from Modeshift STARS, the Centre of Excellence for the delivery of effective Travel Plans in education, business and community settings.

Alongside the five schools achieving Gold accreditation, Bedford Borough also has one school with a Silver accreditation, ten schools achieving Bronze and six with a Green accreditation. This means there are now 22 accredited schools within the Borough.

Investment Zones

Bedford Borough Council has been invited by the government to express an interest in their recently proposed programme of "Investment Zones".

Investment Zones have the potential to accelerate the infrastructure that Bedford needs to drive economic growth. The Government is proposing to cut unnecessary bureaucratic hurdles and red tape that slow down infrastructure development, cut taxes to back business, and as a result, attract new investment and jobs to Bedford."

This is potentially a really big opportunity for Bedford, the council needs to examine the opportunity carefully and if it looks good, grab it with both hands.

Town Centre Footfall decline

Borough reports have revealed footfall figures have been consistently dropping since 2017 which has significant "economic repercussions" for our town as these figures act as a "deterrent to commercial investment".

The publically available report quotes 2020 CoStar data which also reveals that vacancy rates in Bedford have increased by 7% to 26% per square foot, which is almost double the national average.

The Council has received funding in excess of £20million from the Government Towns Fund scheme and more funding from the Governments £95million High Streets Heritage Action Zones scheme which has recently been used to regenerate the Goldings building on the High street.

Fujifilm Opens New UK HQ in Bedford Borough

Fujifilm, the healthcare, materials and imaging company, has officially opened its new UK Headquarters – called Fujifilm House – just off Cardington Road in Bedford.

Southill Estate, a Bedfordshire based family trust, own the land and funded development of the new business premises.

The cladding on the outside of the building fuses Fujifilm's Japanese roots with the local heritage and is adorned with shoji screens and designs that are reminiscent of the historic Bedfordshire Lace patterns that are synonymous with the Bedford area.

The new building has excellent (BREEAM) environmental credentials and provides over 30,000 square feet of attractive working space which embraces innovative sustainable features, including solar panels, and a built-in rainwater collection and storage system. Fujifilm has committed to installing bird boxes and spaces for local wildlife that replicates their natural habitats.

Avian influenza A(H5N1)

The Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) have now confirmed there is avian influenza A(H5N1) in wild bird population within Bedford Borough following positive results in wild dead birds removed from the river Great Ouse on the embankment in Bedford.

Please **DO NOT TOUCH** any sick or dead birds. If any residents find dead or visibly sick birds in the local area, please do not feed or touch them. Instead, cases should be reported to Defra's GB helpline by calling 03459 335577.

If you keep poultry or other birds, please wash your hands and clean and disinfect your footwear before tending to them.

Repairs Royal Engineers Bridge

Recent structural concerns were identified during an inspection of the Royal Engineers Bridge. The concerns are in relation to the decking which presents a risk to users.

As a result, the Council will be conducting repairs to Royal Engineers Bridge, the steel footbridge that carries pedestrians over the River Great Ouse behind Bedford Girls School.

Warm spaces

Bedford Borough Council has launched its Warm Spaces Network. This is a list of places throughout the borough that people can go to during the day to keep warm as we enter the winter months.

The council is contacting parish councils and community and voluntary groups across the borough asking if they would like to join the network.

As more venues join the initiative, they will be added to the directory. The online directory will allow residents to choose a Warm Space based on location, opening hours and the facilities on offer, such as refreshments, free Wi-Fi, TV, books, magazines and games.

Electoral register checks underway in 2022 Annual Canvass

The annual canvass – which allows the council to keep Bedford's Electoral Register up to date, ensuring residents are able to vote in future elections – is now well underway.

As part of the next steps, Electoral Registration canvassers will be knocking on doors of non-responding households to ensure everyone's details are correct.

Residents can call the council helpline on 01234 718078 if they have any queries about the Electoral Registration Canvassers.

For more information visit www.bedford.gov.uk/household-canvass

Funding received from Government for roads works and projects

Since 2020, Bedford Borough Council has received roughly £13.4Million from the Government through the Highways Maintenance grant for roads repairs and maintenance.

For the last two years the amount of road works, repairs and projects funded through Conservative Government grants was in excess of 50%.

Major projects such as the Northern Gateway and Bedford Western Bypass Phase 2, the Council received a £23.587Million in Conservative Government grants.

Traffic Management Act and new Borough powers

As part of the Traffic Management Act (2022) the Government will be giving councils the option to apply for powers to enforce against moving traffic offences. Bedford Borough Council applied for these powers by the deadline of 20th May 2022 and the powers were granted unofficially in June 2022. The Borough is still awaiting the official letter and no updates have been given on its status.

Flu Jab

Bedford Borough Council is encouraging residents to get their flu jab this winter.

Several types of flu vaccine are offered, including the Fluenz nasal spray for children. If you're eligible for a free flu vaccine on the NHS, you'll be contacted and offered one that's most appropriate for you.

Flu vaccination appointments are available at GP practices, selected pharmacies and midwifery services also offer the flu jab to pregnant women. Primary, lower, middle and secondary school children will receive their vaccination at school. Booking is straightforward and the appointment itself can take less than 10 minutes. People who are not eligible for a free flu jab can pay for one at their local pharmacy.

COVID-19 Booster

The autumn booster jab will be offered to everyone aged 50 and over, those who are at higher risk from serious illness such as pregnant women and people with long-term health conditions, along with frontline health and social care workers.

Since Monday 12 September an autumn booster can be booked online for anyone who is:

- 65 or over
- Pregnant
- Aged 5 and over and at high risk due to a health condition or weakened immune system
- Aged 5 and over and living with someone who has a weakened immune system
- Aged 16 and over and is a carer
- A frontline health or social care worker

To find out more about the autumn booster or to book your vaccination [visit the NHS website](#).