

GDPC Monthly Report June 2025

- **Fifth Anniversary of Golf Course Closure**

The closure of Great Denham Golf Course wasn't just a loss—it was an unnecessary setback for the community. Five years ago, the landowner justified shutting it down by claiming it wasn't popular and that the operators wanted out. But the numbers tell a different story: 504 dedicated members, a thriving pay-and-play system, and a lively clubhouse that brought people together. If the operators were looking to leave, why would they have asked to extend their lease for another five years?

Since then, there has been no clear plan for the land. It was classified as agricultural, with the claim that more than one income stream was needed. But the question remains: what happens next? As we reach this five-year milestone, residents—over 5,000 of them—have every right to demand answers.

The timing could not be more crucial. With 2,000 new homes in the area, yet another development would add to the strain rather than enhance the community. And as Bedford prepares for the arrival of Universal's theme park, bringing an estimated 12 million visitors by 2031, the need for leisure facilities has never been greater. Golf wasn't surplus to requirements—it was essential. Other local courses are full, proving there's demand. What better time to bring back a beloved venue that could serve both residents and visitors alike?

The question isn't just about what the landowner will do next—it's about what the community will fight to preserve.

- **Safe Storage**

Under Section 211 of the Housing Act 1996, councils are required to protect the belongings of individuals at risk of homelessness. For several years (starting in 2021), this duty was being fulfilled through the use of commercial storage facilities. However, over time, costs escalated significantly, peaking with more than 100 private storage units in use and resulting in substantial financial pressure on the service.

Following a review in January 2024, it became clear that rising storage costs were a key concern. A new approach was approved in May 2024 to bring these costs under control. Since implementing this plan, the results have been positive. By April 2025, monthly storage spending had been reduced by 87% compared to December 2024.

These savings have been achieved by:

- Making better use of council-owned storage space
- Negotiating directly with service users
- Disposing of unclaimed or unnecessary items appropriately
- Providing targeted training for front-line staff

Robust financial controls are now in place, including supervisor-level checks, budget-holder approvals, and full reconciliation against procurement records each month.

This work forms part of a broader effort to improve the sustainability and effectiveness of the homelessness service, ensuring legal duties are met while achieving better value for public money.

- **GP Update**

A new GP surgery is set to be built in Wootton as part of a £17 million investment in healthcare facilities across the Borough. Following discussions between the NHS, local councillors, and council officers, a new site has been agreed for the relocation of the existing surgery.

The chosen site is Council-owned land near the roundabout opposite Rumble's Chip Shop. The site was chosen as it will allow construction to proceed without disrupting existing GP services.

To ensure continuity of care, the plan is to construct the new facility while the current surgery remains open. Once complete, services will transfer to the new location with minimal disruption to patients.

The new surgery will include improved facilities and a larger car park. It has now been placed on the NHS priority list. This follows news last month of the Council's cross-party Executive giving the green light on the business case for a new GP surgery in Great Barford.

The GP surgeries in Kempston and Wixams are continuing to progress.

- **Improved road repairs**

Bedford Borough Council is stepping up its investment in the local road network with the introduction of cutting-edge repair technology aimed at improving the speed, quality, and sustainability of pothole repairs.

The newly acquired system, Roadmender Elastomac, uses recycled materials to repair potholes and cracks more quickly, effectively, and at a lower cost than traditional methods.

By adopting this proven technology - already in use by other local authorities - the Council expects to achieve faster response times, longer-lasting repairs, and better value for money.

- **Police update**

Bedford Borough Council has been working to address increasing concerns from residents and businesses about community safety, particularly in relation to shoplifting, antisocial behaviour, aggressive begging, and the misuse of e-scooters.

Last month the Mayor sent a letter to the Chief Constable of Bedfordshire Police and the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) raising various concerns to the Council by residents. Following this letter a meeting was held recently between the Chief Constable (PCC) and Mayor to discuss community safety and policing across the Borough.

Key points raised included:

- The need for greater visibility of police in both town centres and rural areas.
- Faster response times to reported incidents.
- A stronger focus on local crime hotspots, including issues such as shoplifting and antisocial behaviour.
- Concerns about the equity of policing resources across the county, particularly when comparing Bedford Borough and Luton, which have similar population sizes.

The Council also highlighted the support it provides through town centre CCTV infrastructure, which police have full access to in support of law enforcement.

While policing strategy remains the responsibility of Bedfordshire Police, a shared commitment was made to improve the situation. The police have confirmed that there will be increased officer presence across the Borough this summer.

Residents are reminded that reporting crime is essential, as police resource allocation is based on reported data. Incidents can be reported via: <https://www.beds.police.uk/>

A follow-up meeting is scheduled for early July to review progress and continue joint efforts to improve community safety.

- **Community Hub**

The new community and visitor hub - What's On Bedford Borough - has officially opened on Wednesday 28th May in the former Debenhams building. The hub offers a central space that promotes local culture, tourism, and services for both residents and visitors with:

- A Visitor Information Centre
- The Corn Exchange Box Office
- Information on local events and activities across Bedford Borough and beyond

The space also features a Bedford-themed gift shop and rotating displays from the Bedfordshire Art Loan Collection, visible through the windows on Silver Street and the High Street.

- **Summer of SEND**

The Summer of SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) 2025 in Bedford Borough is an initiative designed to celebrate inclusivity and provide a wide array of activities for children and young people with SEND, along with their families and carers.

The programme offers over 500 events throughout the summer such as:

- A variety of events such as soft play sessions, inclusive tennis at Riverside, and SEND-specific swimming sessions.
- Workshops are being held at the University of Bedfordshire to assist young people in preparing for adulthood, covering topics like employment and independent living.
- Events like the Kite and Motoring Festival on 21–22 June offer kite displays, classic cars, and children's activities, providing entertainment for all ages.

The initiative has also been aligned with Bedford Borough's Year of Reading which includes activities across libraries and community centres, promoting reading among children and young people with SEND.

To find out more visit: <https://localoffer.bedford.gov.uk/kb5/bedford/directory/home.page>

- **Bedford Kite and Motoring Festival 2025**

The Bedford Kite and Motoring Festival will take place on 21st - 22nd June 2025, from 10am to 4pm, across Russell Park, Mill Meadows Island, and the Bedford Embankment.

The festival features over 300 vehicles, from classic and vintage cars. Each day begins with the "Fab Fifty Cavalcade" - a procession of standout vehicles parading through the town and into the festival.

Beyond the motoring displays, the event offers kite shows by expert flyers, boating on the River Great Ouse, live music, and a wide range of family attractions, including funfair rides and children's games.

There will also be a craft marquee, food courts, and a vegan market.