

Borough Councillor October 2025 Report to GDPC

Golf Course Land as an Asset of Community Value

The Great Denham Golf Course land stands as an irreplaceable and essential area of open space for our community. Its significance is rooted not only in its original vision as the heart of a golf village, but also in its enduring role as a gathering place and green sanctuary for all residents. From its inception, the golf course and the first homes formed the foundation of a thriving, connected population, offering recreational opportunities and a sense of belonging.

Crucially, this land serves as a vital buffer, preventing the merging of neighbouring communities and protecting Great Denham's identity as a designated rural area. Unlike the Country Park, which is often inaccessible due to flooding, the golf course open space remains available year-round, ensuring continuous access to nature and recreation.

Since the closure of the golf course, the area has become a haven for wildlife, with increased sightings of deer, foxes, badgers, hedgehogs, and even the endangered skylark. This remarkable biodiversity highlights the ecological value of the land and its role in supporting local species.

Recognising this land as an asset of community value is not just about preserving nostalgia—it is about safeguarding the health, well-being, and quality of life for current and future residents. The open space provides proven health benefits, supports mental wellbeing, and offers much-needed green space for neighbouring areas like Queens Park and Biddenham, where such amenities are scarce.

Furthermore, there remains hope for reinstating the golf course, as its closure contradicted local authority and Sport England policies, and the land is still acknowledged as necessary for meeting the borough's golfing needs. The Great Denham Neighbourhood Plan also affirms the importance of this green space as a defining feature of the parish's identity and heritage.

In summary, the Great Denham Golf Course land is not just open space—it is a cornerstone of our community's character, health, and future for over 5,000 residents of our Parish. Its protection and recognition as a community asset are vital for preserving what makes Great Denham unique.

Current Financial Position of the Borough Council.

CIPFA/Financial information

- The Council commissioned **the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA)** to carry out a Financial Resilience Review to give an honest assessment of the Borough's finances. On the 5th September 2025 the Portfolio Holder for Finance acknowledged receipt of the report.
- CIPFA confirms that Bedford's financial challenge mirrors the national picture: costs have risen by around 25% while Government funding has fallen by a similar amount, leaving the Council's core spending power roughly 7% lower than a decade ago.
- At the same time, demand for statutory services - particularly Adult Social Care, Children's Services and Temporary Accommodation - continues to grow faster than income, creating sustained pressure on the budget and limiting flexibility.
- As expanded in the previous report, CIPFA governance gaps, uneven financial controls, and short-term decisions have compounded these national pressures, adding to the difficult financial position the Borough now faces. As a reminder, some but not all of the issues identified in the report include:
 - Council Tax: CIPFA states the Council kept its Council Tax artificially low when compared to the Government's funding formula. While this decision would have been popular at the time, this has left a permanent funding gap. CIPFA estimates £24 million in lost income in 2024/25 alone, undermining services like adult social care, housing, and children's services, and areas of discretionary spend such as the Council Tax Reduction Scheme.
 - Cost Pressures in Social Care and Housing: Like councils across the country, Bedford is struggling with rising demand for adult and children's care services, and temporary accommodation costs - all of which are pushing the budget further into the red.
 - Weak Internal Systems: CIPFA identifies significant weaknesses and capacity risks in Bedford Borough Council's commissioning, procurement, and contract management functions. These issues stem largely from past savings decisions that reduced staffing and resources in core corporate services such as Finance, Procurement, and Legal. As a result, these functions are now overstretched,

limiting their ability to provide effective oversight and governance across high-risk, high-spend service areas.

- Difficult Savings Expectations: CIPFA states that over the past ten years, Bedford Borough Council has already delivered most of the easily achievable savings - what it refers to as “low-hanging fruit.” These include straightforward efficiency measures and reductions in back-office and corporate functions such as finance, procurement, and legal services. While these steps helped close previous budget gaps, they have now exhausted simpler savings options, and in some cases weakened the Council’s internal capacity to support financial oversight and decision-making. This creates a more difficult financial environment going forward. CIPFA warns that delivering the level of savings required for 2025/26 and 2026/27 will be “extremely challenging.” The scale of the projected overspend and the limited remaining scope for efficiencies means the Council must now look to more complex measures
- Council Tax Reduction Scheme: CIPFA’s review notes that Bedford Borough Council operates a Council Tax Reduction Scheme that is considered generous compared to neighbouring authorities and recommends that the Council do so to assess whether the current scheme remains fair, effective, and aligned with its financial capacity.
- In order to address the financial pressures, following guidance from CIPFA, the Council has implemented a number of measures; however, it is important to stress that CIPFA warned that straightforward savings have already been made. Further savings will be far harder to achieve and will require a careful, borough-wide examination of every service and every pound spent, including options that may be politically challenging.
 - A combined Improvement & Finance Recovery Plan is being prepared to deliver a balanced budget by 2026/27 and rebuild reserves.
 - Asset sales & capital programme cuts: a revised capital plan reduces borrowing by £35 m and markets surplus land/property for sale
 - Income & debt strategy: new policies for debt collection, fees/charges and concessions.
 - Governance overhaul: updating the Constitution, decision-making rules and scrutiny arrangements.

- No decisions have been made yet. All political groups and officers are now reviewing every area of expenditure to identify fair and workable savings that protect essential services while putting the Council on a sustainable financial footing for the future.

Local Plan 2040 Current Position

The Local Plan process was paused with an agreement for submission of the outstanding information to the Inspector by end of May 2025. This submission could not be achieved as outstanding highway matters have not been resolved and lie outside of the Council's control. National Highways ceased to engage in the Local Plan process (since 20 March 2025) due to the failure to secure funding for the road improvements required and in light of the impact of the Universal project, which also has a significant impact on the highway network. There were objections raised by National Highways, as well as delivery rates on a number of allocated housing sites being a fundamental soundness concern; therefore on this basis would lead to a finding of unsoundness and a recommendation that the Local Plan 2040 is withdrawn.

The Planning Inspector allowed Bedford Borough Council a number of extensions to resolve matters relating to points highlighted above, but due to there being no meaningful progress on these matters and together with the progress with partners of the Universal Destination and Experiences proposal, has rendered the submitted plan and its evidence base out of date. I refer to points made in the Inspector's letter dated of 10th June 2025 (ED99) in which he states (emphasis added):

- *"11. In terms of taking things forward, in the combination of specific circumstances presented in this case, I see no reasonable way for the examination of the Plan to continue. Instead, I would strongly recommend that the plan is withdrawn and that the Council resolve to work in partnership with their local community to bring forward a new plan, away from the scrutiny of an examination.*
- *12. As an alternative option, I can prepare a report finding the Plan unsound. That would bring the examination to an end. However, doing so would come entirely at the Council's financial expense. The costs incurred would serve a limited purpose in this case as the reasons for the Plan's deficiencies are clear and ultimately boil down to what is set out in this letter.*

- *13. Further, as you rightly say, the implications of Universal cannot be underestimated. Any conclusions I reach on areas where the Plan is unsound cannot be relied upon by the Council to assume that the rest of the Plan is sound, as that would need re-examination with the implications of Universal factored in. As such, a report would have very limited value. Preparing the report would also take time that would, in my view, be more positively spent considering the future of plan making for Bedford.”*

Rural Grants

- As mentioned above, Bedford Borough Council is carrying out a thorough review of all discretionary funding in order to focus resources on frontline statutory services such as Adult Social Care, Children’s Services and Temporary Accommodation, which are under unprecedented demand.
- As part of this process, the Council has reduced the Rural Grants programme alongside several other smaller discretionary funds (including Climate Change Grants, Community Centres support, Town Twinning and others).
- At this moment in time, Rural Grants scheme will not continue in the same way however, the Council remains committed to supporting rural communities in other ways:
 - Funding for essential services such as waste collection, highways maintenance and planning remains in place across the Borough, including rural areas.
 - Parish councils will still have access to national and regional funding streams for community projects, such as the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and other central government schemes.

Bus Usage Survey

- The Council are running a Bus Usage survey in order to hear from residents and understand the reasons why they may not be using the local bus service and the barriers they face.
- This feedback will help shape future bus services, as contracts are due for review in the coming months.
- You can share your views by completing the [online survey](#).
Paper copies are also available at:
 - Borough Hall reception

- Bedford Borough Hub (Horne Lane)
- What's On information and visitor hub (Silver Street)
- All libraries
- All Better leisure centres
- If you need a paper copy delivered, or a translated version, please email: sustainable.transport@bedford.gov.uk.
- The consultation opens on Friday 19th September 2025 and closes Friday 19th December 2025. Paper copies will be accepted until Friday 16th January 2026.

Glass and Food Recycling

- Kerbside Glass Recycling
 - Following a successful trial in several communities, glass will soon be collected in orange-lidded bins across the whole Borough.
 - The trial increased overall recycling tonnage by around 17% and is expected to raise the Borough's kerbside recycling rate by about 6% - with estimations suggesting the move could reduce carbon emissions by over 4,000 tonnes of CO₂ each year.
- Weekly Food Waste Collection (from April 2026)
 - Every household will receive a 7-litre kitchen caddy and a 23-litre outdoor caddy with a lockable lid.
 - Around 5,000 tonnes of food waste are expected to be collected each year, turning unavoidable food scraps into renewable energy or compost.
 - The service is fully funded to start, with over £1.9 million in government grants already received for vehicles, containers, and setup.

Family Hubs

- Earlier this year, the Borough Council made changes to its Children Centre's to better support children and families through the expansion and transformation of Family Hubs. 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. They are open to families with children from birth up to 19 years old, and up to 25 for young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

- With all hubs now open there have been ongoing sessions, such as those for Teen parents, offering them a safe space, ability to meeting other people in similar circumstances and build connections. Additionally, over the summer there has been a 57% increase in attendance showing the hubs are reaching the right people and are in the right places.

Tennis

- A number of Tennis sites throughout the Borough (for example, Bedford Park and Russell Park) have been fully refurbished with new surfaces, painting, and SmartAccess gates thanks to the Council entering into an agreement with the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) for capital funding up to (£314,309.62) to renovate courts and implement a financially sustainable model.
- There is a £40 annual household pass lets whole families book courts as often as they like. By July 2025, 354 passes had been sold to 683 individual users, generating nearly **4,000 bookings**.
- Players who prefer occasional games can pay £6 per hour, with over **2,700 “pay and play”** bookings already made. Every Sunday, one court at each site is free from 2-4 pm, encouraging newcomers.
- Additionally, there has been positive feedback from the users of new courts.