

Monthly Borough Report for GDPC April 2024

Anglia Way Barrier

After numerous maybes and possibly conversations, we are now going to properly assess the pavement to see the best way to fit barriers to meet our objective of stopping cars from parking on the ZIG-ZAG lines by the pedestrian crossing. The safety objectives the Council sought by installing a pedestrian crossing have been compromised by this irrational (car park 15 metres away) and dangerous parking. The contractor will be doing some physical assessments on where and how best to position the barriers sometime within the next 15 days. We have also been asked to consider if we feel that the barriers should also be fitted on the other side of the road to funnel people to the crossing.

Open Space Management Charge (OSMC)

As most will know the OSMC has been a singularly criticised charge since 2017. The removal of this additional management charge collected by Bedford Borough was put forward by the current Mayor Tom Wootton but was also highlighted as “unfair” by the previous Mayor. It has been debated in a number of overview and scrutiny committees and was included in the 2024/25 revenue and capital budgets put forward by the administration at a meeting of the full council on 7th February. One of the main parties in the council (Lib Dems) objected to the removal of this charge which has been levied on the land west of Kempston (Kempston West and Great Denham). A vote was taken on their objection and were defeated. The Portfolio Holder for Finance then listed items in the revenue and capital budgets which included the OSMC reduction. The council then voted on the budget as presented and a large majority voted in favour of the reduction and subsequent removal of this charge. The next step was for an Executive Decision to be published which is signed off by the Mayor. Any published Executive Decision can be “called-in” (challenged) if four or more Cllrs sign the “call-in” stating their reasons. Five members of the Liberal Democrats have signed a call-in request so we will now experience delays and further challenges whilst this process takes place.

EVC Points Grant

Over the past couple of years, I have been asked to speak to estate management companies on behalf of residents who wanted to install EVCP in their designated parking spaces in the parking courtyards. Every time I have been told no even though residents would pay to have this done themselves. Part of the grant we have received from Government is a £344k fund to employ staff to roll out charging points across the borough utilising the £1.1m grant received for the charging points themselves. I have asked that part of the remit of these new staff positions should be to work on the estate management companies to ensure we can meet residents' needs for EVCP in parking courtyards.

Changes from FirstPort to Hegarty Property

I am now getting lots of queries regarding the changes by Barratts and their appointed estate management agents. For all their properties in Great Denham and throughout they have

decided – after many complaints and local lobbying to replace them with Hegarty Property. I have asked DWH to do the same but have not yet heard back regarding their intentions. So, we have many confused residents expecting the changes to be across the board. I have written to DWH to ask that they declare their intent with timescales. I think we should pick this up as a PC given the number of people impacted.

Kerbside Glass collection

The Council will be conducting a 9-month trial collecting glass directly from residents' orange-lidded bins, being more convenient for residents. A decision will be made in early May in selected areas to begin the trial which aims to capture an estimated 1,500 additional tonnes of glass that end up in domestic black bins. Areas will be chosen in early April and will be one rural.

What can you recycle?

- Glass bottles (any colour or size)
- Glass jars (e.g., for sauces, jam, baby food)
- Non-food glass bottles (e.g., perfume, aftershave, face cream)

What can't be recycled?

The following glass items are not accepted in the trial and should continue to be placed in the black bin or taken to the Household Waste Recycling Centre:

- Drinking glasses
- Glass cookware (e.g., Pyrex, microwave oven plates)
- Vases
- Window or greenhouse panes

Bus service

The Council currently spends £3.7m on supporting bus operations on public transport, not including school buses. The majority of this (£2.2m) is on concessionary fares which had been cut for the 23/24 budget from £2.8m.

The cut was mandated to make savings however, the Council was later made aware by the operators, that this funding was crucial to their business to support their service. The cut would result in significant alternations to the service and routes in Bedford Borough as a result. To cover the cut £440k from the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP+) had to be used to fill the shortfall. The grant only totals £546K So, instead of using this fund to support and improve bus routes and services in Bedford Borough, 80.59% was used to cover this shortfall.

The Borough's bus service operations and routes have not been reviewed for over 10 years, the current administration will be conducting a long overdue review of the whole bus service operations and routes. They are also looking at some new models of operation to see if smaller buses in the rural areas might be able to feed into more main routes.

A task force – which includes the Police - has been created to see how we might be able to change how the bus station looks and is operated with safety and cleanliness being a priority.

Bedford Borough Council Provides £242,800 Funding Boost for Kempston Pool

A £242,800 grant has been secured by Bedford Borough Council as extra funding for Kempston Pool.

The funding will provide rooftop solar panels as well as improved metering and controls, giving long-term cost and energy efficiency savings. This will enable the site to become 36% self-sufficient from the grid, providing the council with the opportunity to invest in further energy efficiency technology and potentially battery storage to further decarbonise the site.

Freedom of the Borough for RAF Chicksands

Bedford Borough Council agreed at a special Full Council meeting to confer the prestigious Freedom of the Borough upon the United Kingdom Strategic Command - Chicksands. It will grant the Command the esteemed right of Freedom of Entry to the Borough, allowing its personnel to march through the streets of the town centre on ceremonial occasions with colours flying, bands playing, drums beating, and bayonets fixed.

£24million works to create a Community Diagnostic Centre and Primary Care Facilities at North Wing

Patients and staff will benefit from a £24m project that will improve access to healthcare and vital diagnostic tests at Bedford North Wing, on Kimbolton Road.

Gilbert Hitchcock House into a community diagnostic centre (CDC) will begin later this month, offering a “one-stop shop” for diagnostic tests, checks, and scans - it is expected to be completed in 2026.

It will significantly increase testing capacity in Bedford by around 50%, making it quicker and easier for patients to access potentially life-saving tests for a wide range of conditions, including cancer, heart and lung disease.

Household support grant

The Government announced an extension of the Household Support Fund as part of the 2024 Budget which has enabled the Council to support hard-pressed families during economically difficult times. A majority of Councils, including Bedford, most councils have used these funds to extend free meals for children through the school holidays.

Bedford Borough Council has not had any specific news on the funding it will receive from the Government however, it anticipates that the Council will receive c.£1.2m based on previous allocations. Allowing the Council to continue with the school holiday meal vouchers.

New community infrastructure and cultural grants available in Bedford Borough

Two new grants have been made available as part of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. The funding, worth £565,000, is split into two key areas:

- Community Infrastructure projects
- Cultural projects within the Bedford Borough area

Which are designed to improve pride in place and increase life chances.

The Community Infrastructure Grant Fund is designated for capital investment only for new or improvements to existing community and neighbourhood infrastructure projects. The grants available range from £1,000 to a maximum of £20,000.

Similarly, the Cultural Grant Fund, aimed at revenue investment, provides a generous funding pot of £110,000 to support local arts, cultural, heritage, and creative activities. Grants under this fund range from £1,000 to £20,000.

Applications are welcomed from a range of local organisations, such as registered charities, voluntary, community groups, Parish Councils, and not-for-profit organisations with a constitution.

Approval has been given for employment on riverside Goldington road

Outline plans for an employment site to the east of Bedford have been approved by the borough council south of Goldington Road.

This will be a mix of 'light industrial', 'general industrial', and 'storage and distribution' use, along with parking provision and landscaping, alterations to existing access, creation of landscaped areas, and associated works.