

Borough Councillors Report for GDPC – June/July 2023

Local Insights data for Great Denham

The recently published Insight data on Great Denham taken from several sources, makes interesting reading and compares many measures and their status against the national picture in England. It does highlight that on nearly all levels Great Denham outperforms the average. I've attached this link and would advise everyone to have a look at the data, it's fascinating. Did you know that there are 5,061 people living in GD? That the crime rate is lower than the average in England? Or that 53% of people aged 16-74 are in full-time employment in Great Denham Ward compared with 34% across England?

[LocalInsight-Great-Denham-Ward-ca732169723_5bdab2ea71c57237d8105aad7fc66be8-20230518102625097.doc \(live.com\)](#)

Borough Council Budget Setting & OSM

The budget setting process has started with the aim of having a balanced budget by March 2025. This is somewhat difficult as there is already a £2.27m overspend carried over from the previous administration. I have put my forward proposals regarding the removal of the Open Space Management charge and the Chief Finance Officer, CEO and Monitoring Officer as well as the Portfolio Holder for Finance have been sighted on my proposals. The proposal is to leave the charge for this year as budgets had already been set for 23/24 to include the charge. To reduce to £60 per household in 24/25 then to remove the charge completely in 25/26. The legal issues are being explored regarding property owners' legal documentation stating that they must pay this charge. Whether it is just enough for the Council not to collect or whether some other mechanisms are also needed to enable this to be done is still to be determined.

My role as Deputy Mayor

Following the election, I was delighted to be asked to sit on the Executive as Portfolio Holder for Environment, Highways and Transport. I was somewhat surprised that I was also asked to be Deputy Mayor but also happy to accept that responsibility. This means that I must stand in for the Mayor when he is unavailable. The last 6 weeks have been a massive learning curve as I try to understand the complexities of the various functions in the portfolio. I have also rejoined Great Denham Parish Council to ensure I can keep UpToDate with what is happening in GD. From September this year I will be setting up monthly surgeries so that residents can come along and discuss any issues, concerns and seek help. I will publish times and dates later next month.

Estate Management Charges – Fiasco

Alexander Faulkner Partnership (AFP) have continued as we expected and continue to charge residents for non-existent services. Four GD residents are now being harassed for payments for lighting in a courtyard that hasn't worked since 2016. The residents – quite rightly – have now refused to continue paying for a service that hasn't been carried out. I have raised a formal complaint with the Vistry Group plc, and they have appointed a regional Managing Director to liaise with me so that we can sort out the issues. Regarding FirstPort and their failure to return any response for requests to meet I have had to write to DWH and lodge yet another complaint. To finish off and so that they don't feel left out RMG are refusing to meet with a number of residents to discuss issues of service and charges again I will have to raise a complaint to the people who employ them – DWH.

Great Denham Parish Clerk

Anna O'Meara has served as the Parish Clerk for the last 6 years and I think that all past and present Parish Cllrs would agree that Anna has kept the Council on a straight path and seen through numerous projects, she will be sorely missed. She has harried, cajoled, and persuaded officers in the Borough to get things done for the benefit of Great Denham residents. She has supported me in my years as chair and continued to be a critical friend during my first term as ward Cllr. I want to say a big thank you for all she has done, and I hope that after a break she might be persuaded to come back as a parish Cllr! Thank you, Anna.

- **By-election in Wyboston Ward, Bedford Borough**

Conservative candidate Julie Cox has been elected Borough Councillor for Wyboston ward following the by-election on 29 June 2023.

The turnout was 34% with the votes split:

- Conservative Candidate, Julie Cox – 610
- Labour Candidate, Ian Robert James Nicholls – 34
- Liberal Democrat, Thomas Luke Townsend – 323

The total seats now held on Bedford Borough Council are:

- Conservative Party – 14
- Green Party – 3
- Independents – 2
- Labour Party – 14
- Liberal Democrat – 13

- **East West Rail (EWR)**

Earlier this year the Government announced its decision on the proposed route for EWR with the Mayor and Council now reviewing the details of the proposals to better understand the implications for the people of Bedford Borough.

The current Mayor had also attended a BeFare protest and stated that *“While we do support investment into our Borough, improved rail links and the EWR project in principle, we have always been clear that any decision involving the loss of homes and destruction of families, lives and countryside would be completely unacceptable.*

“The selection of route E would involve a pointless six-line track despite EWR accepting the fact a four-track proposal was feasible and would avoid the destruction of homes.”

He said there was a sense of frustration and anger at the event as “residents felt ignored.

I want to leave no doubt that, unlike my predecessor, I will do everything in my power to ensure their concerns and views are heard.”

- **Water Trees**

The Council watering teams are currently out watering but any tree young enough to have support stakes will benefit from additional water during higher than average temperatures which is why the Borough is asking local residents to help look after young trees planted near their homes.

With the additional support these trees are more likely to survive and grow to provide crucial habitats for insects and birds while also improving air quality.

- **Bedford Borough Council left with £2.27m overspend**

It has been reported that the previous administrations balanced budget for 2022/23 has resulted in a £2.27m overspend.

The large amount overspend has been largely attributed to the costs in temporary accommodation and optimistic assumptions in last year's budgeting process which have not come to light.

- **Day Travelcards**

TfL is proposing to withdraw Day Travelcards, which offer travel by tube, bus and rail within London which will negatively impact Bedford Borough residents who use Day Travelcards as they will not have to use other more expensive options.

Bedford Borough Council has asked London mayor Sadiq Khan to think again over plans to scrap day travelcards.

- **Local Plan 2040 hearings**

The hearing sessions of the Examination of the Bedford Local Plan will be held in two blocks and opened at 12 midday on Monday 12 June 2023.

The hearing sessions will take place:

Block 1 hearing sessions

- Week 1: Monday 12 June to Friday 16 June.
- Week 2: Monday 19 June to Friday 23 June.

Block 2 hearing sessions

- Week 3: Monday 11 September to Friday 15 September.
- Week 4: Monday 18 September to Friday 22 September.

Wider Borough Items

- **Bedford Kite and Motoring Festival 2023 a success**

Bedford Borough Council have stated that the festival was a "massive" success with an estimated attendance of 30,000 people.

The event appeared to be positively received by visitors and local residents as it offered a diverse range of activities and attractions.

- **Solar power for Bedford Borough residents**

The community-led initiative, Solar Together, is returning.

The community led sees residents coming together to invest in renewables through a group-buying scheme for solar panels and battery storage. These measures are aimed to help energy generation, cut carbon emissions and save on energy bills.

- **Government extends £2 Bus fare scheme**

The Department for Transport (DfT) led scheme caps all adult single fares at £2 and all return fares at £4 on bus services operated by participating companies. The scheme has now been extended to June 2023.

In Bedford Borough, the following operators have signed up for the scheme:

- Stagecoach
- University bus (Uno)

- **Bedford Borough Council launches bike donation scheme**

Bedford Borough Council is again calling on the generosity of residents and is announcing a second bike recycling initiative.

Bedford Borough Council is partnering with local charities and donated bikes will go to Bedford Borough residents who are most in need. As well as the health benefits of cycling, this scheme aims to give people the increased independence that cycling can offer.