

Borough Councillors Report to GDPC – March 2023

Press Release on EV Points

In February 2021 I received this email from Highways

“We have received a grant from the Office for Zero Emission Vehicles to help fund the on-street charging points. This grant has to be spent in locations where there is no off-street parking i.e., for properties that do not have driveways, garages and other areas where vehicles can be parked off the road.

The grant application criteria states:

The scheme is intended to meet the needs of those residents who are unable to charge at home due to a lack of off-street parking. Therefore, local authorities will need to demonstrate that this is not an option for the residents where the charge points are to be located

For the purpose of this grant, we have therefore had to concentrate installing charging points in roads with terraced housing / flats nearby which have no off-street parking.

Going forward, we will be looking at making further grant applications to enable us to roll these out to other areas across the Borough.

If you wish to identify locations in your ward that meet the following criteria:

1. The area must be part of the adopted public highway. We cannot install EV charging points on unadopted roads or in car parks that are privately owned.
2. The properties in the roads should not have driveways, garages or off-road parking areas.
3. There should be some likely demand (requests) for EV charging posts from residents.

then we will ensure that these are considered for EV charging points going forward:

If there are any areas that don't meet criteria 2 above but are on the public highway and where there is likely to be demand, please let us know and we will speak to other suppliers to see if there is a way that EV charging points can be provided”.

In June 2022 following a chase to see if we could get some installed in the Park & Ride this came.

“We have previously looked at providing EV charging points in this Park and Ride site, but the costs of doing so from our current provider was £50,000+ which make this site unviable. We will be looking at other providers later in the year and will ask for a quote for the Park and Ride. I will keep you informed of any updates”.

Press release out this morning contains the following: “Bedford Borough Council is now looking to identify new locations for EV charging points, and invites residents to suggest locations that they believe would benefit from the installation of charging infrastructure. As part of our expansion of the charging network, we are currently considering installing additional charging points around the town in Brickhill, Putnoe, Kingsbrook, Harpur and Kempston wards as well as in the villages **of Great Denham**, Harrold, Bromham and Sharnbrook”.

I will continue to push.

Estate Management Charges

At Full Council on 28th February, I presented a petition calling on all local authorities to lobby the Government to abolish the current system of Estate Management Charges and put in place a fairer and more transparent scheme.

Richard Fuller MP and Councillor Sarah Gallagher and I have worked together to gather data which has now been used to raise questions in Parliament. Following the latest meetings Richard Fuller MP is pushing for a debate in Parliament and for the issue to be part of the Kings Speech to tackle what he calls “Estate Management fees abuse”. The Council agreed with my suggested course of action after presenting my petition of (currently 1,600 signatures).

Planning Application Mercia Road

The proposed 95 houses off Mercia Road have been approved by Lib Dem and Labour councillors despite the Parish Council and I pointing out to the Planning Committee that this would put too much strain on both the school and the GP surgery which were already operating at capacity. It would also perpetuate the system of Estate Management Charges!

It seems strange then that the Lib Dem are fighting on a platform locally about better GP facilities. The way to improve this is not to add to the problem by another 95 houses in Great Denham without additional provision but rather ensure that the developer and landowner provide funding that improves the current pressures.

There is still time to push for more infrastructure, something I am continuing to do with officers at the Borough Council and the local Integrated Care Board (ICB).

Anti-Social Behaviour

Very disappointingly the second overspill car park by the pavilion has had to be closed after a number of motor cycle riders decided to use it as a dirt bike track. They churned up the service so has been cordoned off until repairs can be made. Both police and Borough would be interested to hear from anyone who could identify the bikes and/or their riders.

Department for Work and Pensions Household Support grant continues to support Borough residents.

The Household Support grant has been used to help provide supermarket vouchers to thousands of families who are entitled to income related free school meals. Additionally, following Government guidance, the Council has chosen to extend the Household Support Grant criteria to include those who face additional energy costs because of a disability, or they are living with a chronic illness. Under the changes, eligible residents may be entitled to claim £100 additional support.

Borough Council receives £149,403 from Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) to help improve Air Quality in Bedford Borough

The funding received from Defra will help ensure the Borough Council can continue its Active Travel work to communicate and inform the public of air pollution which encouraging more sustainable ways of travel.

One way the funding will be used is to hire an Air Quality Officer who will be in charge of communication and improving resident’s awareness of active travel options, air pollution and quality and much more.

Borough Council receives £385,183 from Department for Education

The Borough Council has received £5000 from the DfE to carry out work on their behalf. The money will be used to implement professional development activity to improve children’s early

communication and language, early maths and Personal, Social and Emotional Development outcomes.

Department for Education has also given the Borough Council a £380,183 grant which will enable the delivery of the Family Hubs Delivery Plan and the Family Hubs programme across Bedford Borough. The programme forms part of a national drive to ensure all families get the support they need to help babies and children to thrive. The help offered can support with issues such as infant feeding, mental health and relationship building.

Business Rates to fall in Bedford Town Centre

Following plans announced by the government last year, business rates in Bedford Town Centre are set to fall overall for Retail and Hospitality premises from 1 April 2023.

The change has come after the Valuation Office Agency (VOA) revalued the rates that all businesses pay and the government chose not to increase rates by inflation. The Borough Council keeps 50% of business rates due to changes by this Government with 1% of that goes to Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue.

Rate relief increase

Alongside the revaluation, recipients of the Council's Retail, Hospitality and Leisure business rates relief will see their rate of relief rise under the scheme, increasing from 50% to 75% during 2023/24. This relief will be subject to a cap of £110,000 per eligible business.

Bedford received £69,509.50 from the DfT protect bus services

The Council accepted a grant of £69,509.50 from the Department for Transport to protect socially necessary bus services from January to March.

At Full Council on Wednesday 1st Friday, the Conservative Group tabled a second amendment which switched £100,000 from the Communications Department to the rural Bus Service, this would be cost/revenue neutral.

The £100,000 would then be spent on helping to improve rural bus services which have been left underfunded and with reduced or heavily altered services. The budget amendment was defeated.

More of Bedford's young adults are living with their parents

More young adults are living with their parents which is a national issue. One of the main reasons is the cost of getting on the housing ladder.

House prices in Bedford have risen by an average of 71%, from £178,750 in December 2011 to £305,000 in December 2021. Back in August the average Bedford house prices increased more than East of England average.

New Active Wellbeing sessions for people suffering with long-term health conditions

Bedford Borough Council's Sports Development Team, in partnership with Be Active, are announcing the launch of a new physical activity programme called "Active Wellbeing". These weekly sessions will

offer gentle physical activity for cancer prehab/rehab patients and anyone experiencing other long-term health conditions.

The sessions are set to start on Monday 27 February 2023 and more information can be found in the following link - <https://www.bedford.gov.uk/leisure-parks-and-sport/sports-and-physical-activity/active-wellbeing-sessions>

Central Government approve £11.3m of the Borough's Business Cases under Bedford Town Deal

Following a successful bid, Bedford Borough received £22.6 million from central Government for the Town Deal. Four of these business cases, which were submitted in 2022, have been approved by Central Government, giving the green light to start delivering the projects.

These projects include the Midland Road regeneration and public realm improvements, the regeneration and restoration of St Paul's Square, and improvements to the Greyfriars junction which total £11.3 million of the total funding. More information on the Town Deal can be found on the Councils website here - <https://www.bedford.gov.uk/business/invest-bedford/projects-and-infrastructure/towns-fund>

Cost of Living Grant Fund

Bedford Borough Council is working with Compass Wellbeing and the Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes Integrated Care Board to provide £210K of grants to community, voluntary and social enterprise organisations, or town and parish councils, which are supporting individuals and families during the current cost of living crisis.

Fly-tipping

The Borough Council has released its 11th Press Release on fly-tipping since November averaging 2.5 similar press releases on the topic over the course of these last 4 months.

The Council has been keen to tackle fly-tipping after data revealed incidents have increased since 2016/17 with 1000 more incidents in 2020/21 than the previous year. In 2020/21 Bedford Borough had 2393 (357%) more incidents than Central Bedfordshire.

Only 1 fine was issued in 2020/21 which totalled £200. Despite welcome progress rural residents have reported to Councillors that fly-tipping continues to be an issue.

Residents will need photo ID to vote in person at elections in May

Electors voting in person at polling stations will need to show photographic ID to vote at this year's local elections. Accepted forms of ID include a UK, European Economic Area (EEA) or Commonwealth passport; a UK, EEA or Commonwealth drivers' licence; and some concessionary travel passes, such as an older person's bus pass or an Oyster 60+ card.