

Borough Councillors Report to GD Parish Council February 2022

OpenSpace Management Charge - Kempston Rural & Great Denham

As most will know ever since the imposition of the OSM charge I have tried, both as a Parish Cllr and now as a Borough Cllr to get this charge removed. I have presented several options to the Executive Mayor and whilst he admits it isn't fair, he states he can't do anything about it. This of course is not true, as the Borough is the recipient of the £324,000 it raises each year, as the elected Mayor, he can get it stopped by making an executive decision to do so. At last Wednesday's Full Council, I was part of a group of Cllrs that tried to get the proposed increase of 1.99% (excluding the social care levy) removed from the budget. This was voted down so the increase will remain. Along with other budget items we had to vote on the "special area" charge this tries to even out the costs of "parks and gardens" that are considered available to all Borough residents. So, in essence all residents of Great Denham and Kempston Rural (Wilkinson Road area) pay £20.18 for Borough wide benefit and £3.01 for their own area, but this only applies if you don't live in the new development DWH/Barratt/etc. If you live in the new development, then you pay these charges plus £120 so in total £143.19. Here is where the inherent inequality and unfairness lay. I voted against the "special area charge" because it failed to take into account this very unfair "roof tax" and should be adjusted to take this into account. The response from Borough Finance to my query is below. I will continue to try to get this charge removed.

*"In addition, it is important to note that the residents of Great Denham are charged within the rural category and **not** the Bedford heading, as suggested in Cllr Weir's email below. By way of a reminder, in accordance with CIPFA's independent report, all residents of the Borough are charged an equal amount in respect of parks and gardens to be deemed of Borough Wide Benefit e.g. Bedford Park (£20.18). The supplementary (non-Borough Wide Benefit) element that is payable in all rural areas of the authority equates to £3.01 per annum, this compares to £30.85 for the residents within Bedford".*

Bedford Borough release budget

The papers for the Budget have been released and are available here:

<https://councillorsupport.bedford.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=116&MId=5563>

It is proposed there will be a 2% rise for Adult Social Care precept and an additional 1.99% rise in core Council Tax which means the total rise is planned to be 3.99%.

This will be debated at Full Council on Wednesday 2nd February. (Now voted through)

Bedford Borough accept Bikeability funding from Department of Transport

Bedford Borough Council have accepted funding of £71,756 from the Department of Transport's Bikeability Trust.

This funding will allow over 3,000 of Bedford's children to have cycle training from learning to ride sessions to Level 3 Bikeability where they are trained to cycle safely on the roads. It also includes some family training sessions and a bursary for four instructors to ensure the sessions can be delivered.

Update on speed cameras

An update on speed cameras was given at Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Thursday 27th January which is available here:

<https://councillorsupport.bedford.gov.uk/documents/s59679/Item%2009%20-%20Speeding%20in%20Rural%20Areas%20Jan%202022%20v1.pdf>

Six Sites are being considered for average speed cameras in the current financial year (Wilstead, Wootton, A6 south of Bedford, B530, Ampthill Road, Mile Road Brickhill Drive).

A further 7 locations will be considered in 2022/23 which are currently being assessed.

It was suggested during the debate that the Police do not always monitor the cameras. There is also concern that whenever new cameras are added, each camera is monitored less. The Borough indicated they had offered support to the Police to enable cameras to be monitored more regularly, but this offer had not been accepted.

Rural Affairs Grant

There is currently £77,000 of uncommitted funds in the Rural Affairs Grant. If you want to see the requirements for this grant they are available by clicking the relevant web form here:

<https://www.bedford.gov.uk/benefits-and-support/advice-and-benefits-grants/grants-for-financial-assist/>

Bedford Borough Council efforts to end fossil fuel pension fund investments

At Full Council on Wednesday 12 January, an amended motion was carried to end further fossil fuel pension fund investments and write to Bedfordshire Pension Fund and the Border to Coast Pension Partnership to ask them to phase out all funds from fossil fuels following cross-party agreement from the Conservative, Lib Dem and Labour Groups.

The Green Party had originally submitted a motion calling for more extreme and immediate changes to climate change policy and refused to compromise from their position.

Stagecoach 'temporarily' cutting bus services in the borough

Many bus services run by Stagecoach across the borough have been given a new reduced timetable due to the pressures of Covid-19.

Bedford Borough Council representatives described these as 'temporary' at an Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Thursday 27 January, though it has been implied to residents that Stagecoach may keep the reduced timetable due to low usage.

Bedford Borough have also given Stagecoach money to update the electronic timetables in a timely manner, but that did not happen.

Borough COVID-19 Latest Figures

It was reported on 26th Jan that Bedford Borough has the third highest COVID-19 case rate in England, at 1,488 cases per 100,000 people in the local population.

Cases remain high in Bedford

As of the 23rd January in Bedford, there have been 46,130 cases since the start of the pandemic and there have been 2,660 registered cases in Bedford in the last 7 days.

If you would like the latest COVID snapshot (as of 23rd January) please find it below:

<https://bbcdevwebfiles.blob.core.windows.net/webfiles/Social%20Care%20Health%20and%20Community/Covid19/covid19-weekly-statistics-26Jan22.pdf>

More information available at: <https://www.bedford.gov.uk/social-care-health-and-community/public-health/coronavirus/>

Bedford providing free taxis to and from Vaccination centres

Bedford Borough Council are providing free taxis for anyone in the borough getting a vaccine.

To get your free taxi ride, you just need to call one of the taxi operators from the list available at www.bedford.gov.uk/VaxiTaxi, give them the reference BBC VACCINE, and let them know where you need to be picked up and dropped off.

Businesses can apply for a new Omicron Hospitality and Leisure Grant

Applications for the new Omicron Hospitality and Leisure Grant, which has been funded by the Government, are now open on Bedford Borough Council's website.

The Government announced that further support will be provided to businesses in the hospitality, accommodation and leisure business sectors affected by the Omicron wave through the Omicron Hospitality and Leisure Grant.

The amount eligible local businesses will receive are:

- Qualifying businesses with a rateable value of £15,000 or less on 30 December 2021, will receive a one-off grant of £2,667.
- Qualifying businesses with a rateable value over £15,000 and less than £51,000 on 30 December 2021, will receive a one-off grant of £4,000.
- Qualifying businesses with a rateable value of £51,000 or above on 30 December 2021, will receive a one-off grant of £6,000.

Visit www.bedford.gov.uk/BSG to find out more about eligibility, and to apply for this grant.

You can find out which type of businesses are excluded at: [Omicron Hospitality and Leisure Grant Guidance \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/101111/omicron-hospitality-and-leisure-grant-guidance.pdf)

Omicron discretionary additional restrictions grant scheme

The Government have also provided funds for Bedford Borough to implement a discretionary grant scheme to assist qualifying businesses in the hospitality, leisure, indoor facilities and non-essential retail sectors with further assistance.

The Omicron discretionary grant scheme will pay eligible businesses a one-off grant. You may be eligible if your business:

- Is located in the Bedford Borough Council area.
- Did not receive funding under the main Omicron Hospitality and Leisure Grant scheme.
- Operates within the sectors in the table below.

Sector	Type of business
Hospitality and Leisure	Restaurants, Cafes, Bars, Shisha Cafes, Conference centres, Pubs, Nightclubs, Bingo Halls, Bowling Alleys, Hairdressers, Beauty, Businesses that cater to the events sector and mobile caterers at events
Indoor facilities	Businesses that normally provide group activities – i.e. art & crafts workshops, community centres/public halls/church or religious halls, fitness studios, squash clubs, sports clubs, boxing clubs, wellness studios, gyms, dance studios, escape rooms, health & fitness centres, soft play centres, riding centres and swimming pools
Non-essential retail	Travel businesses including travel agents and tour operators

Visit www.bedford.gov.uk/BSG to find out more about eligibility, and to apply for this grant.