

Monthly Borough Report GDPC June 2024

- **Open Space Management charge update**

Officers are working through the processes and communications related to the above. As you can appreciate there are some challenges to implementing the decision that they are working on (identifying those properties that are owner occupied and those that are rented, and the process for evidencing the reduction has been passed onto the tenants) and they will be meeting with colleagues from both legal and internal audit next week to gain their views on the implementation.

In the meantime, the page on our website that details the annual charge will be updated today to reference the decision to waive 50% of the fee. The page can be found at [Great Denham and west of Kempston - annual charge explained | Bedford Borough Council](#) and will be updated to include the following:

Following a review of the Open Spaces management charges for Great Denham and Kempston West, an Executive Decision was made by the council in March 2024. The decision made the changes as detailed below:

- To waive the Council's right to receive 50% (£60) of the open spaces management annual sum from property owner/occupiers in the Great Denham and Kempston West development with effect from the 2024/2025 financial year.
 - To waive the Council's right to receive 50% (£60) of the open spaces management annual sum from property owners who let out their property in the Great Denham and Kempston West development with effect from the 2024/2025 financial year, where the property owner provides evidence that they have reduced the tenant's rent or service charge by the same amount.
 - That where a property is unoccupied, for the purposes of (1) and (2) above, the property shall be treated as occupied in the same manner as when it was last occupied.
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- **Pros and Cons**

We have a fairly new community developing and gaining an identity here in Great Denham. Not everything is perfect - tell me where is - but we do have some great community spirit, a brilliant school, a thriving and active community hall, a youth club and an active and positive parish council. There are several thorns in the side of Great Denham, excessive and scandalous "Estate management charges", an "Open Space Management charge" and the destruction of a community asset in the golf course.

The first is being championed by Richard Fuller MP and is making its way through UK Parliament the second is on its way out with a reduction to £60 this year and full removal next year. The third is an issue that remains unresolved, and the landowner and their agents continue to ignore and disregard the community by allowing the land and buildings to deteriorate and accumulate rubbish and detritus. They patently don't care about the

community that bought and rented houses on the land they made tens of £millions from, which is why there is no meaningful dialogue or engagement with the community. I have asked Officers to come up with an enforcement option to ensure the landowner secures the site and cleans it up. We have written to the landowner's agents and await a response before bringing enforcement action. Many residents have also written to the agents and reported the weekly occurrence of vandalism but yet they continue to fail in securing the site and buildings.



- **Kingswood Way Trees**

I am meeting with our Arboriculture Officer on Thursday morning (6th June) to sort out the dead trees and get a programme ready for the next planting season.

- **Barrier Anglian Way**

Work has been planned to start three weeks from today.

- **Pedestrian Crossings Feasibility**

The feasibility work being undertaken should be completed within the next three weeks.

- **Oasis re-opens**

In December 2023, the Council agreed to invest £4.9m across Bedford Borough's leisure facilities in order to address issues. Approximately, £500,000 was used to address urgent health and safety issues at Oasis Beach Pool so that the facility would be safe to open to the public.

The works included improvements to plant equipment for increased energy efficiency and longevity with important infrastructure such as boilers, heating, cooling, and customer facilities being replaced. On the 28th of May 2024, Oasis held its official Grand Opening.

More work will be taking place to further redecorate and bring brighter and more welcoming atmosphere.

- **Former Debenhams store acquisition**

The Council officially completed its acquisition of the iconic former Debenhams store on the 24th May 2024, the store had been closed since May 2021.

The building will form a major part of the Council's overall strategic vision for the Town Centre with more details on possible plans for the site and Town Centre vision to be discussed at the Executive Committee on Wednesday 19th June.

- **Bedford Central Library unveils new spaces for the community**

Funding from the Town Centre Priority Fund has enabled Bedford Central Library to open two new rooms.

The first room is a dedicated parent and carer baby feeding room and the second room is a free to use and bookable meeting room available for small groups of up to eight, or individuals seeking a quiet space to work or connect.

- **First 13 properties, new incoming IT system and more for the Council's temporary accommodation service**

As a part of the Council's property acquisition scheme, they have now purchased its first 13 homes that will enable it to provide more a cost-effective to deliver temporary accommodation. The Council has also invested further into the service by ordering a new IT system/equipment and recently recruiting 22 new staff members to better manage cases and address the backlog.

The service is also working through the backlog of housing benefit which has not been claimed by the Council.

- **Bedford Tennis Courts refurbished**

£370,000 has been invested into refurbishing park tennis courts across the Borough with work concluding at Allen Park and Southfields, Bedford Park, Mowsbury Park and Russell Park.

Going back 6 years, 2017 – 2023, the Council did not undertake any significant maintenance work over the Bedford tennis courts. Due to this consultant Knight, Kavanagh & Page identified that the majority of Bedford Borough tennis courts (83%) are considered to be in a poor condition and in serious need of maintenance.

If the courts were not maintained, they would become a liability to the Council and the Borough could risk losing its tennis courts forever.

The Council entered into negotiations with the LTA Tennis Foundation to secure its tennis courts for future generations. As a prerequisite for obtaining the funding the Council is required to implement a sustainable financial model to ensure that its Tennis courts are maintained going forward and do not fall back into a state of disrepair.

A two-fee structure will be implemented: a pay-per-hour rate of £6 for one-off games and a household annual pass priced at £40. Further funding from Public Health will also allow for more free tennis.

- **Appeal for more foster families**

The Council is collaborating with other east of England authorities in a new initiative for fostering under Foster East.

The initiative is funded by the Department of Education and aims to have Councils work together to provide more comprehensive training, support and best practice. In Bedford specifically, there 250 children in Foster families, the Council has new children coming into care and this initiative will help ensure we have the carers needed in the future.

- **General Election**

Residents across Bedford Borough have until Tuesday, 18th June to register to vote ahead of the General Election on Thursday 4th July.

Residents can register to vote at www.gov.uk/register-to-vote and it's possible to choose whether to vote at a polling station, by post or by proxy.

- **Change to Portfolio Holder roles**

The Council has chosen to realign responsibilities across its Executive so that the Council and Executive can work towards priorities more efficiently and holistically. This will help ensure continuity of approach on Council priorities.

The new portfolio:

- **Mayor Tom Wootton - Covers Democratic Services and Rural Communities** which includes:
 - Rural Issues/Communities
 - Inward Investment
 - Corporate Policy and Performance
 - Communications and Marketing
 - Legal Services
 - Democratic Services (Executive Functions)
 - Human Resources
 - Emergency Planning (including Flooding)
- **Deputy Mayor/Councillor Jim Weir - Portfolio Holder for Environment** which includes:
 - Carbon Reduction/Climate Change
 - Transport Policy
 - Traffic Operations

- Highways
 - Car Parking (including Enforcement)
 - Refuse and Recycling
 - Waste and Resources
 - Grounds Maintenance
 - Engineering Services
 - Fleet and Transport Co-ordination
 - Railways
 - Rivers & Waterways
 - Business Partnerships (England's Economic Heartland, New Area Growth Board etc)
 - Infrastructure
 - Major Capital Projects (Environment)
- **Councillor Graeme Coombes - Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate Services**
which includes:
 - Financial Strategy
 - Financial Management and Planning
 - Treasury Management
 - Corporate Finance
 - Revenues and Benefits
 - Insurance and Risk Management
 - Information Technology Strategy
 - Business Rate Reliefs
 - Procurement
 - Internal Audit
- **Councillor Jane Walker - Portfolio Holder for Valuing Families: Children's Services**
which includes:
 - Children's & Young People's Safeguarding, including the Local Safeguarding Board
 - Children's Social Care Quality Assurance
 - Children's Commissioning
 - Children in Need
 - Looked After Children including Fostering and Adoption
 - Leaving and Aftercare Services
 - Children & Young People's Engagement and Development
 - Prevent Strategy
 - Domestic Violence
 - Youth Offending Services
 - Children's Social Care Resilience – Internal, Private and Voluntary
 - School Improvement, Organisation, Admissions, Planning (including Capital Programme) and Support Services
 - Children & Young People with SEND
 - Educational Psychology Services
 - Early Help and Intervention
 - Early Years Provision

- Music Service
- Impact on Family (Crosscutting)
- **Councillor Robert Rigby - Portfolio Holder for Valuing Families: Adults Services** which includes:
 - Adult Services
 - Adults Commissioning and Contracts Care Standards and Review
 - Adults Social Care Resilience – Internal, Private and Voluntary
 - Learning Disabilities and Mental Health
 - Older People and Physical Disabilities and Sensory Needs
 - Safeguarding Adults
 - Adult Education
 - Impact on Families (Crosscutting)
- **Councillor Sarah Gallagher - Portfolio Holder for Customer Experience (inc. Leisure, Recreation & Culture)** which includes:
 - Customer Services
 - Customer Access via Technology
 - Leisure Strategy/Village
 - Leisure Centres/Swimming Pools
 - Sports Development
 - Parks and Open Spaces
 - Play Areas
 - Leisure Services (Bowling Greens, Tennis Courts, Pitches)
 - Mowsbury Golf Course
 - Bedford Park Charity
 - The Higgins
 - Cultural Services
 - Tourism/Tourist Information Centre
 - Libraries and Archives
 - Births, Marriages & Deaths (Registration Service)
 - Third Party Sport & Leisure Providers – Liaison
- **Councillor Phillippa Martin-Moran-Bryant - Portfolio Holder for Housing and Regulatory Services** which includes:
 - Housing
 - Operational Housing (including Gypsy and Travellers)
 - Property/Asset Management
 - Homelessness
 - Community Safety and Resilience (excluding Emergency Flooding)
 - Community Regulations
 - Commercial Regulations
 - Trading Standards
 - Health & Safety
 - Environmental Protection (Contaminated Land, Litter, Fly Tipping etc)
 - Licensing

- **Councillor Andrea Spice - Portfolio Holder for Economic Growth, Planning and Prosperity (inc. Town Centres)** which includes:
 - Development Management
 - Town Centres (including Land Assembly)
 - Economic Development
 - Planning Policy
 - Planning Enforcement
 - Building Control
 - Heritage and Compliance
 - Events
 - Markets

- **Councillor Martin Towler - Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods and Communities: Health and Wellbeing** which includes:
 - Public Health
 - Community Wellbeing
 - Health and Wellbeing Board
 - Health Improvement
 - Health Intelligence and Protection
 - Health Commissioning and Population Health
 - Health Inequality
 - Integrated Care Partnership
 - Food Resilience: including Food Banks and Free Schools Meals
 - Child Poverty
 - Voluntary Organisations
 - Community Partnerships
 - Neighbourhoods
 - Household Support Grants
 - Disability
 - Impact on Family (Crosscutting)