

Borough Councillor Update February/March 2018
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Bedford Budget Council Budget 2018/19

A meeting of the Borough Council on the 7th February determined the Council's budget for 2018/19.

As in previous years, demand for services is increasing whilst the overall resources available to the Council will remain relatively unchanged. This has required the Council to continue its programme of service efficiencies through its 'Bedford Borough 2020' project.

Bedford Borough 2020 will see the introduction of a 'Digital Operating Model', which is estimated to achieve annual savings of £10.4m by the beginning of the next decade through the improved use of technology. This will include increased opportunities for residents to use 'self-service' functions when interacting with the Council, particularly through the implementation of a new website.

The Council is also continuing its programme of service efficiencies, totalling £3.8m in the coming year. In addition to this, there is a proposed Council Tax increase of 1.75% and a rise of 2% in the Adult Social Care Precept. The revenue gained from the latter must be used on adult social care services, the budget for which has been set at £52.1m next year; a 13.7% increase since 2015/16, reflecting increased demand.

The Council's Capital Programme determines schemes for 'one-off' investment totalling £185.8m over a 4 year period from 2017/18 to 2020/21. This includes several schemes of particular note, including:

- Around £19m of Government investment in traffic decongestion schemes at Amphill Road, Manton Lane and the town centre.
- £5.5m in Disabled Facilities Grants monies from the Government to support individuals to live independently in their own home.
- £59m of investment in schools' facilities, including the continued implementation of the 2 tier system in the Borough.

In the current year, 2017/18, the Council has been delivering £7.8m of agreed efficiencies. As we near the end of the financial year, it is estimated that there will be an overall underspend of just under £1.8m. Councillors have, therefore, chosen to allocate £1m of this sum for improvements to roads and pavements. In addition, a one-off sum of £0.525m will be spent on average speed cameras, thus reintroducing a service which ceased in 2016 and allowing some of the 60 plus schemes on the waiting list to go ahead. The criteria for prioritising the speed camera schemes are still to be determined.

Local Plan 2035

The Council is currently consulting on its draft Local Plan, setting out preferred sites for the development of around 8000 homes to the year 2035.

There was an intention to agree the Local Plan by the end of March after the Government stated its intention for local authorities to be subject to a centralised methodology to determine housing targets, rather than each council undertaking their own assessment as at present. The new methodology would increase the Borough's housing need to 2035 from around 8,000 to 14,000 homes. Submitting the Local Plan for examination before the end of March would have seen the Council benefit from 'transitional arrangements', thus avoiding the increased target.

The Government has now announced that the new methodology will not be implemented until the summer. This means that there is now more flexibility around the timeline for agreeing the Local Plan. The consultation has been extended to 5pm on the 29th March and it is likely that the final Local Plan will be subject to a vote at a meeting of Councillors in May.

A key aspect of the draft submission is the selection of a new settlement to deliver around a third of the new homes to 2035. In this regard, land owners and planning agents submitted 4 sites for consideration, namely: Wyboston; Colworth (Sharnbrook); Twinwoods (between Milton Ernest and Thurleigh), and; Thurleigh Airfield. As part of the consultation, details have now been made available of the viability assessments of the 4 sites at www.bedford.gov.uk/localplan2035

An additional site, called 'Bedford Brickworks' was submitted formally for consideration in November following consultation with officers from June and consists of a plan to build on largely brownfield land to the south of Bedford to deliver 4,500 homes in the Local Plan period, extending to 9,145 dwellings thereafter. Whilst this site was put forward late in the process, it does underline the availability of brownfield sites, the majority of which were offered for development in the original call for sites in 2015, that which could have been pursued had the Council taken a more proactive approach at an earlier stage of the process.

The Mayor's draft Local Plan has selected the Colworth site, adjacent to Sharnbrook and Souldrop, as the preferred settlement which will deliver 2500 homes in the Local Plan period and then up to 4500 in subsequent years. It has been stated that a key reason for the selection of Colworth is the possibility of a new parkway rail station linking the settlement with Bedford and London.

I personally am against this decision and will not support it or any of the proposed developments along the A6 corridor should they come forward again. The A6 is already congested enough at peak times and none of these developments propose any new infrastructure to take the traffic off the A6. Furthermore the north Beds countryside is amongst the most beautiful in the county, consisting as it does of top class agricultural land and many unspoilt villages with roads that are not suited to the additional traffic that such large scale developments would generate. More information can be found on the following websites which are opposed to such development: www.keepnorthbedsgreen.org and/or www.cprebeds.org.uk.

The draft Local Plan also includes an allocation of 2420 homes in the urban area, which means there is no longer a need for 'edge of urban' sites at Salph End, Renhold and Gibraltar Corner, Kempston. A 500 home allocation for Wilstead has also been removed, while a 600 dwelling development in Sharnbrook will not go ahead if the Colworth settlement, as set out above, is agreed. Conversely, 500 homes are still scheduled in each of Bromham, Great Barford and Clapham.

The below table is taken from the report to the Mayor's Executive in January (which can be found in full at [this link](#)) and sets out the allocations, a recording of this meeting can be found on the Borough's website at <https://soundcloud.com/bedford-borough-council/executive-10-january-2018-audio>

The left of the table shown the plans consulted on last year, while the right side shows the plans included in the draft submission:

2017 consultation paper	Amount of residential development	Local Plan 2035 Plan for submission	Amount of residential development
Urban area	877	Urban area	2,420
Edge of urban area	1,111	Edge of urban area	210
Brownfield site Stewartby Brickworks	1,000	Brownfield site Stewartby Brickworks	1,000
New settlement(s)	2,200	Colworth garden village	2,500
Group 1 villages – Key Service Centres		Group 1 villages – Key Service Centres	
- Bromham	500	- Bromham	500
- Clapham	500	- Clapham	500
- Gt Barford	500	- Gt Barford	500
- Sharnbrook	600	- Sharnbrook	0
- Shortstown	0	- Shortstown	0
- Wilstead	500	- Wilstead	0
- Wixams	0	- Wixams	0
- Wootton	0	- Wootton	0
Total Group 1 villages	2,600	Total Group 1 villages	1,500
Group 2 Villages – Rural Service Centres		Group 2 Villages – Rural Service Centres	
- Carlton	25-50	- Carlton	25-50
- Harrold	25-50	- Harrold	25-50
- Milton Ernest	25-50	- Milton Ernest	25-50
- Oakley	25-50	- Oakley	25-50
- Roxton	25-50	- Roxton	25-50
- Stewartby	0	- Stewartby	0
- Turvey	25-50	- Turvey	25-50
- Willington	0	- Willington	0
Total Group 2 villages (mid point)	225	Total Group 2 villages (mid point)	225
	8,013		7,855

Residents must respond should they wish their comments to be considered once the Local Plan is submitted for consideration to the Planning Inspectorate. Responses can be submitted via www.bedford.gov.uk/localplan2035 or by emailing planningforthefuture@bedford.gov.uk. Response forms are also available at local libraries and the Customer Service Centre on Horne Lane, while comments can also be sent by post to Local Plan 2035, Planning Policy Team, Bedford Borough Council, Borough Hall, Bedford MK42 9AP.

Bedford Hospital

Toward the end of 2017, Bedford Hospital and Luton & Dunstable Hospital stated their intention to undergo a full merger. In this regard, a business case was submitted to NHS regulators in December and it was expected that a decision would be made on whether the merger will go ahead in time for it to be implemented on the 1st April 2018.

It has now been reported that this timescale has been delayed as talks continue around the financial agreements underpinning the merger. In particular, it will not be known until the summer as to the availability of government capital funding which could support improvements to both sites.

The business case reiterated that a full range of services will continue to be provided for patients on both sites. This includes key services such as A&E, maternity and paediatrics at Bedford Hospital.

Putnoe Walk-In Centre

The Bedfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group (BCCG), the body responsible for organising NHS services locally, has announced its intention to close the Walk-In Centre (WIC) at Putnoe Surgery in Bedford.

At a meeting of the BCCG's Governing Body in January, it was agreed that the WIC would remain at Putnoe until the end of September 2018. Thereafter, alternative provision will be implemented through an 'Urgent Treatment Centre' (UTC), based on the Bedford Hospital site, which will operate a 'like for like service from the Putnoe Walk In Centre'. It will also link with the Hospital's A & E function, allowing non-emergency patients access to diagnostics should further tests be required, and will receive ambulances and appointments via the 111 phone service.

In addition to the UTC, the BCCG has expressed its intention to extend GP opening hours into evenings and weekends, giving patients more options to book appointments.

Non-Patient Emergency Transport

The East of England Ambulance Service Trust (EEAST) is to provide non-emergency patient transport services in the Borough after agreeing a contract with the Bedfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group.

The contract, which concerns the provision of transport where patients are taken for pre-planned medical appointments, will be fully in place from June. The service was delivered until last year by the now defunct Private Ambulance Service (PAS) which went into administration. The service provided by PAS was the subject of complaints due to repeated instances of failures to pick up patients on time, if at all.

Housing Scheme

A new facility opening in St John's Street, Bedford next month is to provide intensive support to homeless individuals. Clarence House will provide 29 beds and 24 hour specialist support aiming to end the cycle of homelessness and support rough sleepers towards independent living. The facility will be managed by One Housing, which has delivered this model of support successfully in London, and will be linked with other support services.

As of November last year, it was estimated that there were 76 rough sleepers in the Borough.

Shared Lives

The Council is promoting its 'Shared Lives' initiative which supports adults (aged 16 or over) with learning disabilities. Shared Lives sees individuals requiring support try new and varied activities such as going for walk or to the cinema, attending a football match, or even going on holiday under the supervision of a carer.

The Council is looking for volunteers to become Shared Lives carers to support individuals with learning disabilities as they experience opportunities which can make a positive difference to their lives.

Carers will be assessed and receive training. They will also receive financial payments on a self-employed basis and are also eligible for a Shared Lives Tax Break. For more information call 01234 228560 or email sharedlives@bedford.gov.uk

Ford End Road Bridge

As a reminder, from the 16th February to August, Network Rail is to undertake demolition and reconstruction of Ford End Road bridge in Bedford as part of works to electrify the railway line through Bedford. The bridge will be closed to vehicle during this period and traffic will be diverted.

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