

Borough Councillor Update – May 2018

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Local Plan 2035 Update

The Borough Council's latest consultation on its draft Local Plan, setting out preferred sites for the development of around 8000 homes to the year 2035, including Colworth Garden Village ended on 29 March 2018. The Borough Council Executive, at its meeting on 16 May 2018, are scheduled to consider the outcome of the consultation and to decide whether or not to make any amendments to the proposed submission version of the Local Plan. It is very likely that changes will be made as the Executive report confirms the need for additional work on the evidence base, following the difficulties of Colworth Garden Village, to enable an amended "Plan for Submission" to be subject to further consultation. The report also states that Officers are considering the possibility of changing the timescale covered by the plan to reduce the number of dwellings that need to be allocated and that, at this stage, other options are also being evaluated. The revised Local Development Scheme, that sets the timescale for the Local Plan process, identifies that a further report will be submitted to the September 2018 Executive, followed by a period of consultation in Autumn 2018 and "sign off" at the Executive/Full Council in December 2018.

National Planning Policy Framework

Running parallel to the Borough Council's development of the Local Plan is a consultation being held by the Government on updating its National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), its main planning policy document. This is proposing the introduction of a standard methodology across England for use by councils in assessing how many homes they need to develop through their Local Plans, which would replace the current system of councils determining their own housing targets.

Initial figures showed that under the new methodology the Borough Council would have to account for the development of around 14,000 new homes in its Local Plan, compared with its own figure of 8000. This increased target will not apply if the Borough Council submits its Local Plan before the updated NPPF, and the new methodology, are published. The latest indications are that the NPPF will not be published until the summer and that local authorities will have a further 6 months after that date to submit their Local Plan without being subject to the new standard housing need methodology. This means that the Borough Council is likely to have until early 2019 to submit its Local Plan, thus allowing more time to consider alternative sites for development if necessary.

Licensing Policy

The Borough Council has agreed a new Statement of Licensing Policy 2018 – 2023 that introduces a presumption against new applications being granted for licenses to sell alcohol in Midland Road, Tavistock Street and the High Street. This is in response to a review which has demonstrated a link between the proliferation of premises selling alcohol in these areas and instances of crime and anti-social behaviour.

Following the adoption of the 'Cumulative Impact Policy' (CIP), on 2 May 2018, applicants will have to demonstrate that their application for an alcohol licence will not have a detrimental effect.

New Special School

The Government has announced plans for a new special school in Kempston. The Bedford Inclusive Learning and Training Trust will offer 200 places for children aged 3-19 with learning difficulties. For more information see: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-measures-to-support-children-with-send>

Hospital Merger Delayed

Bedford Hospital's proposed merger with Luton & Dunstable Hospital is now unlikely to take place until April 2019. The original merger target date of April 2018, which was acknowledged to be ambitious, will be missed. This is due to the need for further discussions with NHS England, the Department for Health and NHS Improvement around the financial arrangements underpinning the merger.

Included in the merger business case is a request for around £150 million of capital investment across both hospital sites. Both Chief Executives have stated their optimism that the merger will be supported with capital when the Government releases its next round of funding, possibly in the summer.

The merger was announced in the autumn of 2017 with a commitment to retain key services such as A&E, maternity and paediatrics at Bedford Hospital.

River Festival 2018

The River Festival 2018 will be held on Saturday 4 and Sunday 15 July 2018 on Bedford's Embankment. The event attracts around 300,000 people with attractions including live entertainment, river events, funfair and arts and crafts.

Parenting Support

Parents and carers of children aged 0 – 12 years old are being offered support through the Council's Positive Parenting Programme. This is a scheme lasting 8 weeks from May – July providing information and support on parenting skills. More information can be obtained by contacting triplep@bedford.gov.uk or by calling (01234) 276367.

Potholes

The Borough Council has received £305,000 from the Government to undertake pothole repairs. This is in response to the recent sub-zero temperatures which have caused damage to roads across the country.

Bedford Park Survey

The Council is undertaking a 'customer satisfaction' survey of Bedford Park. This allows residents to give their views as well as suggest improvements.

Responses can be given via www.forms.bedford.gov.uk/bp or hard copy at Bedford Central Library and Putnoe Library. The deadline for responses is 4 June 2018.