

Borough Councillor Update – December 2018/January 2019

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Local Plan 2030

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The Council approved the Local Plan for submission on the 5th December. Following the removal of the proposed Colworth Garden Village and its planned 2500 homes (because it was too close to the Santa Pod Raceway) the Local Plan period has been shortened from 2035 to 2030. That lowers the housing need figure from 7855 to a minimum of 3636.

The final allocations are set out in the below table taken from the report. As can be seen the majority of houses (2260 of 3636) in this plan period will be on greenfield sites.

Policy 3S – Amount and distribution of housing development

A minimum of 3,636 new dwellings will be allocated and distributed as follows:

- i. Bedford urban area: 2,532 dwellings (of which 1,785 dwellings will be delivered by 2030)
- ii. Urban extensions: 210 dwellings
- iii. Stewartby strategic brownfield allocation: 1,000 dwellings (of which 100 dwellings will be delivered by 2030)
- iv. *Criterion deleted*
- v. Key service centres: 2,000 dwellings
- vi. Rural service centres: 260 dwellings

In the settlements listed below, it will be necessary to identify sites to meet the following levels of development, generally in and around defined Settlement Policy Area boundaries. Other than in Roxton, all sites will be allocated in Neighbourhood Development Plans:

- i Bromham – 500 homes
- ii Clapham – 500 homes
- iii Great Barford – 500 homes

- iv Sharnbrook – 500 homes
- iv Carlton – 25-50 homes
- v Harrold – 25-50 homes
- vi Milton Ernest – 25-50 homes
- vii Oakley – 25-50 homes
- viii Roxton – 25-50 homes (see Policy 28)
- ix Turvey – 25-50 homes
- Willington – 25-50 homes

It is not clear why the Stewartby option has been reduced; that is a brownfield site and capable of taking 1000+ homes by 2030, not just the 100 it has been allocated. This rejection of a brownfield site and at the same time the selection of yet another greenfield site in Sharnbrook for 500 houses is not easily explained and is almost certain to be challenged. In common with the other village developments, the Sharnbrook proposal means inevitable additional strain on roads and local facilities both in the immediate area and for surrounding villages.

Because of the shortened time period, the Local Plan is going to be subject to almost immediate review to take account of the strategic implications arising from the 'Oxford – Cambridge Arc' and associated developments. As a consequence, and in the light of planning guidance, the need to identify sites for Garden Villages will mean continued speculation and developer pressure.

The Local Plan will now be examined by the Planning Inspectorate which will make comments and, where appropriate, suggestions for modifications so that it complies with national policies and legal requirements. Local authorities are not obliged to take on board the views of the Planning Inspector, but doing so could ensure the Local Plan is deemed to be 'sound' should it be subject to challenge from developers in the future.

Depending on the workload of the Planning Inspectorate at the time of submission, it is likely to take several months for the Council's Local Plan to be reviewed.

Bedfordshire Police Funding

The Home Office has announced plans to increase funding for police forces next year which could see Bedfordshire Police's resources rise by £8m. Around £5.6m of this sum will be realised should the Police & Crime Commissioner choose to increase the policing element of Council Tax. Of the remaining sum, £1.3m will come from the central government core grant and there will be additional £1.1m to cover pension costs.

Bedfordshire Police has also received a special £4.57m grant from the Home Office in response to 'exceptional' demands placed on the force by gangs engaging in violent crimes. It will cover the cost of 'Operation Boson'; Bedfordshire Police's response to gang, gun and knife crime.

Rough Sleeper Support

The Council has in place a package of support for rough sleepers during the winter period.

Last year a grant of £307k was received from central government for 6 additional support workers and a Rough Sleeper Outreach Co-ordinator to ensure effective working with partner organisations. Furthermore, additional units of accommodation are being provided, along with 10 emergency accommodation beds.

For more information on the support available to those facing homelessness or rough sleeping see <https://bedfordhomeless.org.uk/>

Bromham Road Bridge

Traffic travelling westbound over the Bromham Road bridge in Bedford is to be redirected from January 2019 – April 2019. This is due to Network Rail's preparatory works for the demolition and rebuilding of the bridge to accommodate the electrification of the line. Specific dates and details of the diversion will be advertised in the area.

Bedford Hospital Inspection

The Care Quality Commission's (CQC) latest inspection found that overall Bedford Hospital 'requires improvement'. This grading was given to urgent & emergency services (including A & E) and maternity, although the remaining 6 categories were rated 'good'.

The Hospital's Chief Executive, Stephen Conroy, told local media that since the inspection the Hospital has opened its Urgent Treatment Centre (UTC) which is seeing around 50 patients a day and taking the pressure off A & E services. He also reiterated plans to retain key services including maternity, A & E and paediatrics as part of the intended merger with Luton & Dunstable Hospital.

Council Website

Following a period of redevelopment and testing, the Council has launched its new website at www.bedford.gov.uk. This is part of the implementation of the 'Digital Operating Model' to save over £10m a year by 2020 through the improved use of technology.

School Cameras

The Council has agreed to allocate £650k, from a predicted underspend on this year's budget, to purchase 38 cameras to enforce parking restrictions outside of schools as a means of improving safety. The maintenance costs will be covered by the income from fines issued.

Alzheimer's Society Scheme

The Alzheimer's Society is publicising a new service in Bedford Borough. 'My Future Plans' provides one-to-one support for those who have been diagnosed with the disease and their careers to discuss future care arrangements. For further details call 01234327380 or email sam.marshall@alzheimers.org.uk

Visitor Information Centre

On the 17th October a new Visitor Information Centre opened at St Paul's Church, Bedford. Opening initially on Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays between 10.30am – 4pm, it has been established by volunteers wanting to promote the Borough a tourist destination.

Winter Maintenance

The Council's website provides updates on winter maintenance, including gritting operations. It also notifies residents of changes to school and adult services transport, bus services and waste collections. See <http://apps.bedford.gov.uk/winterupdates/>