

Borough Councillor Update – February/March 2019

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Council Budget

The Borough Council's budget was agreed at a meeting of councillors on the 6th February. It includes plans to increase Council Tax by 1.49%, with an additional 1% for the Adult Social Care precept; a £36.63 per year rise for the average Band D property.

Demand for adult social care continues to be one of the main pressures on the Council's revenue budget, with spending rising in this service area to just under £52m in 2019/20. There is, therefore, a need for the Council to continue its savings programme, with £5.3m of efficiencies to be delivered next year. The total net revenue budget is £128.6m.

The Council also has a Capital Programme for 2018/19 – 2021/22 which covers spending on 'one-off' schemes. The total value across the 4 year period is £213.2m and includes projects such as the 'Transporting Bedford 2020' road decongestion scheme (£18.4m, with £15.5m being provided by the Government) and Wixams Railway (£27.4m, although this may be superseded by the East West Rail project).

East West Rail

A consultation has been launched on proposed routes for the central section of the East West Rail (EWR) scheme from Bedford to Cambridge.

EWR will enable a new train line between Oxford, Milton Keynes, Bedford and Cambridge, with the potential in the future to extend further to Norwich. It has been unclear for a number of years as to where the line will link with Bedford but the consultation has now provided some detail.

There are 5 options, 3 of which mention the use of an unspecified 'Bedford South' station, which could be the long-awaited Wixams station or an alternative site. Conversely, 2 of the options see the line going through the town centre and linking with the existing Bedford Midland station. For more details on the route options and how to respond to the consultation see <https://eastwestrail.co.uk/haveyoursay>

Black Cat Upgrade

Following a public consultation which received over 4000 responses, Highways England has announced the preferred option to upgrade the Black Cat roundabout and the selected route for a new bypass between the junction and Caxton Gibbet in Cambridgeshire.

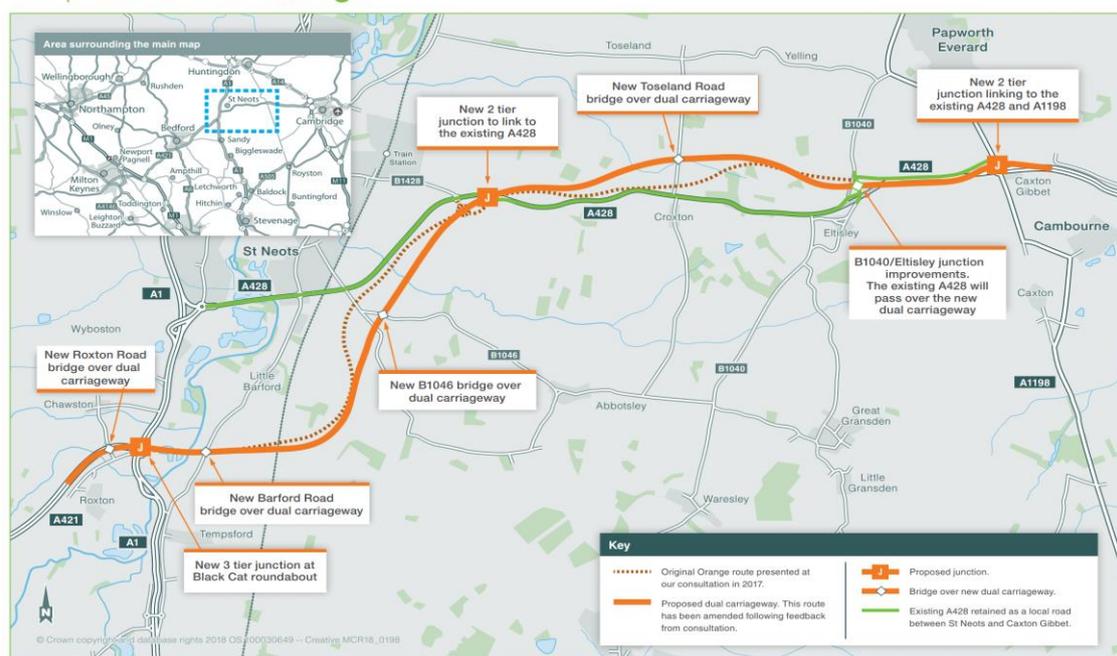
The roundabout is to be reconfigured as per the below diagram taken from the Highways England website. The junction will become three-tier, with the A1 passing beneath the junction and the A421 over it.

The preferred route: Black Cat Option C



The preferred route for the bypass is provided below. Highways England is of the view that it will remove traffic from the A428 to Cambridge and reduce rat running on local roads. The estimated cost of the project is £810m - £1.4bn. For more information see <https://highwaysengland.co.uk/projects/a428-black-cat-to-caxton-gibbet/>

The preferred route: Orange



Bromham Road Bridge

Network Rail began work to demolish and reconstruct the railway bridge over Bromham Road in the town centre on the 4th March. This work is being undertaken to enable the electrification of the Midland Main Line.

Pedestrian access will still be allowed, but the road will be partially closed, meaning that drivers will need to follow a diversion via Clapham Road. This scheme will likely cause disruption across the town's road network.

Rough Sleeping

There has been a 33% reduction in the number of rough sleepers in the Borough in the past year following the provision of new services. The annual rough sleeper count which took place in November showed that there were 51 rough sleepers, compared with 76 in 2017.

Following the receipt of a £307k Government grant, support has been put in place through the recruitment of extra support staff and units of temporary and emergency accommodation. Support is also provided by a range of local organisations, with co-ordination through the Bedford Homeless Partnership. While the news of progress is welcome, clearly there is still a lot more to do. For more information see <https://bedfordhomeless.org.uk/>

Council Website

You may have seen that the Council has a new website as of December 2018. A feature of the new site is the inclusion of 'customer journeys' which aim to make it easier to report or discuss certain issues. For example, residents can now report potholes, graffiti and noise nuisance using the website. New customer journeys are undergoing testing and are being added to the site incrementally. See www.bedford.gov.uk

Green Bins

The Council is reminding residents that green waste collections resumed on the 1st March. Collections days can be found at <http://apps.bedford.gov.uk/bcs/search.aspx>

Voter Registration

Borough residents have until the 12th April to register should they wish to vote in the local elections on the 2nd May. Details of how to register can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/register-to-vote>

The election on the 2nd May will be for the Mayor, Borough Councillors and Parish Councillors.

Volunteers Needed to Support Children in Care

The National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS) provides a network of volunteers to mentor and support children in care. NYAS is currently looking to recruit new volunteers as part of its Independent Visitor Programme.

The volunteers will receive training before being assigned to their young person. Volunteers act as positive role models by engaging them in new experiences, as well as sharing interests and hobbies. For more information email volunteers@nyas.net or call 08088081001.

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 carers to discuss future care arrangements. For further details call 01234327380 or email sam.marshall@alzheimers.org.uk

Advice for Families

The Borough Council has a website which provides advice on a range of services designed to support families including child behaviour support, early years and childcare and youth clubs. For more details see <https://earlyhelp.bedford.gov.uk/home.aspx>

Power Cut Support for Vulnerable People

UK Power Networks (UKPN), the organisation responsible for maintaining electricity lines and cables, is raising awareness of a scheme to assist vulnerable people in the event of a power cut.

Pensioners, families with young children and people with disabilities, health conditions or special needs can be provided with accommodation, meals and home visits if necessary.

Applications to join UKPN's Priority Services Register can be submitted via www.ukpowernetworks.co.uk/priority, 08001699970 or emailpsr@ukpowernetworks.co.uk.