

## **Borough Councillor's Update – July 2017**

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### **Local Plan 2035**

In the last edition of The Bridge I wrote about the Council's latest consultation on its Local Plan 2035 which is setting out plans for sites to accommodate the development of 8,000 new homes.

The consultation ended on the 9<sup>th</sup> June and I understand that the Council's Planning department is now assessing the 1800 responses received.

As reported the Council is pursuing an option to develop 1 or more new settlement(s) in the north of the Borough to accommodate around a quarter of its housing need, with proposed sites in Wyboston, Sharnbrook, Twinwoods (between Milton Ernest and Thurleigh) and Thurleigh Airfield being considered. One or more of these settlements could go forward and are likely to provide around 4,000 – 6,000 dwellings each (although it is thought that only 2,000 could be developed within the Local Plan period to 2035). I am concerned that any of these sites would significantly increase traffic on the A6.

Sites earmarked for development in the urban and edge of urban areas are set to accommodate just over 2,000 properties however only 700 of these are planned in the urban area with the remaining 1,300 being effectively in the rural area with allocations in Biddenham, Salph End Renhold and Gibraltar Corner, near Wootton, all of which the Borough calls "edge of urban area".

In addition, a number of villages have been designated as having 'Group 1' status, namely: Wilstead; Bromham; Sharnbrook; Clapham, and; Great Barford and are all set to increase substantially in size with between 500 – 600 new properties in each. An allocation of 1,000 homes has been earmarked for the brownfield site at the former Stewartby brick works.

This means that the rural areas are to bear the brunt of the Borough's requirement for new housing during the new local plan period up to 2035.

As noted in my last report, Harrold and Carlton and both 'Group 2' villages are earmarked for the development of between 25 – 50 new homes to 2035, Podington, Wymington, Hinwick and Odell are in Groups 3 and 4 which means they are not being asked to make a contribution to the Council's housing target, although those communities may wish to allocate sites for development through their Neighbourhood Plans if they have chosen to do prepare one.

For more information see [www.bedford.gov.uk/localplan2035](http://www.bedford.gov.uk/localplan2035)

### **Policing**

#### ***Special Constables***

Bedfordshire Police is undertaking a recruitment drive to bolster its cohort of Special Constables.

Special Constables are volunteers who have the same powers as Police Constables, including powers of arrest and the ability to stop vehicles. They must volunteer for a minimum of 16 hours a month. There are currently 250 Special Constables in Bedfordshire.

For more information call 07590465193 or email [BeSpecial@bedfordshire.pnn.police.uk](mailto:BeSpecial@bedfordshire.pnn.police.uk). Further details can also be found at [http://www.bedfordshire.police.uk/recruitment/special\\_constables.aspx](http://www.bedfordshire.police.uk/recruitment/special_constables.aspx)

#### ***Operation Sentinel Rural***

The Bedfordshire Police & Crime Commissioner, Kathryn Holloway, has announced the establishment of a new rural crime unit.

Operation Sentinel Rural will see a team of an Inspector, Sergeant, 4 Police Constables and 4 Police Community Support Officers focus on rural policing issues. It was also announced that the unit will have use

of a drone which will be used to acquire evidence. For more information see [http://www.bedfordshire.pcc.police.uk/rural\\_crime\\_unit](http://www.bedfordshire.pcc.police.uk/rural_crime_unit)

### **East West Rail**

A consultation is being held from the 30<sup>th</sup> June – 11<sup>th</sup> August on the proposed East West Rail scheme.

The western section of East West Rail will connect Oxford, Milton Keynes and Bedford. In addition to this, a central section is planned which will extend the line to Cambridge.

Overall, 20 options were considered for the location of the route between Bedford and Cambridge, with the decision being taken for the line to pass through Sandy.

The Government backed the scheme in its 2016 Autumn Statement with £110m investment. A new East West Rail organisation is now taking the plans forward. For more information visit <http://www.networkrail.co.uk/east-west-rail>

### **Black Cat / A428**

Highways England held a consultation between the 6<sup>th</sup> March – 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2017 on proposals to improve the Black Cat roundabout and provide a new dual carriageway to Caxton Gibbet.

The consultation document put forward 3 options for consideration for the A428 and 3 options to upgrade the Black Cat roundabout, as set out in the consultation document which can be seen on the Highways England website (search 'Highways England Black Cat'). A decision on the preferred option will be made this summer.

### **Children's Services Inspection**

At the beginning of April, Ofsted published its report on the Council's Children's Services function following an inspection undertaken in January – February.

Overall, the Council requires 'improvement to be good', although adoption performance and the experience of care leavers was judged to be 'good'.

The Council has produced an action plan in response to the report and is seeking to employ more social workers in the coming years.

### **Homelessness Grant**

The Council is to administer a £623k Government grant to provide assistance to rough sleepers.

The grant will fund in the next 2 years a Rough Sleeper Street Outreach Service across Bedford Borough, Central Bedfordshire, Luton Borough and Milton Keynes.

The Council will use the monies to commission organisations across these areas to provide increased support around accommodation, health and benefits. This includes the use of 'Crisis Intervention Workers' who will be tasked with providing intensive support in complex cases.

It is hoped that the grant will support around 700 people across the region. In November, the Council's annual Rough Sleeper Evaluation estimated that there were 59 people rough sleeping on any given night; up from 17 in 2011. The grant will, therefore, offer timely assistance.

### **Domestic Abuse**

The Council is publicising its joint website, with Central Bedfordshire Council, to assist those requiring advice in relation to domestic violence issues.

The Bedfordshire Domestic Abuse Partnership website is now said to be more user friendly and interactive. The site, <https://bedsdv.org.uk/>, saw a 1296% increase in visits in the past 6 months after it was relaunched in September.

## **'Mindful Sport'**

During Mental Health Awareness Week in May, the Council sought to promote its 'Mindful Sport' initiative.

Mindful Sport is sponsored by the Council, NHS and mental health charity MIND amongst others. It provides sports classes designed to improve attendees' wellbeing through social engagement and being active, as well as giving them the opportunity to discuss issues such as anxiety disorders, eating disorders, panic attacks and stress should they wish to do so.

The scheme began in 2016 with yoga but now also includes swimming, table tennis and walking. Each session costs £2.

For more information see [www.bedford.gov.uk/sport](http://www.bedford.gov.uk/sport), email [robert.lindsay@bedford.gov.uk](mailto:robert.lindsay@bedford.gov.uk) or call 01234718829.

The schedule is as follows:

Yoga: Bedford Central Library, 1pm - 2pm, Wednesdays

Wellbeing Walk: Bedford Central Library 11am Fridays

Table Tennis: Bedford Central Library Third Floor, 2.15pm – 3pm, Wednesdays

Swimming: Robinson Pool, 3pm – 4pm, Mondays