

Borough Councillor Update – June/July 2018

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Local Plan 2035

A meeting of the Mayor's Executive on the 16th May confirmed that the submission of the Council's Local Plan, setting out preferred sites for the development of around 8000 homes to the year 2035, will be delayed. This is because the proposed 'Garden Village' for Colworth (adjacent to Sharnbrook and Souldrop), to deliver 2500 homes in the Local Plan period and up to 4500 thereafter, will not now go ahead.

A key issue in relation to the viability of the Colworth Garden Village is the need for agreement between the site promoters and Santa Pod Raceway for the latter to put in place noise mitigations, given the close proximity of the proposed development. It is now clear that such an agreement is not in place, meaning the site is unviable in planning terms and its inclusion would have put the Local Plan at risk of not being considered 'sound' at examination by the Planning Inspectorate, as required by the National Planning Policy Framework.

Alternative options will now be considered, including the possibility of reducing the number of years covered by the Local Plan, which would decrease the number of homes requiring allocation.

NHS Updates

A function of the Borough Council's Adult Services & Health Committee, comprised of Borough councillors, is to scrutinise the decisions of NHS commissioners and providers. At the Committee's meeting in June a number of plans were presented by NHS representatives which will shape the future of healthcare services in the Borough:

Urgent Treatment Centre and 'Walk-In' Services

You may be aware of plans to develop an 'Urgent Treatment Centre' (UTC) from October 2018. The UTC will be situated at the Cauldwell Medical Centre on the Bedford Hospital site. It will provide same-day appointments for minor illnesses over a 12 hour period, 7 days a week, via referrals from A & E and 111 phone service, thus reducing pressure on the Hospital's A & E function.

The Bedfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group (BCCG), which organises NHS services, said the formation of the UTC is a national requirement. Given that the UTC will provide same-day appointments, the BCCG announced plans earlier in the year to close the Putnoe Walk-In Centre (the surgery itself will remain open) from October 2018.

The Committee was told that the BCCG is now exploring options for a temporary extension of walk-in services north of the river in Bedford until the end of March 2019. It is unclear at the time of writing, however, whether the temporary extension will see the service continue at Putnoe or another location (Gilbert Hitchcock House on Kimbolton Road has been noted by the BCCG as a potential alternative).

GP Extended Access

In accordance with NHS England's requirements, the BCCG has awarded a contract to BEDOC ('Bedford on Call') to provide GP extended GP services from 8am – 8pm, 7 days a week. The Committee was told this would lead initially to an extra 550 appointments a week with GPs and practice nurses at 2 as yet undisclosed locations in Bedford. The appointments will be open to anyone in the Borough.

Stroke Services

Since 2016, patients who have suffered a stroke in most areas of the Borough are taken to the Hyper Acute Stroke Unit (HASU) at Luton & Dunstable Hospital. This is where treatment is provided in the crucial 72 hour period following a stroke. Thereafter, patients are provided with aftercare and rehabilitation either at Bedford Hospital or in the community as appropriate.

The BCCG announced at the Committee's meeting that it is now intending to provide a new 20 bed unit in Bedford for those in need of stroke rehabilitation services. A suitable property has been identified at John Bunyan House on Goldington Road, pending alternative premises being found for the current tenants, Headway (a charity providing support for patients with brain injuries).

The BCCG said that the new facility will be an improvement on the current unit at Bedford Hospital in that it will be more suited to providing rehabilitation, thus decreasing patients' lengths of stay and reducing levels of disability arising from a stroke.

Trains Update

Thameslink Timetable

As a reminder, if you have been affected by the widespread disruption caused by the introduction of new train timetables from the 20th May causing you to arrive at your destination 15 minutes or more behind schedule, you may be able to receive compensation. For more details see: <https://www.thameslinkrailway.com/delayrepay>

The timetable changes were implemented to accommodate the 'Thameslink Programme' which is designed to increase capacity on the lines travelling north and south through London, including the Bedford – Brighton Thameslink service, although this has clearly not been the case as yet.

East Midlands Trains

A separate issue to that of the Thameslink Programme is the future of the East Midlands Rail franchise. Bedford is served by the East Midlands Trains 'Intercity' service providing fast trains from London St Pancras to Derby, Sheffield and Leicester amongst other destinations. This service has, however, been suspended for Bedford passengers in peak hours until 2020 to accommodate the implementation of the Thameslink Programme, as set out above.

It was announced in August last year that a consultation would be held on the specification for the East Midland Rail franchise contract when it is renewed in August 2019. The Department for Transport has now responded to the public consultation and confirmed that Bedford will no longer be served in peak hours by the Intercity service; the rationale being to reduce overcrowding and improve journey times. Bedford will instead be served by 'two dedicated commuter trains per hour' to and from Corby 'providing capacity to prevent passengers from having to travel on busy Intercity trains'. The Corby trains relate to the new East Midlands Rail franchise so they will be operated by whichever company is successful in taking the reins from 2019. At the moment it is run by East Midlands Trains. This line is distinct from the Thameslink service which is currently operated by Govia Thameslink Railway.

In addition, there will be a requirement that 'at least one Intercity service per hour will call at Kettering to retain connections with stations served by the Corby services, and we are also requiring peak time calls at stations between Leicester and Bedford in the counter-peak direction'. One of the main concerns as far as

Bedford commuters were concerned when the proposals came out last summer was that those who travel north would have to get off at Kettering and change if they want to go to Leicester, Sheffield etc. as there would no longer be a direct train from Bedford to these destinations. The above extract from the consultation report, seems to suggest that there will be a requirement for the new operator to provide some coverage during peak periods for those who travel north (i.e. the 'counter peak').

As details of timetables have yet to be produced, it is unclear as to how journey times will compare between the current Intercity service and the forthcoming 'dedicated commuter trains'. For more information search 'future of East Midlands Rail franchise'.

Speed Cameras

In 2017/18, the Borough Council budgeted to deliver £7.8m of efficiencies. In February, Council finance officers estimated an overall underspend for the year of just under £1.8m. Of this sum, councillors chose to allocate £1m for improvements to roads and pavements and £0.525m for new average speed cameras.

There are over 60 requests from local communities for average speed cameras on the waiting list. Following an audit of road safety, cameras will be placed at the following sites. The income from fines goes directly to central government:

Needwood Road, Bedford
Woburn Road, Kempston
Putnoe Lane, Bedford
Polhill Avenue, Bedford
High Street, Clapham
The Causeway, Carlton
High Street, Pavenham

Brewery Approved

A new £13m brewery is to be opened by Charles Wells at the Fairhill site, adjacent to the A6 Paula Radcliffe Way and the Great Ouse Way, following the grant of planning permission. The facility is expected to open in the summer of 2019.

Special Constables

Special Constables are volunteers who have the same powers as Police Constables, including the ability to make arrests and stop vehicles. Following training, Special Constables are asked to volunteer a minimum of 16 hours a month.

Bedfordshire Police is currently recruiting new Special Constables. If you are interested you can request more details by emailing BeSpecial@Bedfordshire.pnn.police.uk or searching 'Bedfordshire Police Specials'

Foster Carers Needed

The Borough Council marked 'Foster Care Fortnight' in May by highlighting the issue of children being placed with foster carers outside of the Borough as there are not enough local carers presently to meet demand.

The Council is in particular looking for new foster carers for older children, sibling groups and children with

disabilities and foster carers from black and minority ethnic groups. All foster carers receive training and a weekly allowance. For more information see www.bedford.gov.uk/fostering or call the Council on 01234 718718.