

Local Plan 2030

The Council's Local Plan, outlining sites for housing and employment growth to the year 2030, was subject to 'Examination' by the Planning Inspectorate in June and July, with hearings taking place at Borough Hall. This process provided an assessment of the Plan's 'soundness' by reviewing its proposals and evidence base, as well as hearing submissions from Council officers and external stakeholders.

A consultation was launched on the 19th August, lasting until the 1st October, on 'main modifications' proposed by the Planning Inspectors to ensure that the Plan is sound and compliant with national policies. Amongst the main modifications is the requirement that the Plan must include an 'Early Review Policy'. This means that the Local Plan will need to be updated and re-submitted for Examination within three years. This is as a result of the decision last year to reduce the length of the Plan period from 2035 to 2030 (requiring fewer homes to be allocated). There is also the need for the Plan to consider the implications of the emerging Oxford – Cambridge Arc policy which is set to increase house building requirements in the region and lead to the development of associated infrastructure, including the East West Rail project linking Oxford – Cambridge via Bedford. For more information on the consultation and the main modification search 'Bedford Local Plan 2030'.

Council Agrees Funding for New Projects

Funding for a range of new Council projects was agreed at a meeting of all councillors on the 17th July, including funds to support the town centre.

A review of the final accounts for 2018/19 yielded an underspend of £800k which has been allocated to three projects, namely; £350k for new average speed cameras; £250k for required works at the Council's depots, and; £200k for security improvements at the Willow Drift traveller site, adjacent to Meadow Lane on the A603. Councillors also agreed around £2.3m of funding for new initiatives following a review of reserves, summarised as follows:

- Public events and activities to support Bedford town centre
- A reintroduction of the Climate Change Fund, supporting local organisations with grants to reduce their carbon emissions
- A 'Young People Empowerment Fund' to assist voluntary organisations offering support to improve the skills of children and young people
- Additional funding to provide improvements to open spaces, highways and the public realm
- A continuation of the Council's Jobs Hub for a further four years, offering careers advice and guidance to job seekers

Bedford Town Centre Consultation

A consultation has been launched by the Council on the future of Bedford town centre. Residents, visitors and businesses have the opportunity to set out their views on the town centre shopping area and ideas on what would attract them to come into Bedford on a more regular basis. The survey can be completed at <https://forms.bedford.gov.uk/TCS/>

Hospital Merger

The Chief Executives of Bedford Hospital and Luton & Dunstable Hospital have welcomed £99.5m of Government funding which is set to enable the merger of the Trusts. The Department for Health announced the funding would provide a new intensive care block, delivery suite and operating theatres at Luton & Dunstable. The merger, announced in autumn 2017, pledged to protect key services at Bedford Hospital including A & E, maternity and paediatrics.

Rough Sleeper Support Grants

The Council has accepted grant funding of £547k from the Government to deliver a range of support services for rough sleepers, as set out below:

- £95k is to be available for homelessness prevention work
- £221k will be used to provide a 24 hour 'Somewhere Safe to Stay Hub' based at 26 Harpur Street in the town centre, providing overnight beds as well as cooking and washing facilities whilst housing needs are assessed
- £125k will fund 'Rough Sleeper Navigators' for a 12 month period to ensure rough sleepers have access to services, providing in particular support to those with complex needs
- £106k has been allocated to employ Local Lettings Officers for 12 months who will work with housing providers to provide secure accommodation for rough sleepers.

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Support

The Council has launched a 'Local Offer' website, providing details of support and services available to children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). This includes details of health services, family support and entertainment activities. For more information see localoffer.bedford.gov.uk

Children's Mental Health Support

The Bedfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group (BCCG), the organisation responsible for organising local NHS services, and Bedford Borough Council have commissioned a new online mental health resource for children and young people. The service, called 'Kooth', offers emotional and wellbeing support to children and young people aged 11 – 19. It provides one-to-one counselling and self-help materials on issues including exam stress and anxiety for 1700 users logging in every day around the country. For more information see <https://www.kooth.com/>

Ward Fund

The Ward Fund allows councillors to support community schemes. Please do get in touch if you would like to discuss any potential projects. The following deadlines apply: highways and greenspace – 13th September; litter bins / salt bins – 22nd November, and; projects supporting external organisations – 13th December.

'Active Adults' Exercise Classes

The Council has started taking bookings for its 'Active Adults' exercise class programme including football, golf and walking, which starts on the 23rd September (for those aged 35 and over). There are also classes available for those aged 75 and above. For more details search 'active adults Bedford'

Cllr Stephen Moon: Stephen.Moon@bedford.gov.uk / 01234870061 / Facebook – search 'Cllr Stephen Moon'

Cllr Phillippa Martin-Moran-Bryant: Phillippa.MartinMoranBryant@bedford.gov.uk / 07934 853907