



## **Brickhill PC: Update from Cllrs Moon and Corp**

### **October 2017**

#### **Bedford Hospital**

A 'Strategic Outline Case' has been put forward for the proposed merger of Bedford Hospital and Luton & Dunstable Hospital.

The future of Bedford Hospital has been up in the air for a number of years through a succession of health reviews, the last of which proposed the transfer of maternity services to Milton Keynes Hospital. Thankfully this was not taken forward before that review ended.

NHS and local authority social care services are now the subject of the Sustainability and Transformation Partnership (STP) review covering Bedfordshire and Milton Keynes. STP processes began last year at the behest of NHS England in 44 areas across the country with a view towards improving service quality and reducing costs; that raised concerns around the future of key services at Bedford Hospital such as maternity, A & E and paediatrics.

The decision now of Bedford Hospital and Luton & Dunstable to pursue a merger has been undertaken independently of the STP process, although the announcement stated that 'a merger aligns with the strategic objectives of the STP and the proposal to pursue this change has the support of the BLMK STP and regulators'.

Aside from saving an estimated £12m a year across both hospital sites, it has been noted explicitly by Bedford Hospital's Chief Executive, Stephen Conroy, that the merger will secure the future of maternity, A & E and paediatric services in Bedford. While we await the detail of how exactly services will be affected, we are cautiously optimistic that the arrangement will be positive for Bedford Hospital.

#### **Homes Consultation**

A national consultation has been announced around plans for increased housebuilding across the country.

At present, the Council's Local Plan 2035 is allocating sites for development based on a calculated need to provide 950 homes a year. The Department for Communities and Local Government has now proposed a new methodology which, if agreed following a public consultation, will require the Council to plan for 1281 homes a year to 2026.

While it is clear that this country has not built a sufficient number of homes over many years to keep pace with demand, we are concerned about the potential implications of the scale of new homes in the Borough should the new methodology be taken forward.

We have asked Alistair Burt MP to liaise with the Housing Minister on our behalf to clarify the need for the housing target set for the Borough which goes above and beyond the Council's current plans. He is also working with the Borough to see if there are grounds for the Council to be exempted from the new proposals.

For more information search 'planning for the right homes in the right places: consultation proposals'.

#### **Bedford Borough 2020 Project**

The Borough Council is progressing with its plans to undertake a fundamental restructure of the organisation as part of its 'Bedford Borough 2020' (BB2020) project.



Following a review by auditors PricewaterhouseCoopers (PWC) last year, it was estimated that there was scope for savings of £10.4m a year could be realised should its recommendations be taken forward. The findings were agreed by the Mayor's Executive in February this year.

BB20202 is now being put into action. The key aspects of the project are a wholesale staff restructure as well as the 'digitalisation' of services. As far as residents are concerned, we are told that the investment of £13m in new technology will make it easier to interact with the Council. For instance, the plans will apparently improve the Council's website and make it easier for residents to use 'self-service' in registering issues and being assessed for eligibility to receive support (for adult social care, housing benefit etc., with eligibility assessed by one team instead of several across various service areas). We have received assurances from the Chief Executive that those who may have difficulty in using computers will receive assistance in accessing services if necessary.

Changes in the upper echelons of the staffing structure have now been carried out and a provider has been selected to implement the digital element of the project. BB2020 will be fully implemented by the end of the decade.

### **Network Rail**

Representatives from Network Rail recently held an event at Borough Hall to inform councillors of their plans for railway improvement works.

Of particular note are plans around the electrification of the line from London to Kettering. As far as Bedford is concerned, this will require reconstruction works to be undertaken at the Ford End Road and Bromham Road bridges in the town centre to allow the necessary overhead line equipment to pass beneath. This will have an effect on motorists using these routes.

For Ford End Road, this work will take place in 2 phases from the 16<sup>th</sup> October – 30<sup>th</sup> November 2017 and from February 2018 possibly to July (for demolition and reconstruction). The first phase will still allow traffic to use the bridge as 1 lane will be kept open (with a subsequent 1 way system). The second phase will be more disruptive as the bridge will be closed and a diversion put in place.

Bromham Road bridge will need to be entirely demolished and reconstructed. This will have the likely effect of causing congestion issues during the period of works but a start date is yet to be agreed.

### **NHS Transport**

You may have seen in the local press in the past few months instances of patients being let down by the service commissioned to provide them with transport to and from medical appointments. The Private Ambulance Service (PAS), which was chosen by the Bedfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group to provide the service earlier this year, repeatedly failed to pick patients up and there were also instances of delays.

PAS has now collapsed and the service for Bedfordshire has now returned to the East of England Ambulance Service Trust.

### **Council Tax Discounts**



The Borough Council has issued a reminder to residents that they may be eligible to receive Council Tax discounts. There are a number of exemptions or discounts in place covering, for instance; disabled people; students, and; people in residential care.

For more information see [http://www.bedford.gov.uk/advice\\_and\\_benefits/council\\_tax/application\\_forms.aspx](http://www.bedford.gov.uk/advice_and_benefits/council_tax/application_forms.aspx) or call 01234 267422.

### **Children's Centres**

Members of the Council's Children's Services Committee received a report at its meeting in September on services provided by the Council's Children's Centres.

The Children's Centres are located at sites throughout the Borough and provide an array of services including; support from health visitors and midwives; support for children with special educational needs and disabilities, and; advice on adult training and employment. For information see <http://ecpbedford.org/contact-us/> or call the Early Child Partnership, which runs the service, on 01234 341977.

### **'Mobility Hub'**

The Borough Council has teamed up with the Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity (BRCC) to provide a 'Mobility Hub' supporting those who are unable to use public transport.

Users of the 'Door to Door' service, which provides wheelchair accessible minibuses, will be able to rent electric scooters and wheelchairs from the Mobility Hub at Bedford Bus Station for a small charge. For more information see <http://bedsrcc.org.uk/mobilityhub/> or call 01234348000. For more details on the Door to Door service, see <http://bedsrcc.org.uk/door-to-door/> or call 01234838771.

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