

Borough Councillor's Report August 2022

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The Governments Energy Bills Support Scheme

The Energy Bills Support Scheme discount, equating to £400, will be administered by energy suppliers and paid to consumers over a 6-month period. Payments will start from October 2022, there is no need for residents to contact energy suppliers concerning this.

This forms part of the £37 billion cost of living assistance package for consumers over winter 2022 to 2023. A further 8 million of the most vulnerable households will be receiving £1,200 of direct support to help with the cost of living.

Household Support Grant for Winter 2022-2023

Bedford Borough Council is giving more than 50% of the Household Support Grant funding to families with children that qualify for free school meals. This will help vulnerable families on very low income to meet the cost of food and utilities during school holidays.

There is also a Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme which provides a Council Tax Support discount of 100% to households on a low income.

'Make sure you can vote' urges Bedford Borough Council

The Annual Canvass of households, to update the Electoral Register, is now live. Communications via email and/or letters have been sent to residents of Bedford Borough from the 21st July 2022 to remind them about the electoral register.

The Borough will be sending out further communications to residents that do not respond.

Clapham Road Roundabout

The roadworks at the Clapham Road roundabout are finally complete. So far they seem to be successfully regulating travel times into Bedford. However, the schools have only just gone back so it remains to be seen what difference the works make in termtime. The Borough's traffic planners have worked hard to devise the scheme and hope it works.

I have noticed driving in myself that one must be careful leaving the A6 and heading straight into town to avoid traffic queuing at the traffic lights to access the Great Ouse Way and there are still some concerns about the new slip lane turn into Manton Lane. It seems like a very sharp angle and is hard to judge the on-coming traffic from the roundabout. I understand that there have been a number of accidents at that spot due to poor visibility and that council officers have commissioned video surveys to monitor the operation of the junction. Apparently, it has passed stage 1 & 2 of a safety audit and the whole scheme is currently undergoing a stage 3 safety audit so hopefully if there are any problems they will be picked up at this stage.

Traffic lights are currently working on a fixed time basis but will eventually be linked to traffic control software so that they will then respond directly to traffic at the junctions. The decision will then be taken as to whether the traffic lights will remain on at all times or just operate during peak times. This monitoring is going on at the moment.

Bedford Borough's Active Adults courses

Booking is now open for Bedford Borough's Active Adults courses, opening the door for everyone to try a new sport or get back into a sport they used to love.

The courses all start the week commencing 26th September and last eight weeks. These beginner sessions are ideal for people who have never tried a sport or who would like to get back into sports in a relaxed environment.

All sessions are situated in Bedford Borough with many available in the villages.

With such a large range of sporting activities, there is something for everyone across Bedford Borough. From badminton and tennis, golf, indoor bowls, yoga, pilates, to walking football and swing dancing. I hope residents will take part in these fantastic activities.

There is no need to have any special clothes or equipment, and everyone is welcome. Find out more about all of these courses at www.bedford.gov.uk/activeadults

Fusion Leisure Centres

Fusion currently runs all of the leisure centres in the Borough. This includes Robinson pool, Kempston pool, Oasis, The Bunyan centre and Mowsbury Park Golf club along with Blue Peris in Wales and the Kempston outdoor centre. The contract is due for renewal in 2023 so the Council is currently looking at alternative local providers to try and determine what will be the best way to successfully run the facilities for the benefit of Borough residents.

Elstow Solar Farm goes live

Bedford Borough Council's new solar farm has been fully energised and is now exporting low-carbon electricity to the grid.

The project has cost £4.15m with Bedford Borough Council investing over £2.2million. The project was awarded more than £1.8million from the South East Midlands Enterprise Partnership (SEMLEP) with additional support from HM Government via the Getting Building Fund.

The Elstow Solar Farm is going to play an instrumental role in the council meeting its ambition of becoming net-zero by 2030.

Borough Council Commissions Theatre Company to Raise Awareness of Air Quality Initiatives

Bedford Borough Council's Sustainable Transport team has been raising awareness of factors that affect air quality in order to encourage behaviour that will help to reduce pollution. Using DEFRA's Air Quality Grant 2020-21, the Council has arranged for a professional theatre company to visit ten schools in the Borough to perform a live show about air pollution, which investigates the causes and concerns of air quality and promotes safe, sustainable travel.

Students in Year 5 and 6 at four schools from Bedford's Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) and six of school outside of the AQMA had been invited to watch the performance.

These schools were chosen because of the good progress they have shown in promoting active travel to their students and parents.

The show is an engaging and interactive performance, which offers pupils practical advice and information about how they can make a positive impact on both their local environment and their health by helping to improve air quality. The Sustainable Transport team has also been visiting these schools and running awareness campaigns. The children are educated about how to reduce idling (turning engines off), improve air quality around the school and how to spot lichen. The lichen lessons involve taking pupils on a walk outside of school to discover different types of lichen and its relationship to air pollution.

It is great to see the Borough putting funding by Central Government to good use. It is important that we raise awareness of and educate our youngsters on how they can take active steps to drive down emissions and improve air quality. The Government continues to invest in a sustainable future for the next generations. Investments such as £2 billion over five years which will deliver thousands of miles of safe, continuous, direct routes for cycling in towns and cities. Supporting delivery of 4,000 new zero emission buses and the infrastructure needed to support them.

If you represent a school or have a child of school age? You can speak to the Council's Sustainable Transport team about them visiting a school by emailing sustainable.transport@bedford.gov.uk.