

Borough Councillor Update – June 2020

**Contact Borough Councillor Alison Foster by telephone on 07773371190
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Coronavirus in Bedford Borough

As of Saturday 28th June there were more than 800 confirmed cases of COVID19 across Bedford Borough with more than 200 deaths confirmed at Bedford Hospital. This is one of the highest rates in the country and as a result the Borough Council is working with Public Health England and the Joint Biosecurity Centre to investigate why rates of infection here aren't falling as quickly as other areas and how to take action to bring the rates down.

While Bedford Borough is not currently seeing a spike in the virus, rates of infection remain high compared to other areas. Therefore it is important that everyone continues to stay at home as much as possible. If you need to go out keep two metres apart, wear a face covering (particularly on public transport), and regularly wash your hands.

Updated advice from the Borough Council is available here:

<https://www.bedford.gov.uk/social-care-health-and-community/public-health/coronavirus/>

Local Outbreak Control Plan for Bedford

With the introduction of the NHS Test and Trace programme Councils were asked to produce a Local Outbreak Control Plan. These plans set out how local authorities will work with communities and partners to prevent and respond to local issues and situations related to coronavirus and slow the spread of infection. The plan also provides a specific focus on measures to support those who maybe more vulnerable to the effects of coronavirus.

As a key part of the NHS Test and Trace programme, the plan also describes how any local residents developing symptoms associated with COVID-19 can get tested and how mobile testing units may be used to provide tests to specific locations within the Borough. It also explains how the Test and Trace programme will identify and inform people who have been in contact with someone with the infection so they can self-isolate to limit further spread.

Local Outbreak Engagement Board

For oversight and delivery of the Local Outbreak Control Plan, the Borough Council has set up a "Local Outbreak Engagement Board" of which I am a member. The next meeting of the Board, which will be a public meeting held virtually, takes place on Thursday 2nd July at 5pm and will then meet weekly thereafter.

Details for meeting on 2nd July:

<http://www.councillorsupport.bedford.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=706&MId=5368>

Social distancing from 4th July

Whilst the national rules on social gatherings are changing with effect from Saturday 4th July, because of the high infection rate in the Borough, the Mayor and I, along with others on the Local Engagement Board, believe it is essential that people continue to keep acting responsibly

and to slow the spread of the virus and avoid a local lockdown. It is crucial that we all continue to stay at home as much as possible. If you need to go out, I would recommend continuing to keep two metres apart, wear a face covering on public transport and continue to regularly wash your hands with soap.

Re-opening of pubs, hairdressers, restaurants and other businesses from 4th July

Alongside the change to national social distancing rules, there will be a re-opening of a number of businesses starting on Saturday 4th July. Premises are having to implement measures to continue social distancing, but owing to the high infection rates in Bedford, I would advise people to continue with 2m where possible and to be responsible with alcohol consumption, which we know impairs judgement.

Mass gatherings in parks and open spaces

Again, please avoid mass gatherings in parks and open spaces. Whilst I understand how frustrating the lockdown has been, the behaviour seen at beaches, parks and street parties around the country is irresponsible in the current circumstances.

Borough Council Meetings

All Council Meetings are now running virtually. It's not ideal, but it does allow for democracy to continue and for public participation.

Planning Applications

I requested a return to 'normal' decision making by the full Planning Committee and to revoke the temporary powers that were given to Planning Officers, at the start of the COVID19 period, to make decisions on applications. I felt it was now possible with virtual meetings to return to the normal planning process, however this was voted down at the last meeting of the Planning Committee on a party vote.

Borough Council Services

Please check the Borough website www.bedford.gov.uk for the latest on Council services. Conscious that we are in a fast moving situation, the website is being frequently updated.

Waste collections

Green waste collections are currently made on a monthly basis rather than the usual fortnightly collection. I have seen a number of green bins put out at Wixams still on a fortnightly basis, alongside orange recycling bins. I would encourage residents to check their collection date on the Council website:

<https://www.bedford.gov.uk/rubbish-recycling-and-waste/household-bins-and-recycling/check-bin-collection-day/>

Bedford Household Waste Recycling Centre (HWRC)

The HWRC is now open again, since 17 June, but is using an appointment system and there are major changes to how the site will operate. Everyone booking an appointment will be given

a 15 minute slot which can be booked up to 14 days in advance. Further information and a link to the appointment booking can be found here:

<https://www.bedford.gov.uk/rubbish-recycling-and-waste/local-recycling-sites/household-waste-recycling-centre/>

Borough Community Hub

The Community Hub remains open to assist those requiring support during COVID19

Contact: **01234 718 101**

Bedford Borough Local Plan

The Borough has only recently adopted the Local Plan 2030, but as part of the requirements of the Planning Inspector, is now undertaking a Local Plan Review, which will take us up to 2040 or beyond. This will need to consider future development growth and take into consideration things such as the Oxford-Cambridge Arc and East West Rail.

The Borough is looking at options, which the Mayor presented to Councillors a couple of weeks ago. He will be considering whether to look at: new large developments of between 4,500 to 6,000 homes each, town centre growth; expanding villages; or a mixture of each. During the last Local Plan process 3 very large developments were put forward in our area, each ranging from between 4,55 – 6,000 homes at Twinwoods, Thurleigh Airfield and Colworth in Sharnbrook. If you consider that the Wixams development is approved for 4,500 homes and as yet only 2,000 have been built you will get an idea of the scale of development the Mayor is looking for.

The review starts with a call for sites and there is a public consultation which closes at 5pm on 4th September. Last time the organisation of the LP was a complete shambles with constant reviews and revisions and sites in and out. This time the timetable is extremely tight, so the Council will be under added pressure to get things done.

Details of the report to the Borough Executive are available here:

<http://www.councillorsupport.bedford.gov.uk/documents/s50210/Item%2009%20Local%20Plan%20Review%20and%20SCI.pdf>

The consultation document is available here:

<https://edrms.bedford.gov.uk/OpenDocument.aspx?id=ajXyWpiQOSjbXJMPuCUZyw%3d%3d&name=Appendix%20A%20Issues%20and%20Options%20Paper.pdf>

Borough ward boundary review

The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) has now re-opened their review of ward boundaries for Bedford Borough. The new deadline for public responses to the review is 20 July.