

Borough Councillor Update – April 2018

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Local Plan 2035 Update

The Council's latest consultation on its draft Local Plan, setting out preferred sites for the development of around 8000 homes to the year 2035, ended on the 29th March.

Planning officers will now review the responses. Following this, the Mayor's Executive will decide whether or not to make any amendments to the document. If changes are made, there may be a requirement for a further round of consultation. If not, it is possible that the Local Plan for submission will go to a vote of all councillors at a meeting in May.

If and when the Local Plan is approved by Councillors, it will then be submitted to the Planning Inspectorate. The role of the Planning Inspectorate is to make comments and, where appropriate, suggestions for modifications so that the Local Plan complies with national policies and legal requirements. Local authorities are not obliged to take on board the views of the Planning Inspector, but doing so could assist in ensuring the Local Plan is deemed to be 'sound' should it be subject to challenge from developers in the future. Depending on the workload of the Planning Inspectorate at the time of submission, it may take several months for the Council's Local Plan to be reviewed.

National Planning Policy Framework

Running parallel to the Council's development of the Local Plan is a consultation being held by the Government on updating its National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), its main planning policy document. This is proposing the introduction of a standard methodology across England for use by councils in assessing how many homes they need to develop through their Local Plans, which would replace the current system of councils determining their own housing targets.

Initial figures showed that under the new methodology the Council would have to account for the development of around 14,000 new homes in its Local Plan, compared with its own figure of 8000. This increased target will not apply if the Council submits its Local Plan before the updated NPPF, and the new methodology, are published. The latest indications are that the NPPF will not be published until the summer and that local authorities will have a further 6 months after that date to submit their Local Plan without being subject to the new standard housing need methodology. This means that the Borough Council is likely to have until early 2019 to submit its Local Plan, thus allowing more time to consider alternative sites for development if necessary.

Hospital Merger

The Chief Executives of Bedford Hospital and Luton & Dunstable Hospital attended a meeting of the Council's Adult Services and Health Committee on the 6th March to provide an update on their merger plan.

They reported that there has been a delay meaning that the original merger target date of April 2018, which was deemed to be 'ambitious', will be missed. This is due to the need for further discussions with NHS England, the Department for Health and NHS Improvement around the financial arrangements underpinning the merger.

Included in the merger business case is a request for around £150m of capital investment across both hospital sites. Thus far, the hospitals have submitted 2 bids for funding but have not been successful, although it was acknowledged that other hospitals which did receive funds were further ahead in the queue. Both Chief Executives stated that they were optimistic that the merger would be supported with capital when the Government releases its next round of funding, possibly in the summer.

Bedford Health Village (Gilbert Hitchcock House)

On a related note, the Government has allocated an indicative sum of £6m to redevelop the Bedford Health Village (Gilbert Hitchcock House) site on Kimbolton Road to become an 'integrated healthcare hub', providing GP, specialist, community and mental health services. This will see the relocation of 3 GP surgeries (namely Pemberley, De Parys and Goldington) onto the site and will also lead to existing hospital services provided at the Health Village being moved to the main Bedford Hospital site.

Potholes

The Borough Council has received £305k from the Government to undertake pothole repairs. This is in response to the recent sub-zero temperatures which have caused damage to roads across the country.

Adult Disability Sport

Bedford International Athletics Stadium (BIAS) and the Bunyan Centre provide a range of sports and activities for adults (16+) with disabilities and additional needs:

- Between 1.45pm – 2.45pm on Mondays at BIAS there are a range of sports to try such as badminton, basketball and football amongst many others.
- Disability football sessions are held at BIAS on Mondays from 10.30am – 11.30am.
- The Bunyan Centre provides activities including table tennis and tennis on Tuesdays from 5.30pm – 6.30pm, as well as tea and coffee from 6.30pm.

The cost is £3 per session, which can be paid on the day, and attendees can be accompanied by a carer for free. For more information contact haylee.elphee@bedford.gov.uk or call 01234718839.

Bedford Park Survey

The Council is undertaking a 'customer satisfaction' survey of Bedford Park. This allows residents to give their views as well as suggest improvements.

Responses can be given via www.forms.bedford.gov.uk/bp or hard copy at Bedford Central Library and Putnoe Library. The deadline is the 4th June.