

Borough Council Report to Parish Councils February 2021

Local Matters

East West Rail – Route E

A number of North Beds Parish Councils and other interested organisations and residents are seeking to force a further consultation and reconsideration of the Borough's decision to sign a memorandum of agreement giving support to Route E of the proposed E-W Railway. This was not put to Full Council and Councillors were not given the opportunity to debate the choice of this route or even to agree the preferred route. This could potentially open the door to large scale residential development in our north Beds area and the construction of large new towns of 6,000-10,000 homes at Twinwoods and 4,500 at Colworth.

The petition states that there has been no proper consultation by the Council or public debate on East-West Rail before reaching a decision that will adversely affect thousands of residents, both in Bedford and surrounding rural areas. Route E will lead to significant noise and disruption for residents of both Bedford and the rural areas, both in the construction and ongoing use of the railway. Since EWR's consultations on route options, there has emerged a clear and increasing demand for the use of the railway for freight traffic to and from the East Coast ports, the noise from which, especially at night, will significantly adversely affect all those living near the proposed route, not just in the rural areas, but in the town as well.

If you wish to view the petition which runs from 02/02/2021 to 16/03/2021 see the link below.

[ePetition - Bedford BC's support for East West Rail Route E - Bedford Borough Council](#)

There is also a FB page at:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/fightingewrroutee>

The Borough's Response to the E/W rail consultation can be found through this link below:

[BBC-EWR-Response-March-2019-with-key-paras-highlighted.pdf \(cprebeds.org.uk\)](#)

East-West Rail funding for track laying between Bicester and Bletchley

The impact of East-West Rail link which is due to come through Bedford is still not established. A £760m fund will be spent to break ground on a new railway link between Oxford and Cambridge. The cash from the Department of Transport will be used to lay track along a disused railway line between Bicester and Bletchley, in Buckinghamshire, with services scheduled to begin in 2025. It is intended a second section of track could be laid between Bletchley and Bedford by 2028.

More information available here: <https://rosettapublishing.com/bulletin/2021/01/23/east-west-rail-funding-for-track-laying-between-bicester-and-bletchley/>

Petition to improve flood defences

Over the Christmas period we experienced throughout the Borough severe flood conditions both as a result of water run-off from the saturated fields and the river Great Ouse. A number of properties were flooded in Odell, Harrold and Carlton as a result. The Borough's resilience team has been

visiting those affected properties and will be collating the evidence of their findings into a report which will identify areas of improvement. Borough officers have also been working closely with the Environment Agency to establish what went wrong in terms of flood warnings and improvements that can be made.

A flood plan was drawn up following the floods in 2015 but there appear to be a number of actions which are still ongoing from this plan. A petition was presented to Full Council at the last meeting and will be debated at the next meeting on 24th February seeking a review of the causes of the local flooding and to seek improvements to the flood defences. It also asks for more action to be taken to increase flood protection in the Borough. You can find more information here:

<http://chng.it/VYvBwZ8q>

Bedford News

Improvement Works Set To Begin on Bedford High Street

Through the Transporting Bedford project, Bedford's High Street is set have a regeneration makeover, becoming one lane only for traffic permanently and creating more space for shoppers and pedestrians. Bedford's High Street has been one lane for a number of months now, with temporary barriers put in place to help people social distance during the coronavirus pandemic.

This new and permanent scheme will see a different road layout with wider pavements on both sides of the road. Works will be starting in February with the improvements expected to be complete by the end of November 2021. Works will be undertaken in stages so that the whole road will not be closed at once and the work is being carefully planned with businesses to maintain access. The length of the road from St Peters Street to Mill Street will be closed from February until July, with this length then re-opened and the southern half of the street down to the Embankment then closing. Signed diversions will be in place.

As part of these works, permanent loading and short-term parking bays will be installed to help shops along the High Street function and to attract shoppers, wider pavements will be created using high quality York paving and granite kerbstones, and the 20mph speed limit will be enforced by average speed cameras.

Budget 2021/22

Bedford Borough Council has approved an increase in core Council Tax of 1.99% supplemented by a 1.75% Adult Social Care Precept, totalling 3.74% giving an average Band D Council Tax of £1,624.14 which will be discussed at Full Council on Wednesday 3rd February.

You can find more details about the budget proposals here:

<http://www.councillorsupport.bedford.gov.uk/documents/s53056/Item%2014%20-%20Revenue%20Budget%202021-22.pdf>

There will also be a Full Council on Wednesday 24th February to finalise the completed budget to include the precepts of Police & Crime Commissioner for Bedfordshire, the Bedfordshire Fire & Rescue Authority and the Parish Councils.

eCargo bikes join Bedford Borough's delivery fleet

The addition of six eCargo bikes to the Council's vehicle fleet has been welcomed by councillors and businesses keen to see greener and more sustainable transport solutions in the Borough. The bikes, bought following a successful funding bid to the Department for Transport, are two or three wheeled electric-powered vehicles that can be used to transport bulky items. Bedford was among 18 local authorities to successfully bid for the funding. Four of the bikes will become part of the Sustainable Transport team's vehicle fleet to support their work with schools and at events, within the Street Cleansing Team, and at Harrold-Odell Country Park for park maintenance.

Bedford River Festival postponed until 2022

The Council has confirmed that the River Festival – already postponed from 2020 until this Summer – and also the Kite and Motoring Festival are being postponed until 2022. As one of the largest free festivals in the UK, Bedford River Festival takes months of planning, made harder by changing Covid-19 (coronavirus) guidelines and the uncertainty around mass participation events later this summer. The bi-annual River Festival was originally due to take place in the summer of 2020, but the growing pandemic meant it was postponed until 2021. The planned new date for the next River Festival is 23 and 24 July 2022. The Council has said it will continue to keep traders, exhibitors, local residents and businesses informed.

Borough COVID Information

As of the 31st Jan in Bedford there have been 11,825 cases since the start of the Pandemic and 670 registered cases in Bedford in the last 7 days up to 31st January. This means there have been 386.6 people per 100,000 in Bedford, even though this is a decrease of 98.1 per 100,000 in the last week, these numbers still show how rapidly the virus is currently spreading. At the Mayor's latest briefing he stated that the numbers were declining at a slow rate and it was important that everyone does their bit to keep everyone safe.

If you would like the latest COVID snapshot please find it below:

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

COVID test centres in Bedford

There is continued testing in Bedford at Borough Hall and Prebend Street car parks as well as University of Bedfordshire's Polhill Campus. Test results from these sites should come back with 24-72 hours. The government has updated its advice on testing. If you have any of the symptoms of Coronavirus, you can ask for a test through the NHS website or phone 119.

There are two walk through testing centres in Bedford for residents showing symptoms of Coronavirus. Drive-through testing is available 6 days/week at Gilbert Hitchcock House, Bedford Hospital and 5 days/week at Borough Hall. Both can be booked through the national testing website.

If you're an essential worker (see list [here](#)) you can apply for priority testing through GOV.UK by following the guidance for essential workers on the government website. You can also get tested through this route if you have symptoms of coronavirus and live with an essential worker.

If you are unable to get to a testing centre, you can order a home testing kit through the national testing website. For further details look here: <https://www.bedford.gov.uk/social-care-health-and-community/public-health/coronavirus/covid-19-testing/>