

Report to Kempston Rural Parish meeting 21st March.

I am not sure if you are aware, but Michael Gleeson is leaving Wootton Upper school at the end of this term after 37 years of service, there will be interim cover till a new head joins in September this year. I wish him well in his retirement,

I attended a meeting last week with Alistair our new M.P. and members of the rural Police to discuss issues in rural areas. Top of the list was speeding, E scooters and county lines (coming out of town into rural areas). More rural officers are being recruited with more patrols in our area.

Please note that you only have to end of next week to submit any requests to Highways to consider in there 2024/2025 budget for re-surfacing of roads and pavements in Kempston Rural, any issues I or Sue Abood will be able to assist. It would also be a good idea to request ASC or other speed reducing measures.

Regards

John wheeler

Now for the Borough report.

- **Council potentially owed millions in uncollected capital receipts.**

The Executive have been investigating the disaggregation agreement between Bedford Borough Council (BBC) and Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC) to ensure all money BBC is owed has been collected.

A preliminary investigation has uncovered various pieces of land noted in the disaggregation agreement that have either been sold off or developed. But the Borough has received no capital receipts for and/or failed to collect this for successive years.

A very significant amount of land (199.167 acres) is being investigated which could have resulted in a significant amount of money, that could have prevented cuts to services and eased financial pressures for many prior years, being completely missed out on.

The Executive is now working with its Officers and CBC to further investigate the status lands the Borough believes it has not received capital receipts and will pursue all measures to ensure any money owed, is collected.

- **LTA Funding under threat after opposition motion**

At the Full Council on the 28th February, a motion had been passed by opposition parties instructing the Council break the already agreed terms and conditions for funding by the LTA for the Borough's Tennis courts.

As the demands of the motion directly impact the Tennis Courts under the LTA agreement, the £400,000 worth of grant money is now under threat. This means all the dangerous courts in Bedford Borough will not be refurbished and will continue to fall into an extreme state of disrepair which would lead to them eventually closing permanently.

No alternative, maintenance plan or other options were supplied by opposition parties in the event of losing the LTA funding.

- **Tennis Court maintenance**

An assessment of the Council's Tennis Courts was undertaken by Knight, Kavanagh & Page before local elections last year.

Table 1

Park	Number of Courts	Current Condition
Addison Howard Park	3	Good
Allen Park	2	Poor
Bedford Park	9	Poor
Linden Road	2	Good
Mowsbury Park	8	Poor
Russell Park	3	Poor
Southfields Park	3	Poor

The results found that 25 out of 30 (83%) of Tennis courts were considered poor and potentially a liability to the Council due to a lack of maintenance. Without a maintenance programme the Courts would eventually be lost for good.

To give an indication of what the Council previously spent vs what is required for effective and meaningful Tennis Court maintenance, we can use Bedford Park as an example.

From May 2023 – 2017 (6 years), the Council had not undertaken significant maintenance work over the Bedford Park Tennis Courts outside of replacing tennis nets and undertaking chemical treatments for moss over that period.

Replacing tennis nets and spraying courts would be undertaken 2 – 3 times per year. This equates to a Council spend of £3300 on the Bedford Park tennis courts over the last 6 years. The lack of maintenance has resulted in Bedford Park tennis courts now being considered dangerous and in serious need of maintenance.

In order to maintain the Courts, the Council would have needed a sinking fund of around £1,200 per courts per year to resurface, reline each court depending on use and location. This means the Council would have needed to set aside £71,400 over the last 6 years to effectively maintain the 9 tennis courts at Bedford Park to keep them in a good condition. Extrapolate this out to 2009 and the figure would be nearing £200,000.

To help address the lack of maintenance the Council has now secured a £400,000 of funding from the Government and the LTA Tennis Foundation to improve the courts through resurfacing, repainting and the installation of new gate-access technology and an online booking system. This is now under threat due the motion passed at the February Full Council.

- **Free Car Parking Success**

To help encourage visitors into the Town Centre Allhallows Multi Storey Car Park offered 4 hours free parking on a trial basis for 6 months. During this period there was increase in over 40,000 additional car parking in our Town Centre with no determinantal effect on air quality.

The Council is now considering the extension of free car parking and consideration is being given to extending four hours free car parking at Lurke Street from October 2024;

- **Bus service**

For the last 13 years the whole of the Borough's bus service operations and routes have not been reviewed additionally, unsuccessful bids for fund means Bedford Borough only receives a small amount (£546k) the Bus Service Improvement Plan.

To put that into prospective Luton and Central Bedfordshire received £19.1m and £3.7m respectively. So, the £546k was a consolation prize in 23/24, we will receive the same amount again in 24/25.

Despite the financial pressure and historic lack of management, the current administration will be conducting a long overdue review of the whole bus service operations and routes. They are also looking at some new models of operation to see if smaller buses in the rural areas might be able to feed into more main routes.

- **SEND School and update**

Despite financial pressures the Council is building a £26million SEND school in Kempston at the former site of Robert Bruce Middle School and will have places for 200 children and young people from across Bedford Borough.

The children attending this new school will predominantly have profound and multiple learning disabilities, severe learning disabilities and autism and will be open in phases and is on track to be delivered on time.

- **Household Support Grant**

The Government announcement in the Budget the extension of the Household Support Fund, it will be a 6-month settlement and Bedford Borough Council is anticipating £1.2million based on previous allocations.

The Council will continue, with help of the funding, continue offer school holiday meals vouchers for our families most in need.

Through finding an affordable provider, the Council offers a buyback school meal service to help schools procure affordable school meals – this contract ended at the end of the previous school year which required the Council to find a new provider.

- **Caterlink/Free School Meals**

The Council previously offered a School Meals service through its contract with Caterlink however, before the local elections in May last year the contract was up for renewal.

The original tender was agreed by the previous administration, this tender received no bids as potential contractors cited issues with the price cap and costs as barriers to bidding. This left the Council in a difficult position as there was insufficient lead-time afforded to make it viable for the Council to re-tender the contract or for schools to undertake individual re-tender.

Instead of ceasing the service, which would result in schools struggling to meet their statutory duty to provide a school meal service, the Council renegotiated with the incumbent contractor Caterlink to continue to offer the school meal service. The Council sought to negotiate the best price possible for

schools however, due to increases in food costs and other factors the price of school meals had increased.

There have been suggestions there are reserves which can be used to help mitigate the increase cost however, this is untrue. The reserves mentioned are there to be used for the maintenance and upkeep of the kitchen equipment of the schools that are part of the service as well as pay for the administration and oversight of the service. If these reserves are used to try and decrease the cost of school meals, this would leave schools in a vulnerable position if their equipment had broken down as there would be insufficient funding to support with replacement and repairs.

The contract is not being renewed for the next coming year and Council is working extensively with schools to help them procure their own school meal providers, Schools have a statutory duty to provide these meals and children entitled to free school meals will still receive free school meals.