

## **Borough Councillor Report – November 2024 – Cllr Sue Abood**

### **News from the Council**

Full council hasn't met since 9<sup>th</sup> October with the next meeting taking place on 27<sup>th</sup> November.

Since the last report, my colleagues and I have called in the decision made by the executive to look to buy the Lloyds Bank building in Bedford for £450,000 over the suggested valuation of the property. The building is derelict on the top floor with a pigeon infestation. This call in will be heard at a special meeting of the Budget Overview and Scrutiny committee taking place on 11<sup>th</sup> December.

You may have heard in the local press recently that the executive are proposing to close the Oasis swimming pool despite spending £338,000 on it earlier this year when the new leisure providers took over. Residents were promised at the time that the pool would remain open. This closure will leave those living south of the river with no local swimming pool. Mohammed Yasin MP has asked to meet the mayor to discuss it.

The Executive are preparing their budget for the 2025/26 year and the Medium Term Financial Strategy indicates that there will be a budget gap of £15.6million. The council are proposing an efficiency plan to attempt to save £10.8million but this will still leave a gap. The efficiency plan does detail some concerning changes which we will be keeping an eye on.

Fees and charges across all services are also rising with a proposed 10% rise in car parking charges along with an increase in charges for resident parking permits.

The Executive are trying to start looking at a 10 year programme of capital works which includes borrowing £30.4million for their 'Leisure Vision' and £16 million to extend the Corn Exchange. Borrowing will peak at £156 million up from £60 million at the end of the last administration and they claim to limit borrow to £147.4m by March 2036, though this doesn't take into account any new situations that may become apparent between now and then. They are also proposing to borrow money to cover annual expenditure which has historically been covered by revenue. At a time when Adult and Child Social Care costs are rising and some councils going bankrupt or teetering on the edge, we need to be careful that vanity projects are not undertaken at the expense of council solvency.

The council are also looking at cuts to bus funding of approximately £300k which is a reduction of 40% in funding for the supported bus services over the next year. This includes a reduction of the current rural bus network as a first phase. The government have pledged to provide money for bus services and it remains to be seen how much that will be and where it will be spent.

At the last Health Overview and Scrutiny committee on 4<sup>th</sup> November we received a report regarding cancer services across Bedford Borough. This stemmed from a discussion about the Mount Vernon Hospital relocation and why so many patients from one surgery were receiving treatment at Mount Vernon – this was due to the nature of their cancer and the specialism that Mount Vernon provides. While we were reassured to see that cancer identification in the borough is above the ICB average, participation in screening programmes is lower than it could

be with Breast screening having a 58.4% uptake, cervical screening a 68.2% uptake and bowel screening a 65.3% uptake.

We also received a report from the East of England Ambulance Service NHS Trust on their performance between January and September 2024. The report shows a deterioration in response times with a 26% increase in the number of hours lost to handover delays at hospitals. Handovers at Bedford Hospital are on average 17 mins and 42 seconds with the national mandate being 15 mins. Only 62% of handovers at Bedford Hospital were within this 15 minute window but only 19% were within at the Luton and Dunstable hospital. The trust have various plans to bring down both the response times and handover times and how they will work to improve the patient experience and outcomes.

We also received the financial plan from East London NHS Foundation Trust (ELFT) who provide various services within the BLMK area, most notably the mental health services. As with all NHS trusts, they are expected to make savings in the 24/25 financial year, with their required savings totalling £29 million, and there had been concerns about how this would affect services locally. In Bedford and Luton, the savings amount to £5.5 million and while this sounds like a lot, this is in line with, or less than, other NHS providers. Across their trust, they had to make £20 million of savings last year. The committee expressed its concerns about a reduction in service for patients in the area and requested that ELFT keep the committee informed of any impact to patients of their efficiency plans.

### **East West Rail**

You may be aware that in the recent Government budget, funds were pledged to complete the East West Rail project. EWR company are currently undertaking a consultation and residents are welcome to attend any of the consultation events below. Further information on the routes and plans can be found on the EWR website - <https://eastwestrail.co.uk/>

30 November (12pm-5pm) – The Grand Hall, The Sixth Form, Bromham Road, Bedford  
6 December (2pm-7pm) – Lidlington Village Hall, High Street, Lidlington  
9 December (2pm-7pm) – Bedford Swan Hotel and Thermal Spa, The Embankment, Bedford  
11 December (2pm-7pm) – Wilden Village Hall, High Street, Wilden  
13 December (2pm-7pm) – Stuart Memorial Hall, Church Street, Tempsford  
7 January (2pm-7pm) – St Neots Town Football Club, Kester Way, St Neots  
17 January (2pm-7pm) – The Summerlin Centre, Woburn Sands Station Road, Woburn Sands

### **Local Issues**

It was an honour to attend the Remembrance service and parade on 10<sup>th</sup> November with Angie. I laid a wreath as Borough Councillor for Kempston Rural with Angie laying the wreath from the parish council. As always it was wonderful to see so many young people taking part and a large number of people joining the parade.

I have chased BPHA regarding the purchase of the land on Wood End Road and am still awaiting a response.

Having chased Andrew Prigmore last week about the yellow lines in Wood End, he replied on Monday with the new plan for discussion at the Parish council meeting. They will go out in the press within 2 weeks for consultation.

I have also chased Rickie Dawes about the repairs to the pavements in Wood End. These were marked out with areas needing patch repair over 16 months ago now and no repairs have been started yet. While they may have been waiting for the fiberoptic broadband installation to be completed, this work was finished some time ago. I have just found out, after chasing again, that work to repair these sections of the pavement will start on 2<sup>nd</sup> December.

I downloaded the speed sign data on 19<sup>th</sup> November and it shows that 13.95% of people were speeding and the maximum speed between 17<sup>th</sup> October and 19<sup>th</sup> November was 70mph. Between those dates there were only 5 hours where no one drove over the speed limit. It is unfortunate that the number of people speeding is less than 15% as that is the threshold to be considered for average speed cameras.

As always, I continue to hold my surgeries with those in Kempston Rural taking place on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday of the month – 10 – 11am opposite the Cross Keys and 11.15 – 12pm at Gibraltar Corner. My next session will be 21<sup>st</sup> December.