

Kempston Rural Parish Council – Borough Councillor report – Sue Abood, March 2025

Council news:

Since the last parish council meeting, Full Council has met (26th February). It will also be meeting on 19th March.

During questions from members of the council, my colleague raised the issue of litter with the Mayor as both myself and colleagues have been receiving complaints from residents and raising concerns themselves about the growing build-up of litter along the A421. Unfortunately, the Mayor was unable to provide an update on when the next clean-up is scheduled, which is deeply concerning.

With £165,000 cut from the grounds maintenance and street cleansing budget, it is a concern that this situation is one that we may see more often. Even National Highways has acknowledged the severity of the issue, stating: *"We too have noticed that the build-up in places has become quite severe. Unfortunately, we are a little powerless when it comes to this as the responsibility lies with Bedford Borough Council."*

This issue isn't just about litter—it's about the first impression people get when they enter Bedford Borough. Whether it's visitors, potential investors, or those travelling through to our villages in the south, a neglected and litter-strewn roadside does not reflect well on our area. While the administration pat themselves on the back for cleaning Bedford Town Centre, we will continue to push for litter picking across the borough and action on the issue along the A421.

The main contentious point within the full council meeting was the Council Tax resolution for the coming year. As mentioned in my last report, council tax is to rise by the maximum permitted amount of 4.99%. For Kempston Rural this means a Band D property will now pay £2334.62 and in Wootton £2398.10.

My colleagues and I voted against this increase as I don't believe the budget offers good value for money for residents and the budget is unlikely to balance at the end of the year, but also due to the special area charges. Everyone in the borough pays special area charges to pay for the upkeep of green areas within their ward. De Parys ward, for example, pays special area charges towards the upkeep of Bedford Park. The new estate in Great Denham and Kempston West has open spaces within it and it is written in the deeds of the houses there that residents should pay an open space management fee for the upkeep of those green areas. Most people on a new estate will have an equivalent clause in their deeds. The difference in the case of Great Denham and Kempston West is that the open space management company, instead of being a commercial company in the case of the vast majority of new estates, is the council. The deputy mayor in his manifesto before the last election promised to get rid of these open space management charges for residents in Great Denham. And so a decision was made by the executive that the council will pay the open space management charges for those houses in Great Denham and Kempston West, adding £300,000 a year to the council's budget. CIPFA (Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy) stated that the special area charges in Great Denham and Kempston West should be changed to reflect this ensuring that people in Great Denham and Kempston West paid for the upkeep of the land there. Instead the council have chosen to go against CIPFA's advice and now all residents in the borough are paying for the upkeep of this land. So for example, residents on new estates in Wootton pay open space management charges for their estate as well as their council tax, and parish precept, and now

they are also paying for the open space management charges for Great Denham and Kempston West.

The Health Overview and Scrutiny committee (HOSC) met in a workshop at the beginning of March to review the findings from the GP Access work we have been undertaking through the last two years. This has meant scrutinising all areas of GP access from appointments at the surgery to digital access. A series of recommendations to the ICB and full council were put together and these will be formally approved at the next HOSC meeting taking place at the end of March.

Bedford Borough Rural Affairs Committee

The next Rural Affairs Committee will be held on Thursday 3rd April. Our Liberal Democrat spokesperson, Cllr Jon Abbott (Clapham and Oakley) will be attending. Please let me know if there are any issues from Kempston Rural which he can raise for us.

Local issues:

Verges along Box End Road - I am planning on asking a question at the full council meeting on Wednesday 19th March about the pavement along Box End Road. It is nearly a year since I was told that the clearing of the pavement would be added to the work programme and still the work has not started. When I chased the work at the end of January stating I was going to ask about it at Full Council I was told the work would be done in February. We are now mid-March and nothing has happened. I will report back verbally at the meeting with the outcome.

Purchase of land Wood End Road – I still have not heard an outcome from BPHA regarding the purchase of the land but continue to chase.

The double yellow lines were installed in Wood End at the end of February and I understand they have been successful (at times) in stopping people parking in those areas.

Speed sign: I will update on figures from the speed sign verbally during the meeting as I've been delayed in being able to download the information.

I continue to work on case work for residents and hold my monthly surgeries. As always, I continue to hold my surgeries with those in Kempston Rural taking place on the 3rd Saturday of the month – 10 – 11am opposite the Cross Keys and 11.15 – 12pm at Gibraltar Corner. My next session will be 15th March 2025 in Kempston Rural.