

Borough Council Report to Parish Councils February 2021

Death of Captain Sir Tom Moore

Last week Captain Sir Tom Moore died in Bedford Hospital.

For those who wish to, there is a book of condolences to leave tributes to Captain Sir Tom Moore at the following website:

<http://www.sirtom.org/>

Petition to improve flood defences

Over the Christmas period there were worrying floods in the borough and this is becoming a more regular occurrence. Investigations revealed that the [current flood action](#) plan was drawn up in September 2015 whilst there was another [risk assessment](#) in November 2020 it is unclear to see how it follows from the action plan in 2015. In the 2015 plan there are a number of actions which are still ongoing and it is unclear whether they have been completed. Therefore, a petition has been started by the Conservative Group to review the causes of the local flooding and 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/VYvBwZ8g>

The Petition was presented by Cllr Jim Weir and will be debated at a Full Council in the near future. Any comments on flood defences can be submitted to Stephen.vallance@bedford.gov.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/>

Improvement Works Set To Begin on Bedford High Street

Through the Transporting Bedford project, Bedford's High Street is set have a high quality 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, 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 have 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 their 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.

Tesco confirms Midland Road closure but plans new Express store in town centre

Tesco have confirmed that they will be closing their Metro store on Midland Road in Bedford town centre.

However, in a letter to Bedford & Kempston MP, Mohammad Yasin, the company said they were, “actively working on plans to open a Tesco Express in the town centre.”

In the letter, Tesco said that all staff members would be offered alternative roles at nearby stores.

The difference between a Tesco ‘Metro’ and an ‘Express’ is that a ‘Metro’ is generally bigger offering a wider range of products whereas ‘Express’ is closer to an off-license style of shop.

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.

One each have also been loaned to the University of Bedfordshire and Flamme Rouge Cycles.

In leading by example, the Council hopes that other local organisations and businesses will be encouraged to explore low carbon transport

Bedford River Festival postponed until 2022

The Council has today 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.

COVID-19 update

The United Kingdom was placed into a National Lockdown on Monday 4 January. You must not leave, or be outside of your home except where necessary.

Colleges, primary (reception onwards) and secondary schools remain open for vulnerable children and the children of critical workers. All other children will learn remotely until 8 March at the earliest.

You can find more information about the national lockdown regulations on: [National lockdown: Stay at Home - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/coronavirus/coronavirus-lockdown-rules)

Borough COVID Information

As of the 31st Jan in Bedford there has been 11,825 cases since the start of the Pandemic and there have been 670 registered cases in Bedford in the last 7 days. 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 (as of 31st Jan) please find it below:

<https://bbcdevwebfiles.blob.core.windows.net/webfiles/Social%20Care%20Health%20and%20Community/Covid19/Covid19-weekly-statistics-3Feb.pdf>

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.

You can find further details on testing on the government webpages.

More information is available here: <https://www.bedford.gov.uk/social-care-health-and-community/public-health/coronavirus/covid-19-testing/>

Vaccine rollout

The vaccine is currently being rolled out in Bedford by the Bedfordshire Clinical Commission Group. The NHS has written to all over 80's residents saying that they can have jabs at Stevenage, however if they would like the jab in Bedford they will have to wait until they are called for an appointment. This letter was essentially to highlight a shortcut for those over 80s residents who are able to travel to Stevenage.

There have also been reports that there has been problems with supply of vaccines in the Borough. You can find out more information here: <https://www.bedfordindependent.co.uk/government-supply-issues-force-queens-park-vaccine-hub-to-temporarily-close-next-week/>