

Monthly Borough Report January 2024

- **Council Tax increase**

Council's up and down the country of all political persuasions are facing significant financial pressures for 2024/25.

The previous administrations budget has led to material budget shortfalls meaning the budget for 2023/24 has required £9.4 million additional funding to "catch up" and make sure that the critical demand led services are supported, so that our elderly residents and vulnerable children can be properly cared for. It also includes over £5.3 million for inflation pressures.

Bedford Borough Council will be seeking to increase Council Tax by 2.99% and the Adult Social care precept by 2.00% in order to continue to deliver services to residents, whilst ensuring that budgets balances.

- **The 4-hour free parking in Bedford Town Centre**

Introduced by the current Mayor following his election, 4 hours of free parking at Allhallows had been introduced during 2023.

The current trends and statistics points to the trial having a positive impact on the Town Centre with footfall continuing to trend up and new shops opening. Further information will be provided after the trial period has concluded and the data has undergone an in depth analysis.

- **Share your thoughts on bus services in Bedford Borough**

A consultation has gone out to the public to collect the views from public transport users, residents, businesses, and visitors within the Borough regarding local bus services and other public transport alternatives that will be used to help shape the Council's Public Transport Policy.

The consultation period concludes at 23:59 on 16th February 2024. To learn more and participate in the survey, please visit: <https://www.bedford.gov.uk/your-council/have-your-say/consultations/bus-usage-survey-2024>

- **Capital Programme**

At an Extraordinary Full Council meeting in December, a majority of the current administration Capital Programme had been agreed.

This real lack of GP provision in communities across the Borough by "unblocking" delivery of these surgeries. It includes maintenance of our leisure facilities which were found to have over 1100 issues after a survey by the new administration, it includes funding for Town Centre regeneration among other projects.

The Leisure Village Capital Investment will be coming back in February.

- **Town Centre/Christmas light switch on Footfall Up**

Recent changes in the Town Centre from the free car parking, new events, trees and lights over the Christmas period and the Council attracting new shops in the latter half of 2023 has had a positive impact on Town Centre footfall with it trending in positive direct.

Further detail and historical data can be found in the attached footfall report.

- **EWR Routes**

The Mayor commissioned research into an alternative southern routes.

The Mayor has routinely mentioned his commitment to transparency and will be hold a special meeting on Tuesday, 6th February in the Council Chamber from 6.30-8pm to discuss the report, with it also being live-streamed for anyone else to watch.

Wider Borough Items

- **Bedford Park Tennis Courts**

In the last 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 to combat 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.

To help address the lack of maintenance the Council has now secured £370,000 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.

The courts will be reduced from 9 courts to 3 – this is unavoidable as the Courts will need to be repositioned to protect the trees in the surrounding area, protecting the natural wildlife and ecosystem.