

Monthly Borough Report April 2024

- **Oasis re-opens**

In December 2023, the Council agreed to invest £4.9m across Bedford Borough's leisure facilities in order to address issues. Approximately, £500,000 was used to address urgent health and safety issues at Oasis Beach Pool so that the facility would be safe to open to the public.

The works included improvements to plant equipment for increased energy efficiency and longevity with important infrastructure such as boilers, heating, cooling, and customer facilities being replaced. On the 28th of May 2024, Oasis held its official Grand Opening.

More work will be taking place to further redecorate and bring brighter and more welcoming atmosphere.

- **Former Debenhams store acquisition**

The Council officially completed its acquisition of the iconic former Debenhams store on the 24th May 2024, the store had been closed since May 2021.

The building will form a major part of the Council's overall strategic vision for the Town Centre with more details on possible plans for the site and Town Centre vision to be discussed at the Executive Committee on Wednesday 19th June.

- **Bedford Central Library unveils new spaces for the community**

Funding from the Town Centre Priority Fund has enabled Bedford Central Library to open two new rooms.

The first room is a dedicated parent and carer baby feeding room and the second room is a free to use and bookable meeting room available for small groups of up to eight, or individuals seeking a quiet space to work or connect.

- **First 13 properties, new incoming IT system and more for the Council's temporary accommodation service**

As a part of the Council's property acquisition scheme, they have now purchased its first 13 homes that will enable it to provide more a cost-effective to deliver temporary accommodation. The Council has also invested further into the service by ordering a new IT system/equipment and recently recruiting 22 new staff members to better manage cases and address the backlog.

The service is also working through the backlog of housing benefit which has not been claimed by the Council.

- **Full Council waives "Unfair" additional charges for Great Denham and Kempston West**

Residents who purchased a property in Great Denham (GD) or Kempston West (KW) pay an annual charge (£120) to toward maintaining open spaces – Open Space Management Charge on top of their Council Tax.

This is unlike all other properties in the Borough that do not pay twice for the maintenance of Council owned land.

Full Council has now made the decision to offer relief from the additional charge with a reduction to £60 this year, the Council will then be looking to ensure the next part is delivered for 2025/2026 by removal of the remaining £60.

- **Bedford Tennis Courts refurbished**

£370,000 has been invested into refurbishing park tennis courts across the Borough with work concluding at Allen Park and Southfields, Bedford Park, Mowsbury Park and Russell Park.

Going back 6 years, 2017 – 2023, the Council did not undertake any significant maintenance work over the Bedford tennis courts. Due to this consultant Knight, Kavanagh & Page identified that the majority of Bedford Borough tennis courts (83%) are considered to be in a poor condition and in serious need of maintenance.

If the courts were not maintained, they would become a liability to the Council and the Borough could risk losing its tennis courts forever.

The Council entered into negotiations with the LTA Tennis Foundation to secure its tennis courts for future generations. As a prerequisite for obtaining the funding the Council is required to implement a sustainable financial model to ensure that its Tennis courts are maintained going forward and do not fall back into a state of disrepair.

A two-fee structure will be implemented: a pay-per-hour rate of £6 for one-off games and a household annual pass priced at £40.

- **Appeal for more foster families**

The Council is collaborating with other east of England authorities in a new initiative for fostering under Foster East.

The initiative is funded by the Department of Education and aims to have Councils work together to provide more comprehensive training, support and best practice. In Bedford specifically, there 250 children in Foster families, the Council has new children coming into care and this initiative will help ensure we have the carers needed in the future.

- **General Election**

Residents across Bedford Borough have until Tuesday, 18th June to register to vote ahead of the General Election on Thursday 4th July.

Residents can register to vote at www.gov.uk/register-to-vote and it's possible to choose whether to vote at a polling station, by post or by proxy.

- **Change to Portfolio Holder roles**

The Council has chosen to realign responsibilities across its Executive so that the Council and Executive can work towards priorities more efficiently and holistically. This will help ensure continuity of approach on Council priorities.

The new portfolio:

- **Mayor Tom Wootton - Covers Democratic Services and Rural Communities** which includes:
 - Rural Issues/Communities
 - Inward Investment
 - Corporate Policy and Performance
 - Communications and Marketing
 - Legal Services
 - Democratic Services (Executive Functions)
 - Human Resources
 - Emergency Planning (including Flooding)
- **Deputy Mayor/Councillor Jim Weir - Portfolio Holder for Environment** which includes:
 - Carbon Reduction/Climate Change
 - Transport Policy
 - Traffic Operations
 - Highways
 - Car Parking (including Enforcement)
 - Refuse and Recycling
 - Waste and Resources
 - Grounds Maintenance
 - Engineering Services
 - Fleet and Transport Co-ordination
 - Railways
 - Rivers & Waterways
 - Business Partnerships (England's Economic Heartland, New Area Growth Board etc)
 - Infrastructure
 - Major Capital Projects (Environment)
- **Councillor Graeme Coombes - Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate Services** which includes:
 - Financial Strategy
 - Financial Management and Planning
 - Treasury Management
 - Corporate Finance
 - Revenues and Benefits
 - Insurance and Risk Management
 - Information Technology Strategy
 - Business Rate Reliefs
 - Procurement
 - Internal Audit
- **Councillor Jane Walker - Portfolio Holder for Valuing Families: Children's Services** which includes:
 - Children's & Young People's Safeguarding, including the Local Safeguarding Board
 - Children's Social Care Quality Assurance
 - Children's Commissioning
 - Children in Need
 - Looked After Children including Fostering and Adoption
 - Leaving and Aftercare Services
 - Children & Young People's Engagement and Development

- Prevent Strategy
- Domestic Violence
- Youth Offending Services
- Children’s Social Care Resilience – Internal, Private and Voluntary
- School Improvement, Organisation, Admissions, Planning (including Capital Programme) and Support Services
- Children & Young People with SEND
- Educational Psychology Services
- Early Help and Intervention
- Early Years Provision
- Music Service
- Impact on Family (Crosscutting)
- **Councillor Robert Rigby - Portfolio Holder for Valuing Families: Adults Services** which includes:
 - Adult Services
 - Adults Commissioning and Contracts Care Standards and Review
 - Adults Social Care Resilience – Internal, Private and Voluntary
 - Learning Disabilities and Mental Health
 - Older People and Physical Disabilities and Sensory Needs
 - Safeguarding Adults
 - Adult Education
 - Impact on Families (Crosscutting)
- **Councillor Sarah Gallagher - Portfolio Holder for Customer Experience (inc. Leisure, Recreation & Culture)** which includes:
 - Adult Services
 - Adults Commissioning and Contracts Care Standards and Review
 - Adults Social Care Resilience – Internal, Private and Voluntary
 - Learning Disabilities and Mental Health
 - Older People and Physical Disabilities and Sensory Needs
 - Safeguarding Adults
 - Adult Education
 - Impact on Families (Crosscutting)
- **Councillor Phillipa Martin-Moran-Bryant - Portfolio Holder for Housing and Regulatory Services** which includes:
 - Housing
 - Operational Housing (including Gypsy and Travellers)
 - Property/Asset Management
 - Homelessness
 - Community Safety and Resilience (excluding Emergency Flooding)
 - Community Regulations
 - Commercial Regulations
 - Trading Standards
 - Health & Safety
 - Environmental Protection (Contaminated Land, Litter, Fly Tipping etc)
 - Licensing
- **Councillor Andrea Spice - Portfolio Holder for Economic Growth, Planning and Prosperity (inc. Town Centres)** which includes:
 - Development Management
 - Town Centres (including Land Assembly)
 - Economic Development
 - Planning Policy
 - Planning Enforcement
 - Building Control
 - Heritage and Compliance

- Events
- Markets
- **Councillor Martin Towler - Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods and Communities:**
Health and Wellbeing which includes:
 - Public Health
 - Community Wellbeing
 - Health and Wellbeing Board
 - Health Improvement
 - Health Intelligence and Protection
 - Health Commissioning and Population Health
 - Health Inequality
 - Integrated Care Partnership
 - Food Resilience: including Food Banks and Free Schools Meals
 - Child Poverty
 - Voluntary Organisations
 - Community Partnerships
 - Neighbourhoods
 - Household Support Grants
 - Disability
 - Impact on Family (Crosscutting)