



Brickhill Borough Councillor Report

April 2013

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Welcome to our April 2013 Borough Councillor Report. This is an important opportunity for us to communicate with the parish about things which are happening in Brickhill and across the Borough. We will not produce such a full report at every parish council meeting, however a couple of times each year it is important to try and give an overview of the things which we are doing to make Bedford a better place to live and visit. Of course we always dedicate ourselves to Brickhill but it is important that we also work hard to support the Mayor who works tirelessly to make ensure that our Borough achieves growth and prosperity for the benefit of all our residents.



Riverside North

We write this report just after the successful planning application for Riverside North. There has been opposition to the scheme and a hundred people came to the planning meeting to express their views. Nevertheless there was considerable support for the scheme which has the support of the Federation of Small Businesses, The Chamber of Commerce and SEMLEP the South East Midlands Local Economic Partnership representing business and government

across the region. Town Centres across the country are dying.

A report published this month by Price Waterhouse Coopers revealed that retail chains closed 20 stores a day in 2012. There was a ten-fold increase in store closures compared with 2011. This trend is exacerbated by the current economic climate, but there are long-term trends including out-of-town and internet shopping which are causing, in many areas, the death of the high street. This new development will bring a new seven screen cinema, restaurants, a public square by the river, a new footbridge, retail, hotel and residential accommodation. This represents a significant investment into Bedford, expected to be 50million, with 500,000 visitors annually. We hope that everyone can work together to ensure that local businesses derive great benefit. Even in these tough economic times Bedford is attracting investment and we are securing a better future for Bedford Borough.



The Higgins Bedford will Re-Open from Dawn to Dusk on 21st June 2013

The much anticipated opening of The Higgins Bedford will take place on the longest day of the year, Friday 21st June, in an amazing dawn to dusk launch. The transformed art gallery and museum is located in the historic buildings of Castle Brewery and the adjoining Victorian family home, both built by the Higgins family in the mid-19th Century. The Higgins Bedford will bring together an internationally renowned art collection with a brand new visitor experience of national significance, that does justice to the stories behind the people, places and collections associated with both the former museum and art gallery. The £5.8 million project also features a hugely expanded floorspace for exhibitions, state-of-the-art modern facilities and the latest technology to enable people of all ages to enjoy the displays. The Mayor of Bedford Borough, Dave Hodgson, said: "The opening of The Higgins Bedford is a tremendously exciting event for Bedford town centre, marking the creation of a major cultural attraction for local residents and visitors to enjoy. Internationally renowned art will be on display in the very best modern facilities, while the story of Bedford Borough will be brought to life in the state-of-the-art surroundings. The redeveloped Higgins Bedford belongs to us all, and I hope local people of all ages will come along time and again to enjoy what is on offer. In the face of extremely challenging economic conditions we have a stream of town centre regeneration projects coming to fruition, bucking the trend of decline for high streets elsewhere. Together these projects and the major investment in our town centre will increase footfall dramatically and send the clear message that Bedford town centre is a vibrant, enjoyable place to visit."

Stay safe and Say no to Cold Callers

Bedford Borough Council Environmental Health & Trading Standards are urging people to stay safe in their own homes by saying a firm "No" to cold calling doorstep traders. There has been a recent spate of 'cold calling' in the Borough, particularly around Brickhill, Affected consumers have claimed that 'builders' were pressurising them into agreeing to have building work carried out on their home. Pressuring consumers may be considered illegal under current consumer protection legislation. It has also been alleged that the completed works have been of poor quality. Bedford Borough Council's Environmental Health & Trading Standards team are investigating this series of recent incidents are also issuing information and advice to residents in the affected areas. Agreeing to pay for any service on the basis of a door step visit is extremely risky and we would strongly advise local residents not to do this. The best course of action is to always do your homework first and try to find local people or businesses which you can trust. In many cases that means using personal recommendations or you can use traders on the Trading Standards Approved list. It is also important to remember that all traders are required to provide paperwork confirming a statutory 7 day cooling-off period providing the consumer the opportunity to change their mind so you should never feel rushed or pressured into having work carried out." If you think you may have been the victim of doorstep crime or would like further advice, please contact Environmental Health & Trading Standards via the Citizens Advice consumer helpline on 08454 04 05 06.



Major rebuilding for All Hallows Multi Storey car park and toilets as part of bus station regeneration

Allhallows multi-storey car park and public toilets are to be given a £2.7 million refurbishment as part of the regeneration project to improve Bedford bus station. Work is already although the shops below the car park will remain open throughout the works. The works will take place as part of the regeneration project to improve the bus station area announced by Mayor Dave Hodgson. This will include a new and improved bus station waiting area and the construction of a new surface car park on the site of the former Gwyn and Patteshull Court block

of flats. The major refurbishment of Allhallows car park includes:

Major improvements to the multi storey car park, including repairs to concrete and construction joints, use of energy efficient lighting, waterproof decking and a new payment system

Refurbishment of the public toilets with modernised disabled facilities

New shopfronts, including new windows and doors which will improve the appearance of shops in Greenhill Street, below the car park.

Mayor of Bedford Borough, Dave Hodgson, said: “Thanks to savings and efficiencies identified throughout the Council, we have set aside significant funding to improve the bus station area. “This is a vital gateway to the town centre and it has been in need of modernising and development for decades. We are therefore pleased to be delivering this regeneration of the bus station area in the face of the extremely tough economic climate, starting with these major improvements to Allhallows multi-storey car park. We will also be completely refurbishing and improving the public toilets, including modernising the facilities for users with disabilities. The refurbishment of the toilets will require the closure of the facilities while the work is taking place. However, temporary toilet provision will be provided on Hassett Street during this time to minimise any inconvenience to the Public.

Allhallows MSCP was built in 1960 and structural surveys have found it is in need of urgent refurbishment and it remains the last of the Council car parks to be refurbished.

In order to minimise disruption to users the refurbishment will take place in stages with the car park remaining in use for the majority of the works. Clearly, this means the refurbishment will take longer compared to completely closing the car park. As a result, the full refurbishment programme is scheduled to take 52 weeks with a four week closure when work will take place on the entrance and exit ramps.

Borough Schools Get Top Marks

It is something of a scandal that in a week when the Borough schools have done so well in league tables measuring standards across the country, the press have been silent on the achievements. It seems that so many people have criticised our Borough schools for so long that they simply cannot bring themselves to give credit where it is due. The facts are that our primary school aged children 5-11, have come 11th out of 150 in a national league table by Ofsted. It recognises that 85% of these children will be in good or outstanding schools. Secondary children are not put into the same kind of league table but here 70% of children will be in good or outstanding schools, ahead of the national average at 69%.. So we say well done to teachers, governors, children and families.

Economic Growth and Increasing Employment Opportunities

Mayor Dave Hodgson has made attracting businesses to Bedford a key priority to build growth in the economy and jobs. From the opening of Go Outdoors and Waitrose we will also see the opening of Morrisons supermarket on Ampthill Road and a new B&Q by the interchange. The Mayor will be officially opening the new Premier Inn and Brewers Fayre and plans have been submitted for a new M&S Simply Food and Costa Coffee drive-through. This retail growth is supported by the location of important new manufacturing which has been attracted to Bedford such as Interbake, with the creation of important job opportunities.

The Electrification of the Midland Mainline north of Bedford

This is a tremendous opportunity for local residents and businesses to improve transport links north of Bedford. However, in order to install the necessary overhead equipment, changes will have to be made at a number of locations in the borough, including Bromham Road bridge. The Mayor is in negotiations with Network Rail about Bromham Road bridge which is a known bottleneck for cyclists and pedestrians and the Council is committed to improving cycling provision across the borough. Therefore, we are working with Network Rail to ensure that cycling provision is at the forefront of their thinking to make changes to the bridge and road layout in this area in order to improve access and safety for all road users. A total of fourteen structures will be changed and work will start from 2014.

Embankment Trees

The trees along the embankment which have been chopped down cause much debate. It has been claimed that the trees were healthy. The facts are that trees along the embankment and elsewhere are a much loved part of the borough and their removal costs taxpayers' money as well. That is why we are replanting more trees than we are removing along this stretch of the river. It is important to understand that across the country Horse Chestnut trees are suffering from serious pests and diseases leading to the rapid deterioration and the premature death of many trees. Bleeding canker affects the live tissue of trees, immediately under the bark. As it spreads, it cuts off the water supply to the crown and over time the tree will die. This means that tree stumps can appear perfectly healthy even if the rest of the tree was seriously affected and in decline. The Council has already been forced to fell trees which rapidly deteriorated in areas such as London Road, Rothsay Road and along the river. Following inspections, a total of 28 Horse Chestnut trees were removed, 23 of these trees were suffering decay as a result of bleeding canker. The remaining 5 trees were all in poor condition and suffering decline as a result of having been planted in building rubble over a gas main. This increased the likelihood that they would also be prone to the disease in the near future. When completed later this year the scheme will ensure a beautiful tree lined river walk will remain in place for all to enjoy for generations to come."

Trees planting in Brickhill

Tree planting has taken place across the Brickhill ward since our last report seeing a real increase in the number of trees. We are pleased that we have managed to ensure that these are located outside properties where the owners have been consulted and approve of the planting. We one outstanding request in Westrope Way which we hope to have filled this year. Planting has also take place using ward funds in Hamble Road to provide support to a resident faced with sports activities outside his property.



The Hydro Power

The Archimedes Screws which produce electricity from the river continues to be a hot political potatoe. Having attacked the scheme in the first place the conservatives find it impossible to say a good word about it and look for every opportunity to criticise it. There are times when it is not able to operate since it only works when the top river and the lower channel have a difference in height of at least a metre. Drought or flood can cause the river levels to be less than a metre and shut the power

down. However this does not mean that it is broken and in normal conditions excellent operation takes place. In terms of the litres of water flowing through the screw much depends on river level and will change constantly but this week the flow through the screws was Screw 1 2522lps (litres per second) Screw 2 2699lps. At over 5,000 lps the screws produced over 2,000kwh of power over one weekend.

The commissioning phase of the hydro has now been completed and it is producing 60% more power now than when first opened. Floods and drought will always affect the output from one year to the next however it is apparent that the original expectation that the plant would produce 160,000kwh of power per annum was entirely reasonable. The hydro qualifies for the government feed-in tariff and with income from the scheme the payback is expected to be about 15 years, of course the cost of electricity is increasing all the time and so it could be even less. What is certain is that the hydro will be producing electricity for many more years to come. Spaans Babcock have fitted Archimedes screws which are still going strong after over 50 years.

Verge Parking in Brickhill

The no verge parking zone is in place and we are monitoring the behaviour of motorists. The zone has been well received and we have been asked to extend the boundary into Pipit and The Buntings. Additional signs have also been requested in Falcon Avenue. As local councillors we believe that verge parking causes damage to the grass and it also damages cables in the verges, sometimes leading to costly repairs of telephone and fibre optic cables. Remember that the zone is enforced using the camera enforcement vehicle which is effective and automatic.

Speeding

There is ongoing speeding taking place across the ward with one very serious accident in Brickhill Drive The Borough Council now has active enforcement using mobile wireless average speed cameras and these are being extended with a new site at Barkers Lane due soon. The cameras are very effective at reducing speeds. Milton Ernest has seen a compliance of over 85%, whereas it was 85 % lack of compliance. The Liberal Democrats are supportive of enforcement against speeding, however we have received criticism from councillors who have rejected average speed cameras in Bromham Road, despite having asked for the speed limit to be reduced to 30mph ! We believe that it is ludicrous for Borough councillors to ask for lower speed limits and then ask for them not to be enforced.

Roads Programme

The junction of Windrush and Severn way will soon be resurfaced and the Borough Council has formally accepted our request for the repairs of Clyde Crescent and Falcon Avenue. We have also drawn attention to the access road to Thomas More School on Kennet Rise, Kestrel Road and Curlew Crescent. There are many roads in Brickhill which are showing signs of wear, including roads off Tyne Crescent such as Douglas Road, especially at junctions, Merlin Gardens etc. The sad fact is that there are more roads requiring attention than there are funds to enable them to be resurfaced. We will continue to monitor and agree with the parish council our road resurfacing priorities.

Pot Holes

Please do continue to report potholes on 01234 718003. The pot hole hit squad has been effective in reducing the cost of filling pot holes. In 2011 the approximate cost to fill one pothole was £60 in 2012 approximate cost fell to £48. The amount paid in compensation for potholes continues to fall as serious pot holes are filled quickly, 2009/10 £ 2,982 / 2010/11 £ 1,086 / 2011/12: £906 / 2012/13: £0

Mayor announces Pot Hole Blitz. The Mayor has agreed to invest in an additional two pot hole hit squad teams starting in May to get on top of the pot holes across the Borough. As soon as the cold weather stops there will be a blitz on pot holes which have come following the severe cold weather. Sometimes only temporary repairs can be made in cold weather, however as Spring approaches the squads will be out in force across the Borough. The Mayor has agreed an additional £180,000 of funding to the pot hole hit squads to enable the additional teams to be deployed.



20's Plenty

We have been campaigning for a 20mph limit around Tyne Crescent since this picture was taken in 2008. It is now almost a reality. There have been a few objections from people regarding the 20mph restriction on Tyne Crescent which we have asked to be implemented. Some residents from the Woodlands have complained to us that it adds time to their journey. It is worth noting that the maximum increase in time when travelling the entire length of Tyne Crescent is 90seconds and Woodlands itself has a 10mph limit.

Given that most people do not drive the entire length but stop at some point around, this would be considerably left. The question must be asked as to why we would complain about loss of a small number of seconds when it has been shown that lives are saved in residential areas when speeds are reduced.



Real Time Bus Information

Our ward funds have been used to purchase the new display which has been fitted at the bus stop in Brickhill Drive. It has been a real bonus for bus users who have commented on how helpful it is to have real time information on how long the next buses will be. We have agreed to allocate more funds to providing another unit this year at the bus stop near to the junction of Severn Way and Waveney Avenue, town centre bound. Please tell us if you agree that this is the next best location.

Parking Restrictions

The new parking restrictions for Kestrel Road, Hawk Drive, Tyne Crescent and Falcon Avenue have all been approved. There have been delays due to the inclement weather which is difficult for painting yellow lines, parked cars have been a problem in Kestel.

Resurfacing Footpath, Brickhill Drive to Bedford Park

The surface of the park was recently laid but deteriorated quickly. Following concerns expressed by residents we inspected the area with Borough Council officers who agreed it was a poor surface and the contractor was been brought back to relay the surface at no cost to local tax payers.

Drainage Issues

There have been problems with blocked drains at Brickhill Drive shops, we are working with those responsible for street cleansing to resolve the issues. There have also been ongoing problems with Stour Way and serious flooding. We are working to agree who owns the blocked drains and culvert responsible and have the matter rectified.

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Real Nappies and recycling

We have not managed to get rid of all our subsidies of £25 cash back from the Council when you spend £50 or more on washable nappies or laundry services. Continuing to advertise. At 5,000 disposable nappies per child that is one tonne of nappies thrown away every year or up to 50% of their household waste could be disposable nappies. Newspaper wraps for a campaign are attached.

We are always pleased to hear from residents with any concern which you may have. Please also visit our website www.puttingbrickhillfirst.com for the latest information .