

Willington Parish Council: Update from Borough Councillors Stephen Moon and Phillippa Martin-Moran-Bryant – November 2019

Planning

The very disappointing decision by the Borough Planning Committee to allow the application for up to 46 dwellings on the vital green space in the centre of Willington shows how seriously flawed is the planning process. The excellent work done by residents over the last three years to produce a Neighbourhood Plan which identified additional housing on three much less damaging sites has been completely ignored.

Witnesses saw instructions being given at the Committee meeting by certain Councillors to others to vote on political lines in favour of the development; one who did vote as instructed said he was against the development when he attended the site visit but changed his mind when told to do so. In addition the advice given by officers to the Committee over-emphasised the problems caused by the Council not having an adequate land supply and ignored the fact that the proposals from the Neighbourhood Plan group would have exceeded the target set by the Borough for Willington's expansion. We are questioning the advice given to councillors regarding the weight which can be given to Neighbourhood Plans.

At the time of writing an attempt is being made to get the Minister to call in the application so that the decision of the Planning Committee can be reconsidered. The Minister has been written to by the Neighbourhood Planning group and a supportive letter has been sent by Alistair Burt MP urging the Minister to respond. The calling of the election has made the process, which usually takes several weeks, much more difficult.

Hospital Merger

The Chief Executive of Bedford Hospital told a meeting of the Borough Council's Health Committee in October that the merger with Luton & Dunstable is set to be completed by April 2020. This follows the receipt of £99.5m from the Department for Health to upgrade facilities at Luton & Dunstable Hospital including a new intensive care block, delivery suite and operating theatres.

The merger, announced in autumn 2017, pledged to protect key services at Bedford Hospital including A & E, maternity and paediatrics. The meeting heard that some smaller services may be combined on a single site, but 95% of services would be unaffected.

Putnoe Walk in Centre

The Bedfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group (BCCG), the organisation responsible for organising NHS services locally, has stated its intention to renew the contract for the Putnoe Walk in Centre (WIC) for a further year to September 2021.

The Putnoe WIC (but not the main GP surgery) was threatened with closure last year after the decision to open the Urgent Treatment Centre, which has a 'walk in' element, on the Bedford Hospital site. It was ultimately agreed that the Putnoe WIC would remain open with reduced hours. The Council's Health Committee has heard that it continues to receive a high number of patients.

Rural Crime

Bedfordshire Police undertook a range of targeted activities as part of Rural Crime Week of Action from the 7th October. Actions addressed issues such as motoring offences, illegal fishing and fly-tipping.

Bedfordshire Police has published a Rural Crime Handbook, primarily for businesses, setting out advice on how to make it more difficult for criminals to operate. Search 'Bedfordshire Rural Crime Handbook' for more information.

Temporary Accommodation Investment

A meeting of all Borough councillors in October agreed investment of £10m to purchase and provide the Council's own housing supply to support individuals and families at risk of homelessness. This is an 'invest to save' measure designed to reduce payments to private landlords.

Ward Fund

The Ward Fund allows councillors to support community schemes. Please do get in touch if you would like to discuss any potential projects. The deadline for highways and greenspace projects has now passed, but applications can still be submitted for litter bins and salt bins (deadline 22nd November) and projects supporting external organisations (13th December).

'Safe and Well Visits'

Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service provides Safe and Well Visits for the benefit of elderly and vulnerable people. These are designed to check over houses to identify safety hazards and provide advice to improve wellbeing and prevent crime. Email safeandwell@bedsfire.com if you know of someone who might benefit.

Flu Jab

The NHS advises that you should have a flu jab if you are:

- 65 years old or over
- pregnant
- have certain medical conditions
- living in a long-stay residential care home or another long-stay care facility
- receive a carer's allowance, or you're the main carer for an elderly or disabled person

Contact your GP or local pharmacy for further details.

School Admissions

The admissions process for transfer to secondary schools in the Borough closed on the 31st October, but remains open until the 15th January 2020 for children beginning primary school in September 2020. For more information search 'Bedford school admissions' or call 01234718120.

'Active Adults' Exercise Classes

The Council is taking bookings for its 'Active Adults' exercise class programme including football, golf and walking, which started on the 23rd September (for those aged 35 and over). There are also classes available for those aged 75 and above. For more details search 'Active Adults Bedford'

Cllr Stephen Moon: Stephen.Moon@bedford.gov.uk / 01234870061 / Facebook – search 'Cllr Stephen Moon'

Cllr Phillippa Martin-Moran-Bryant: Phillippa.MartinMoranBryant@bedford.gov.uk / 07934853907 / Facebook – search 'Cllr Phillippa Martin-Moran-Bryant'