

## **Alison Foster, Borough Councillor**

### **Local News**

#### **Podington Wind Farm**

The High Court recently threw out the Borough's s.288 High Court challenge to the Podington Wind Farm planning permission granted by the Planning Inspectorate. The Court rejected all the grounds of appeal made by the Borough. I understand that the Borough's Counsel advised strongly against any further appeal. This means that the wind farm development in Podington is now likely to go ahead.

#### **Nunn Wood Wind Farm**

The appeal was heard at the beginning of June. This appeal has been called in by the Secretary of State who will now make a decision once he has received the Planning Inspector's report.

### **Wind Farms**

Rt Hon Eric Pickles MP *Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government* recently issued a statement announcing new guidelines in respect of wind farms developments. This came out during the Nun Wood Inquiry. The new guidance will state clearly that:

- The need for renewable energy does not by definition override environmental protections and the planning concerns of local communities.
- Decisions should take into account the cumulative impact of wind turbines and properly reflect the impact on (a) the landscape and (b) local amenity.
- Local topography should be a factor in assessing whether wind turbines have a damaging impact on the landscape. For example, it should be recognised that the impact on predominantly flat landscapes can be as great or greater than on hilly or mountainous ones.
- Great care should be taken to ensure heritage assets are conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance, including the impact on proposals on views important to their setting.

The Government is looking to local councils through their Local Plans to implement policies which ensure that adverse impacts from wind farms developments, including cumulative landscape and visual impact, are addressed satisfactorily.

### **Gypsy and Traveller Sites**

The Borough Planning Committee recently refused the Borough's own planning application for a Gypsy and Traveller site at Fairhill, in the urban area near to Sainsbury's and the Paula Radcliffe Way. This was a surprise particularly since the application for 14 pitches was recommended for approval by the Borough's own planning officers and fully compliant with the Borough's own policies. The Borough's other choice of site, Meadow Lane, has been beset by problems since it obtained planning permission in 2012 and no development has taken place at the site. In the absence of an alternative Borough owned site in the urban area, the Planning Committee's decision leaves the rural areas open to private speculative developments. A number of small privately owned sites have already gained planning permission on appeal through the Planning Inspectorate because of the Borough's failure to provide sufficient pitches of its own to satisfy locally assessed need. A group of 5 rural Borough Councillors submitted their own revised planning application for the Fairhill site at the beginning of July which addresses the weak reasons for refusal of the Planning Committee. This is likely to be heard by the Planning Committee on 23<sup>rd</sup> September.

### **Police Survey**

Police and Crime Commissioner Olly Martins has just launched a survey which it is very important for rural residents to respond to. He is looking at alternative ways of contacting the police in non-emergency situations via modern media for example skype, he is also looking at ways of cutting costs and one of the potential proposals is to close some police stations including Riseley. The survey can be accessed through the following link: <https://www.snapsurveys.com/wh/s.asp?k=137483661407>. I would encourage all residents to respond with their views.

## **Broadband Update**

The Council has provided an updated timeline for its Joint Local Broadband Plan, which is being carried out alongside Milton Keynes and Central Bedfordshire Councils. The objective of the Plan is to provide superfast broadband (minimum 24Mbps) to 90% of premises in the Borough (currently 77%) and basic speeds (at least 2Mbps) to all premises.

The contract was given to BT recently. A planning and mobilisation stage will then begin during the remainder of this year and the contract will be delivered between 2014 and 2016.

In terms of funding when the original BDUK funding allocations were made it was expected that if matched by the local areas, (the Borough arranged this) the funding should be sufficient to reach 90% superfast coverage.

However, when BT did their 'modelling' for the Borough with this funding they found that the Borough had significant areas that had 'very rural' characteristics in respect of its settlement pattern (eg dispersed small settlements) and telecomms infrastructure (eg lots of exchange only lines) and that this superfast coverage could not be achieved with the funding available.

Additional funding was allocated but even this proved insufficient so Borough officers argued for and were awarded some further funding. This was the maximum they could get and an early task for BT is to remodel with this funding. We await the outcome, hope it will be close to if not 90% coverage, and the Borough hopes to make the geography of that coverage publicly available in an appropriate form as soon as possible, hopefully by the end of October.

## **Borough News**

### **Bedford Hospital Paediatric Services**

As of the beginning of August, Bedford Hospital has scaled back its paediatric services following the removal of 7 junior doctors from its Riverbank Ward. This course of action was taken by Health Education East of England after the junior doctors raised concerns that they were not receiving adequate supervision. A number of services for 0 – 19 year olds have been suspended as a result;

- The Hospital will provide A & E services for minor injuries, such as stitching a wound or providing an X-ray. However, A & E services for more serious cases will no longer be provided. In these instances the Hospital is encouraging parents and guardians to call an ambulance so their child can be taken to the next nearest hospital with a paediatric unit.
- The families of around 260 patients with open access to the Riverbank Ward will have to travel to receive care at alternative hospitals.
- Planned operations and follow up care requiring overnight stays have been moved to other hospitals. This will affect 3 patients a week on average.

The following services will not be affected by the changes;

- Children's outpatient services.
- Maternity and neo-natal.
- Day unit for planned procedures and care following planned procedures.
- Nurse-led ambulatory care for children with long term conditions.

## **Budget Proposals**

The Council is currently consulting on a number of budget proposals totalling just over £17m which can be viewed here; [http://www.bedford.gov.uk/council\\_and\\_democracy/consultations/budget\\_2014.aspx](http://www.bedford.gov.uk/council_and_democracy/consultations/budget_2014.aspx). The consultation will end on the 30<sup>th</sup> September.

## **Sports Classes**

The Council is offering sports sessions such as basketball and tennis for individuals with learning and / or physical disabilities at the Athletics Stadium every Monday from 2pm – 3.15pm. There is no need to book to participate. Sessions such as table tennis and badminton will also be available for those aged 70 and over at

Bedford Central Library on Mondays between 11am – 12pm and at the Bunyan Centre on Wednesdays between 2pm – 3pm.

More information for both schemes is available by calling **01234 718835**.

**Contact Alison**

If you have any issues or concerns you would like to raise with me directly I can be contacted on my mobile 07773371190 or by email on [afield\\_foster@btinternet.com](mailto:afield_foster@btinternet.com)