

Borough Councillor's Update - November 2014
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Broadband

A recent meeting in Colmworth focussed on the extension of superfast broadband in Bedford Borough. You may recall that the Council previously agreed to match fund a contribution from the Government to provide 90% of premises in Bedford Borough with superfast broadband (24 Megabits per second (Mbps) or above) and all premises with at least basic speeds (2Mbps). This scheme is to be extended following the Council's willingness to match fund a further contribution from the Government of just under £1m to provide at least 95% of premises with superfast speeds.

A number of rural communities were left out of the original scheme but BT Openreach is set to announce in the early part of 2015 which areas will be included in the second phase (ie. to provide 95% of premises with superfast speeds). However, the Council is confident that close to 100% of homes will receive superfast broadband in the second phase. For more updates visit http://www.bedford.gov.uk/business/projects_infrastructure/broadband-1.aspx

Broadband - Harrold and Carlton

The superfast cabinet for Harrold Cabinet 1 serving the western half of Harrold has been installed and powered and should go live very soon.

Meanwhile, preparatory work has started for the superfast cabinets to go with Harrold Cabinets 2 and 3, serving the eastern half of Harrold, Little Odell and Carlton.

Most premises linked to these cabinets will therefore be able to get superfast broadband in the near future. Exceptions may be premises, eg farm houses/cottages, a long way (eg over 1 km) from their cabinets. Other technology is being tested for such premises.

You can check which cabinet you are linked to, and broadband project progress generally, through the Council's broadband web page (www.bedford.gov.uk/broadband).

Broadband – Odell

The cost per premise for delivering superfast broadband to Odell was assessed as too high (relative to other areas) for Odell to be in a superfast phase of the Borough's first £1.4m broadband project which is currently in its delivery stage.

However, the Council is currently contracting for a second £2.4m superfast broadband project to take superfast coverage towards 100% of premises. A combination of this scale of resource, fibre already being close by (Harrold's cabinets are being fibre enabled in the first project) and Odell being a fairly compact village of well over 100 premises, bodes well for Odell in this second project.

The likely geography of the second project will be more definitely known nearer to contract signature, early in the new year, and delivery should be in 2016/2017. However, as set out below Little Odell will benefit from the installation of cabinets 2 and 3 to be installed in Harrold shortly.

Bedfordshire Healthcare Review

A report was published at the end of October outlining plans for the future of NHS services in Bedfordshire and Milton Keynes. It follows several months of work carried out by the Bedfordshire

Clinical Commissioning Group (BCCG), Milton Keynes Clinical Commissioning Group (MKCCG) and NHS England.

Of particular interest are proposals concerning the provision of services at Bedford Hospital and Milton Keynes Hospital. Two options have been put forward which could see one of the hospitals become an 'Integrated Care Centre' and the other a 'Major Emergency Centre (b)'. Both hospitals currently have statuses similar to a Major Emergency Centre (b) so it is possible that the hospital which becomes an Integrated Care Centre will see services reduced / delivered differently. Despite this, the Integrated Care Centre will retain A & E, maternity and paediatric services. The removal of these services has been of concern in recent months but the report confirms that they will remain at Bedford Hospital. The report has also not ruled out the possibility of either hospital expanding links with other hospital networks.

The report also details plans for GP and community services that seeks to bring services closer to home and avoid trips to hospital by integrating services. GP practices in Bedford Borough are looking at a 'hub and spoke' model. This would see a central facility that acts as a 'hub' which is linked to a network of GP practices. There is a possibility that 'minor surgery' and diagnostics could be provided at the central hub and it could act as a base for professionals providing care to elderly and frail people. Blood tests could be provided at the GP practices, meaning that patients would not have to travel into Bedford.

The next step in the process is for the proposals to be refined, including analysis of financial viability and travel times for patients. These plans will then form the basis of a public consultation although this will not take place until after the General Election in May. The report and updates on the review can be seen at <http://www.yourhealthinbedfordshire.co.uk/progress-report/>

Bedford Western Bypass

Work has now started on the second phase of the Bedford Western Bypass. The Bypass will be situated from the Deep Spinney roundabout in Biddenham to the A6 Paula Radcliffe Way. The road will act as an important link between the A421 / M1 and the A6 north of Bedford, thus removing traffic from Bedford town centre. Several hundred new houses and a school will also be built alongside the new road.

Gypsy & Traveller Sites

The Secretary of State for Communities has rejected a planning appeal for a 4 pitch Gypsy & Traveller site in Bletsoe. The applicant was appealing against a decision of the Council's Planning Committee to refuse the application at a meeting in May last year. A one day, informal hearing concerning a site at Roxton will be held on the 5th November at Borough Hall.

Winter Updates

The Council provides updates on its website showing changes to transport arrangements and waste collections as a result of the winter weather. It also has a tracking map showing the location of gritting vehicles. The page is particularly useful for those anticipating changes to public, school and adult services transport arising from poor weather conditions. You can access the updates by visiting <http://apps.bedford.gov.uk/winterupdates/>

Sunday Parking

Parking in Bedford town centre is now free on Sundays in the Council's car parks after the £1 daily charge was removed.