

Brickhill Borough Councillors Report to Parish Council October 2025

**From Charles Royden
and Wendy Rider**



Sale of land off Ashmead Road

The most worrying consequence of the council bankruptcy is that the Mayor is now pursuing a fire sale of public property and has announced plans to sell land off Ashmead Road in a desperate dash for cash. This is a tragic loss of green open space in Brickhill and we will do all we can to prevent it. Full Council on 8 October supported us to send a strong signal to the Mayor and his Conservative Executive that this is wrong. We are currently compiling a petition which we encourage residents to sign.

Sign our petition

on our website www.puttingbrickhillfirst.com

Ward Fund

Councillors will know that we use our ward fund every year to support activities or projects in Brickhill. This includes things like the lights at the shops at Christmas, tree planting and the flower planting on the roundabout at Avon Drive. Now that the Council has become bankrupt there are major cuts to services across the council and the ward fund has been cut as well. This cut means that we will not be able to fund some of the projects which we had planned, including the bench at Avon Drive shops which the council has only just agreed after two years of us asking.



Graffiti

We continue to seek the removal of graffiti in Brickhill as quickly as possible. This graffiti is on property belonging to Virgin Media and we have asked them to attend to it as quickly as possible.

Fooding in Swindale



We are grateful to Bedford Borough Council who responded quickly when we called for help following a water main burst in Swindale on the evening of Friday 3 October. This is now a regular occurrence and it was repeated in the early hours of Sunday morning when officers attended once again. On previous occasions significant damage has been caused to properties in Helford Close where the water cascades down from across Avon Drive.



Campaign Success

Charles and Wendy have campaigned for resurfacing after the growing number of potholes on Avon Drive. Works are now to take place from the junction with Bourneside and the roundabout with Waveney Avenue. The works will consist of resurfacing the carriageway and repairing kerbs, gullies and manholes. They have also requested the reinstatement of the

centre lining of the carriageway. Work will commence on 20 October and continue until 11 November. If you wish to discuss working arrangements relating to this project please telephone the Highways Helpdesk on 01234 718003 or email highways.helpdesk@bedford.gov.uk.

Please let us know if you have any difficulties during the works. Please visit our website for further details

Liberal Democrats move to protect Allotments

With Bedford Borough Council now in fire sale mode on public property, Liberal Democrats have acted with a motion to protect allotments from development. Full council agreed with Liberal Democrat Group Leader Henry Vann who successfully proposed that the Council should not sell off allotments in order to raise money.



Cllr Vann moved that as allotments are vital to the health and wellbeing of our communities and contribute positively to biodiversity and have local ecological benefit, they should not be considered for the purposes of raising money.

Cllr Vann commented, "I am delighted that this motion was passed. There are some assets which are too important to our communities to sell off. We must preserve our green spaces and maintain our vital allotments for residents' use and enjoyment."

Brickhill Parish Council took action to take possession of the allotments in Brickhill to manage and protect them and has no intention of selling them off.

Cuts to Council Services

The Mayor and his Conservatives administration on Bedford Borough Council have published their budget savings plan for next year, which includes unprecedented cuts. Included in their plan are:

- Reduction in services for children and families by cutting Children's Centres and using Family Hubs (£118,000)
- Grants for Rural Communities axed (£100,000)
- Climate Change Grants axed (£100,000)
- Road safety cuts - Average Speed Cameras maintenance budget (£200,000)
- Removal of the automatic Toilets in Parks (£64,000)
- Turning down streetlights (£60,000)
- Library Cuts (£93,000)
- Reducing grass cutting and maintenance (£100,000)
- Cuts to free parking (£300,000)
- Green bin charge introduced (£850,000)
- Raising Council Tax Bills for the poorest households (£1,500,000)
- Cuts to pest control, building control cuts, Economic Development hit – just as Universal arrive - free parking cut, leisure services cuts.

Cllr Henry Vann said, "Residents across the Borough will be devastated and horrified by these proposals. Frontline services such as public toilets, libraries and grass cutting are under direct attack. These proposals also take the axe to important support for our rural communities and for families throughout the Borough. To add insult to injury, they plan to introduce increased charges for parking, green bin collections and higher council tax for households most in need. We haven't even seen the proposed fees and charges for next year yet."

"It didn't have to be this way. The Mayor and his Conservative colleagues have embarked on a costly spending spree over the last 2 years spending millions on vanity projects and failing to control spending and now residents are going to have to pay the price for the waste. When he was first elected, the Mayor boldly compared himself to be like a bloke in a sweet shop who wanted everything. Well after 2 years of this attitude the shelves are now bare. We have seen millions of pounds wasted on buying a costly empty building and splurging cash on the Oasis pool to then announce its closure."

"During this time Council borrowing has been out of control and has gone from £60m to £129m, with their plans set to take this even higher to £179m. That's over £900 for every adult and child in the Borough. This is placing a heavy burden not just on residents today but also into the future."

"After driving the council to bankruptcy, the Conservative response is to announce these devastating cuts – even as their property buying budget of £13m stays in place. But this doesn't look like the end of the story. Higher council taxes for everyone will be still on the table to balance the books."



Cost of Debenhams to Council Tax Payers

The costs of the former Debenhams building exceed £450,000 per year. Despite Bedford Borough Council being judged by external financial experts in July as 'already in Section 114 territory' (in effect bankrupt), councillors at the

Budget Overview and Scrutiny committee were told on 11 September that this year's costs are:

- Business rates: £121,000
- Electricity and other utilities: £30,000
- Insurance cost: £16,380
- Security cost: £3,000
- What's On Hub £117,000

Together with the purchase cost of £1.9m, that leads to ongoing borrowing costs of approximately another £170k.

The Council ticket office has moved from the Harpur Suite to the only part of the former Debenhams building which is in a usable condition. An extra member of staff has even been employed. The Committee was told that much of the building needs a substantial amount of work.

Cllr Michael Headley, Deputy Leader of the Bedford Borough Liberal Democrats and Chair of the Budget Overview and Scrutiny Committee, commented:

"This is an empty building, merely hosting the Council's own relocated ticket office and 'What's On' hub. No external tenants have been found and the Council is left paying 100% of the costs. This is not the project that was originally intended. As nice as the 'What's On' hub looks, spending £450,000 a year is simply not justifiable when the Council faces a financial crisis. A significant amount of tax-payers' money is going out the door on this project."

"Other frontline services will be cut so this extra office can stay open."

Councillor Christine McHugh, member of the Budget Overview and Scrutiny Committee, commented:

"According to the Portfolio Holder's take on things – which might not be right – she would have us believe that the survey carried out at the time of purchase was insufficient for the risk on this building. The Council should have been alert to those risks, as no commercial purchaser was interested. The Mayor claimed that this building would be let out by Christmas last year, and yet now we hear that the majority of the building is 'unlettable'."

"Blind faith that all will be well is no substitute for a proper business plan."



Council Closes Outdoor Activity Centre

Blue Peris is an outdoor activity centres in Snowdonia in North Wales enjoyed by generations of young people from Bedford. At a 'call in' meeting on Wednesday 3 September, Tory councillors and a Labour councillors voted for no need for further exploration into maximising use of the much-loved activity centre, or increasing benefit to locals. They had 'no concerns' about the decision to close the centre.

Charles Royden was appalled that the Mayor and the Portfolio holder had not even bothered to visit Blue Peris themselves to discuss with staff whether or not the centre could be made commercially viable. Both he and Lib Dem Cllr Jon Abbott spoke passionately about the value of outdoors education and the loss of the Centre to the Borough's schoolchildren. Both Liberal Democrat councillors voted for the centre's future, but in vain. The centre could have been saved at a fraction of the cost being wasted on the Debenhams building.



Asleep at the Wheel

Councillors have accused the Mayor of being asleep at the wheel when it comes to planning issues across the Borough.

On 28 September 2025, the Government confirmed that they intend to progress with a new town at Tempsford, with a large part of

the development within Bedford Borough. This development is planned for over 40,000 homes. At the Executive committee meeting on Monday 29 September, Lib Dem Cllr Vann questioned the Deputy Mayor regarding which meetings the Council

have held with Government officials, and urged him to share the assessment Council leaders have made so far of the potential infrastructure needs for Borough residents. Frustratingly, there was no confirmation that any meetings had taken place. No infrastructure assessment was shared.

Cllr Vann commented,

“This announcement is on a massive scale. 40,000 new homes. Bedford Borough Council must be ready to face the infrastructure challenges to our roads, rail, health, education and more. We must not be playing catch-up. It is incredibly frustrating that the political leadership of the Council are not on top of something that has been on the cards since at least January 2025. We now need to reach out urgently to stakeholders in this project and ensure that Bedford Borough is fully involved in all discussions. The Government’s own report calls for ‘proactive collaboration across local government’ in order to deliver this new town plan, and that there is ‘a live debate about whether there is the need for a new regional hospital’. “Decisions that affect Bedford Borough need to be made with Bedford Borough in the room. Sadly, the Conservative administration is asleep at the wheel yet again!”

Changes to Recycling

The government has introduced legislation requiring councils in England to collect both glass and food waste at the kerbside. Under the Simpler Recycling initiative, part of the Environment Act 2021, all local authorities must provide collections of core recyclable materials—including glass and food waste—for all households by 31 March 2026. Government grants have been awarded to Bedford Borough Council to fund the initial cost.



A £1.56M grant for vehicles and caddies and £341K revenue by the government has been awarded. There was also a promised funding of £1.15M from DEFRA to assist with staff and maintaining the fleet of vehicles. From 1 April food collections and kerbside glass collections will be active. The council has also decided to remove bottle banks from across the Borough.

Green Waste Collection The council has indicated that it is still considering a new charge for the collection of green waste. This would see a cost to residents of £56 per year. We are awaiting a decision as to whether this charge will be introduced next year.

Help us keep in touch

It is always helpful to be able to inform residents of Brickhill with updates via our email list and if you have not yet signed up for this yet then please do so as this is the best way for us to keep in touch. We won't bombard you and you can unsubscribe at any time. Sign up here

www.bedfordlibdems.org.uk/sign-up

We always aim to respond to residents the same day or within 24hrs. If you haven't had a reply to an email please call us because they can go astray.

Avon Drive Shops Saturday 25 October 10.00am
Brickhill Drive Shops Saturday 8 November 10.00am
Avon Drive Shops Saturday 22 November 10.00am
Brickhill Drive Shops Saturday 6 December 10.00am

*You can also speak with us or another Lib Dem Councillor
every Saturday morning 11.00am - 12 noon at Bedford Central Library*

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Working all year round not just at election time !

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