

Buckinghamshire Councillors Report – Sept 22

Opportunity Bucks’ – ‘Levelling Up’ in Buckinghamshire

Buckinghamshire Council’s Cabinet has this week approved a new programme aimed at promoting opportunity for all in the county. ‘Opportunity Bucks’ aims to help all residents access the fantastic opportunities on offer in Buckinghamshire where education, skills, work, living standards and health are concerned.

Following the government’s ‘Levelling Up’ White Paper earlier this year, Buckinghamshire Council has carried out extensive work to draw up a local approach to promote better opportunity for everyone. The result is our new programme “**Opportunity Bucks – Succeeding for All.**”

The approach will vary by area depending on what is most important locally and will initially focus on creating action plans for ten wards where outcomes for residents are poorer than in other parts of the county. The ten wards are in parts of Aylesbury, High Wycombe and Chesham.

This is a long-term piece of work and importantly is a partnership approach with other key stakeholders in the local areas such as housing associations, local businesses, voluntary and community groups, schools, and charitable organisations. Activities will be locally led by neighbourhood Community Boards along with local councillors

Planning enforcement success for Buckinghamshire Council

Buckinghamshire Council has issued the highest number of planning enforcement notices outside of London according to the latest national data. A planning enforcement notice is issued when an individual or developer is found to be in breach of planning control – it might be that someone has carried out works without planning permission when it was needed, or that they’ve done something that wasn’t within the granted permissions.

Buckinghamshire Council has also served the highest number of ‘breaches of condition’ notices in the whole country – this is where individuals or developers have failed to adhere to conditions set out when planning permission for their project was granted.

Buckinghamshire Council to hit 25% renewable electricity target

As part of its commitment to tackling the climate crisis, Buckinghamshire Council is pleased to announce that from October of this year, **25% of the electricity it uses will come from renewable sources**. We have finalised the details of how we will procure the energy for council buildings and assets like streetlights.

Buying renewable energy is one of a number of ways we’re tackling climate change in Buckinghamshire and is directly related to action 33 in our Climate Change and Air Quality Action Plan. It helps support the renewable generation sector, reduces emissions of greenhouse gases and other air pollutants, and our dependence on fossil fuels. The extraction, processing, and transportation of fossil fuels has various

negative environmental impacts so this purchasing decision helps improve the Council's environmental performance overall.

Town and Parish Charter

In line with the establishment of the new Buckinghamshire Council, we wanted to take the opportunity to strengthen our relationship with all councils across the county.

There has been an ongoing programme of work in the last few years and, following discussion and consultations on earlier iterations, we have developed a charter that demonstrates and articulates the commitment to work and communicate effectively with residents.

The charter has been published on our website and will be shared widely across the council. You can [view the charter online or download a PDF copy](#).

The charter will be subject to an annual review which will of course be done in consultation with you all. Cabinet Members and senior officers will be accountable to the Localism and Communities Select Committee to ensure that the commitments made in the charter are upheld.

New Guardian's Guide website launches

Buckinghamshire Council has launched a unique website to support people who may be taking on the role of a Special Guardian in a child or young person's life. The innovative 'Guardian's Guide' website – makes it easy for guardians and parents involved in Special Guardianship Orders to gain access to a variety of helpful information, advice and support.

A special guardian is a person who looks after a child or young person who cannot live with their birth parents or who isn't suitable for adoption. The child can maintain a relationship with their birth family, but the guardian – usually a family member – is responsible for looking after the child and all day-to-day decisions until they are 18.

In Buckinghamshire the number of children being cared for by special guardians is rising every year. The number of Special Guardianship Orders being granted for Buckinghamshire children is currently outstripping the number of Adoption Orders, so having easy, accessible information for people new to Special Guardianship is vital.

Council employs green technology to repair damaged roads

The programme of work started earlier this month. In three phases, it will tackle some of the 'failing roads' where the filling and refilling of potholes is not enough to maintain the road surface to an adequate standard. These are generally more rural roads, originally simple tracks, that were never designed to carry the amount of traffic they now do. As traffic levels have increased over the years, the road surfaces have deteriorated and foundations subsided to such an extent that normal plane and patch repair work is not enough.

The repair work is carried out using a process called Regen. It has been trialled previously in other parts of the county. Crews break up the existing road surface. These materials are then pulverised on site, spread out and compacted to create a level surface. A small amount of cement mixed with water, binds the materials together and creates a solid structure. The surface is then covered with bitumen and stone chippings, sealing it to prevent water getting in. The process is specifically designed for rural roads with a relatively low volume of traffic and would not be suitable on bigger roads with higher traffic flows.

The use of the new technique has multiple benefits:

- The whole process is significantly quicker than alternatives so reducing the inconvenience for local residents and road users

- It has a direct impact on improved air quality as there is no need to use hot asphalt
- By reusing materials instead of taking them away from the site by vehicle, it helps reduce our carbon footprint
- Using fewer materials also brings about significant savings. The cost is £22-£28 per square metre compared to £75-£100 per square metre for more conventional methods

‘Find out if you need planning permission’ service now live in Buckinghamshire

A new online self-service planning tool has been launched that enables anyone in Buckinghamshire to check if an idea they have for a project is likely to be allowed under national permitted development rights or whether it may require planning permission. The service is part of a national pilot by the Department for Levelling Up, Communities and Housing (DLUCH) to improve submitting and processing planning applications.

The new service works by doing a high-level check of the project against legislation and Geographic Information System (GIS) data to see if the project may fall under ‘permitted development’. The service also warns if other types of consent, such as prior approval, tree consent or listed building consent may additionally be required.

This new service is available to use now on [Buckinghamshire Council’s website](#).

There is also an option to use a new online application service to allow homeowners and planning professionals to apply for a lawful development certificate as an alternative to using existing planning application submission tools.

Both services ask applicants questions specific to their project, meaning that users don’t need to be planning experts to start researching the changes they can make to their homes.

The self-service planning tool is free to use and can be accessed now on our [website](#).

Have your say on a new political map for Buckinghamshire Council

New boundaries are being proposed for council wards in Buckinghamshire Council. The Local Government Boundary Commission wants to hear what residents and local organisations think about the proposals. A 10-week consultation on the proposals will run until 10 October 2022.

The Commission is the independent body that draws these boundaries. It is reviewing Buckinghamshire to make sure councillors will represent about the same number of electors, and that ward arrangements will help the council work effectively. The Commission has published proposals for changes to Buckinghamshire. It is proposing that Buckinghamshire Council should have 98 councillors. Those councillors should represent 51 wards, represented by 10 three-councillor wards, 27 two-councillor wards and 14 single-councillor wards. The boundaries of most wards will change.

The changes to the Ivinghoe ward will be the reduction of elected councillors from 3 to 2 off.

The Commission has a dedicated section on its website where people can see the detail of the proposals and comment on the names of wards and their boundaries:

<https://www.lgbce.org.uk/all-reviews/south-east/buckinghamshire/buckinghamshire-council>

People can also give their views by e-mail at reviews@lgbce.org.uk, and by post:

Review Officer (Buckinghamshire)

LGBCE

PO Box 133

Blyth NE24 9FE

Buckinghamshire Council is upgrading its revenue and benefits systems

Buckinghamshire Council is preparing to move to a more efficient single system for all revenues and benefits functions, which includes council tax, business rates and benefits. This will complete the merge of the Chiltern and South Bucks systems with the already merged Aylesbury and Wycombe system – creating one new unified system serving the whole of Buckinghamshire.

The new and improved system will deliver many benefits to both residents and the council. These benefits include:

- Improved customer self-service functions and real-time notifications of their transactions
- Reduction in administration and an increase efficiency allowing council staff more time to spend on customers with priority and complex needs
- A reduction in printing and postage costs
- Increasing the council's ability to improve collection rates which can be used to pay for essential services
- New system makes it easier to check claims are correct and to clamp down on fraud

The temporary system shutdown is due to start on **Monday 15 August** for Chiltern and South Bucks systems, and **Thursday 22 September** for the Aylesbury and Wycombe system.

The target date to have the new system up and running is **Thursday 27 October**.

For help or assistance, residents can contact the council online:

[Council Tax](#)

[Housing and benefits](#)

Or by telephone: 0300 1316000

Residents are encouraged to check [Buckinghamshire Council's website](#) for updates on the status of the service.

Interested in adoption? Find out more at our free online webinars

Anyone interesting in finding out more about adoption in Buckinghamshire is invited to attend one of the council's new style Adoption Information Session Webinars. Designed to give people the opportunity to find out more about how the process works and to get answers to any questions they may have, the monthly events are open to all.

Webinars are planned for the following dates:

- 23 August 2022
- 20 September 2022
- 18 October 2022
- 22 November 2022

Anyone interested should book their place online: www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/adoption

At any one time there are dozens of children in Buckinghamshire who are looking to be adopted. This includes older children, brothers and sisters and children with additional There is further information online including an Adoption Readiness Checker which allows you to consider your circumstances and gives advice about how to become ready for adoption. Alternatively, you can call: 01494 586349 or email: adoption@buckinghamshire.gov.uk

Councillor Derek Town