

Buckinghamshire Councillors Report Edlesborough PC Meeting 21st April 2023

Council joins forces with Forestry England to create new woodland in Wing

Plans to plant a brand-new woodland in Wing have been given the green light in a joint project between Forestry England and Buckinghamshire Council. The new Wing Wood will see 132,000 trees planted on land owned by Buckinghamshire Council, creating an inspiring green space for local people, a valuable habitat for wildlife and a sustainable source of timber.

The decision to create the new woodland on the 51-hectare site follows a public consultation last year and local and national organisations were also involved in discussions over the woodland plan. Wing Wood will include a mix of tree species suited to the locality, five new wildlife ponds and a community orchard as well as accessible paths for walking and cycling. As part of the woodland design, Forestry England hope to link the new Wing Wood with Long Spinney Wood, creating clear paths and an easy connection between the two areas.

Forestry England will begin planting this year and aim to get most of the trees in the ground before the end of April with the rest planted in the autumn and winter. The 132,000 trees will form part of the council's pledge to plant 543,000 trees, one for every resident in Buckinghamshire by 2031, as part of its Climate Change Strategy.

Vision for future of Buckinghamshire libraries is agreed

Buckinghamshire Council's Cabinet has today reviewed and agreed a vision and strategy for Buckinghamshire's library service.

As well as traditional reading and book-borrowing, Buckinghamshire's library service has transformed to offer many more services including free computer classes, health checks, loanable tablets and a broad range of educational, social and cultural activities for all ages.

Over this winter our libraries have also become important welcoming spaces for anyone who needs a warm, free and safe space to visit during the colder months.

The strategy for Buckinghamshire's libraries adopted today has been developed after extensive consultation with users, staff, volunteers and stakeholders. It outlines the priorities for the service and agrees a clear vision for the future – which is that Buckinghamshire libraries “*provide welcoming and safe spaces for everyone to access reading, culture and the information and services they need to learn, discover, imagine and thrive.*”

With reading and book-borrowing still at the heart of our libraries, the new strategy reflects the growing use of libraries as community hubs accommodating other services too, for example, registrars and the Junction Youth Club in partnership with Action4Youth at High Wycombe library. Many libraries also now operate as Council Access Points, helping residents with information on wider council services.

New parking charges to come in across Buckinghamshire

New charges for on and off-street parking across Buckinghamshire will come into force from Monday 3 April. The changes are being introduced following a review by the council's budget scrutiny committee.

The changes will see an increase of 20p per tariff for on street parking and 10p per tariff for off street parking. Where applicable, free parking periods are expected to remain unchanged.

Buckinghamshire Council awarded £576k to provide energy efficiency and clean heating upgrades to low-income households in the county

Buckinghamshire Council has been awarded £576,000 from the government's Home Upgrade Grant to provide energy efficiency and clean heating upgrades to owner occupied and private rented properties in the county. The upgrades are aimed at tackling fuel poverty and reducing carbon emissions.

The scheme enables eligible households to benefit from a range of energy and cost saving upgrades, depending on the specific circumstances such as the fuel source, energy efficiency and EPC rating of the home. The majority of the funding will be made available for the least efficient homes heated by the most polluting fuel sources.

Council has a new tool in the fight against potholes

As part of its new contract, which started on 1 April, Buckinghamshire Highways has taken delivery of a different type of vehicle to help in the fight against potholes. Used by many councils across the country, the Pothole Pro is a time-saving, three-in-one vehicle designed to make pothole repairs faster. First it cuts into the road surface where a pothole has appeared, it crops the perimeter of the hole neatly to allow a watertight repair, and then it brushes away and collects the debris afterwards. Highways teams just need to lay and compact asphalt into the prepared hole to complete the repair.

The benefits of using such a vehicle are speed but also that operators are safely in their cab, with no risk of the use of vibrating hand tools affecting their hands or fingers.

Council sells unused land for affordable homes development

Buckinghamshire Council has announced the sale of unused council-owned land at Horns Lane in High Wycombe – paving the way for the construction of 50 affordable homes which will be managed by social housing provider Sovereign. This decision aligns with the council's ongoing commitment to addressing the urgent need for new, affordable housing within the county.

Woolridge Developments will be constructing the homes for Sovereign, who have a proven track record of delivering affordable housing. The housing association will work with the council to ensure that the homes are built to high standards, and that they meet the needs of the local community.

The Horns Lane development serves as yet another example of the council's proactive approach to community enhancement, following a similar project to deliver affordable homes on a council-owned site at Bellfield in High Wycombe, where 68 affordable homes will be built.

The Horns Lane homes will meet Sovereign's unique Homes and Place Standard and be constructed using its new range of house types. The new design range goes further to support the health and wellbeing of its future customers, exceeding national space standards, incorporating increased storage and renewable energy sources.

The new homes will have air source heat pumps and photovoltaic panels, making them even more affordable and sustainable.

Councillor Derek Town