



Cabinet Member report – Leader

Councillor Martin Tett

Strategic Finance

Budget Scrutiny took place in January with a number of question and answer sessions held on the overall budget proposals and financial strategy. The budget for 2024/25 was approved by Full Council on 21 February.

Whilst still in very uncertain times the assumptions used in setting the budget remain valid but as contained within the papers considered by Council in February there are still significant risks and uncertainties in the short and medium term. The new financial year starts with the Council having a balanced medium term financial plan for the next three years.

The final outturn position for 2023/24 is still being finalised and will be considered by Cabinet in due course, however despite significant challenges and pressures from rising demand and inflation the prudent budget setting and strong financial management of this Council means that we are not facing unsustainable overspends.

South East Aylesbury Link Road (SEALR)

Following a Cabinet funding decision on 25th March, we have taken another step forward in the construction of the South East Aylesbury Link Road (SEALR), with this key infrastructure project due to open to traffic in 2026.

SEALR will see the construction of 1.1 miles of dual carriageway including three new roundabout junctions. It is an essential part of the Orbital Link Road which, when completed, will provide a route around Aylesbury, easing congestion through the town centre. The new link road will join the A413 Wendover Road with the Stoke Mandeville Relief Road, which is being constructed by HS2 Ltd.

We are coordinating the SEALR scheme with the project being delivered in phases. Construction works on Wendover Road and Lower Road have already started to deliver two new roundabouts. Work is continuing to link Lower Road with the new Stoke Mandeville Relief Road and the future South West Aylesbury Link Road.

Later in the year, work is planned to start to connect Wendover Road and Lower Road, which will include the construction of a new bridge over the Aylesbury – Marylebone railway line.

South West Link Road

We continue to work with HS2, Network Rail, developers and landowners in South West Aylesbury to ensure that the complex infrastructure required in the area is able to support the needs of existing and future residents.

Eastern Link Road

After a decision at Cabinet in January, the Woodlands and Eastern Link Road project is progressing to market this Spring and officers will report back in due course.

Aylesbury electricity Grid Reinforcement

The Aylesbury Grid Reinforcement HIF project has been restructured due to legislative change, with UK Power Networks now securing land and planning to undertake critical works later in the year to secure the increased electricity capacity needed for the growth of Aylesbury.

Buckinghamshire Devolution Agreement

As part of the Chancellor's Spring Budget, Buckinghamshire has been offered a Devolution Framework Agreement. The main benefits of this to us will be the opportunity from 2026 to take control over the Adult Education Budget. This will give us local freedom to direct provision to support our local needs as identified in the Opportunity Bucks programme.

Negotiations will continue with government over the coming months, and I expect to bring details of the proposed secondary legislation to secure devolution for Buckinghamshire later in the year.

Buckinghamshire Place-Based Growth Board

The Growth Board met in February and March to preside over the integration of the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) into the Council and set up of the new Enterprise and Investment Fund. The Board is also taking an oversight of the Enterprise Zone programme for Buckinghamshire, income from which is being ringfenced into the new Economic Development Investment Fund. The Board is developing the priorities and criteria for this funding. Additionally, the Board is overseeing the new funding agreement between the council and Buckinghamshire Business First for the provision of business support and Skills Hub functions.

Buckinghamshire LEP

The LEP met for the last time on 29 February when the Transfer Agreement of the LEP's assets to the Council was agreed. The contribution that the LEP has made to the economic growth agenda in the county is appreciated as well as the commitment of its staff and private sector Board members over the years. My particular thanks go to Andrew Smith who has chaired the LEP since 2015 and been a great champion for Buckinghamshire and who will continue to sit on the Growth Board as my Vice

Chair. Economic growth in Buckinghamshire now looks forward to a new phase as part of the Council and under the strategic direction of the new Enterprise and Investment Board.

Buckinghamshire UK Shared Prosperity Fund

The UKSPF programme enters its final year of delivery in 2024-2025, with a number of new initiatives scheduled to launch particularly around the people and skills theme. For more information, please visit: [About the UK Shared Prosperity Fund \(UKSPF\) | Buckinghamshire Council](#)

Bucks Rural Business Grants

The Bucks Rural Business Grant fund focuses on small-scale investment in micro and small enterprises in rural areas. Its primary objectives are to create jobs, support business growth, and drive economic prosperity within Buckinghamshire.

The Bucks Rural Business Grants programme opened for applications on a rolling basis in June 2023 and has so far supported 10 rural projects to secure new equipment or upgrade premises. Funding has been used for a range of projects including providing new equipment ranging from fermentation tanks and canning lines to dog laser therapy as well as facilities to support tourism businesses.

Eligible businesses can apply for grants ranging from £2,500 to £300,000, with a requirement to match-fund a portion of the grant amount. Projects must be completed and funding claimed by 31 March 2025. For further information, please visit: [About the Bucks Rural Business Grant \(BRBG\) | Buckinghamshire Council](#)

England's Economic Heartland

England's Economic Heartland (EEH) is currently producing a series of 'investment brochures' which will be used to advocate for priority transport schemes in the region. This includes improvements to connectivity in Aylesbury, including the ring roads, and the East West Rail link to Milton Keynes; and improvements to the A404/M40. The brochures, which build upon EEH's body of evidence alongside new economic analysis, are due to go before EEH's Board in May. The Board will also consider EEH's next two connectivity studies, which focus on north-south movements between Northampton and southern Buckinghamshire and east-west movements between Buckinghamshire and east Hertfordshire.

A major work stream is also progressing on improving bus journeys and patronage in the region – this includes support for local authorities on refreshing their bus service improvement plans. With around a year to go until East West Rail opens between Oxford and Milton Keynes (including a station at Winslow), the most recent meetings of EEH and the East West Main Line Partnership (chaired by Cllr Steven Broadbent) have been given briefings on the East West Railway Company's emerging 'door-to-door strategy'. Both boards were clear that the next phase of work should be developed as a collaboration with local authorities, who must receive the appropriate funding to ensure the strategy's ambitions can be delivered.

Buckinghamshire Skills and Employment Strategy 2024-29

The Skills Strategy Board, reporting to the Place-Based Growth Board, brings together key partnerships and intelligence to progress the county's approach to increasing productivity through skills and employment interventions. The Skills Strategy Board has developed a Buckinghamshire-wide Skills and Employment Strategy 2024-29, to focus efforts and design the approach to increasing productivity through skills and employment interventions. The vision for the Strategy is:

Buckinghamshire: A place with a future-focused, agile and dynamic employment and skills system that assures the needs of employers, individuals and communities are met in order to contribute to the growth and productivity of the local economy.

The Strategy was formally adopted in January 2024 and was launched at Buckinghamshire College Group on the 12 January 2024, alongside the launch of the wave 4 Skills Bootcamps.

Homes for Ukraine

With the second anniversary of the conflict in Ukraine, our commitment to supporting Ukrainians living in Buckinghamshire remains consistent. We have used the Local Authority Housing funding from Government to recently purchase a block of flats in Chesham for nine Ukrainian families. The families moved into these flats in February, having previously been in temporary accommodation or about to be made homeless.

These properties will remain the property of Buckinghamshire Council and when no longer needed for Ukrainians will be available for us to use as needed.

Afghan Resettlement

On Friday 8 March, our Chairman, Councillor Birchley and the Lord Lieutenant, The Countess Howe, celebrated the conclusion of creative art workshops for several female Afghan refugees who have settled in Buckinghamshire, with the launch of an exhibition of their incredible work at Discover Bucks Museum. The workshops enabled these refugees to connect with each other, share their experiences, and support them to learn English, whilst also producing artwork reflecting their personal experiences.

South East Strategic Leaders (SESL)

SESL wrote to the Secretary of State for Transport setting out the need for greater investment in the roads network and highway maintenance. SESL also wrote to the MP Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and the Chancellor regarding the state of strategic authority finance.

Leaders, chief executives, and colleagues met the new Minister of Local Government, to discuss priorities and challenges for strategic authorities. That meeting was followed up by a further meeting of SESL and the Minister.

Leaders, chief executives and colleagues explored the use of artificial intelligence in preventative services and more widely across council functions.

House of Lords Public Services Select Committee

As Chair of the Local Government Association's People and Places Board, I gave evidence to the [House of Lords Public Services Committee](#) on Wednesday 7 February on the topic of the transition from education to employment for young disabled people, alongside officers from Essex County Council and Bristol City Council.





Cabinet Member report – Culture and Leisure

Councillor Clive Harriss

Libraries



The libraries have been involved in several cultural and creative projects, including Rekindle, a three-year project funded by the Arts Council England, which aims to bring culturally relevant and creatively vibrant activities to libraries. A recent highlight of the project included 'The Head Gardener', a show about gardening and mental health, which toured nine libraries in February and March with performances which focused on plant species and garden design, as well as singing a few songs. 95% of attendees rated the quality of the show as high or very high.

The Healthy Libraries programme is working with Public Health to update the Reading Well for dementia collection and to provide dementia information points and resources in partnership with the Alzheimer Society Local Service.

The Prison Library Programme is expanding, with a successful Arts Council England bid to deliver a Writers-in-Residency Programme at HMP Grendon, that started in March.

Culture

Buckinghamshire Archives has begun delivery of a project funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund which aims to research and share the stories of LGBTQ+ people and communities in the county during the Victorian era. The project will recruit and train over 20 volunteers, who to date have been researching archival sources and oral histories, and have uncovered some fascinating and hidden

stories, such as the trial of Oscar Wilde's lover, Lord Alfred Douglas, in Aylesbury, and the life of Annie Kenney, a suffragette and lesbian activist, in Lacey Green. The project has also been engaging with LGBTQ+ organisations, schools and heritage partners, and will produce a website, a podcast, an exhibition and a toolkit for teachers.

The Culture Development Team are supporting projects in Opportunity Bucks ward areas to enhance the quality of the public realm, and a schools programme linked to the upcoming Paralympic Games. WhizzFizz, the county's flagship cultural festival, is co-producing events with 35 community groups across Buckinghamshire for later this year.

Half-term activities at Discover Bucks Museum and Wycombe Museum included 80s inspired craft activities, Woollywonka's crochet workshops and felting fun. Wycombe Swan's Spring Youth Project performed Les Misérables on 17 and 18 February to a sold-out audience.



Wool experimentation, half-term activity at Wycombe Museum



Wycombe Swan, Spring Youth Project

Easter holiday events included an Easter Egg Hunt and craft activities at Wycombe Museum and Family Activity Days at Discover Bucks Museum. Wycombe Museum also hosted sessions for home educators, toddler forest school workshops and a family fun civil war reenactment day. Waterside Theatre held 'sold out' Make-Up Masterclass and drawing and painting workshops in the Norman Bragg studio.

Discover Buckinghamshire Museum is currently hosting 'Fractured Land', an exhibition featuring artworks inspired by Buckinghamshire landscapes in the museum collection.

Over the last weekend of July, [Open Weekend](#) will take place. It involves arts, heritage, sports and environmental organisations working together to share and celebrate creativity and culture in Buckinghamshire. The event is coordinated by Buckinghamshire Culture, delivered by venues and organisations across the county and is supported with investment from the Rothschild Foundation and Buckinghamshire Council. Last year, over 16,000 people visited new places and took part in free or low-cost arts activities as part of this annual weekend celebration in Buckinghamshire. This is an opportunity for people of all ages to try something new and experience the amazing variety of culture, arts, heritage and beautiful green spaces available year-round across the county.

Buckinghamshire Film Office

Despite the US strikes having a major impact on the film industry in the UK, Buckinghamshire Film Office worked with 90 productions in 2023/24 - from feature films to student productions - and handled more than 200 enquiries (an increase on the previous year). Income from filming for FY2023/24 reached £798k across Country Parks, Property, Highways, Parking and Film Office. The Film Office is experiencing a significant increase in enquiries and is aware of several productions planning to shoot in Buckinghamshire over the summer; we are therefore hopeful that we will see continued growth in 2024/25.

In February, the Film Officer attended the North West Chilterns Community Board's Business Networking event to promote opportunities from filming and the Film Office to local businesses. The session highlighted the benefits of promoting their venues through the [locations database](#), as well as the wider economic benefits to the area of production spend.

Parks and Green Spaces

I was delighted to officially open our new Changing Places Toilet at Black Park Country Park on 11 March alongside Beverley Dawkins OBE, who has been working to improve disabled people's lives for many years. This fully accessible facility for visitors with complex needs features a height-adjustable changing bench, a hoist system, a large waste bin and more space than a standard accessible toilet; and was installed with the support of funding from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. Our new Changing Places Toilet is now included on the national register compiled by Muscular Dystrophy UK; we hope it will enable many more visitors to enjoy the benefits of our park.



The Lake Erosion Project at Black Park is progressing well with initial tree works completed; the area will be fenced off ready for works to commence later in the year. The project is required as the northern bank of Black Park lake has been eroded by natural wave action. This has been significantly accelerated by the impact of visitor and dog activity on the unprotected banks of the lake. Trees and particularly tree roots, which have previously supported the bank structure, are now failing and leaving the banks at risk of further erosion. This area is currently devoid of vegetation due to compaction and visitor pressures and has little biodiversity value, so part of the project will be to deliver additional planting to improve the habitat value of this area of the lake.

The upgraded play area in Vale Park in Aylesbury was officially opened in March, with a new multi-play unit, a basket swing, a seesaw, a roundabout and a climbing net, as well as new surfacing and fencing. The recently completed Bridge Street Skatepark in Buckingham has received great feedback from local residents. The new concrete skatepark has been designed to accommodate all abilities, is significantly larger than the facility it replaced and comes with a variety of new ramps and rails,

lighting and CCTV. A £280k project to replace the 'Ropes on the Rye' play area in High Wycombe has also recently been completed, providing an exciting range of new equipment including a bespoke 'Tree Castle' multi-play unit, a mini space net, a track ride tower, a giant spinning disc, a 'cocowave' swing and an outdoor calisthenics fitness unit. Many of the new items have been crafted from recycled materials and incorporate features to improve access for all ages and abilities.

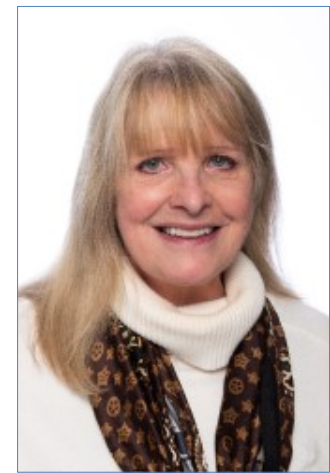
Leisure

The Council has been successful in bidding for a grant of £398k from the Government's Sport England Swimming Pool Fund for capital works to improve energy efficiency and reduce running costs at Aqua Vale Swimming & Fitness Centre in Aylesbury and the Swan Pool & Leisure Centre in Buckingham.

We have been working with our leisure partners on a comprehensive mobilisation programme for the new leisure contract which started from 1 April covering Aqua Vale Swimming & Fitness Centre in Aylesbury, Swan Pool & Leisure Centre in Buckingham, Little Marlow Athletics Track, The Beacon Leisure Centre in Beaconsfield and Evreham Sports Centre in Iver. This has included staff briefings, building inspections, equipment orders and ongoing customer communications to ensure a positive handover. As part of the new contract there will be investment of £500k across Aqua Vale Swimming & Fitness Centre and Swan Pool & Leisure Centre, with a full gym refit and all new equipment going into the sites during the first two weeks of April.

The service also supported a successful Opportunity Bucks pilot of swimming lesson sessions for children at Aqua Vale Swimming & Fitness Centre over February half-term.





Cabinet Member report – Health and Wellbeing

Councillor Angela Macpherson

Managing winter pressures

Since establishing the Transfer of Care Hub (ToCH) in October 2023, which has improved the hospital discharge process, over 1,150 people have been supported to leave hospital safely. The majority of these discharges have gone via the HomeFirst and HIT (Home Independence Team) pathways. The HIT pathway focuses on providing rehabilitation at home, while the HomeFirst pathway provides care for a longer period to support people with their recovery and regain their independence at home.

Referrals with highly complex needs which require additional time, go to social work to ensure that they have the right resources to leave hospital safely. Examples of this are cases where safeguarding involvement has been identified or there is a need for long term care.

The team has steadily managed the pressures throughout the winter period. Through the Health and Wellbeing Board, a partner survey was conducted as part of the system winter evaluation, and positive feedback was received. The results of a survey showed that 75% of service users and their carers thought that this winter pressures were better managed than last year. We will continue to review the feedback received and learn from it to ensure we are as prepared as possible for next winter.

I would like to thank all staff for their continued effort and dedication, particularly over the winter period, to manage the increasing pressures and continue to provide the best outcomes for our residents.

Adult Social Care – increasing demand

Demand continues to rise in adult social care, with 9,876 contacts received between December 2023 and February 2024 compared to 9,021 contacts between December 2022 and February 2023.

Of the contacts received between December 2023 and February 2024, 6,168 contacts related to care needs, with 3,262 new referrals and 2,906 contacts relating to an existing case. 592 safeguarding contacts have been progressed to a concern, which is where a social worker decides what action to take for the individual, and 555 Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLs) assessments were requested. 1,532 contacts were provided with information and advice and 356 contacts signposted to other agencies.

Care Quality Commission (CQC) Assurance of Adult Social Care

Following the publication of the [CQC local authority assurance framework](#), the Council continues its preparation for a future assessment visit. Between April and October 2023, the framework was tested with 5 local authorities and in November 2023 the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care formally approved the framework.

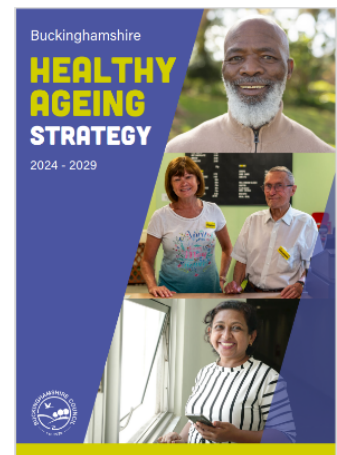


Although CQC will be inspecting all local authorities over a two year period, the programme of assessment for Buckinghamshire Council has not yet been assessed. However, we continue to focus on ensuring the Council is well prepared for the visit. This includes learning from others, including the Local Government Association and the five pilot authorities and developing our own self-assessment.

Healthy Ageing Strategy

On the 5 March 2024, Cabinet approved the first [Healthy Ageing Strategy](#), which sets out the ambition for Buckinghamshire to be more age friendly, supporting older people to live healthy, active and independent lives. The strategy sets out the commitment to become an 'age friendly community' by undertaking improvement actions across the 8 areas identified by the World Health Organization (WHO), which are:

- Outdoor spaces and buildings
- Transport
- Housing
- Participation in society
- Volunteering and employment
- Communication and information
- Community support for health and wellbeing
- Respect and social inclusion



This is a countywide strategy and in the first year, the focus will be on two priorities:

- Outdoor spaces and buildings
- Social isolation and loneliness

To deliver the strategy the Age Friendly Bucks Partnership, which I chair, has been set up with partners including the NHS and voluntary sector organisations. The partnership is now focused on delivering the action plan to make Buckinghamshire more age friendly. This includes the recently launched Healthy Ageing Fund which assists voluntary and community organisations to support new or expanding projects that improve social connectedness for older adults.

Public Health Campaigns

'Show Your Heart Some Love'

For International Women's Day (8 March 2024) Public Health launched their new campaign for women – 'Show Your Heart Some Love'.

Coronary heart disease kills twice as many women as breast cancer in the UK, and research shows that women are less likely to seek medical help when they are experiencing what could be symptoms of a heart attack. Simple lifestyle changes can massively lower the risk of heart disease, and knowing the symptoms of a heart attack and when to seek medical advice makes all the difference, as early intervention limits the damage done to the heart.

With busy lives and endless responsibilities, women can sometimes put themselves last, but our campaign aims to encourage women to prioritise heart health, ensure they know what to look out for, and feel empowered to seek medical help.

I encourage you to support this campaign by sharing the campaign page [Show your heart some love | Buckinghamshire Council](#) with your networks, and most importantly by encouraging the women in your life to get their blood pressure checked. This can be done at the free health kiosks at Aylesbury Library, High Wycombe Library, Burnham Library and Health on the High Street, Friars Square Aylesbury.



Healthy Start Scheme

The NHS Healthy Start scheme is a food assistance programme for low-income families providing financial support to families and pregnant women to buy fruit, vegetables, pulses, milk and infant formula. We estimated that over 1,000 Buckinghamshire families are missing out on financial support. To address this, a social marketing campaign is being developed for eligible families and local retailers consisting of promotional materials, a toolkit for partners and local comms campaign led by public health. The aim is to increase uptake of the scheme locally by increasing awareness and knowledge of the scheme. So far, over 45 partners and organisations, and 92 retailers have been engaged and are supporting the promotion of the scheme.



Social Work and Occupational Therapy Apprenticeship Degrees

Delivered alongside Bucks New University, the apprenticeship programmes include social work, and a new BSc (Hons) in Occupational Therapy (OT), which is launching in September 2024. This is great news for Buckinghamshire and the Council who can take advantage of localised training and potential staff to join teams. We aim to enrol around 4 employees onto the social work apprenticeship in 2024.

Both apprenticeship degrees are 3 years in duration. Most social work degree learners are existing staff who have been working as social work assistants. On qualifying, the successful candidates move to a qualified role and go on to complete their assessed supported year of employment (ASYE). After completing this 12-month internal programme, the member of staff is a fully qualified social worker.





Cabinet Member report – Transport

Councillor Steve Broadbent

Buckinghamshire Highways Update

The Highways contract for Buckinghamshire is one year old! The first year of the new arrangements have seen a completely new delivery model implemented, with far greater control of direction and works ordering by the Client team, alongside Alliance delivery partners Balfour Beatty Living Places, AtkinsRéalis and specialist framework contractors.

Looking back, the start of the new contract coincided with one of the most damaging winters for road surfaces we have ever seen and followed recently by one of the most relentlessly wet and stormy winters on record – all bringing extensive challenges for the service. By the end of the year, our crews had fixed over 30,000 potholes, delivered a £42 million capital programme, and for the third year running, attended and cleansed almost every one of our 85,000 gullies. Our emergency crews dealt with a staggering 3,300 call-outs, responding 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Looking forward, 2024/25 promises another bumper year for delivery with plans in place to deliver both the capital programme and the additional £5M council funding for road repairs, as well as a DfT funded extra £1.6M. We will also maintain our highway drainage assets ahead of next winter and ensure our streetlighting stock remains in light whilst completing the LED replacement programme.

We will be working with our Alliance partners to trial new, innovative processes, materials and plants where they may offer the best value for money to Buckinghamshire residents, as well as tackling key issues such as reducing our carbon impact and adding social value to local communities.



HS2 Road Safety Fund - Puffin Crossing at Westbury

In February, children from Beachborough School, Westbury celebrated the official opening of a new Puffin Crossing in their village which will make crossing the busy A422 much safer. The works were carried out by Buckinghamshire Highways and the cost of £223,000 was met by the HS2 Road Safety Fund which was established in recognition of the impact HS2 construction is having on communities in Buckinghamshire and to leave a legacy of safer roads.

Parking Strategy

In February, a new Parking Strategy was approved by Cabinet which sets out how the service will develop in coming years. Embracing technology and innovation, the strategy has been informed by a previous review of current parking arrangements and addresses inconsistencies across the county identifying where changes are needed in order to provide a better service for residents and visitors to the county.

Key aims within the strategy include:

- A commitment to maintaining the upkeep of quality parking provision across the county
- Working to ensure the council's parking operations are fully self-funded
- Intelligent use of parking enforcement to ensure effective enforcement
- A gradual transition to online/digital payments for all parking, reflecting trends in payment preferences which have accelerated in recent years, whilst maintaining cash payments for as long as economically possible in existing locations
- Ensuring residents and customers are kept fully informed of changes

The council is signing up to the National Parking Platform (NPP), a Department for Transport pilot scheme which aims to provide greater flexibility in paying for parking while providing value for money. The scheme will be piloted in council car parks in Wycombe and allows customers to choose from which supplier they will purchase their parking time.

Public Footpath affected by HS2 sinkhole reopened

A well-used public footpath at Great Missenden has been reopened following its two-month closure as a result of the HS2 related sinkhole which appeared last November. Following the Council's swift intervention and pressure on HS2, the hole was repaired, and the route reopened for the public to safely use.

Berry Hill Footbridge – Taplow – across the Jubilee River

The work to replace the mid-section of Berry Hill Footbridge in Taplow is progressing. The Environment Agency has agreed the work programme for installation of the new structure anticipated to commence in May. It is expected that the new section will be floated down the river on pontoons and lifted hydraulically into place.

Rights of Way Capital projects update

Recent capital works have been completed on the Rights of Way network. Surface works have been completed on public bridleways #51 in Denham and #14 in Beachampton. The public footpath #14 in Stewkley has had clearance and surface drainage work completed whilst a replacement bridge has been installed at public footpath #1 in Hedsor.

School Transport Update

Following National Secondary School Offer Day on 1 March and National Primary School Offer Day on 16 April, teams in Children's Services are busy assessing [school transport eligibility](#) for new pupils. Pupils who are eligible for Council-funded school transport assistance will be referred to the Client Transport Team over the coming months. The team work over the summer making suitable arrangements ahead of the start of the new school year in September. More information on school transport is available online [here](#).

Demand Responsive Transport Update – Aylesbury Launch

Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) is a flexible type of bus service that allows users to book their journeys on demand as they require it, between any two points within the operational area. This is instead of a traditionally routed and scheduled bus service but provided at fares that are in line with them. Buckinghamshire Council were successful in submitting a bid to the Department for Transport Rural Mobility Fund (RMF) in 2020. This provides part-funding for two DRT pilot schemes which will operate for 3 years in High Wycombe and in Aylesbury. The High Wycombe scheme, known as "[Pick Me Up](#)", launched in September 2022.

The Council has recently awarded a contract to [We Move](#), for the Aylesbury scheme. The new Aylesbury DRT service is planned to start in late spring 2024 and will benefit residents in villages around Aylesbury, including Aston Clinton, Weston Turville, Stoke Mandeville, Weedon, Hartwell and Bishopstone, by providing a convenient and affordable travel option to supplement existing public transport services. Further information about the Aylesbury scheme will be publicised in the coming weeks as the new contract is mobilised.

Concessionary Fares - Early travel scheme extension



We have agreed a further extension until 31 March 2025 for our early travel offer. Holders of the [Buckinghamshire Older Person](#) and [Disabled Bus Passes](#) will be able to travel before 9am (Monday to Friday) for a reduced single fare of £1 on all journeys starting in Buckinghamshire. Holders of a pass for a visual impairment can continue to travel free of charge at any time.

Modeshift Stars National Award

Modeshift STARS is the Centre of Excellence for the delivery of Effective Travel Plans and the scheme recognises schools that have shown excellence in supporting cycling, walking and other forms of sustainable and active travel. Congratulations to Thorpe House School in Gerrards Cross who were successful in winning the STARS Regional Secondary School of the Year 2023/24 – Southeast at the regional awards and represented Buckinghamshire at the national awards. This marks another

regional award for a Buckinghamshire secondary school following Amersham School's success last year.

High Wycombe Transport Strategy & LCWIP

Following public consultation, the Council has now approved and adopted its Transport Strategy and Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) for High Wycombe. The Transport Strategy envisions that by 2050, High Wycombe will be among the best connected and most innovative towns in the Thames Valley. The LCWIP outlines in more detail, the opportunities for a future walking, cycling and wheeling network and a prioritised programme of infrastructure improvements for High Wycombe. Delivery of these priorities is subject to further development work and external funding.

Further information is available on the Buckinghamshire Council website: [Council approves new Transport Strategy for High Wycombe | Buckinghamshire Council](#)

Active Travel Funding for Buckingham Railway Walk



Following a successful application, Buckinghamshire Council has been awarded £1.42m through Active Travel England's Active Travel Fund (ATF). In Buckinghamshire, this funding will facilitate the delivery of a new route along a disused railway line corridor, the 'Railway Walk', in Buckingham. The funding will enable the existing path to be upgraded to a Greenway style route between the A421 and Tingewick Road, enhancing accessibility for residents to local schools, facilities and existing and proposed active travel routes.

The Railway Walk scheme is identified as part of the town's active travel network proposed in the [Buckingham Transport Strategy](#) and Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan. The scheme will be developed in conjunction with local stakeholders. Once complete, the Railway Walk will also form part of the Council's [Buckinghamshire Greenway](#) vision for a continuous north-south active travel route across Buckinghamshire.

Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure funding secured

The Council have successfully secured a further £1.9m of Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) capital funding (provided by the Office for Zero Emission Vehicles) to install hundreds of new public charge points across Buckinghamshire. This funding will be focused in areas where there are large numbers of properties with no access to driveways or off-road car parking, delivering primarily on-street charging solutions and enabling more people to switch from petrol- or diesel vehicles to EVs. This project will help towards meeting the target of 1,000 publicly-accessible charge points by the end of 2027, as set out in our EV Action Plan available online [here](#).

Wendover Electric Vehicle (EV) Charging Trial – in-pavement cable channels



Part of the Wendover electric vehicle (EV) charging trial, the Council has recently installed in-pavement cable channels outside eligible households through the use of LEVI funds. These cable channels enable homeowners who do not have access to a driveway to connect safely from their charge point to their EV parked on the road outside their house. The scheme may also help to reduce carbon emissions and improve air quality in Wendover by encouraging the uptake of EVs. The trial commenced in February 2024 and will be reviewed throughout the next two years.



Cabinet Member report – Communities

Councillor Arif Hussain

Cost of Living

We have continued to develop and deliver a range of initiatives this year, utilising the Household Support Fund, to support residents regarding cost of living pressures; delivered through our Helping Hand service providing support to residents who need it most.

This year we have issued over 88,500 digital food vouchers to eligible families ensuring that they have access to food during the school holidays.

Funding has been provided to support over 90 Voluntary and Community Sector initiatives and schemes for residents across Buckinghamshire to ensure that residents can access support locally to themselves.

We welcome confirmation from Government that we will receive further funding via the Household Support Fund between April and September 24, and are developing plans to ensure this fund is used effectively during this period.

VCSE (Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise) Sector



Congratulations to Community Impact Bucks who recently celebrated the placement of its 2000th volunteer in the county since the Volunteer Matching Service was set up in 2020. This valuable service makes it easy to find volunteering opportunities and currently has over 800 volunteer vacancies across the county.

There are a variety of different ways to volunteer. You can get involved with this year's Big Help Out taking place on the 7th to 9th June where you can pledge to lend a hand within your local community. More details can be found on their website [The Big Help Out | Home](#)

We will also be celebrating the 40th Year of Volunteers Week in early June (3rd to 9th June), where we will recognise and thank volunteers who do such a fantastic job supporting local organisations, schools and sports clubs to name a few.

The VCSE Resilience Fund is drawing to a close with funding totalling circa £222,000 being given to local organisations to support them with cost-of-living increases. I will bring you more on this in my next report. Huge thanks to the Mulberry Trust, Rothschild Foundation and Heart of Bucks who have supported this fund.

Community Boards

The engagement work for the Community Boards Boundary Review has continued, with several Members having requested a one to one meeting with me. In addition to this, feedback was also received from other Members via email. Further engagement has also taken place with the community board team, our town and parish councils and other key partners.

Proposals are now being drawn up on options for the future which will be considered by Cabinet in due course. These new arrangements will be effective after the elections in May 2025.



The Community Board Annual Report for 2023/24 is on the agenda for this Council meeting and provides a really positive overview of the work of the Boards over the last 12 months and of the outcomes delivered locally. There has been a real drive to increase the engagement and partnership working which has seen some very good projects come to fruition with local partners.

Social media and Board promotion has been a priority for this year, the Boards have generated an additional 2000 followers and nearly all physical projects will have plaques or other branding showing they are funded or supported by their Community Board.



I have continued to meet with various residents' groups, organisation and Chairmen to discuss a variety of subjects and to continue to familiarise myself with what is happening across the County.

I would urge you to get involved with your local Community Boards as our priorities are being set for the coming financial year. One notable example of how by working together we can make a difference is a project completed by High Wycombe Community Board. Through collaboration with the Department for Health and Social Care, South Central Ambulance Service, the Chair of Hazlemere Fete, Buckinghamshire Councillors, public health, community groups, and residents, 14 public access defibrillators have been procured and installed around High Wycombe.

The aim of the initiative is to enhance community safety and emergency response capabilities by strategically placing defibrillators in community locations with the highest footfall. By leveraging partnerships and community involvement, the project will ensure widespread accessibility to life-saving equipment in community venues and faith settings. Overall, the project exemplifies the power of collective action in safeguarding public health and well-being and will benefit the local community.

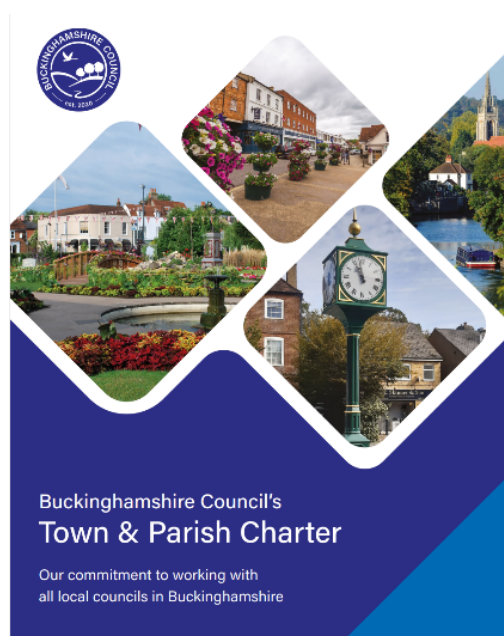
Devolution

Following the introduction of our new devolution policy, two projects have been completed since December. Prestwood Recreation Ground completed in January and three Community Centres, and an associated piece of land should be transferred to Aylesbury Town Council shortly.

One project remains in progress, and we will consider what project to bring forward next.

Town & Parish Councils

Feedback from the Town and Parish Survey in 2023 highlighted that more engagement with Town and Parish Councils was needed. In response to this I have established the Town & Parish Focus Group, working with a cohort of representative local councils to understand current issues affecting them. Our last meeting was on the 9th April, with feedback being shared at the wider Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Association of Local Councils (BMKALC) on the 24th April 2024.



A refreshed Town & Parish Action plan was shared with the Focus Group, picking up actions from the town and parish survey, and outstanding actions from the previous Charter Action Plan. The action plan will continue to be reviewed and updated by the Focus Group.

I attended the Town and Parish Clerks Forum in Aylesbury, which was well supported and informative. I look forward to the next forums on the 22nd and 23rd April. The format of the meeting has recently been reviewed and a new actions log has been created which is shared with all Town and Parish Clerks. Where possible we will endeavour to respond to and resolve all queries within 2 weeks. More complex cases may take a little longer, but our aim is to maintain an honest and open dialogue.

The next Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Association of Local Councils (BMKALC) meeting will take place at the end of April so I will be able to report back on this in my next update. This meeting is led by BMKALC for town and parish councils so would encourage your local councils to attend.

Community Safety

The Community Safety Team will be commencing a county wide consultation on all the existing Public Space Protection Orders (PSPOs). These are;

- Aylesbury Vale Public Parks
- Aylesbury Vale Town Centre
- Buckingham Town Centre
- Chiltern, Alcohol Restrictions
- Chiltern, Car Parks
- High Wycombe, Desborough Rd
- High Wycombe, Town Centre
- High Wycombe West End Rd
- South Bucks, Dorney Lake
- Winslow and Steeple Claydon

Full details of all active PSPO's can be found on the Council's website on this link- [Public space protection orders and how they help your community | Buckinghamshire Council](#).

This review will be looking at which orders need to be continued and those which need to have new prohibitions added.

The review is being undertaken due to a number of the existing orders across the county having inconsistent prohibitions and some areas having a change in local needs and crime and community safety concerns.

Therefore, this will be assessed and if necessary new prohibitions will be introduced to meet the changing needs of our communities and the challenges they face. All ward members and town and parish councils affected will be notified when the consultations begin and will have the opportunity to make their views known.

Resilience Service

In my last update I spoke about Storm Ciaran and the work the Resilience Service carried out to support response activity. Unfortunately, since that update, we have had Storm Henk which was a much more severe and disruptive storm. Along with other council services the Resilience Service supported a number of Town and Parish councils through warning and informing them on expected flooding. This included those along the river Ouse catchment area and along the Thames in Marlow and Bourne End.

There was significant partnership work undertaken and the Resilience Service represented the council at both Tactical and Strategic Coordination Group meetings that were held several times a day over a weeklong period. This process was supported by our own internal emergency response mechanisms being put into place.

Planning is currently taking place to deliver Exercise Yorktown on the 23 April. Yorktown will be testing the council response to a scenario that will entail emergency response procedures being set up and testing our capacity to set up, manage and close down a rest centre. The Resilience Service are taking this event out into the community as it will be staged at the community hall in Wingrave.

Since my last update Business Continuity Management (BCM) has moved back into the Resilience Service. In January they launched a new BCM strategy and structure on behalf of the council with the goal being that every Service in the council will have a working BCM product hosted on the same internal platform with an analytical tool built into the system. Service areas are currently completing the new templates designed to support the process and from the beginning of April this should be fully embedded.

Cyber remains a constant threat across the UK and the Resilience Service are working with council colleagues to ensure that we have robust structures in place to manage and respond to any threat. Whilst still in the early stages of planning, the Resilience Service will be running a weeklong BCM exercise that will incorporate an element of cyber resilience.





Cabinet Member report – Homelessness and Regulatory Services

Councillor Mark Winn

Vapes

Following a government announcement, we are expecting legislation shortly that will ban the sale of disposable vapes and put further restrictions on where other vapes are displayed in shops and the packaging of those vapes. In the meantime, there are two strands of enforcement being undertaken by the Trading Standards team with the support of Public Health – underage test purchases of vapes to identify and deal with shops selling vapes to under 18's and removing illegal vapes from sale. We continue to find numerous examples of child appealing vapes on sale, so we are keen to see the legislation change which is likely to make this illegal.



Vapes seized in January 2024



Examples of child appealing vapes

Multi-agency work

In December, the licensing service introduced new monthly liaison meetings involving the service areas and local partner agencies involved in the various licensing regimes. The meetings have provided an opportunity to exchange information, co-ordinate activities, plan joint operations, and share ideas, knowledge and experience.

Multi-agency visits took place on 6th December involving Licensing, Trading Standards and Thames Valley Police working in 3 teams across the county area. 19 shops and 2 pubs were visited. 8 warnings were issued for various licence contraventions and a seizure of illicit tobacco and vapes was made from 1 premises. 3 referrals were made to Bucks Fire & Rescue Service in relation to concerns about safe means of escape.

£155,000 compensation returned to a Buckinghamshire consumer

A victim of home improvement fraud investigated by Trading Standards (TS) has received £155,000 compensation from the perpetrator. An expert surveyor employed by TS found that works to her house were unnecessary and of such a poor standard they would have to be done again. The trader was prosecuted by TS and pleaded guilty to offences under the Fraud Act. In May 2023 he received a 30-month prison sentence. Further details can be found [here](#).

Environmental Health updates

We have continued to experience high demand in the winter period concerning poor housing conditions including issues related to damp and mould in homes. We have worked with professional partners (i.e. NHS, social care, citizens advice) to ensure that they can make direct referrals for assistance in Opportunity Bucks wards on behalf of their clients. We have also been working in partnership with the hospital discharge teams to enable clients' home conditions to be improved, enabling speedier discharge home to a suitable environment with the target of reducing future hospital readmission rates. The proactive targeting of unlicensed HMOs (houses in multiple occupation) has led to a number of enforcement cases, which in some cases have involved the service of Civil Penalties as an alternative to prosecution.

We provide expert advice on environmental noise, air quality and land quality and are currently working on the expansion of London Luton Airport development consent order (DCO). Work also continues on the HS2 project in relation to construction noise and the operational noise consenting process. The Noise App is now available to all residents to enable them to report noise nuisance to the Council using their mobile phone. More information can be found [here](#).

Officers have carried out a project on gas safety in catering establishments. Issues found included ignition switches not working, fail safe devices tampered with or too dirty to work, poor ventilation and a lack of maintenance and certification. Enforcement action was taken to rectify the problems and in total 21 appliances were made safe.

Environmental Health - Strategic Environmental Protection

The Strategic Environmental Protection team are currently reviewing and consolidating the existing legacy area Air Quality Action Plans with a view to creating a revised plan for Buckinghamshire. This will require DEFRA assessment, followed by stakeholder consultation and then formal adoption in line with Local Air Quality Management Policy Guidance. It is also intended that any potential revocations of existing Air Quality Management Areas as suggested by DEFRA are also considered as part of this forthcoming consultation.

Scrap Metal Policy

The Leader agreed the adoption of the first Scrap Metal Licensing Policy for Buckinghamshire Council which took effect from 1st April 2024. The policy sets out the Council's approach to licensing fixed sites and mobile collectors of scrap metal. Through the policy mandatory DBS checks will help safeguard the public and licensed collectors will be more easily identified via the display of window cards.

Street trading policy

On 27th February 2024 the Licensing Committee agreed the content of a new draft street trading consent policy for public consultation. The draft policy proposes the introduction of a single consent area across Buckinghamshire and contains measures to help promote healthy lifestyle choices and environmentally friendly activities. Elected members, town and parish councils and all relevant stakeholders are encouraged to complete the online survey at [Your Voice Bucks](#) between 11 March and 21st April 2024.

Taxi and Private Hire Licensing

In November 2023, the Department for Transport published new "Taxi and private hire vehicle licensing best practice guidance" for licensing authorities in England. The guidance covers vehicle design, age limits, livery, emission levels, testing arrangements, inclusive transport planning for disabled passengers and staff training. The Service is reviewing the current [policy](#) in light of the new guidance and holding workshops with stakeholders. A public consultation on proposed policy changes will follow.

Unauthorised Encampments

The Autumn and winter months have been quiet as expected for the time of year with only one further report of an encampment since the last update, making it fourteen for the fiscal year. This has been the quietest year for unauthorised encampments since the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, it remains to be seen if this is a shift in Gypsy/Traveller behaviours or an anomaly.

We will continue to work collaboratively with partner agencies, and assess the welfare needs of Travelling groups in Buckinghamshire, which gives us the opportunity to decide upon the most appropriate enforcement action. We aim to keep any disruption on local authority land to a minimum whilst balancing the human rights of those who choose a nomadic lifestyle; however, we will take robust enforcement action on those who flaunt the law.

Being seasonal, most unauthorised encampments begin in the springtime when the weather begins to improve, so we are likely to see an upturn in numbers around March 2024. Some of our neighbouring counties such as Oxfordshire have also had low numbers of encampment's compared to their usual figures whereas Milton Keynes continues to experience high levels.

Crematoria & Cemeteries

After a lot of hard work, the Crematoria service is very pleased to be able to showcase its newly launched website. This new website houses both of our crematoria pages with customers able to easily manoeuvre between the two creating an all-over better customer experience.

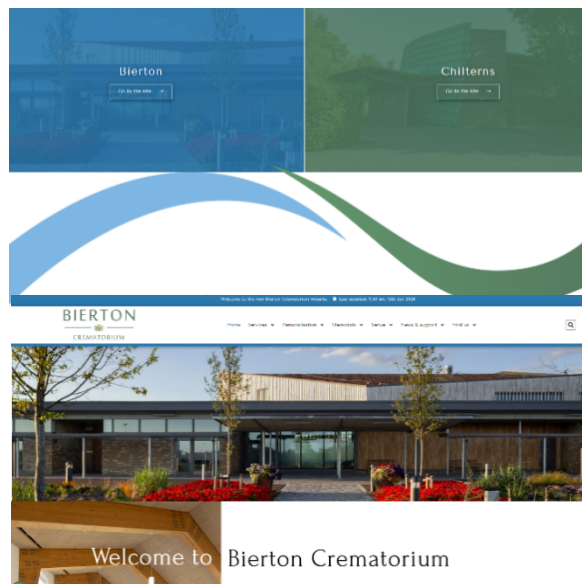
A project two years in the making, working collaboratively with the Corporate Web Design Team, the focus was put into improving the look, feel & accessibility of the webpages with a goal to remove excessive costs and create a more sustainable website. This was achieved by combining the two legacy websites into one and designing the new site with the potential to subsequently add our cemeteries and the ambition to expand our services.

Our sleek new 'one stop shop' has the customer experience at the forefront with new attention around bereavement, education, and support as well as a community focus on events and local charities.

A tremendous amount of effort has gone into ensuring that this design is practical, accessible and user friendly with a new mobile format creating an inviting, and easy to navigate webpage and working closely with the web team to ensure the language used supported our drive for inclusivity.

Newly added pages support a variety of work still going on in the background as we continue to strive for new and innovative products and services. We continue to develop the customer experience and although this is by no means our final product, we are very proud to now be able to demonstrate the fantastic upgrade of our new platform and the hard work that gone into its development.

Since it was opened in July 2022 approximately 140 burials have taken place within Penn Road Cemetery with a significant number of these taking place within the Muslim Section of the cemetery. The graves within this section are carefully aligned ensuring that they are orientated to meet the needs of the Muslim faith.



Concrete burial chambers were the preferred option for burial, within the Muslim Community, at High Wycombe Cemetery and this preference was approved for Penn Road Cemetery following a consultation prior to its opening. Installation of the chambers facilitates a same day burial service, Monday to Saturday, as required by the community.



The Cemeteries Team have recently successfully completed a procurement exercise for a second instalment of chambers, and this has expanded the Muslim Section by a further 99 concrete chamber lined graves to meet future need. The burial chambers are installed underground and the programme of work, that took over three weeks to complete, involved the removal of 50 loads of soil using Tipper Load trucks carrying up to 20 tonne each with 10 tonne of soil left on site for future use. Working collaboratively with the supplier on site the team were able to continue to provide burials within the cemetery throughout this period with no disruption to those attending services.

Homelessness Prevention

The number of households approaching the Council for assistance with their housing between December and January decreased by 126, this reduction was expected due to Christmas period. The top three reasons for requesting homelessness advice and assistance continue to be landlord serving a notice, clients at risk of domestic abuse and relationship breakdowns. Our Rough Sleeper figures across Bucks were 15 in December and just 9 in January. We have placed three long term High Wycombe rough sleepers into off the street accommodation in January and they are still in accommodation and doing well. One rough sleeper who had not spoken to any services for the last four years is now in temporary accommodation and has started to engage with the services thanks to joint working with colleagues in the MEAM team.

Temporary Accommodation

Work continues in the team to reduce the spend on Temporary Accommodation and in particular more expensive nightly paid accommodation. As at the beginning of March, there were 393 households in Temporary Accommodation, of which 184 were in nightly paid. This is a reduction compared to the 246 households in nightly paid at the end of March 2023. The team have also worked hard to reduce the overall nightly cost.

The team continue to work with providers to review voids in Temporary Accommodation. All of the workshops with the substantive Temporary Accommodation providers have now been concluded and we are drafting a Memorandum of Understanding, which will standardise and improve Temporary Accommodation void turnaround times. The metrics around this will be monitored to ensure improved performance. In addition, we are looking at how the Council's own substantive stock can improve its voids performance and the cost thereof.

Disabled Facilities Grant

Between October 2023 and the end of February 2024, 89 adaptations to homes were completed. This is an increase from the previous quarter. Alongside this, the team have been working hard to reduce the backlog of applications in the service and have reduced the average waiting time from 7-8 months at the beginning of the year to 3 months.

Bucks Home Choice

As at the end of February 2024, there were 6224 live applications on the housing register, which is an increase of 183 compared to September 2023. Between October and February, the Council let 455 social housing properties through Bucks Home Choice. This is an increase on the 266 lets completed between July and September 2023.

Registration Service

The service is now planning for the busy Spring and Summer seasons with the increase in ceremonies from Easter time. We are training our new staff from last May to conduct at ceremonies so that we have capacity to cover the summer months. The office at Buckingham Library opened in November and has appointments for one day a week. This has proved to be very popular and most appointments are taken up each week. We had a very successful Winter Promotion offer for getting married during the winter months and booked in an extra 89 ceremonies due to this marketing. We now plan to market our summer availability in a similar way. Bookings for ceremonies for 2023/24 stand at 1723, with the total for 2022/23 being 1851. The year 2024-2025 bookings currently stand at 1070, an increase of 340 bookings since the last report.

Coroner's Service

The service continues to be extremely busy investigating unnatural deaths in the county. The service now has a Court Officer who attends inquests which alleviate some of the workload of the Coroner's Officers and we have also recruited an extra Officer to help with the caseloads as staff had double of what the Chief Coroner recommended. With the Medical Examiner system being implemented shortly, this has been a welcomed addition to the team and has eased the pressured placed on the Coroner's Officers as a whole.

Work continues on the Portal which will allow Police and medical practitioners to report unnatural deaths to the Coroner much quicker and add directly onto the reporting system. This will have a positive impact on the workload of the Coroner's Officers who would usually upload these referrals manually.





Cabinet Member report – Planning and Regeneration

Councillor Peter Strachan

Regeneration

I am delighted that since the Cabinet adopted the 'Regenerating Bucks', a regeneration framework, we now have three regeneration programmes in place for our key towns of Aylesbury, High Wycombe and Chesham. We are working in partnership with other key stakeholders in each of these towns to keep our focus on delivery and to really start to see our strategies come to life.

These strategies are key in progressing forward regeneration opportunities within our towns. We are also looking at other projects and sites that can be delivered in the short term whilst some of the larger sites are considered for regeneration.

In High Wycombe a number of key projects are being progressed including:

- White Hart Street Public Realm Enhancement – after the initial phase 1 of outline design and engagement with key stakeholders on the ambitions for this scheme, phase 2 has now commenced for the detailed design and implementation timetable, in partnership with Highways colleagues. It is anticipated that we can share designs with the public for views later in November/December and commence works early 2024.
- Eastern Quarter – an exciting and ambitious project has commenced that will set out our ambitions for this key major site to ensure delivery of much needed regeneration, housing, leisure and employment. Additionally, this project will identify opportunities to enhance the heritage and existing built environment whilst creating new and sustainable cycle and pedestrian spaces and improvements to our green spaces and public realm.

We are also taking forward the ambitions of the Aylesbury Regeneration Strategy which Cabinet agreed last year through the proposed improvement works to Market Square, Cambridge Street and Kingsbury (traffic regulation orders).

- **Traffic regulation Orders** - The council installed temporary traffic regulation orders in the town centre including Cambridge Street as a covid recovery measure which has proved popular including a petition to make the orders permanent. A formal consultation process took place in February to respond to this. Consultation responses are being analysed and proposals will be taken forward for a Leaders Key Decision. It is anticipated that permanent orders will be implemented from June 2024.
- **Cambridge Street** - Public realm improvements for Cambridge Street have been developed between the Harrow pub and No.22. This scheme will build on the benefits of the street

closure and create an attractive environment in this section of the street which is home to a number of independent businesses. Cambridge Street businesses will be engaged in the details as the scheme progress through the detailed design stage.

- **Market Square Improvement Works** - Improvements are also planned in the Market Square to enliven this space. Further details of this work are being finalised and will be subject to a Leader Decision for delivery in coming months.

Planning Enforcement

The planning enforcement service continues to take a focused and efficient approach to resolving breaches of planning control, either by amicable negotiation, or by using the full spectrum of enforcement powers.

In real terms, this means the team served a total of 86 planning enforcement notices in 2023, along with 45 other formal actions being taken. Of course, this formal action, in turn results in a continued increase in enforcement notice appeals lodged to the Planning Inspectorate with the team having seen the number of new enforcement notice appeals this year almost double to 62.

The team were also successful in seeking 6 Injunctions at the High Court and prosecuting 3 offenders. It is very encouraging to see law courts backing up our approach and the decisions taken by the team.

Whilst formal action clearly plays an important part of the role of the Council, these formal actions and appeals need to be managed alongside the day-to-day investigations. 2023 saw 1569 investigations being opened, which is an increase of 32% over the previous year, but as well as managing an increase in the number of cases and appeals, the team also managed to close 2418 investigations, which is an increase of 30% on last year's figures.

Alongside the appeals, which currently stand at 79 in hand, and the increased new investigations, the team have been working to clear the backlog of cases inherited from the legacy authorities, and COVID. This focused working has seen the cases in hand reduce from near 1500 last year to now under 1000, which is a much more productive and manageable caseload for officers.

Our continued solution focused approach from the team ensures that harmful breaches of planning control are regularly remedied. Of particular note is a case where the team secured demolition of a large extension that had been erected to the side of a dwelling, and clad with white PVC, in the open countryside. The team have also secured compliance with 4 enforcement notices on various sites across Buckinghamshire in relation to unauthorised use for vehicle storage and airport parking, 3 of sites were in the Green Belt. These examples demonstrate that we seek to continually uphold the planning system and follow through our formal actions until the breach is fully resolved. Formal action is really just the start of the process.

Our high performing team continues to push the Council’s no-nonsense approach to planning enforcement matters, ensuring a firm and fair line is taken against breaches of planning control, taking action where it is proportionate and appropriate to do so, to ensure Buckinghamshire is protected from harmful development.

Planning Policy

I am pleased to report that Cabinet agreed to adopt the Shenley Park Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) at its meeting on 13 February 2024. This means that it will be used to guide the development of a new community on the site comprising at least 1,150 homes, a primary school, new walking and cycling routes, and a local shopping centre.

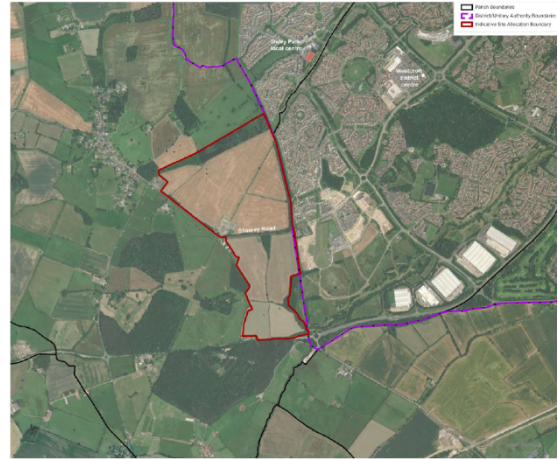


Figure 2: Shenley Park Site boundary overlaid on aerial plan of site and surroundings

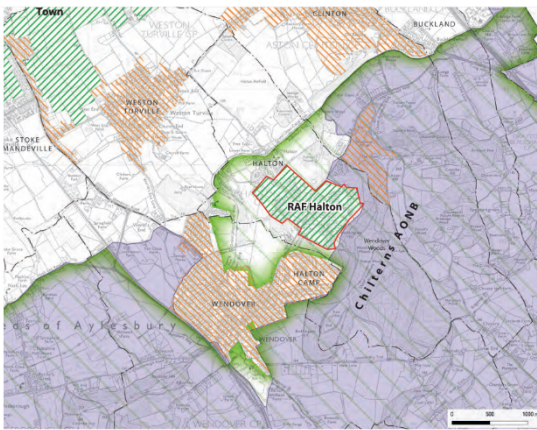


Fig. 1: Location and wider context of the RAF Halton strategic allocation

We commenced the public consultation on the draft SPD for the remaining Vale of Aylesbury Local Plan site allocation at RAF Halton on 22 January. This closed on 4 March. The consultation attracted approximately 220 comments via the Planning Policy online consultation portal and 110 individual responses. The Planning Policy team is now considering these representations and what revisions to the SPD should be made in response. The aim is for Cabinet to be asked to agree the adoption of the final version of the document later this year.

Development Management

Planning applications (major, minor and other) are being determined above the KPI targets set for speed of decision.

Table - Quarterly performance 2023-2024 in respect of determination of planning applications

Category	Q3 (22/23)	Q4 (22/23)	Q1 (23/24)	Q2 (23/24)	Q3 (23/24)
Majors (target = 80%)	80%	93%	88%	95%	97%
Minors (target = 75%)	90%	83%	86%	86%	87%
Others (target = 80%)	90%	93%	93%	94%	94%

Despite carrying vacancies and significantly reducing reliance on external consultants, since the start of 2024, KPI’s have been exceeded over the last 12 months.

Table – Planning applications received and determined

Year	Total applications received	Total applications determined	Total appeals received
2021/22	7177	6717	
2022/23	6472	5815	283 (2023)
2023/24 (Q1-3)	4126. (End of Year forecast=@5501)	4105. (End of Year forecast = @5473)	29 (2024 so far)

Total number of undetermined cases = 3068 (*Feb 2024)

The number of new planning and related applications registered has reduced, albeit the overall number of applications determined remains consistent resulting in a slight reduction on the overall number of cases in hand.

Nationally, Buckinghamshire Council is the second largest in terms of numbers of applications received. In respect of appeals, Buckinghamshire had the highest number of appeal decisions nationally (186) and second highest number of appeals dismissed (112).

Luton Airport DCO – Examination closed

The Examination into the DCO opened in July 2023 and closed on 10th February 2024. A team of Planning Officers and Specialist Environmental Officers from BC provided both written and verbal evidence for this stage in respect of impacts relating to climate change, highways and transport, noise, air quality, the economy and employment and landscape/visual.

The Planning Inspectorate (as the Examining Authority) is now in the process of making its recommendation and will do so by 10 May 2024 to the Secretary of State for Transport. The Minister, on behalf of the Government, will then make a decision on the DCO by the late summer of this year. The recommendation and decision will be published in due course on the Planning Inspectorate's website in respect of the DCO.



Cabinet Member report – Education and Children’s Services

Councillor Anita Cranmer

Joint Targeted Area Inspection

Between 22 and 26 January 2024, Ofsted, the Care Quality Commission (CQC) and His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) conducted a joint targeted area inspection (JTAI) of Buckinghamshire. This inspection looked at the multi-agency identification of risk and need across the local partnership, primarily around the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). A summary of areas of strength and what needs to improve is below:

Strengths

- The effectiveness and quality of support offered by CAMHS.
- The support given to children by their schools and the mental health triage car when struggling with their emotional and mental health.
- The improved timeliness of referrals from Thames Valley Police, including the measures taken to reduce a significant backlog.
- The combined efforts of social care and maternity/midwifery services to ensure that unborn and newly born babies are safeguarded.
- The positive impact of the family support service and those working in partnership with early help practitioners.
- The positive impact of a joined-up approach to children at risk of exploitation and those being exploited.

What needs to improve?

- The consolidation of performance information and data to fully understand the most pressing issues for families.
- The effectiveness of sub-groups of the safeguarding partnership.
- Multi-agency training informed by a full strategic need analysis.
- The involvement of schools and colleges in formulating the partnership’s strategic direction.
- The timeliness and consistency in quality of social work assessments.
- The quality, consistency and timeliness of information-sharing between the partner agencies involved in safeguarding children.

We are pleased with many of the findings of this report which notes that there are many examples of the partners working effectively together to support children, and that children's mental and emotional health are supported well. It was pleasing to see the inspectors recognise the very strong partnerships that are in place and that the services know themselves well, which is critical in ensuring that referrals are responded to quickly and are well managed.

The report does identify areas of improvement and we know there is still progress to be made, particularly around how all partner agencies share critical information in a timely manner.

Protecting and supporting children is the utmost priority of all the agencies involved in this work and we thank the inspectors for their overview of our services. We will be responding with an action plan within the requested timeframe.

Launch of the Skills Bootcamps

The Skills & Employment Strategy was formally adopted in January 2024 and was launched at Buckinghamshire College Group on 12 January 2024, alongside the launch of the innovative pilot of wave 4 Skills Bootcamps which are delivered in partnership with Buckinghamshire College Group.



***Image:** At the launch event (from left to right): **Joseph Baum**, Deputy Cabinet Member for Education & Skills at Buckinghamshire Council; **Jenny Craig**, Principal and Chief Executive of Buckinghamshire College Group; **Nick Braisby**, Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive Officer of Buckinghamshire New University; **Martin Tett**, Leader of Buckinghamshire Council; **The Countess Howe**, His Majesty's Lord-Lieutenant of Buckinghamshire; **Rob Butler**, MP for Aylesbury.*

Starting in January 2024, these Bootcamps offered Buckinghamshire residents and employees the opportunity to learn new skills in brickwork or property maintenance to enter the construction sector. Skills Bootcamps are free, practical, and engaging short courses designed to equip adults with the knowledge and skills needed by employers across Buckinghamshire. At the end of the bootcamp, the individual learner has a 'job outcome' – such as an interview for a live vacancy within the relevant sector, a move into self-employment, or proof from their employer that the skills learned on the bootcamp are being used in their existing role.

Buckinghamshire Council has secured a further £3.2million of funding for Bootcamps from the Department of Education as part of the Government's Levelling-Up agenda and Lifetime Skills Guarantee. This funding will provide further Bootcamps beginning later this year in engineering, construction, creative (film, TV and gaming), digital, agriculture and leadership and management.

Skills Bootcamps are being funded through the Government's Levelling Up and Department for Education's Lifetime Skills Guarantee. For further information, please visit: [Enrol in a Skills Bootcamp | Buckinghamshire Council](#)

Pupils step from the classroom into the conference room at Model United Nations event

More than 100 pupils from secondary schools around Buckinghamshire swapped their regular classrooms for the conference room and the world of international relations on 1 March 2024, as they took part in a Model United Nations event hosted by Buckinghamshire Council.

The event took place at The Gateway offices in Aylesbury, with pupils from Year 9 taking on the task of representing 32 different countries, coming together to discuss the topic of Food Poverty and Sustainability in the day-long activity. The conference mirrored the structure of a United Nations debate, encompassing all the formal processes, professionalism and language typically associated with such discussions, giving the pupils first-hand experience of what a real-life debate would look like.

The event, now in its 13th year, is organised by Buckinghamshire Council in partnership with schools across the county, but the origins of Model United Nations go back to the United States in the 1930s. Its aim is to engage students in current world affairs and develop communication, negotiation and debating skills. It helps students develop skills of enquiry, critical thinking and reflection as well as deepening their understanding of identity, diversity, equality and community. The event is designed to simulate the format of real-world international forums.

As part of the build up to the day, pupils taking on the roles of country delegates prepared their position stance to present at the conference. Others attending took on the role of media correspondents. At the end of the day awards were presented to the pupils who excelled in a range of skills including public speaking, diplomacy, delivery and media skills.

It is always a delight to see the students truly immerse themselves in the experience. It was a very intellectually stimulating and engaging event for everyone involved. It may seem like a world away from a normal school day but the skills these young people have learned by taking part in this event are invaluable and will be useful for the future in a variety of ways.

Young people speak up at the Bucks Youth Summit

On 11 March 2024 young people from across the county came together to discuss the biggest issues and areas of interest for young people in Buckinghamshire today.

Nearly 200 young people from secondary schools and youth groups in the county attended the event at the Waterside Theatre. The Summit was hosted by young people in the Youth Voice Executive Committee as part of Buckinghamshire Council's Youth Voice Bucks programme. Throughout the day, discussions and conversations were held on topics covering mental health, LGBTQ+/Pride, vaping, politics, sexual health, relations with the police, matters relating to special educational needs and the cost of living crisis.



It is the second time the event has taken place with feedback on last year's event used to plan this year's summit. The aim is to bring young people together to share views on the biggest issues affecting and of interest to them.

In addition to listening and taking part in the discussions, the young people attending were given a ballot paper to cast votes on their priorities. Votes were counted at the end of the day and the results will be used to feed into documents including the CYP (Children & Young People) Partnership Plan and the Buckinghamshire Youth Offer.

Dozens of young people acted in facilitation and behind-the-scenes roles including as election staff to run the ballot, journalists, activity facilitators and front of house roles.

The summit was a hugely successful event, thanks in no small part to the efforts and engagement of the young people who were involved. From getting stuck into back-office tasks to immersing themselves in the discussions and conversations, it was wonderful to see so many young people taking part.

The Youth Voice Bucks website (www.youthvoicebucks.co.uk), will continue to be updated with information and progress about the event and its outputs.

Virtual School – Attachment and Trauma Award Programme

Following an increase in recognition of childhood trauma, notably since the Covid 19 pandemic, trauma informed practice is becoming more widespread within schools and our Virtual School has developed the 'Trauma Informed and Attachment Aware Awards' (TIA) programme.

Designed as an award system, the Virtual School's programme allows schools to embark on a progressive journey that provides opportunities to gain recognition for their commitment to whole school 'Trauma Informed and Attachment Aware' practice. The Virtual School have been delivering this award programme for approximately 20 months. Eight schools have so far achieved the bronze level award as part of the first cohort (4 primary and 4 secondary). They will progress to the Silver and continue to develop their knowledge and understanding. Cohort 2 (12 schools) commenced the awards in January 2024.

Trauma informed practice aims to educate the workforce, in this instance using a whole school approach for staff to develop knowledge and understanding of ACEs trauma and attachment theory in order to (a) develop practice that uses a positive and restorative approach (b) develops resilience and (c) practice that avoids re-traumatisation.

Following this pilot programme our Virtual School aims to expand the programme to encourage all schools within the county to become 'Trauma Informed and Attachment Aware'. This is part of a local authority wide strategy to equip schools to promote practice that supports vulnerable children (including those known to social care) to attend and engage in education. Mitigating the barriers to good educational outcomes for this cohort is a national priority as demonstrated by the government's commitment to the extended duty to all Virtual Schools ([Children's social care: virtual school head role extension - GOV.UK](#)). Trauma Informed and Attachment Aware approaches can have a profoundly positive impact on children who have had or are experiencing 'Adverse Childhood Experiences' (ACEs) enabling them to be more interested and engaged in their learning.



Cabinet Member report – Climate Change and Environment

Councillor Thomas Broom

Fly-Tipping Enforcement

On 18 December 2023, Buckinghamshire Council adopted raised charges for fixed penalty notices (FPNs) for offences of fly-tipping and of failure by householders in their 'duty of care' responsibility for how they dispose of that waste. These new charges were adopted at the maximum rate allowed by Government of £1,000 for a fly-tipping offence and £600 for a failure in duty of care by a householder (where the failure precedes the waste being fly-tipped).

The first £1,000 fly-tip fixed penalty was issued in January 2024 (and was paid in full) for an offence which took place on 20 December (2 days after the new rate was approved).

Future fixed penalties will be issued at this maximum rate as an expression of the Council's determination to demonstrate and support its 'Zero Tolerance' policy against fly-tipping.

North Waste Collection and Street Scene Services

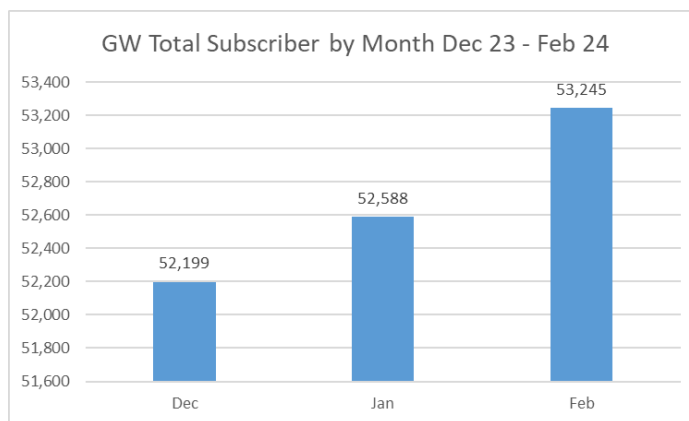
It may feel some time ago, but the total amount of dry mixed recycling collected over the festive season rose by near 26% compared to standard recycling week. It is expected that the recent Easter break will have seen an increase in paper and card, and the annual peak increase in garden waste is expected in the coming months. Over 25,000 residents have successfully subscribed to the garden waste service following a change which now allows residents to have a rolling 12-month subscription rather than a calendar year from the date they sign up.

Across street cleansing and grounds maintenance, March saw litter picks across high-speed roads following verge cutting and now the weather has changed the yearly grass cutting regime has commenced.

South Waste Collection and Street Scene

Contract performance continues to improve. The ongoing improvements in performance and the KPI target of 0.20% has been achieved consistently during 2023/24 following close monitoring and management of the contract.

Garden waste subscriptions are starting to increase as we move into spring, and we have now reached over 53,000 garden waste subscribers. We have over 3,400 properties who also have a second subscription.



During January to March many litter picks on high-speed roads were completed, namely the Marlow By-pass in February and the A413.

The number of abandoned vehicles reported through Fix My Street continue to be high. However, a very small percentage of the vehicles reported are deemed abandoned after checks are made.

Waste Prevention



The Waste Prevention team have had some recent successes focusing on reuse and repair across the County.

The team support Repair Cafes in Buckinghamshire with regular promotions, training, equipment, and advice. The council's Waste Prevention fund recently helped with the setup of the Buckingham Repair Café, the latest addition to the now 13 regular Repair Cafes across the County. Repair Cafes are run by volunteers and help residents fix items that they bring along. It saves items from the bin, saves money buying new items and teaches basic skills, as well as lots of hot drinks and cakes.

Re-using items is also a key focus and across February the team promoted the reuse revolution highlighting the thousands of tonnes of waste that is avoided each year by reusing whether at recycling centres, charity shops or online via Freecycle. All ten household recycling centres accept items for reuse, which are then sold by South Bucks Hospice at their reuse shops at Aston Clinton & High Wycombe recycling centres.

The more items we can repair or reuse, the more money individuals and the council can save, not to mention the massive positive environmental impact too.



Changes to DIY waste disposal at Household Recycling Centres



Important changes came into effect on 31 December 2023 at all ten household recycling centres in Buckinghamshire. The changes, introduced after a change in the law by central government allowed residents to dispose of small amounts of DIY waste for free. To facilitate the change in law and still maintain a credible deterrent to trade abuse at recycling centres a new DIY e-permit was introduced.

We are starting to notice the effect the new policy is having on the recycling centre service. Residents have disposed of small amounts of DIY for free over 3,000 times.

Satisfaction with the e-permit process has remained high, despite many residents using it for the first time, with 85% happy, or very happy. As expected though, we are noticing an increase in DIY type materials, wood, rubble etc. coming to the recycling centres, which is an increased cost to the council.

3,000+
DIY permits used



We are maintaining our proactive communications to ensure as many residents know about the change and have an e-permit ready if needed before they arrive on site. It's especially important as we enter the busy Spring period for the recycling centres when they open 9am-6pm between April-September.

We will continue to monitor the effects of the changes and return to Cabinet in June to review the implementation and submit recommended changes if required.

Member training on flooding

Training for members on roles and responsibilities for flooding and how Buckinghamshire Council responds to a flood event is being organised by the Resilience Service, Strategic Flood Team and Buckinghamshire Highways during Spring 2024 and members are encouraged to attend to familiarise themselves with who does what, where to find information and how we can be prepared in the event of flooding. In the meantime the Flood pages on Bucks website will be useful [Flooding and flood risk management | Buckinghamshire Council](#).

Climate Change

We're making huge progress against our ambition to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050. Our corporate emissions have reduced by 73.4% against our 1990 baseline (so we're on track to achieving our target of a 75% reduction by 2030) and emissions area-wide are also decreasing - in 2021 they were 7.73% lower than 2019. Information about the activities that have helped contribute to these achievements is available in the **Climate Change & Air Quality Strategy Progress Report [2022-2023](#)**.

Tree Planting

112,660 trees have been planted on council land, with a further 23,000 expected to be planted at Wing Wood by the end of March '24. Significant community-based projects have been completed, including the establishment of 5 new Miyawaki forests – which are reported to grow ten times faster than traditionally planted woodland.





Cabinet Member report – Accessible Housing and Resources

Councillor John Chilver

Resources Update

Microsoft Co-Pilot

In November 2023 we launched our Microsoft Co-Pilot AI programme. The council was invited to participate in Microsoft's Early Adopters Programme for CoPilot, their AI tool. The programme gave us CoPilot access for 300 users for 1 year with dedicated support from Microsoft, these licenses have been deployed across the council to understand how it can help us improve our services.

We understand that AI is a complex field, and we need to partner with experts in this area. That is why we are working with Microsoft, who are at the forefront in AI solutions and already a major IT partner for the council. Their technical expertise and tools such as Bing Chat (which we already have access to) will add value to our deep knowledge of public services, enabling a more effective and innovative approach to AI implementation.

In November, Council staff attended a Copilot Art of the Possible session hosted by Microsoft. The session showed the features of Copilot, and then two council staff members presented their use cases. Staff came away very excited about the potential of AI and were enthusiastic to get involved.

We are proactively engaging with other local councils, exchanging experiences, insights, and best practices. This collaboration allows us to learn from each other's achievements and difficulties, not only improving our own AI strategy but also mitigating risks.

Creative Concept Recruitment Campaign

Buckinghamshire Council faces the challenge of recruiting and retaining talent for hard-to-fill roles such as Educational Psychologists and Lawyers. To address this, the council designed and implemented two creative concept recruitment campaigns in-house, using social media, video content, interviews, and events to showcase the employer brand and values, and the benefits and opportunities of working for the council.

The campaigns were successful in attracting and engaging potential candidates, reaching a wide audience, and filling the roles. The campaigns also demonstrated the potential for local authorities to run cost-effective and innovative recruitment campaigns in-house, without relying on external agencies. The campaigns received positive feedback from the hiring managers and the current employees and contributed to the council's objective of making a positive impact on the residents, businesses, and communities of Buckinghamshire.

According to the data collected by the council, the campaigns achieved the following results:

- The Educational Psychologists campaign reached over 74,000 news feeds on social media and resulted in over 3,900 clicks to the advert link. In total, 57 applications were received, 9 of which were through the social media advert. All 5 roles have been filled.
- The Lawyers campaign resulted in 86 applications with appointments to posts on-going.

These campaigns have been so successful that we have been shortlisted for the PPMA award for Best Creative Concept Recruitment Campaign.

Customer Relationship Management

The Customer Relationship Management (CRM) programme is migrating interactive web forms and processes from legacy platforms to a new single CRM platform, provided by Abavus. The Waste and Recycling teams, in both the North and South, now use Abavus for resident interactions. The Southern team no longer uses the GOSS Interactive platform, and the Northern team has begun winding down the use of Salesforce. Fix My Street interactions are now integrated into Abavus, providing more information to customer services and the waste team, as well as improving communications with customers.

In the first month from February 2024 launch, 2,048 service requests for Waste were processed through the platform, with 98.5% completed within a 10-working day service level agreement. Similarly, 1,649 Fix My Street requests were received, with 99.4% actioned within a 10-working day service level agreement. The new integration has resulted in close to a 100% increase in customer responses from the Waste and Recycling teams.

Excluding garden waste sign-ups, the average number of calls for waste and street cleansing has dropped by 12.5% since launch, compared to the preceding 2 months. This showcases the improvements to web-content, webforms, and back-office processes. The next steps for the CRM programme include the launch of integrating forms for missed bins and bulky waste collection by May 2024.

Property & Assets Update

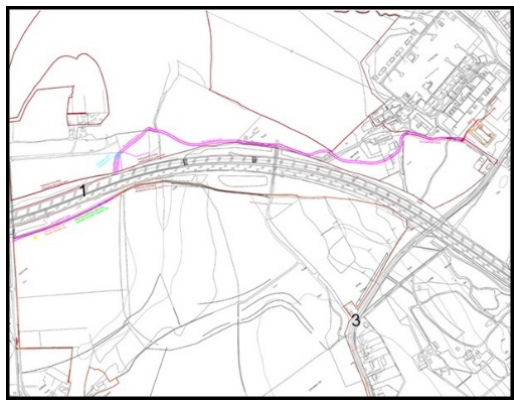
Investment and Development

Property & Assets have made significant progress on the Council's Operational Estate Strategy. The Estate Strategy was formed in January 2023, and during the year closed and let the Wycombe Old Library and also took the decision to close our offices at King George V House in Amersham. These will contribute positively to the savings targets identified by the Council. A further paper has also been approved by the Council's Cabinet in relation to our offices at Queen Victoria Road, High Wycombe. More positive news was achieved when the Secretary of State confirmed the Certificate of Immunity from Listing for the New Council Offices in Aylesbury. This will enable us to consider our future opportunities for the site moving forward in the broadest sense.

The Property Team are also focussing on our disposals programme which seeks to realise capital receipts to support our wider capital programme. We have made good progress and Cabinet recently agreed a further sale of a long leasehold interest in the Site at Wycombe Air Park to the leaseholder. This will generate a capital receipt which is budgeted for in the Medium-Term Financial Plan and support the development and delivery of the site in accordance with the Wycombe Local Plan.

Mansfield Farm, Iver

Yondr, a data centre developer and operating company required a high voltage connection between their emerging data centre in Slough, and an existing substation in Iver via a cabling route that crosses Council owned land. The easement permitting this work negotiated by Property and Assets provides a substantial capital receipt to the Council with minimal outlay, and all Council costs covered. As part of the agreed settlement there will also be improvements made to the Bridle path as highlighted on the plans. Once installed the surface land will be re-instated and continue with its present use.



Asset Management

As we enter 2024, the Asset Management Team continues to focus upon delivery of Medium-Term Financial Plan priorities in property and other critical targets in terms of occupational and investment related requirements, including safety, and the environment.

We continue to focus on providing a supporting environment for our tenants but with a commercial focus, across our commercial portfolio of offices, industrial retail, and agricultural estates. Significant changes in the investment market are a continuing focus.

Construction Update

The East West Rail Winslow Station car park work commenced on site in November 2023. Piling is now completed, and integrity tested Drainage 60% complete. Completion of construction currently planned for September 2024.

