

Ivinghoe ward – Buckinghamshire Councillors report for Marsworth Parish Council AGM 2024

General introduction

During the last 12 months we have continued our commitment to attend every parish council meeting. We have dedicated members to each parish and try our best to add a second. This underscores our continued support to you and the importance we place on the work of Parish Councils.'

The current financial position of all local government remains particularly challenging and we in Buckinghamshire are no different. We have nonetheless just passed our budget for the year 2024-2025 which protects our core services and continues with our commitments laid out in 2021. Those statutory services consume a large part of our budget, social care being in the order of 71% of all expenditure for example, but we remain committed to the promises we made. Our pledge to plant a tree for every resident in Bucks is on target with Wing wood, for example, which now has 109,000 trees with a further 23,000 due to be planted this year. The budget for road maintenance was further enhanced with an extra £5m announced at the budget setting meeting. Central government has also added £1.65m this year to help overcome what has been another challenging winter. The wettest February on record has had a major impact on road surfaces but the gulley cleaning programme introduced last year has had a major impact on flood alleviation. There is still more to do of course, but this proactive approach has undoubtedly had a positive impact.

Buckinghamshire Council sets budget for next three years

Councillors in Buckinghamshire have approved the council's Medium Term Financial Plan, which sets out its spending plans and how these are budgeted for over the next three years.

The budget has been set amidst a volatile economic environment and outlines where the council will make savings to balance the books over the next three years, while committing spend to the priority areas residents have asked for.

Councils across the UK are facing acute financial pressures, particularly in four key areas that support vulnerable residents; social care for both adults and children, temporary accommodation for homeless people and transport for vulnerable children to get to and from school. These services alone make up 71% of Buckinghamshire Council's budget, leaving only 29% of the budget to pay for all the other services the council provides, from fixing and improving roads, to collecting bins and providing libraries and leisure centres.

The costs of providing some of these services have also risen well above already high inflation rates, for example, a 20-30% increase in road construction and repairs costs. With council tax funding 80% of the council's net operating budget needed to pay for these services, councillors have agreed to raise the base rate of council tax by 2.99% with a further 2% increase in the adult social care precept. **This means an overall rise of 4.99% in council tax bills, or an extra £1.69 per week for the average Band D household.**

The budget also sets out how much the council proposes spending as part of its £666 million 'capital' programme, which is shaped by what residents have told the council they want to see prioritised.

Councillors have also voted through an amendment make an extra £5 million from Reserves available directly to address the deterioration of local roads caused by the

severe weather conditions in recent weeks. **It means a total of £110 million is now set aside for roads repairs and improvements over the next four years.**

Overall, the final budget includes spending:

- £110 million on roads with a further £8.4 million on footways
- £26.1 million on services to support housing and homelessness, including affordable housing action plans and disabled facilities grants
- £14.7 million on climate change and flood management
- £37.6 million on town centre regeneration and economic growth

The final budget has been agreed following rigorous cross-party scrutiny of the plans that were originally put forward in January. The financial plans for each portfolio area were looked at in detail during a series of meetings last month. The final plans have also been adjusted in recent weeks after the government made some extra funding available to councils, meaning a further £5 million can now be set aside for Social Care, the majority of which has been allocated to a contingency fund for this service.

The council has also agreed to additional council tax charges on homes that have been empty for more than twelve months. While savings across the board are still being found to balance the books, this additional income has allowed the council to reverse a small number of savings measures originally put forward. For example, for now we will not need to shorten opening hours at our Household Recycling Centres and the council can continue the gully cleansing programme and reinstate a round of weed spraying and litter picking.

However, overall, the council still must deliver considerable savings to balance the books, over and above the £75.4 million already saved since becoming a unitary council. Some of the savings' measures include difficult decisions, such as allocating less money to our community boards and some local voluntary organisations.

The council has also put forward long-term solutions to reduce costs including:

- investing in additional children's homes to reduce the heavy cost burden of external placements
- making savings in Adult Social Care through providing help for some residents, where it fits their need, to live more independently
- rationalising the council's office space, such as closing the King George V site in Amersham
- investing in more housing and temporary accommodation units to bring down the spend on costly nightly-paid accommodation

A key part of this budget is about managing the considerable risk and continuing turbulence, which is why we've put most of the extra funding we have had from government in recent weeks into our adult social care contingency pot. We are making some tough choices to deliver the savings we need to balance the books and we are also closing under-used office space and examining the best ways to maximise efficiencies from our activities overall – but there really is very little room for manoeuvre indeed as we have been finding savings year after year already. It's a tough but realistic budget and as we cannot run in deficit like central government, I truly believe this is the best we can do, that continues to deliver for our residents.

This budget underpins our over-arching priorities of protecting the vulnerable, strengthening our communities, improving our environment and increasing prosperity.”

Infrastructure

Freight zone

We are delighted to report that the installation of the Ivinghoe Freight Strategy (Phase 1) was implemented last year as planned.

The purpose of the Freight Zone is to restrict HGV access to the area to those that have a business reason to be there. HGV traffic entering the area as a cut-through to somewhere else will be in breach of the order, this traffic should be encouraged to follow more suitable roads around the zone. Those operators who are based within the zone are allowed passage within the zone.

Phase 1 covers the installation of signage around the zone making the 7.5 tonne environmental traffic regulation order restricting HGV traffic with exception for local access legal.

Phase 2 (which is currently being implemented) covers the more bespoke advance notice signage on key routes around the zone, including Central Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire, to alert drivers and operators about the restriction enabling them to avoid breaching the order and follow the more appropriate routes

Some FAQs

1) Whether training vehicles are allowed through the villages?

HGV driver training vehicles are not a permitted exception to an environmental weight restriction as they do not strictly require local access, on the basis that they can undertake driver instruction on roads where there is no constraint. The driver test centre in Leighton Buzzard is also not allowed to undertake examination movements inside the zone without a permitted exemption.

2) Whether restrictions apply if they are not carrying freight?

There is no specific requirement for vehicles to carry freight, the restriction is based on the 'maximum gross weight' (MGW) of the vehicle. That is the plated maximum weight a vehicle can carry fully laden, including driver, axles, and load. It does not matter if a vehicle is empty or not, if its MGW is above the restriction weight the movement would be in breach of the order.

3) To whom I should address any complaints if such vehicles are prohibited?

It may be useful to speak to the operator, this would give them the opportunity to make use of appropriate routes elsewhere. If they continue to use routes through the zone without any local business the breach may be reported to the police using their online tool. The aim is to discourage through traffic.

Here is the link if required: <https://www.thamesvalley.police.uk/advice/advice-and-information/rs/road-safety/making-a-road-traffic-incident-report/>

Highway/Road maintenance and repair.

We are now approaching the end of the first year with the new contractor Buckinghamshire Highways. During the last 11 months the Ivinghoe Ward members have had regular meetings/surgeries with the Local Area Technician to review road repair priorities and issues. The obvious current issues have been the state of local roads and particularly 'potholes. We are beginning to see a more positive approach than previously experienced. The result being response to reports and quality of repairs once completed.

The capital programme that covers the total resurfacing of large sections of highway is a list of projects that are now being completed and removed from the list that previously only was added to. In Marsworth the B489 over the White Lion bridge is high on the list for the next budget year starting in April 2024.

STRENGTHENING OUR COMMUNITIES

Community Board – Ivinghoe and Wing Wards.

Recent changes have resulted in a more robust approach to funding and supporting local initiatives. This includes a new Community Board Manager whose approach is both positive and productive.

PROTECTING THE VULNERABLE

Social Care

Adult and Childrens Care is the most important service delivered by the council and demands the lion's share of the budgets. The detail of the spend will be available after mid-April when they are formally communicated.

Fostering in Bucks

Could you, or someone you know, help young people in Bucks?

We have more than 500 children in Buckinghamshire in need of caring, supportive homes and we are looking for more foster carers to ensure that young people do not have to move far away from their family, friends, and schools. Could this be you or someone you know?

IMPROVING OUR ENVIRONMENT

Chiltern Beechwood Special Area of Conservation (CBSAC)

Ivinghoe ward sits within the extended area of Ashridge affected by this current moratorium on planning applications, planning applications that will result in increased residential population i.e. housing developments are affected. The area covered is within a 12Km of the Ashridge National Trust boundary.

A Special Area of Conservation (SAC) is an internationally recognised designation comprising habitats and species of significant ecological importance. Natural England has overall responsibility for protecting SACs and says that the Chilterns Beechwoods is the most degraded SAC in the country.

SANG (Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace) Mitigation Strategies need to be in place before planning applications proposing a net increase in new homes in the vicinity of the SAC may be permitted. SANG Mitigation Strategies have been approved by our neighbours, Dacorum Borough Council and Central Bedfordshire Council. We are working on the draft Buckinghamshire SANG Mitigation Strategy at the moment and are aiming for its approval – either by Cabinet or as a Leader Delegated Decision – by the end of the year.

The issue is more complex for us because, unlike the situation in Dacorum and Central Bedfordshire, we have no existing areas of suitably located greenspace which can readily be converted in a SANG. We are therefore in discussion with several developers, trusts, other local authorities, and Natural England with the aim of securing the provision of SANG within or close to Buckinghamshire.

INCREASING PROSPERITY

UK Film Industry

It has been reported that Buckinghamshire has more production ‘Sound stages’ than anywhere else in the world and this includes Hollywood. Over the past year there have been several planning applications to add to the facilities associated with the film industry including extensions to the site at Pinewood.

Priorities and projects aligned to Opportunity Bucks

Building the Opportunity Bucks programme will require a collaborative approach from every service in every directorate in the council, with many existing projects and campaigns already sharing the same priorities as the programme.

We will focus on five key themes:

- Education and Youth Engagement
- Jobs, Careers and Skills
- Quality of Public Realm

- Standard of Living
- Health and Wellbeing

Council initiatives and projects which align to the Opportunity Bucks priorities should be communicated as such to build familiarity, reputation, and recognition. Aligning projects and programmes to Opportunity Bucks also helps us to ensure that we are using our collective resource as efficiently as possible, not duplicating, and maximising benefits to our residents.

Each project or campaign will have its own communications objectives but will include the key aims of the Opportunity Bucks strategy. It will also incorporate the Opportunity Bucks design concept and branding as far as possible, to ensure it is visually recognisable as part of the overall agenda, whilst recognising that different campaigns will be aimed at different audiences and may require slightly varied branding or artwork to maximise the effectiveness of the specific project.

Examples of projects which share the Opportunity Bucks objectives include:

- [Buckinghamshire Adult Learning's Multiply programme improving adult numeracy](#)
- [Public Health's focus on heart health and cardiovascular disease to reduce health inequalities across the county](#)
- [Interview and CV writing workshops put on by our HR & OD team at The Mandeville School in Aylesbury](#)

South East Aylesbury Link Road (SEALR)

Whilst the traffic management of Aylesbury may seem of little relevance to us here in our part of the county, it is of interest to us that the SEALR is continuing at pace. SEALR will see the construction of 1.1 miles of dual carriageway including three new roundabout junctions designed to ease congestion in Aylesbury and provide an easier route for traffic to flow without going 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 (High Speed 2).

The council is coordinating the SEALR scheme with the project moving forward in two phases. Phase 2 will connect the B4443 Lower Road to a new roundabout junction with both the Stoke Mandeville Relief Road and future South West Aylesbury Link Road.

The new road will ease pressure on our unsuitable roads at times of congestion in other areas.

Creating an age friendly Buckinghamshire for all

Buckinghamshire Council has outlined its commitment to helping older people in Buckinghamshire live healthy, active, and independent lives.

As set out in its Healthy Ageing Strategy which has been formally approved by the council this week.

The document sets out the vision for how Buckinghamshire aspires to be a place for all residents to enjoy growing older in an age friendly community. The strategy also includes an action plan of how the vision will be achieved.

To become an age friendly community, the strategy focuses on eight interconnecting areas outlined by the World Health Organisation (WHO):

- 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

In the first year, the focus for Buckinghamshire will be on two priorities - outdoor spaces and buildings and participating in society.

To oversee the implementation of the strategy a multi-agency Age Friendly Bucks Partnership has been set up with external partners including the NHS and voluntary sector organisations. The views and ideas of residents and community groups have shaped the aims of the strategy and will continue to inform the implementation.

To further support the success of the strategy Buckinghamshire Council has joined the UK Network of Age Friendly Communities which is run by the Centre for Ageing Better and affiliated to the WHO's Global Network for Age Friendly Cities and Communities. Being a member of this network provides access a range of additional resources including good practice guidance and advice. In addition, the council has partnered locally with Age UK Buckinghamshire to ensure a local focus is maintained.

Find more information on [Healthy Ageing in Buckinghamshire on the website](#).