

**BedfordBID Board Meeting 106**  
Thursday 21st October 4:30pm,  
George & Dragon, Mill Street



**BedfordBID**  
Business Improvement District  
Funded by Town Centre Businesses  
[www.lovebedford.co.uk](http://www.lovebedford.co.uk)

**Directors attended:**

Christina Rowe	BedfordBID
Sam Laycock (Chair)	The Harpur Centre
Martin Keys (Deputy Chair)	Gallone's Ice Cream Bedford Parlour
Steve McBrearty	Cash Converters
Amanda Olliver	The Body Shop
Dean Thompson	The Swan Hotel
Charles Royden	Bedford Borough Council
David Roffey	Bedford College
Greg Warwick	Jeeves Gentleman's Hair & Grooming Salon
Shaun Barnett	Leaders

**Also attended:**

Elanor Karklas	Bedford Borough Council
Callum Fletcher	Bedford Borough Council
Ian Brown	Bedford Borough Council
Inspector Samantha Hunt	Bedfordshire Police
Revd Kelvin Woolmer	St Peters Church
Leah Perkins	BedfordBID

**1. CHAIR'S WELCOME & APOLOGIES**

The Chair, Sam Laycock, opened the meeting, welcomed the virtual attendees and thanked everyone for attending. She informed them the meeting was being recorded. Open session is being planned to resume in the next meeting.

Apologies/absence noted were received from:

Mike Lewis	Riverside Bedford
Tony Moliterno	Mayfair Financial

**2. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING & MATTERS ARISING. ITEMS FOR AOB**

The directors approved the minutes of the last meeting.

As a recently appointed Director, Martin Keys requested an item for AOB, to define in detail the roles and responsibilities of everyone in the business with a view to understanding a role for directors and how best to assist and support both the team and the business going forward.

**3. APPOINTMENT OF DEPUTY CHAIR**

The Director of Operations, Christina Rowe, confirmed Martin Keys as Deputy Chair.

**4. NEW MEMBERS APPLICATION**

N/A

## **5. TOWN CENTRE UPDATE**

Eleanor Karklas, Manager for Economic Growth & Development, Bedford Borough Council provided an overview of the town centre development works.

Depending on funding approvals from the Town Centre Priority Fund today, the plan is to have vinyl wraps on Debenhams and Beales in time for Christmas, organised by BedfordBID.

Waterstones is relocating to the former BrightHouse unit Shoe Zone is being refurbished and Foxy Wings is now being fitted out in Riverside. The owners of Riverside Bedford are refreshing and targeting a new marketing campaign to get more businesses into the empty units there. B&M are hoping for a pre-Christmas opening in the former M&S unit.

The High Street works have moved to the bottom of the High Street now, which is closed during the evenings and progressing. There was an issue with Anglian Water which is fully repaired so we can commence laying the York stone. Silver Street is looking great, and work is commencing on St Paul's Square.

The High Street Heritage Action Zone is progressing. There is a board meeting tomorrow, where one application has already been submitted and is with Historic England for approval and we have a draft application to submit. There is another building coming forward so we should have 3 buildings on site within 6 weeks. We are trying to get the money out before the end of March, so things are really progressing behind the scenes. We should see some work on the High Street buildings soon.

We ran a successful engagement competition where people took a model of Goldings to craft. We gave away 400 and our aim is to do more. It is a really good way to engage with people what is happening on the High Street.

We are looking at some funding from the Additional Restrictions Grant to fund business support initiatives after COVID-19. A pre-Christmas one reintroducing an online campaign, will look at place-making initiatives and mental health training.

Sam Laycock gave an update that the Town Centre Investment Plan has been approved and is back with the government. It has just under half a dozen schemes including the college which has just had an extension, incorporating adult education, more transport works, enhancing St Pauls Square and Station Quarter investment. They are looking to start works from next year to completion in 2025.

Sam Laycock thanked the council for their assistance during the pandemic and Greg Warwick commented on their great communication.

Christina Rowe explained the Additional Restrictions Grant funding, where BedfordBID can bid up to £50,000 which is to be split pre- and post-Christmas. This will include social media training, a video campaign focussing on businesses that opened during the pandemic and placemaking, such as giant self-watering tubs.

## **6. COVID-19 UPDATE**

Ian Brown, Chief Officer for Public Health presented a COVID-19 update. The case rates in Bedford are rising and hospitals are under pressure. The number of deaths remains stable, but it is too many. The highest positive case rates are in 11–18-year-olds and in rural areas and rural secondary schools. The vaccination programme is progressing well in Bedford. There is a push to get 12–15-year-olds vaccinated.

We don't know what is going to happen over winter due to a number of factors and there may be additional measures introduced with Plan B e.g., mandatory face masks in certain settings, mandatory vaccination only COVID status in some settings and asking people to work from home.

There is a lot we can be doing now e.g., wearing masks in crowds and doing regular lateral flow tests. We don't need to wait for plan B.

Callum Fletcher, Manager for Corporate Safety & Commercial Regulation explained the steps that businesses can take now. Business can do risk assessments and look at measures such as staff procedures for feeling unwell, staff vaccinations, face coverings, adequate fresh air, hand sanitisers & regular cleaning, displaying an NHS QR code poster and using the NHS COVID-19 pass. He offered advice and assistance for businesses in reviewing their COVID-19 safety measures.

Sam Laycock said business have continued to adapt to the changes in guidance. The Harpur Centre has seen a reduction in customers using face masks and anything to encourage the message to wear them would be helpful.

Greg Warwick has continued requires face masks in his salon.

Martin Keys requires his staff to wear them, which encourages the customers to wear them to.

Shaun Barnett said there is no requirement for his staff to wear face masks and few customers do.

Sam Laycock said there is an opinion that not wearing masks is better for sales, which is difficult to know.

Dean Thompson said they follow the government advice, and one member of staff continues to wear a mask. He has been advised from a HR point of view, not to encourage staff to wear a mask. About 5-10% of his customers wear a mask.

Amanda Olliver said all her staff wear face masks when there are customers in store. Last Saturday was the busiest since they came back in April and she decided to allow up to 15 people in store at a time, to reduce the risk of catching COVID-19. There were a couple of times they asked customers to wait outside, and most people were fine with this and understood.

Dave Roffey said they have decided across all campuses to maintain the rules at the end of last term. There is a seating plan, and every student is facing forward and spaced apart. As well as being asked to wear a mask when moving around building, there is a meet and greet rota where a member of staff will ensure all students are wearing a mask. About 50% already have them and the other 50% have provided them. The cases at the college have been very low compared to other institutions, where they must give a daily report to the department of education of cases. Yesterday, there were 4 confirmed cases in the student population. However, this is only the reported cases. They are seeing cases in staff creep up, with 15 staff off yesterday who had tested positive. They have hand sanitising stations across campus and ask big groups to disperse. It is difficult to enforce mask wearing when they don't have to in public areas.

Ian Brown said a good proportion of the older young people have had one dose of the vaccine and we are not seeing as many cases as last term. What we are seeing is cases rising in parents who are working in schools, colleges, and business, where students are bringing it home from schools and the parents are infected. It is only mild but disruptive to business and education.

In Brown said they are looking to use funding to prepare for winters and welcomed ideas for this. They have suggested some ideas to the council which are being considered.

Callum Fletcher said there is a link on the presentation slides to contact them for any assistance.

**ACTION:** Sam Laycock said they would think about some ideas, such as refreshing to COVID-19 guidance posters.

**ACTION:** Leah Perkins to circulate the COVID-19 presentation slide to the board.

## **7. UPDATE FROM SAM HUNT, BEDFORDSHIRE POLICE**

Inspector Samantha Hunt Bedfordshire Police updated the board that Sergeant Cliff Kaile is now on the town policing team. They are working on a Christmas Retail initiative to deter shoplifting. The team do not usually deal with shoplifting, which goes through to the response team. If they come through as violent though, their team will respond. Umar and Neil are working on an operation around deterring shoplifting though and linking with additional support from other officers and resources, giving a better present in the town centre in the lead up to Christmas.

Based on the feedback from the Have Your Say survey, the priority focus is around drugs. Last week, 2 people were arrested for possession with intent to supply with knives in their possession. This priority will be reviewed after 3 months, where the public will be consulted again for what they would like the police to focus on.

They have been using social media, where they put news of an arrest on there, for a breach of community behaviour order. He is on bail with conditions. There was another male causing issues in town and he now has a CBO, which he has not breached.

Operation Highgate has restarted with the purpose being information sharing. In November, they are trialling a Town Centre Intervention Group (TIG) amongst partners, based on the model in Luton. The police will provide their top 5 nominals in relation to street drinking and begging. They will cross reference with Path 2 Recovery (P2R) who also engage with these people, to ensure they have all the support they need to safeguard them and break the cycle.

Samantha Hunt encouraged the board to follow the local police team on social media. They have 3 PCS, 1 PCSO and 2 specials which is a very small team, but they are working on the priorities and being as visible as possible. She asked if there is anything else that needs to be raised for the team to look at.

Steve McBrearty said the level of street drinking at Greenhill Street by the bus station has been a lot worse recently and the staff are complaining. Today, there was 2 groups sat around the benches in various states of consciousness. Occasionally they get moved on but are back within half an hour. His staff have been instructed to log everything on BeBAC.

Christina Rowe said she has been travelling by coach recently and there is a number of street drinkers at a certain time in the bus station area. The other passengers said it is a regular occurrence, where these people are drunk and violent and then they disperse.

Sam Hunt said the bus station is on their radar, which can be seen on their patrols on social media. They have recently been working on Tavistock Street which has displaced the problem, as well as the bus station being used for shelter in the winter weather. These people have homes but it all stems from addiction, which is really difficult in terms of what the police can do unless they are committing an offence or ASB. The TIG is intended to tackle this public health issue. CBOs are quite difficult to get and evidence needs to be reported directly to the police, not just BeBAC. It is important to collect the data to be able to bid for funding for extra resources, like they did with Operation Primrose.

Steve McBrearty said that when BeBAC was started, one of the reasons was to enable the collection of data which would be used to support the police in their budgeting decisions to help argue for more resources.

Sam Hunt said the police priority budgeting (PPB) review happened 2 years ago, before she arrived, and it may be what that data was used for, which has led to the resources we have.

Sam Laycock reiterated we need to report directly to the police to ensure this area becomes a police hotspot. They also come from Harpur Square and Pigeon Square and all congregating together.

Sam Hunt said they are doing a big recruitment drive to assist with the 101 reporting. If you are reporting retrospectively, the police will not be dispatched but it will be added to the data. Warnings are being given to those acting aggressively but the police cannot do anything if they are just drinking. The Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) is a controlled drinking zone, not an alcohol zone. This means that it is only an offense if they have an open container and don't hand over that container. They have to be likely to cause ASB and not hand over the alcohol.

Sam Laycock asked if they could offer the police any support with the Christmas shoplifting initiative.

**ACTION:** Samantha Hunt to talk to Cliff Kaile how the BID can support the police with this and liaise with Sam Laycock.

Charles Royden said he had a call last week about a stolen bike and the police said they don't investigate this anymore. Charles contacted the control room, where CCTV was checked, and the offender was identified and arrested. He asked if this is a decision that has been made by the police.

Samantha Hunt said they would always record a crime, but decision may have been decided to file it at source.

Charles Royden said that we have excellent CCTV coverage in the town centre and always willing to assist police.

**ACTION:** Samantha Hunt to find out about the police recording and investigating bike thefts and let Sam Laycock know.

Sam Laycock thanked the police and BID team for recent dealings with first aid incidents.

Christina Rowe reiterated concern about the use of BeBAC information being shared with police to specifically be used with regards to funding.

Martin Keys was asking how we can log this information regarding hotspots.

Leah Perkins confirmed that this information, including criminal intelligence and hotspots, is regularly shared with the police in Operation Highgate meetings. However, how it is used in police budgeting decisions is a separate matter.

Sam Laycock said with the bids Safer Streets, the maps do not show this information.

Martin Keys expressed concern regarding budgets being based on their caseloads and the information is being highlighted to them, but they are still not getting that funding. There is a link missing with this information between us and the police. People do not report due to the lack of police response.

Leah Perkins suggested online reporting prevents people from being on hold. Charles Royden said the online reporting tool directed him to calling 101, which could be dependent on the crime.

Christina Rowe explained the changes at Inspector level presented further challenges with the loss of valuable background knowledge and consistency to follow through agreed actions.

Martin Keys suggested getting the police office staff more involved.

**ACTION:** Christine Rowe to look into the police use of BeBAC information.

Sam Laycock explained how on the recent police action day, police were tied up with an incident after a few minutes.

Revd Kelvin Woolmer was a police officer for 30 years and when they were under resourced, the locals became aware and ASB and shoplifting went up. They would then flood the area with officers for 2-3 days at a time. The Ratepayers Association said that the town centre pays a lot of money into the budgets for policing for the town centre, which he raised in 2017. It might be worth pushing that with the new Police and Crime Commissioner, who is promising to put more officers on the street. Kelvin is on the interview board, and they are interviewing a lot more.

Greg Warwick said that moving the problem to other areas does not solve it, where Steve McBrearty and Martin Keys added they have witnessed this displacement to their business locations.

Sam Laycock said Sarah Stevens has been promoted in the council safety team and is very knowledgeable and collaborating with the police on this new operation.

## **8. DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS UPDATE**

Christina Rowe, Director of Operations, referred to the previously circulated update highlighting updates including vacant units. The key thing is there is a list of health activity going on in the vacant units, including some work being done on Greyfriars, the old police building. We will also be dressing some of the larger vacant units, hopefully in time for Christmas.

The Christmas lights on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of November will be a very soft launch which is good given the recent information from the government. As per the update, there will be a series of events throughout December, which we are working on with the council, giving compelling reasons for people to come into town.

Sam Laycock said that we will be informing the public there will be no showstoppers but lots happening around town including reindeers, trails and lots more. We want people to feel safe whilst supporting businesses.

## **9. ONGOING ITEM – GENERAL OPEN DISCUSSION**

There was a discussion on business Christmas hours and how businesses have reduced their opening times and days when it is quieter. Martin Keys said it is down to the individual businesses to think with conscious care. By cutting down opening hours, it is encouraging more people to shop in a smaller time window.

Dean Thompson is capping the bookings to lower than usual but more because of concern around food supplies, where they have prepared a freezer for turkeys.

Sam Laycock asked what else can be done as a BID, other than getting the word out. Martin Keys said communication is key to get all messages out there in advance e.g., a list of businesses that are open.

Despite some criticism for freezing car parking charges, Charles Royden said it is important car parking is low and you can park in town every day for free in Bedford.

Charles Royden said the High Street works will be finished by the 4<sup>th</sup> December, but it is expected to be in November. Then it will be resurfaced from top to bottom. The extra funding that is coming in is changing when the St Pauls Square works will commence. The amount of development that will happen in Bedford as a result of this huge investment is phenomenal – rebuilding the station area, Prebend Street etc. There are a lot of talks going on about the economic development and it would be good to invite the mayor to a meeting one day to share all this.

Charles Royden said that there has been criticism for encouraging cars in town but the council are also encouraging cycling with a £5million pound investment including new cycle stands, the wider High Street is for pedestrians and the whole of the Castle area is going to become a 20mph zone. The council are doing everything we can to encourage people to the town centre in the way they choose. Raising parking charges will discourage people from town. The riverside development is now open for electric car charging. All the council owned units in Riverside are now let and Marks & Spencer is being converted to B&M, which will be open shortly. There is £27million pounds of investment going into the town centre.

Greg Warwick said this is very positive and suggested for the vacant Debenhams and Beales units, the idea for an indoor market in the with quality products that cannot be bought online. This would be a reason for people to come to Bedford and make it a destination, like Borough Market in London.

Sam Laycock said we are monitoring what unique, new ideas are sustainable. In the meantime, dressing them up is a good idea.

Christina Rowe added they have a plan for how the vacant units looks. On the High Stress Heritage Action Zone board, there is a wealth of information there being discussed but nothing can be released as a definite. We want to start pushing some of that information out, as people want to hear there are changes happening now.

Greg Warwick agreed that they are not hearing this. We all want the best for Bedford and it just seems to be deteriorating, where doing something is better than doing nothing.

## **10 – ITEM 9 TO BE REVIEWED**

Sam Laycock explained that this item was to pick two or three important strategic topics. What we just discussed in relation to vacant units is number 1. Point 2 needs to involve updating roles and responsibilities, which we can talk about fully in the next meeting.

Martin Keys said point 2 is integral as we build the team, to help keep them focussed and driven in the same direction.

Christina Rowe asked about skateboarding at Silver Street, to which Charles Royden said the PSPOs are being renegotiated in June next year, where they are seeking to include skateboarders and electric scooters.

Amanda Olliver said Silver Street has been a nightmare for skateboarding since it has been repaved and they have had many complaints from customers.

Sam Laycock added that it causes noise and is destroying the benches.

Charles Royden stressed the need for everyone to feed into the PSPO consultation with these views.

Sam Laycock asked about the cleaning regime now the town centre it is opening up and we have had these improvements. Charles Royden said he is already in discussion with the officer about this. Greg Warwick reiterated the need for this at the kebab shop next to his salon.

## **11. NEXT MEETING**

Next meeting, **Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> December @ 4.30pm**; time and venue TBC

**ACTION:** To ask the board members to vote for their preferred time between 10:30am or 4:30pm.

## **10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

The Chair thanked everyone for their time and concluded the meeting at 6.32pm