

# Great Hollands Newsletter

January 2025

## Dear Residents,

The last few months have been extremely busy for the Council. We have consulted on; your priorities for dealing with crime and disorder, school attendance strategy to improve attendance rates, how you access planning information, the continued regeneration of Bracknell Town Centre, the new transport strategy, climate change strategy and, proposals for the budget to be voted on in February. We have been out and about to talk to residents for many of these consultations—as promised, taking the Council to you. There has been a good response. We have listened and the plans have been adapted.

The Overview and Scrutiny Commission has done an in depth review of Thames Water in Bracknell Forest, and one on Sexual Health provision for young people.

## Special Educational Needs

When we took over the Council in 2023, there was a deficit of £21m in the fund for children with high Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) who attend Special Schools. We have few Special Needs Schools in Bracknell Forest and most children have to attend out of Borough schools. Councils were allowed to accrue these deficits in payment in a special account and the previous government demanded the deficit was repaid within 6 years. To do this we have to build more capacity for children to attend Bracknell Forest Schools.

Part of Sandhurst School has already been adapted and opened. There are also plans for a special unit for 25 students to be built at Edgbarrow, a newly built school on the All Saints Warfield site. A new school for 100 students is to be built at Buckler's Park; this one will be built by the government.

These developments are being prioritised to open as soon as possible. All this will increase our capacity and enable our children to be taught locally while saving on fees and transport costs. Addressing the need for SEND provision is putting many councils' finance in jeopardy.

## Financial Help for Residents

In Bracknell Forest we have contacted all the residents we know who currently receive help from the housing benefit or council tax exemption support schemes but are not claiming the pension credit or winter fuel payment to which they are entitled.

Many residents will be eligible for other assistance, such as Attendance Allowance or Council Tax. Attendance Allowance is designed for our older residents who face health-related challenges while council tax exemption is available to those with a long-term impairment. Many people have not yet made their applications and are missing out on vital financial assistance.

In Bracknell Forest, we are committed to ensuring access to these benefits and, in the last two years, our financial inclusion team has helped residents to claim more than £500,000 in additional support. They have also ensured the delivery of over £3m in crisis grants to residents in the Borough since 2021.

It has never been more important to check if you, or someone you know, may be entitled to additional help. Please do take a look at the free benefits calculator on the government's website: [www.gov.uk/benefits-calculators](http://www.gov.uk/benefits-calculators) or Bracknell Forest Council's cost of living webpage: [www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/cost-living-support](http://www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/cost-living-support) for more information.

Support is there for people who really need it and nobody should feel they just have to make do. For so many, the impact could be life changing. So please, if you are worried, take some time to check what support you could receive.

## Devolution: Greater Local Autonomy

We are now considering the government's white paper on Devolution which will need us to unite with other Council areas to form a Strategic Authority serving about 1.5million people. These are very early days and we will keep you informed as the plans evolve.

## Great Hollands Update

We were delighted when Donna Pressland won the by-election in November and joined Gerry Webb and Mary Temperton on both the Bracknell Town and Bracknell Forest Councils. Where each of us lives forms a triangle on Great Hollands and enables us to keep a good eye on issues arising and report them in as soon as possible.

For example, fly tipping is still a real issue in Great Hollands, particularly in the garage areas and on the grass verges behind garden fences. We spend a lot of time reporting this and getting it cleared. If you see anyone dumping anything, please let us know. Several culprits have already been identified and fined.

## Local Facilities

The Zone, in Great Hollands Square, is to become the new centre for 'New Hope' when its present location, under the car park in Market Street, is demolished. 'New Hope' provides a friendly, free and confidential service to anybody who is looking for help with drugs or alcohol addictions. This will be the professionals' main office from which they will go out to different communities to provide support.

In 2025 the cemetery will run out of space for burials. The Council has been trying to locate neighbouring ground for several years, but the only space located is that presently taken by the golf course's "Pitch & Putt". This is next to the cemetery and would provide enough burial space for the next 25 years. By that time, the oldest existing graves could potentially be reused.

Everyone Active, who manage the golf course, were compensated for the loss of the ground during Covid and have added Track-Man technology to the driving range to compensate for the potential loss: adding more family fun. Loss of the Pitch & Putt facility is a difficult decision but residents, who have lived in Bracknell all their life, should have the choice to be buried here.

The pirate ship at Mill Pond recreation ground had to be removed due to deterioration and has been replaced by a bigger ship. There is also to be a PUMP TRACK built next to the skateboard ramp. This has been designed with our young people and will be for all ages to do stunts on skateboards, cycles or scooters.

## Parking and Garages

Parking continues to be the a main source of irritation and frustration for Great Hollands residents. The grass verges, except those on Ringmead or Great Hollands Road, are owned by Abri Housing Association. The Council has to work with Abri in order to provide additional spaces.

The state of the garages is another area of concern. Some garages are owned by house owners, others by Abri, others by private landlords and the rest by several housing associations. Most are in a state of disrepair but sorting out who is responsible for organising this work and getting it done has proven to be a very difficult challenge. While many residents still put their car in their garage, others now have cars that are too big to fit. The garages are useful storage areas for families, but some are just used as dumping grounds and often need emptying. Abri owns the land in the garage blocks. Meetings with Abri are set up to discuss what can be done but please do not hold your breath for rapid solutions!!!!

Please do report to [customer.services@Bracknell-Forest.gov.uk](mailto:customer.services@Bracknell-Forest.gov.uk) if lights are not working, or surrounded by foliage or if litter bins need emptying.

**Surgeries:** Every Wed 12 noon-1pm at the **Look in Café** and the 1st Saturday in the month in the **library**. We really do enjoy working with you to make Great Hollands an even better place to live. Please continue to keep in touch.



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