

Bedford Borough Council Corporate Asset Strategy

2024/2025 – 2027/2028

Foreword

I am delighted to present this Corporate Asset Strategy that sets out our vision and strategic framework for the effective management of the Council's land and buildings aligned to the Corporate Plan 2024/2025 – 2027/2028. It is underpinned by the commitment to ensure that the right decisions are made regarding the future use, management, development, and disposal of property and that the property portfolio is sustainable, efficient, and fit for the purpose of delivering vital services to our communities. The strategy sets out the actions to be taken to maximise social, economic and regeneration benefits for Bedford Borough by working together with partners and communities.

The ambition is to deliver continuous improvements in the management of the Council's property assets so that they are put to the best available use and that maximum value can be realised from them. We are in challenging economic times with the cost-of-living crisis impacting on residents, businesses and Council finances. Continuing environmental and global factors mean that there is a need to focus on the best use of resources; therefore, making it an imperative that the Council utilises its considerable land and property estate in as creative way as possible. After our people, our land and property assets are our biggest resource and are key to transforming the way in which we deliver our services.

Property assets are, therefore, integral to the drive to deliver efficient and effective services and, through continual challenge and targeted investment, to enable the achievement of our bold and ambitious plans for the future of Bedford Borough. This includes maximising the opportunity to generate income through the development and use of our commercial estate, minimising void period and property holding costs and the efficient use and occupation of the operational estate. The innovative management, utilisation and leverage of the property portfolio will, therefore, help generate revenue to diversify funding sources and thus contribute to the delivery of essential public services.

Tom Wootton, Mayor of Bedford Borough

Our Vision

"Property assets will be effectively used to support Council priorities for the benefit of the residents, businesses and communities of Bedford Borough.

"Through strategic investment, the Council will create a dynamic, efficient, fit for the purpose estate that supports our wider Council objectives, including driving place-based regeneration and economic prosperity, contributing to housing needs, achieving environmental ambitions and greater financial sustainability."

Asset Management Strategic Priorities

The Corporate Asset Strategy and Asset Management Plan will support the Council's strategic priorities through the efficient and effective use of land and buildings, ensuring that we have the optimum asset base to enable high-quality service delivery.

Corporate Plan 2024/25 – 2027/28

Our Corporate Plan sets out four key priorities to ensure the Council can deliver its ambitions:

- Supporting our families and the vulnerable
- Protecting the Environment
- Stimulating Economic Growth
- Promoting Health and Wellbeing

Land and property assets should be aligned to Corporate Plan objectives and priorities. The use of the Council's assets must be maximised to ensure effective service, community and financial benefit. In managing the Council's assets, we will embrace the overarching principles adopted in the Corporate Plan, namely:

- Forward thinking
- Place Leadership
- Service Excellence
- Benchmark for Quality
- Community Collaboration
- Results-Driven
- Proactive

Key Drivers

In planning and reviewing its land and property assets the Council will consider the local and national context to either mitigate or exploit opportunities. Some of the key drivers shaping the Corporate Asset Strategy are:

- The commitments in the Corporate Plan to families, health and well-being, the environment and economic growth.

- Financial sustainability and the need to use assets to realise a financial return and to generate capital receipts from surplus property.
- Supporting key Council strategies, including the Town Centre Vision and Capital Delivery Programme, Economic Prosperity Plan 2023-2028, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2024-2029 and Local Plan 2030/40.
- The Climate Emergency and the Council's commitment to Net Zero Carbon emissions by 2030.
- Meeting the evolving needs of the Council through the effective use of its operational assets and community assets.
- Supporting communities where gaps in delivery are evident (such as the need to improve the GP estate within the Borough).
- Exploiting the benefits of inward investment for the Borough through strategic investment and working together to realise major opportunities.
- Effectively protecting the Council's estate and priorities, while balancing the impact of national and regional initiatives that affect local land and property.

Our Objectives – An Overview

1. Corporate Landlord: Manage our property assets strategically as a corporate resource to ensure that statutory and priority services are delivered effectively.
2. Strong Communities: Support strong and healthy communities by providing the right property, in the right place to meet current and future service needs.
3. Carbon Reduction: Minimise the carbon footprint of our estate and utilise our property assets to reduce environmental impact.
4. Local Economy: Use our property assets to stimulate residential and commercial development, economic growth, town centre regeneration and to promote health & wellbeing.
5. Efficient Operations: Manage and maintain our property assets in an effective, efficient and cost-conscious manner whilst optimising financial return and commercial opportunity and responding to our evolving needs.
6. Partnership Working: Maximise the opportunities of working with the wider public estate and partners to support new models of service delivery and enhance Bedford as a place.

Our Objectives & Priority Outcomes

1. Corporate Landlord: Manage our property assets strategically as a corporate resource to ensure that statutory and priority services are delivered effectively.
 - Robust governance structure that enables and facilitates sound and informed decision making on strategic property matters and that enables corporate property assets to be effectively and efficiently planned and managed.
 - Continue to strengthen and embed a Corporate Landlord Model across our estate that provides a consistent approach and service levels for all clients, improved governance and assurance of compliance.
 - Positive commitment to a restructured, efficient and responsive Property Services.
 - Make information relating to property easy to access, timely, accurate and comprehensive so that stakeholders are kept informed.
 - Undertake an annual asset challenge exercise in order to appraise the councils estate and provide recommendations that drive efficient operations and value for money outcomes.
2. Strong Communities: Support strong and healthy communities by providing the right property, in the right place to meet current and future service needs.
 - Ensure that the accommodation available to service users being cared for by the Council meets their needs and fulfils statutory requirements.
 - Within the maintained schools portfolio, manage our properties to create suitable and productive learning environments for students and staff that enable children and young people to achieve positive outcomes.
 - Deliver the Temporary Accommodation Strategy to ensure that there is an adequate supply of appropriate accommodation to meet service needs and support the reduction of costs.
 - Support the development and delivery of the Council's Leisure and Cultural Strategies to ensure that there are high-quality facilities across Bedford Borough and improved access given the health and well-being benefits of leisure and recreation.
 - Enable local communities to live healthy and independent lives by working with in-house teams and partners to improve access to services and the quality of the health estate, with a particular focus on GP and mental health provision.

3. Carbon Reduction: Minimise the carbon footprint of our estate and utilise our property assets to reduce environmental impact.
 - Drive down our CO2 emissions by developing a priced net carbon zero delivery plan for our operational estate that will inform prioritisation within the Repairs and Renewal Programme and potential funding bids.
 - Invest strategically in our commercial properties to maintain the rental viability of our assets and to place Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards (MEES) at the heart of our estate management commitments.
 - Delivery of identified property related outcomes identified in the Council's Carbon Reduction Plan.
 - Work with our staff and partners who operate from our properties to encourage behaviour change and energy efficient approaches where improvements can be made.
 - Explore opportunities to utilise new technologies that will help to support a reduction in the Council's carbon output and provide new opportunities around decarbonised or renewable energy.
4. Local Economy: Use our property assets to stimulate residential and commercial development, economic growth, town centre regeneration and to promote health & wellbeing.
 - Delivery of property related projects identified in the Vision and Capital Delivery Programme for Bedford and Kempston Town Centres.
 - Use key assets to support the delivery of economic growth, inward investment and the creation of quality local employment, skills development and training opportunities.
 - Develop and implement a Regeneration and Development Strategy that provides a framework for Council investment in property developments and strategic property acquisitions.
 - Manage the commercial portfolio, effectively balancing regeneration needs, job creation and income generation (budgeted capital receipts and rental returns and the scope for increased business rates income) through the effective development or disposal of sites.
 - Be proactive in the identification and release of land to create a pipeline of development opportunities that contribute to meeting Local Plan housing targets within the Borough and forecast capital receipts.

5. Efficient Operations: Manage and maintain our property assets in an effective, efficient and cost-conscious manner whilst optimising financial return and commercial opportunity and responding to our evolving needs.
 - Regularly review, challenge and assess the use of assets, including considering disposals, development and re-investment in order to ensure property is used to its full potential.
 - Proactive management and development of the commercial portfolio to increase the generation of rental income and capital receipts.
 - Continue to deliver efficiencies through improved asset occupation and effective space utilisation, recognising changes that occur in working practices for the benefit of our workforce and effective service delivery.
 - Develop and deliver a regular planned maintenance cycle to ensure that the estate is well maintained, so that maintenance backlogs are reduced and reactive maintenance spend is minimised.
 - Develop up to date and reliable condition survey data across the commercial estate.
6. Partnership Working: Maximise the opportunities of working with the wider public estate and partners to support new models of service delivery and enhance Bedford as a place.
 - Pursue joint ventures and partnerships where our delivery capabilities can be improved and value for money enhanced.
 - Collaborate with housing associations and the Council's established housing company to successfully advance the delivery of viable housing development projects to meet local housing needs.
 - Actively support third-party organisations commissioned to deliver services on the Council's behalf.
 - Continue to support regeneration and renaissance programmes, such as the One Public Estate Programme, to deliver investment and opportunity.
 - Maximise the opportunities of working with the wider public estate and partners to support new models of service delivery and to enhance Bedford as a place to live, work, visit and enjoy, including the provision of improved GP estate in priority locations.

Our Estate in Numbers

- £425m is the total value of our estate.
- Our estate covers 3,500 acres, which is the equivalent of 97 Addison Howard Parks.
- £1.7m won through the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme and Swimming Pool Support Fund
- £89m committed to funding building works, new builds and expansion projects in our Schools Capital Programme.
- We've reduced our carbon output by 16% since 2018/19
- 558 properties in our estate
 - 328 commercial
 - 118 corporate buildings and operational land
 - 75 education
 - 37 residential
- £6m of annual rental income
- £4.5m allocated to corporate & school maintenance programmes.

Governance Structure

Having good governance ensures that property decisions are made in a transparent and inclusive way, with a clear programme showing how service areas are involved and contribute to the planning and decision-making process in terms of asset requirements, whilst ensuring that the Corporate Asset Strategy and Asset Management Plan are overseen at a corporate level via the Strategic Asset Group, the Executive and Full Council.

Working Groups, Projects and Programme Boards and Directorates > Strategic Asset Group > Mayor and Portfolio Holder > Executive > Full Council

Key Plans, Policies and Strategies

The Corporate Plan

Corporate Asset Strategy and Asset Management Plan

Corporate Strategies

- Corporate Plan 2024/25 – 2027/28
- Local Plan 2030
- One Public Estate Masterplan

- Carbon Reduction Delivery Strategy
- Medium-Term Financial Strategy
- Education Strategy
- Town Centre Capital Delivery Programme
- Economic Prosperity Plan

Property Related Strategies

- Asset Management Plan
- Disposals Policy
- Community Asset Transfer Policy
- Property Investment and Development Strategy
- Surplus Property Protocol
- Commercial Estate Lettings Policy
- Building Managers Handbook
- Maintenance Policy

The Asset Challenge Process

It is appropriate that the Council regularly reviews the land and property assets we control to support their efficient and effective use. The aim of the asset challenge process is to establish whether the council's assets are fit for purpose, provide value for money, and are aligned to its corporate priorities and objectives. This will enable informed decisions making in respect of the retention, management, and disposal of our assets. Our outline asset challenge process is set out below.

Strategic Purpose - Why do we have this asset?; What is its strategic purpose?; Who is accountable for performance?; What do we expect of the asset?; Is this financial or non-financial or both?; How would we know when it's being achieved?; Have we considered the customer?

Opportunity & Risk - Are there any opportunities that could be exploited?; Are there any restrictions, delays or blockers to achieving these opportunities?; Are there any risks that the asset could be facing?; What is the customer expectation?

Performance Appraisal - What financial and non-financial outcomes have been delivered?; Can non-financial benefits be quantified or are they qualitative?; What are the management costs?; Are there any invisible costs?

Option Appraisal - Balance of performance opportunities and risk?; What options are there?; What are the relative costs and benefits of these options?; Do any options carry increased risks?

Consultation - Internal stakeholders; External stakeholders and partners.

Outcome - Retain?; Replace, remodel or reuse?; Disposal on open market or Community Asset Transfer?

Finding out more

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