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BEDFORD BOROUGH EDITION **NOVEMBER 2019**

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WHERE IS WIXAMS' RAILWAY STATION?

The Wixams rail project has been a long drawn out saga for its long-suffering residents. Many of whom are still waiting to see work commence on their station.

Some residents including Cllr Graeme Coombes, Leader of the Conservative Group on Bedford Borough Council moved out of London to Wixams preferring a daily commute.

In 2013, residents were promised that their station would be completed.

Six years on and finally there might just be a ray of light at the end of this very long tunnel.

The original planning agreement was signed off in 2006 but did not make the building of a station a contractual condition.

Instead, Gallagher Estates agreed to contribute financially to the project with its index-linked contribution of £13.4m.

The rail project faced imminent danger Cllr Coombes explained: "We had a termination period that was coming to an end sometime in mid-2019 if the station project had not materialised and additional funding could not be found then Gallagher's financial contribution would have been reduced to a £1m.

"We were in danger of losing all the funding and we would not get our station. The damage to Wixams would be enormous."

Pressure from Wixams residents, Wixams Parish Council and Cllr Coombes ensured that Bedford Borough Council made the commitment to fund the deficit needed to fulfil the rail project on the proviso that a feasibility study was undertaken.

A meeting of the Wixams Joint Development Control Committee held last July it was agreed that Gallagher's obligation to the building of the train station would be extended until 2024 to give the

by **Caroline McCormack**

Council time to plug the funding gap.

The first stage of the feasibility study has been completed and the Council has already agreed the £14m funding needed.

Revenue will be generated from ticket sales, car park charges and passenger usage plus Council borrowing with the return on investment likely to be 40 years.

Commencement of the project is expected within the next 18 months with the station finally complete in 2023.

Good news at last but a fly in the ointment could just hinder the progress of this project.

THE EAST WEST RAIL LINK

There are five possible routes, three of which are routed south of the town centre following the route of the A421.

If the line takes a town centre route through Bedford station then this should not affect Wixams, however, if the link passes further south of Bedford then this could delay the development of the Wixams rail station by nine years.

In spite of these challenges, Cllr Coombes remains upbeat. He has been a resident of Wixams since 2009 and, like the community, was angered by the lack of progress.

He is cautiously optimistic: "Having fought for this for a long time with the local community the station is back on track. The funding is in place, the feasibility study is done, and the numbers stack up. When I see spades in the ground digging the earth, I'll be happier".

Henry Vann throws his hat in the ring

HENRY VANN, a local Councillor, campaigner and teacher, is standing for the Liberal Democrats in Bedford and Kempston in the imminent General Election.

Henry grew up in Bedford and has been a local Councillor since 2011. He is a teacher and lives in Goldington Road, Bedford. As education portfolio holder on Mayor Dave's cabinet he oversaw a multi-million pound investment in local schools and he has been campaigning to save Bedford Hospital for more than ten years; his track record shows it, and in 2017 he uncovered secret plans to downgrade Bedford Hospital. He is now Portfolio Holder for Town Centres and Planning.

His appointment comes as the Lib Dems have gained new recruits from Conservative and Labour parties as liberals from across the political spectrum seek a new home.

Henry said: "In May, the Lib Dems became the



largest group on Bedford Borough Council, with the Conservatives no longer having any Councillors in Bedford and Kempston constituency. The Lib Dems are once again a serious choice in this constituency.

"I grew up in Bedford and know that both Bedford and Kempston are amazing towns, thriving with rich history, culture, communities and industry. I will fight tooth and nail for my home town to get a fair deal from the Government.

"On the most urgent question of the day the Liberal Democrats have a clear position: we are the party to remain. The Government is in disarray and the Labour Party still doesn't know if it is coming or going.

"Brexit will be bad for the people of Bedford and Kempston and the Lib Dems will be offering the people of Bedford and Kempston a sensible, principled option at the upcoming General Election."

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