

The Regeneration of Bromham Mill

The purpose of this communication is to further clarify the extent and circumstances behind the proposed development of Bromham Mill. Please find below further clarification of this project.

Objective Summary

- ✓ To develop Bromham Mill as an asset for our community, retaining its heritage by restoring the mill, the mill house, the front barn, stables and the workshop barn for future generations.
- ✓ To maintain the green space around the mill. The meadow and woodland are very important to the character of the site and will be retained and maintained to be enjoyed by all visitors.
- ✓ To move the café into the listed front barn with sympathetic restoration so that it can be used energy and commercially efficiently and providing a great place to meet for local residents and visitors to Bromham.
- ✓ To restore the Listed Mill to a Museum and Arts and Educational facility. This would attract funding for the upkeep and restoration of the mill which would not be available if run as a commercial enterprise. The Milling wheel and equipment is fully operational but is in desperate need of restoration to ensure that flour milling process can be operated and demonstrated for interested visitors and educational purposes.
- ✓ To restore and improve the Mill House which is not listed but is within the curtilage and is important to the character of the site. This development will ideally provide accommodation for small local businesses in the Health & Wellbeing sector.
- ✓ To restore the workshop barn which is adjacent to the toilets to provide an artisan workshop facility.
- ✓ To restore the stables adjacent to the Mill House to create small local business sales, e.g. Farm Shop, Florist, short lease pop-up store.
- ✓ To replace the current toilet facilities which are inadequate and will be replaced with a new purpose built facility.
- ✓ To provide 6 small Commercial office units for local Businesses if required in the future. At this stage this is only an option and will be a consideration for the future.
- ✓ To provide a suitable car park for the site based on Bedford Borough Council planning requirements unfortunately this will necessitate moving the Badger Sett. This would be carried out by an Ecology & Environmental Specialist. The Car Park will be installed with low level energy efficient lighting for safety purposes.
- ✓ To provide a loading bay for deliveries to the café and other small businesses.

Not Included in the Plan:

- ✗ **Glamping** - There will be no glamping or camping at Bromham Mill
- ✗ **Wedding Venue** - The Mill site will not be used for a Wedding Venue.
- ✗ **Showers** - There will be no Showers in the Toilet facilities, as reflected in the revised and approved plans.

This communication is from Bromham Parish Council

Background

In 2008 a group named the Bromham Millers begun talks with Bedfordshire County Council to take ownership of Bromham Mill. This transaction was almost agreed but Bromham Parish Council challenged Bedfordshire County Council and encouraged them to halt the sale. In 2009, Bedford Borough Council became the unitary authority for Bedford and Bedfordshire County Council ceased to exist. Bedford Borough Council agreed that Bromham Mill should not be sold to a private company and retained the mill keeping it open to the public.

Unfortunately, Bedford Borough Council did not maintain the mill and had little interest in it. Parish Council asked Bedford Borough Council to open a café and contributed s106 monies towards the necessary refurbishment. Bedford Borough Council opened the café in 2014 but it didn't do too well. At this point Bromham Parish Council started asking that a lease be granted to Bromham Parish Council to look after Bromham Mill generating a financial revenue to maintain the site for the future.

After a lot of work it took a further 5 years to eventually secure the 100 year lease in August 2022 ensuring that Bromham Parish Council can protect Bromham Mill and its surrounding area for our future generations.

Coffee Shop

The café as it was pre 2020 was not a successful model – it did not attract the numbers required to keep the business open, therefore the Parish Council had no choice but to change the way we work. Bromham Parish Council asked for expressions of interest to lease a café and contracted the Mill Coffee Shop to run the café at the mill. We are delighted with the success of the Mill Coffee Shop and continue to work with our tenant on current issues and future changes. Our tenant has been part of discussions, contributed to designs, and is agreeable with the change of location into the front barn at Bromham Mill, they may still retain some space in the mill itself, this will be negotiated with The Mill Coffee Shop directly. Bromham Parish Council have been supportive of our tenant's other initiatives – Food Truck Fridays and Christmas events. We are pleased that residents continue to enjoy this beautiful location for coffee and cakes.

Back Barn

Keeping the mill buildings safe and maintained for the future is a costly business. Thankfully, the new roof on the front barn, which is a listed building, was paid for by Bedford Borough Council; as was the temporary bridge at the front that provides access to the island and to the back of the mill.

The back barn is unsafe, it is not a listed building. It is a 1930s building which, as the conservation officer at Bedford Borough notes, is constructed of poor quality materials. Although there is a 'less than significant historical value' to the back barn, it took substantial deliberation for Parish Councillors to agree to demolish this barn but it is in very poor condition and its removal would mean a safer site. However, where possible materials will be retained and reused to refurbish existing buildings. Its improvement for acceptable usage would be costly, impractical, and, ultimately, a poor use of resources. Currently, we constantly have a vehicle pedestrian conflict, i.e. cars travelling around a corner where visitors are walking. This is not safe and unfortunately the decision was taken to remove the back barn.

Business Plan/Funding

Because such an old site requires so much renewal and maintenance our model is to rent out space to pay for the work required. Parish Council do not want this cost to fall on residents, therefore, this is the preferred model. It is true that Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) will be used for this project. CIL monies are from new development. The funds received have to be spent within 5 years otherwise the money is returned to the developer. There are rules on how we spend the money i.e. funds have to be spent on infrastructure in Bromham (It cannot be used to give everyone a Council Tax Holiday, it cannot be used for Potholes etc). If the money is not used for Bromham Mill we would have to find an alternative project, or return the funding.

This communication is from Bromham Parish Council

The Capital costs covered by CIL do not need to be repaid but sufficient revenue funds must be obtained to cover the maintenance costs of all the buildings so that this will not come from residents (via Council Tax) but rather it will come from businesses renting space at the mill.

There is also a substantial cost, and risk, associated with doing nothing to the site. The current layout and status of the buildings in use is maintained at a significant cost. In order to protect and preserve Bromham Mill as an accessible venue for all residents of the village, that is capable of sustaining its own longevity, work must be undertaken.

The proposals offer a long-term aspirational vision for Bromham Mill, essentially a Masterplan, which removes the costs of submitting numerous further applications for amendments and additional plans over the next decades of tenancy.

The complete delivery of the entire proposed scheme in one, immediate undertaking is not the intention of the Parish Council. Phased development, as and when finance is available, is the benefit afforded by the plans; allowing for choices to be taken each step of the project, with reasonable assessments of demand and feasibility undertaken before commencement of each phase.

Rather than being overly ambitious, the plans reflect a viable product required to ensure the Mill remains in the public's interest for the duration of the Parish Council's lease. Its drafting has taken many hours of voluntary work, undertaken with the interests of the Mill, the village, and its residents, at the heart.

We have received interest from 60 small local businesses asking for space at Bromham Mill and are confident that the space we provide at the mill will be appropriate for local small businesses.

The development of the coffee shop is a perfect example of how change can work.

Car Parking

The current parking arrangements are not sustainable. There is often confusion around which direction of travel has priority. Equally, there is currently no clear delineation between pedestrian and vehicular routes through the site.

When events take place, the only way access and parking can be managed relies on availability of volunteers to marshal ingress and thoroughfare.

The surface, rights of way, and designated spaces used by vehicles on the Mill site all need to be improved. The solution to these issues is embedded in the proposed designs.

An overflow car park is a requirement of the Borough's planning policies and will be Grasscrete and will be gated off normally. This area will not be in the meadow but will be behind the existing car park.

Bus & Coach Parking

There are no plans for coach trips to Bromham Mill. As with the additional parking, the Planning and Highway requirements at Bedford Borough Council insisted that a bay be included as one is necessary for this type of site. Hopefully, we may get some school visits in the future as we think the mill is special and provides a unique educational opportunity which should be shared with everyone – particularly young people who do not have a mill in their area.

Loading Bay

It is a planning requirement to provide a loading bay for the café and small businesses at Bromham Mill.

This communication is from Bromham Parish Council

Bromham Neighbourhood Plan

The agreed plans for the mill do not differ from the ideas included in the Neighbourhood Plan, see results from Neighbourhood Plan Questionnaire at **Appendix B**. Please see below:

Exert from Bromham Neighbourhood Plan, 6 May 2021

C.7.5. We believe a charitable trust would be better placed to attract funding and sponsorship to make the Mill a dynamic community hub. By this we mean it would be open every day with a café, offices/studios for small local businesses and organisations, space for local artists and musicians to showcase their work and where voluntary sector services could be explained. We believe that much could also be made of the Mill outbuildings if they were sensitively refurbished, and also that much more could be done to make the Mill as a popular centre for walkers, cyclists and river users.

Bedford Borough Council required the lease to be in the name of Bromham Parish Council, with proven financial means, rather than a Charitable Trust. The Parish Council have continued with the agreed commitment to keep Bromham open to the public for future generations.

Planning Application

Bromham Parish Council held an exhibition in respect of the development proposals for Bromham Mill from Sunday 23 October 2022, to coincide with the official opening time of Apple Day, to Sunday 6 November 2022. It remained available for viewing at Bromham Mill and on the Bromham Parish Council website, with feedback encouraged. The exhibition was well attended, produced a very encouraging dialogue and some very positive soundings about the development and the design features, the effective use of space and the proposed uses for the complex. The feedback remained very positive throughout, with overwhelming support for the regeneration proposals and some good ideas to embrace as part of the overall provision on the site (such as occasional workshops, provision of electric charging points and play area enhancements).

As part of the planning process Bedford Borough Council consulted with the public on the planning application for Bromham Mill. Link to planning information on Bedford Borough Council website: <https://publicaccess.bedford.gov.uk/online-applications/applicationDetails.do?keyVal=RMHBE8CUIR600&activeTab=summary>

All information with regard to the planning application is available online and the various minutes of Parish Council meetings, over several years, has the discussions and decisions taken in relation to Bromham Mill. Information has been in the broadsheet and on noticeboards and social media.

Bromham Parish Council have been sensitive to concerns of neighbours but also realise the importance of this asset and do not want to see it go into further disrepair. Bromham Parish Council worked tirelessly for a period of almost 5 years to negotiate and agree a long lease for Bromham Mill and then worked for a further 2 years on the planning application. In doing so, the Parish Council sought to make the proposals acceptable to neighbours, endeavouring to address as far as we could neighbours concerns.

Planning permission was given in January 2024, and it was voted for unanimously by the Planning Committee at Bedford Borough Council. The Parish Council are now working on sequencing the project in line with the planning consent and the conditions imposed. It is intended that further consultation will take place with the village as the project evolves.

This communication is from Bromham Parish Council

Badgers

The proposals do involve the careful relocation of a small number of badgers; they are in the centre of the mill site but the relocation will happen properly in line with Natural England's recommendations.

Badgers are protected but can be moved under licence from Natural England. The Badger sett in question is a small, minor sett that is only occasionally used i.e. it is not the primary sett that houses the nursery. The Parish Council will have to make sure the highest welfare standards are implemented so that the Badgers are not injured in this process. A series of one-way gates will be used to move the badgers to other minor setts in the meadow.

The planning application in respect of the regeneration proposals for Bromham Mill was approved by Bedford Borough Council's Planning Committee on 22 January 2024.

This gives consent for the following changes at Bromham Mill:

- The Mill Building will revert to gallery and museum space, with improved space for artists to showcase their work and the development of the museum as a first-class educational resource.
- The listed front barn would become the new location for the Coffee Shop with a raised veranda for external seating and compliant ramping. The existing tenant has been fully engaged with the café design that will improve the internal and external space to meet the needs of the operator and for visitors to the Coffee Shop.
- The Hovel (next to the front barn) would be retained as an external food outlet associated with the Mill Coffee Shop.
- The Mill House would be sympathetically extended and developed into a well-being centre to include therapy space and office accommodation.
- The Mill House Stables would, following change of use, be used as small retail units to add interest and appeal to the location. This could include, for example, a florist, bakery, art and craft supplies, local produce, and zero waste/refill shop.
- The existing Workshop would be converted a commercial workshop for suitable tenant occupation, with the erection of compliant disabled platform lift. This could include uses such as furniture restoration and upcycling.
- The existing toilet block would be replaced with a new improved facility.
- A new welfare and facilities building would be provided to incorporate further public conveniences and site maintenance workshops/storage.
- New commercial/office business space (6) would be provided for tenant occupation. These units would provide small local businesses with a place to develop and expand within the Bromham Mill Site, whilst also contributing to Bromham's local economy.
- The reconfiguration of the car park and associated engineering works, provision of an overflow car park for peak periods, and associated public realm improvements and landscaping.
- Corporate wayfinding features and signage would be installed to aid navigation through Bromham Mill site.

This communication is from Bromham Parish Council

Future

Turning the vision into reality will take considerable time and require careful financial and operational planning. This is the start of the journey to achieve a sensitive and sympathetic transformation, with leisure, culture, heritage and recreation key to the success of the location.

Protecting the heritage, conservation and the magnificent meadow has been key in formulating these exciting plans. It is a fabulous location, and the Parish Council is fully committed to refurbishing the site in a sensitive way in order to enhance the recreational and educational asset, transform Bromham Mill into an exciting community facility and visitor attraction and to create the location as a key, vital and vibrant leisure and cultural destination.

The Parish Council will now be looking to take the necessary steps to enable the development in accordance with the planning consent obtained and in a reasonable phased manner. Our aim remains to provide a valued facility at Bromham Mill for residents, building upon the success of The Mill Coffee Shop and occasional small events. We will be producing some visuals during the next stages and these will be available on the website. All drawings, maps etc are on Bedford Borough Council's website.

Parish Councillors understand that not 100% of residents will agree with the proposals for the mill but the majority of residents agree that the Mill site is important to Bromham and should be protected for the future. Residents can be assured that Parish Councillors act within the law and adhere to strict protocols. Parish Councillors have worked for free on this project and for Bromham for many years. It is rather disappointing that after the considerable efforts, and progress made to date, some residents have made personal remarks against some Parish Councillors. This is unacceptable.

Despite this, the Parish Council remains keen to better understand their concerns and will always ensure that, as far as is possible, their reasonable views will help inform the next steps.

The only other option would be to return Bromham Mill to Bedford Borough Council in accordance with the agreed lease. This would not be the preferred option for Parish Councillors as Bedford Borough Council had no interest in preserving the Mill as the Parish Council have committed to do. The concern would be that Local Authorities are selling off their assets to meet their budget needs, but if there is genuinely no support from residents this action should be considered by the Parish Council.

Bromham Parish Council will keep you updated and will consult with residents when required. Further information including link to approved plans can be found at: www.bromham-pc.gov.uk. If you require any further information please do not hesitate to contact us, details below.

Yours sincerely

Sian Woodfine

Sian Woodfine, Chair
Bromham Parish Council

CONTACT DETAILS:

Bromham Parish Council, Bromham Village Hall, Village Road, Bromham, MK43 8JP, Email: julie@bromhamparish.co.uk, Tel 01234 828851
www.bromham-pc.gov.uk
Instagram - @bromham_parish_council @themill_bromham
Facebook – Bromham Parish Council The Mill Bromham

Borough Councillors, Robert Rigby and Dylan Simmonds, have kindly funded this communication from Ward Funds, so that the cost does not fall on residents. They remain neutral on the proposals and would welcome feedback from residents on the village on the Mill and other local matters.

Email: CllrRobert.Rigby@bedford.gov.uk CllrDylan.Simmons@bedford.gov.uk

This communication is from Bromham Parish Council

APPENDIX A

Bromham Mill Buildings

Bromham Mill		Mill House	
Mill Stables		Front Barn	
Workshop Barn		Back Barn	
Toilets		Hovel	

This communication is from Bromham Parish Council

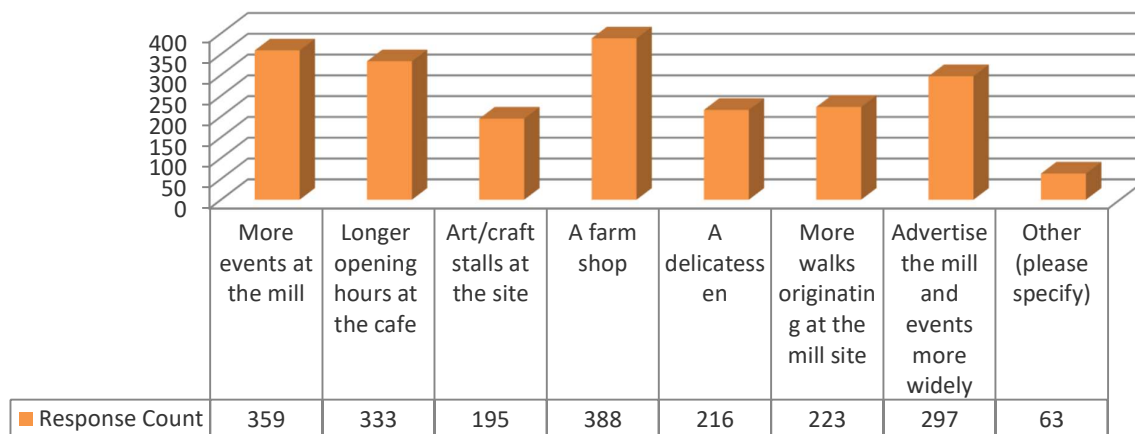
APPENDIX B

Responses below to the Neighbourhood Plan Questionnaire circulated to residents in 2015 to inform the Neighbourhood Plan adopted in 2021.

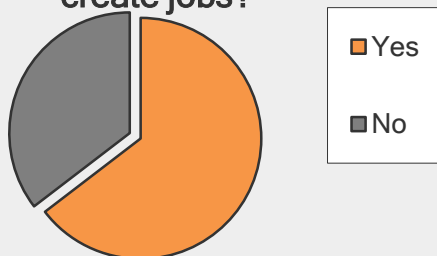
Q20 Do you think more use should be made of Bromham Mill?



Q21 If you said yes, What issues do you consider important for the future of the mill



Q25 Should there be further development at the Mill to create jobs?



Q27 Would small business/start up units (at the mill or other locations) benefit the village?

