

# Leader's Statement

## 22 November 2022

### Rail Freight visit takes place

Along with fellow members, October saw a productive visit to the site of the proposed Hinckley National Rail Freight Interchange (HNRFI) in the south of the district.

The visit gave members a chance to take a look at the site and the potential landscaping implications if the development was given the go ahead by the Secretary of State.



There are numerous issues with the current proposals, and neither planning officers or my fellow members and I can support it in its current form. These visits help to give us context to the plans which further helps us to prepare for the critical months ahead.

We remain absolutely committed to ensuring that we have our say on these proposals as each stage of the process continues, and that residents are kept informed at every stage.

### Huncote Leisure Centre reopens

It has been a very long 12 months for Huncote Leisure Centre, but I am delighted to say that the facility has successfully reopened following the discovery of landfill gas issues last November.

Extensive work has been undertaken since the closure, with recent work focused on ensuring the centre was able to reopen on schedule.

The Council has also committed over £500,000 to this vital work and I am pleased that standing resolute in our desire to reopen this valuable community location has paid off.

Our brilliant officers have worked so incredibly hard since Huncote Leisure Centre first closed, including on Christmas Day and in all weathers. Their work has ensured we got to this point, and I want to genuinely thank them.

A huge thank you also to operators Everyone Active, who have highlighted the strength in our partnership throughout this difficult period.

## **Cosby Neighbourhood Plan Referendum to take place**

This Thursday (24 November) sees the referendum in Cosby on their proposed Neighbourhood Plan.

Residents are going to be able to vote on whether to adopt the proposals, as those living in Leicester Forest East, Blaby and the Fosse Villages have also had in recent years.

It is testament to these parishes for their commitment in ensuring that they have a say in the planning process for pushing ahead with these Neighbourhood Plans, and I hope as many Cosby residents use their vote on referendum day.

Our Elections and Planning Policy teams have worked extraordinarily hard to ensure that we have reached this point, and I want to thank them for their fantastic efforts.

## **Sycamore Street case presented**

The appeal hearing for land off Sycamore Street in Blaby has concluded, with the Council presenting a strong and robust case to the Inspector.

Refused in May 2020, the original application was refused after being considered to be inappropriately located and also harmful to the area.

A two-day hearing was held in September following an appeal by the applicant against the decision, where we highlighted the reasons for its refusal and responded to the case made by the applicant.

We are pleased with the hearing and the brilliant work of our officers in presenting a strong case to the Inspectorate. This is a matter that many local residents care deeply about and the team have worked hard to ensure this appeal is rejected.

The Planning Inspectorate will be making its independent decision soon.

## **Empty Homes reduce for second year**

The number of long term empty homes in Blaby District has reduced for the second year in a row.

New figures have shown that there are just 269 long term empty properties in the district, down from 383 in 2021, and 413 in 2020, with the reduction giving a much-needed boost to housing stock in the local area.

Our Environmental Health team have been working proactively to identify and help bring empty properties back to life, and this work helps to highlight our incentives including loans and grants of up to £10,000 from us to help bring long-term empties back into use.

This important work will continue to keep reducing the number of long-term empties we have in the district.

## Be a Councillor Event

Next May sees our District Elections and residents from across the area will be selecting their Councillors for the 2023-2027 term.

Democracy is an absolutely vital part of any council, and that's why we want as many people to stand to be a Councillor in May. Every resident deserves to have a good pool of candidates to choose from, and that's why we'll once again be running our Be a Councillor events.

The first will take place on Wednesday 06 December 2022 from 6-7pm, virtually on Microsoft Teams. This is a great chance for anyone interested in standing to find out more about being a Councillor and seeing how the Council works.

Find out more at [www.blaby.gov.uk](http://www.blaby.gov.uk) to book a place, and I hope that many enthusiastic prospective Councillors join the event.

## Community Awards return

We've been so pleased to see nominations come in from across the district in the return of our Community Awards.

It is a great opportunity for the Council to honour those people and groups who make such an important and valuable contribution to the district, and recognise the positive difference they make to people's lives.

Our three categories are Volunteer of the Year, Young Volunteer of the Year and Community Group of the Year, with cash prizes for all finalists and contributions towards the finalists' community groups.

We are once again thankful to our sponsors, BHIB Charities Insurance and Central England Co-op for helping to fund these awards.

We'll be announcing the winners and runners-up of the Community Awards in January.

## Job Fair is a roaring success

Our latest Job Fair in October was a huge success with nearly 200 jobseekers in attendance.

After the planned event for September was postponed due to the sad passing of Her Majesty the Queen, our Employment, Work and Skills team worked quickly to rearrange the event to make sure that employers still had the opportunity to fill their vacancies.

With the Council Chamber and Civic Entrance packed with employers, and jobseekers flowing through the doors, it was fantastic to see so many people taking advantage of the event.

We are committed to keeping Job Fairs going into 2023 after positive feedback from companies and jobseekers to help boost our local economy.

## **Parks and open spaces consultation**

There's still time for everyone who enjoys using the Council's parks and open spaces to have their say on the new Parks and Open Spaces Strategy consultation.

The short survey is a fantastic opportunity for residents and anyone who uses the parks and open spaces in Blaby District to give specific feedback about how often they use an open space, what they enjoy and what they'd like to see.

We are extremely proud of our much-loved, strategic open spaces, which include Fosse Meadows, Bouskell Park and the Osiers. Feedback is vital to help our team find out more about what people like and what people want from their local parks.

Thank you to everyone who has already completed the survey. There's still time to complete the form, which can be found at [www.blaby.gov.uk](http://www.blaby.gov.uk) until Friday 25 November.

## **Important prosecution successes**

We were pleased with the recent successful prosecutions from our Planning Enforcement teams against unauthorised works in the district.

In Sapcote, a landowner was ordered to pay nearly £9,000 by Leicester Magistrates' Court for not following an enforcement notice on a partially built structure in Sapcote without planning permission.

Officers had exhausted every option to stop the work with the enforcement notice, but sadly the landowner failed to follow the instructions, leading to prosecution at the Magistrates' Court.

Meanwhile in Glenfield, fines totalling £5,880 have been given to both a tree specialist and a landowner for illegal work to a mature ash tree in Glenfield protected by a Tree Preservation Order.

I want to thank officers for their tireless efforts in ensuring these prosecutions, which highlight that the Council will act when necessary against flagrant breaches of planning law. Their work helps to protect the integrity of the district's landscape.

## **Active Blaby launches**

I'm delighted to share the fantastic news that an eagerly anticipated and innovative new website has been launched to help Blaby District residents get more active.

Active Blaby is a brand-new website featuring the most comprehensive directory of over 450 local activities and groups in the district. The directory gives residents all the key information about the classes and exercise groups listed, which can be filtered by day, activity type and location.

The website is expected to help thousands of residents and we are proud to be leading the way across the county with this pioneering website. A huge well done to the Active Blaby team on getting this website up and running. Visit [www.activeblaby.org.uk](http://www.activeblaby.org.uk) to get started.

## **Christmas Fair just weeks away**

It's the time of the year to start getting festive, and this year we'll be getting into the spirit with the upcoming Christmas Fair.

Taking place in our Council Chamber on Friday 09 December from 5-8pm, the fair will include Santa and his elves, and local companies offering Christmas gifts and food on their stalls.

We'll also have free craft activities and food and drinks available in the warm surroundings here at the Council's offices. It's set to be a fantastic occasion and we're thankful to the officers who are working hard on organising the event.

## **Armed Forces Coffee Mornings**

Our popular Armed Forces Coffee Mornings have been marking the Remembrance season with the creation of a fantastic poppy cascade.

The display was shown at the Council Offices during Remembrance to help honour those who have made the ultimate sacrifice for our country.

Coffee mornings have been confirmed for the next few months, and we're delighted to welcome anyone who is serving in the armed forces, a reservist, or veteran, along with their families to help build friendships.

We even provide free drinks and a lunch in our warm and friendly environment. Find out the dates and join us at our Council Offices by visiting [www.blaby.gov.uk/armed-forces-support](http://www.blaby.gov.uk/armed-forces-support).

## **Blaby toilet project progressing well**

I am pleased to say that our work to install brand new toilets in Blaby Village Centre is progressing well.

Back in March the Council secured nearly £70,000 in Government funding to install a Changing Places toilet, and another £100,000 has been committed to ensure two toilets will be available in the village centre.

The Changing Places toilet will be a larger, accessible toilet for people who cannot use standard accessible toilets and will include hoists, curtains, adult-sized changing benches, and a space for carers.

Officers have worked to find a viable site and have identified a proposed location in Blaby's precinct and I am delighted with the positive reception from shoppers and residents at our plans.

I'm hopeful that work will commence on the toilets in the coming months, and residents will be kept up to date on this exciting project at every stage.

## **Tourism attractions promoted at Fosse Park**

The Tourism team took a trip to Fosse Park at the end of September to promote tourism attractions in the district.

Engaging with residents and shoppers who were visiting the district, the team also highlighted the Fosse Foxes Trail and handed out leaflets of 12 fantastic walking trails as well as cycle maps of the area.

I'd like to thank Fosse Park for donating the space to us for this event. The valued and long-standing partnership we have with Fosse Park gives us unique opportunities to showcase our district.

## **Green Week highlights council successes**

The end of September saw Great Big Green Week, which gave us the opportunity to showcase the Council's work in helping to tackle climate change.

### **Trees snapped up at giveaway**

2,000 trees were given away to visitors at Fosse Park as part of efforts to help people, wildlife and the environment in the district.

The Hazel, Crab Apple, Dog Rose and Downy Birch trees were distributed by the Environmental Services team as they continued to focus on promoting green initiatives to residents.

With trees being essential for people, wildlife and the environment, planting a free tree was a simple yet ideal way to make a difference as part of Great Big Green Week.

A big thanks to Aggregate Industries and opticians Edmonds and Slatter, as well as Fosse Park, for helping to ensure the tree giveaway was able to take place.

### **Schools benefit from air quality lessons**

Local schoolchildren have been exploring the world of air quality and going green with a series of lessons from our officers.

Using the £135,000 in funding from Defra for its "Countdown to Clean Air" project, the Council is working to raise awareness about air quality to primary-age pupils.

Officers with a specialism in air quality and active travel visited Danemill Primary in Enderby and delivered the lessons, which include information about climate change and air quality. The content was targeted towards children of primary age to make it both fun and easy to understand.

A big thanks to Danemill Primary for giving us the opportunity to deliver the first lesson, and to our team, whose efforts are helping the next generation understand climate change.

### **Fleet gets first taste of HVO power**

We are very excited to see our fleet have up to 90% of their emissions wiped with the start of the Council's move to alternative fuel.

Since Cabinet approved plans to change the majority of the fleet to hydro treated vegetable oil (HVO) all of the Council's waste collection fleet have now been moved to HVO. We are delighted to have seen this green step introduced so quickly to our 16 lorries. HVO is a popular alternative to diesel.

Our fantastic Neighbourhood Services team empty more than 2,500,000 bins each year and we know that we need to ensure our vehicles are as sustainable and environmentally friendly as possible.