

Leader's Statement

18 April 2023

Blaby village toilets approved

Plans for fully accessible toilets with a Changing Places unit in central Blaby have been approved.

Work should start on the block soon with an opening later in the spring bringing modern facilities to the village centre for the benefit of both residents and visitors.

The Council will demolish the existing, dilapidated, brick building on the John's Court car park and replace it with a modular block featuring rustic, red brick cladding, steel doors and a green environmentally friendly 'sedum' roof.

As well as a standard accessible toilet it will include a highly specialised Changing Places unit able to accommodate the needs of severely disabled children and adults who need assistance when using the toilet.

Thanks to all concerned who have ensured these plans are now coming to fruition.

Youth Conference success

At the end of February the Council welcomed the return of the annual Youth Conference and what a fantastic day it was. Our Youth Council and Youth Green Forum members delivered sessions in the morning to more than 100 young people on the topics of hate crime, vaping and the Green Agenda.

The young people were completely engaged throughout these sessions and created some fantastic material such as hate crime masks and videos, vaping posters and Green Agenda pledges which will be used to form campaigns moving forward. Students were also given the opportunity to write a letter to our local MP Alberto Costa on what should be done to reduce vaping among young people.

During the afternoon we ran a 'Meet the Councillor' session where they were able to voice the concerns they have in their local area and offer their ideas for solutions to the issues which young people face. These concerns were taken on board by the District and Parish Councillors who were there on the day, as well as Council Officers.

We have had some outstanding feedback from students and teachers, as well as 35 young people register to become members of the Youth Council and/or Youth Green Forum. Well done everyone for helping make this event so successful.

Secretary of State visits New Lubbesthorpe

Our award-winning development at New Lubbesthorpe has received the seal of approval from one of our top politicians.

South Leicestershire MP Alberto Costa arranged for the Right Honourable Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, Michael Gove, to take time out of his busy schedule to visit the development and we were honoured to show him around.

He praised the efforts which had gone into the community so far and held it up as a prime example of partnership working to deliver first class residential living, saying: "We want beautiful, well designed and greener neighbourhoods and the community I've seen in New Lubbesthorpe is something we wish to replicate right across the country. By modernising the planning system, our reforms will create more places people are proud to call home." It was truly a proud day for us all.

The Villers tree planting

An affordable housing scheme is being delivered by ourselves, emh Group – as part of its strategic partnership with Homes England - and Lovells at The Villers formally known as Henson Park, and will provide 27 homes available for social rent, 39 for shared ownership and a supported living block of 11 flats with a communal hub and staff office.

A number of us have visited the development site to celebrate progress and to plant a special tree in memory of Her late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

The tree will form part of The Queen's Green Canopy, an initiative created to mark Her Majesty's Platinum Jubilee in 2022 which has since been extended to provide the opportunity to plant trees in memoriam to honour The Queen.

We anticipate the first of the shared ownership homes will be completed in the coming weeks with all properties anticipated to be handed over by the end of the year.

Inspiration Campaign

This month sees the launch of our Visit Blaby District Inspiration Campaign, which highlights our key attractions and aims to encourage both visitors and residents to explore and spend time in our wonderful District.

The revamped inspiration section on the Visit Blaby District website now has pages dedicated to each of our core themes including food and drink, shopping, history and heritage, the great outdoors and events.

We are encouraging people to follow us @visitblaby on social media and check out our new web pages to find out more about just what the District has to offer

Nature parks improvements

The Council is proud of the beautiful parks and open spaces we have here in the District, works have taken place over the winter to improve infrastructure at some of these areas to help improve the visitor experience.

Among the biggest changes people will find is the overflow car park at popular nature spot, Fosse Meadows, which has been given a dramatic overhaul with damaged areas scraped off and a reinforced grid substructure laid to improve drainage and better hold the stone and gravel top layer.

Fences have also been repaired and fixed with high visibility strips to help mark out spaces to aid better parking. The works were carried out in stages so visitors were still able to park at the site.

The Osiers, in Braunstone Town, has also been given a makeover with the southwest woodland area fenced off to create a safe zone for wildlife and nature and the step at the wooden footbridge replaced with a ramp.

Visitors will find changes at Crow Mills, between Countesthorpe and South Wigston, where footpaths and retaining walls have been replaced and new steps installed on slopes. There has been a lot of positive feedback on the works so well done all concerned.

Stray dogs prosecution

We have long been aware of issues with stray dogs causing a nuisance in the community in Enderby.

Thanks to partnership working with Leicestershire Police we were able to serve the owner of Grange Park, a mobile home site in Enderby, with a Community Protection Notice – a CPN – in March last year.

This followed separate incidents of dogs, which we believed to be from Grange Park, straying near the motorway and being seized as they were not under control.

Now the owner has been ordered to pay £2,570 after being prosecuted at Leicester Magistrates' Court for non-compliance of the CPN.

We hope this now serves as a real deterrent and will ensure residents and their pets in Enderby are no longer threatened by nuisance dogs.

Community Grants update

We are justifiably proud of our Community Grants scheme and this last financial year I am happy to report we awarded a total of £92,302.76 to 52 different organisations

Some 23 organisations (38% of eligible applicants) were first-time applicants to the scheme and 15 organisations (29% of all grants) were supported with projects to address challenges brought about by high energy costs, the cost-of-living crisis or the pandemic.

Six organisations benefited from funds raised through the Love Blaby Lottery and the successful projects are located within 18 of 24 parishes in the district – those not

New walking and cycling routes

We want to give people as many options as possible to make it easier to get around the District and encourage people to rely less on their car.

It's great to see then that works are progressing on new walking and cycling routes to improve connectivity in the District and between New Lubbethorpe and the city.

The first phase is taking place at Mossdale Meadows, with further works to be undertaken at Murby Way and Foxon Way, Meridian Way roundabout improvements, Kingsway, Aylestone Meadows and a new access point at Meridian Leisure Park.

The scheme involves Blaby District Council, Leicester City Council, Leicestershire County Council, Braunstone Town Council, Lubbethorpe Parish Council, Sustrans and Meridian Leisure Park.

Funding has come from the Leicester and Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership (LLEP), Blaby District Council, Leicester City Council, Sustrans (from the national Paths for Everyone scheme) and Leicestershire County Council.

The route is around 2.5 miles long and will ensure people can walk into Meridian Leisure Park from Braunstone Town instead of driving.

Funding for Housing Enablement Service

It's great news that our Housing Enablement Team has once again gained external funding of £783,400 to provide housing related support to inpatients in the hospitals in Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland. The funding comes from the Improved Better Care Fund via Leicestershire County Council, the Better Care Fund via the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Integrated Care Boards and Leicester Partnership Trust.

This is an increased amount lasting up to 31 March 2026 and will mean our successful pilots in other hospital locations will become a permanent addition to our mainstream service.

We will now offer services to not only the three University Hospitals Leicester – Leicester Royal Infirmary, Glenfield Hospital and Leicester General - and the Bradgate Mental Health Unit but also the Mental Health Rehabilitation sites at the Willows and Stewart House, the Mental Health Service for Older Persons wards at the Bennion Centre and the Evington Centre and all the Community Hospitals in Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland.

Not only does this mean that we can continue to provide our vital service for another three years and in more hospital sites, reaching more vulnerable patients, but it also means we have also been able to provide more job opportunities within the council, as our staffing numbers have increased from six permanent FTEs in 2020 to 10.5 FTEs from April 2023. A huge success.

JUST programme

JUST is a physical activity programme that provides the opportunity for women aged 16 plus to get involved in a range of physical activity sessions across South Leicestershire.

The main target audience was inactive women, who were given a £2 subsidy off their first eight classes to encourage them to take part. For 2023, JUST ran in Blaby for nine weeks between 23 January and 26 March. During this time, women had the opportunity to attend a large selection of local classes, with everything from Zumba to tennis on offer.

Everyone who joined the programme were also able to claim incentives for their attendance each week, receiving a JUST branded T-shirt for attending four sessions and a JUST branded gym bag for eight sessions attended.

Overall the District had 600 women sign up to the programme, with 180 of those being completely inactive (less than 30 minutes a week of activity). More than 300 T-shirts and more than 150 bags have been handed out so far, with more to go out.

One instructor had 98 new participants in her classes as a result of JUST, meaning she was fully booked each week and had a total of 40% more participants than last year in her classes

Debate not Hate campaign

According to the LGA's 2022 census seven out of 10 Councillors reported experiencing abuse or intimidation during that year.

And with local elections taking place in May it is timely that the LGA has launched the Debate not Hate campaign.

Debating and disagreeing with one another is a healthy part of democracy but abuse and intimidation crosses the line into dangerous territory. The right engagement matters.

Anyone, regardless of their background or political affiliation, should feel safe to become a Councillor and be proud to represent their community.

But the increasing level of abuse and intimidation aimed at local politicians is preventing elected members from representing the communities they serve, deterring individuals from standing for election and undermining local democracy.

The LGA's Debate Not Hate campaign aims to raise public awareness of the role of Councillors in their communities, encourage healthy debate and improve the responses and support for local politicians facing abuse and intimidation.

It's a campaign we should all get behind.

Blaby District Carbon Neutral by 2050

EV charging

The Council has benefited from a collaborative project called Flex D to share in a £2.3 million grant from LEVI Pilot funding to expand electric charging across the county.

Here in Blaby District this will enable us to install a solar canopy at Enderby Leisure Centre providing up to 12 charging points.

There will also be support for a rural electric vehicle car club encouraging rural mobility and the take up of electric vehicles with dual chargers in village locations.

The Council is also working with Leicestershire County Council to develop a countywide electric vehicle strategy to support the roll-out of further charging points across the District, also funded through the LEVI Pilot.

Climate Change and Nature Pact

Blaby District Council has joined Leicestershire County Council and 16 other key partners and stakeholders in pledging to tackle climate change, nature decline and carbon reduction.

The Council is among the first 18 signatories of The Leicestershire Climate and Nature Pact. The document is based on the principles of the Glasgow Climate Pact, signed by the UK government in November 2021.

It supports national and international efforts to tackle climate change by bringing together key organisations including Councils, businesses, educational institutions and voluntary, community and social enterprises to drive local action and work towards a number of shared environmental aims.

At the core of the Pact is the need to act quickly on reducing the impacts of climate change, reducing carbon emissions to net zero and halting ecological decline. As well as supporting climate recovery and working together to deliver effective action on climate change.

Blaby District Carbon Neutral by 2050

Air Quality Grant

Blaby District Council has received more than half a million pounds to help reduce harmful vehicle emissions under the banner of Let's Go Electric.

The money, £573,701, has come through the government's annual Air Quality Grant and will be spent on an electric conversion kit for a diesel bin lorry and the purchase of Blaby's first electric road sweeper.

These will be used specifically in the five Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs) in the District, Enderby, Narborough, Whetstone and the M1 corridor in Leicester Forest East and Thorpe Astley. All these areas feature major traffic routes and dense populations and while air pollutant levels do not exceed national guidelines they remain higher than the World Health Organisation advises.