



A great place to live, work and visit



Leader's Statement to Annual Council May 2023



Terry Richardson
Leader, Blaby District Council

Every year comes with its own set of challenges and opportunities for Blaby District but we always strive to make the most of them. This past year was no exception as we tackled the ongoing issues at the site of Huncote Leisure Centre, supported our residents through tough economic times, bid farewell to her late Majesty Queen Elizabeth and welcomed our new monarch HM King Charles III to the throne. In addition we made significant strides towards our goal of achieving Net Zero carbon emissions.

Despite these challenges we remained committed to delivering on our Blaby District Corporate Plan and made progress on several fronts. We embraced commerciality to ensure the financial sustainability of vital services, worked in partnership to provide affordable housing such as the Villiers development in Whetstone and successfully transitioned our fleet to HVO - hydrogenated vegetable oil - reducing our heavy vehicle emissions by 90%.

Our offices underwent a transformation resulting in significant reductions in required space. We also established a new Transformation Team to help us close our financial gaps and introduced a new performance management system. In March 2022 a peer review team visited and in November 2022 they returned to review our action plan, commending our impressive journey in light of the challenges we faced, our approach to leadership and positive relationships with others.

While this statement highlights some of our achievements over a busy year, I want to draw attention to a few noteworthy accomplishments.

- ◆ Over the past year we have made significant progress towards our Net Zero targets, with a focus on embedding sustainable practices across all areas of delivery. Our efforts in this area have included securing more than £500,000 towards new electric vehicles and signing up to the Climate and Nature Pact. Additionally we have worked to improve our green spaces, which have been highly valued by our communities, and we will continue to enhance these strategic areas for all to enjoy.
- ◆ We have distributed more than £5.5m as part of the Government's Council Tax Energy Rebate scheme which reduced the council tax bills of more than 36,000 residents by £150 in 2022/23.
- ◆ A further £357,000 has been allocated to Blaby under the Energy Bill Support Scheme (Alternative Funding) initiative to support harder to reach residents who have not benefited from the £150 rebate.

- ◆ As well as the DEFRA funding already mentioned, we have secured in excess of £237,917 worth of external funding which will support the work we do as a Council and many of the integral community groups and facilities within the District.
- ◆ During the year we were notified we will be receiving more than £2,135,168 worth of UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) funding to be spent over three years.
- ◆ Another major accomplishment has been securing funding for the Hospital Enablement Team for a further three years, ensuring people can leave the hospital when they are ready and move into suitable housing.
- ◆ We have also organised job fairs that have been attended by more than 530 individuals who have been successfully supported back into work.
- ◆ Other notable achievements include the launch of the Tourism Inspiration Campaign on the VisitBlaby website, which included information about travelling to and around the District and the return of the Community Awards, which recognised individuals who have made a significant positive impact in our community.
- ◆ We also successfully held local elections, saying goodbye to some brilliant Councillors who will be missed but also welcoming new Councillors who we look forward to working with in the future.

The past year has been a whirlwind of activity and successes for the District of Blaby. While we are proud of what we have accomplished we also recognise there is much work to be done, especially as we develop the next corporate plan that will guide us for the next four years. This plan will continue to drive us to be the best we can be, serving all of our residents, communities and businesses with excellence. As always, we will put our customers at the heart of our decisions and approach everything with the 'Blaby Way.'

I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to all the officers and members who have contributed to the accomplishments highlighted in this statement and continue to work tirelessly to make Blaby District an exceptional place to live, work, and visit. As the leader of Blaby District Council, I am proud of our team and eagerly look forward to what the future holds for us as we continue to deliver for our communities.



Councillor Terry Richardson
Leader of the Council



A GREAT PLACE TO *live*



- ◆ **Positive feedback from Health Walks** – We were pleased to launch brand new weekly Beginner Health Walks in partnership with Walk Together across Braunstone, Countesthorpe, Glen Parva and Glenfield last May.

These physical activity initiative walks offer weekly free, sociable and accessible group walks within Leicestershire, alongside our established and brisk paced walks in Kirby Muxloe, Stoney Stanton, and Glen Parva.

The walks are a vital service for the community to reduce loneliness, create a community feel while improving physical fitness. They were well received with positive feedback from many participants.

Work is being undertaken for a possible parent and toddler walk in the District, in addition to the health walks.

- ◆ **Celebration event for Queen's Jubilee** – More than 2,000 people attended a special celebration event on the Saturday of the late Queen's historic Platinum Jubilee in June at Bouskell Park in Blaby.

Some 20 local businesses took the opportunity to sell a wide range of items, including afternoon teas, handmade gifts, personalised items and candles to the thousands in attendance. There were also a number of activities for young people and families to participate in at no cost to them which proved very popular.

It was also fantastic to see three local schools in the district taking part in a crown making/ decorating competition and we received more than 300 entries before the event. Some 12 young people were chosen by Gather Create Grow (the team behind the brilliant Cosby Yarn Bomb) to receive a gift voucher.



- ◆ **Scouting safety for schoolchildren** – Bike Week took place in June and to mark the event our Active Travel Officer visited three primary schools in the District to deliver assemblies and practical bicycle and scooter safety.

Danemill Primary School in Enderby, The Hall Primary School in Glenfield and All Saints Church of England Sapcote were visited during the week and all pupils left the assembly with an eight-page activity booklet to complete with their parent or guardian. This important introduction for pupils helped to start the conversation between family members and discuss safety equipment and being confident in road awareness.

We followed up with a visit to deliver a Scootability course at all three schools to give basic scouting skills for younger pupils. Giving them an introduction to safe scouting and road awareness gave each pupil the confidence and encouragement for more active travel to and from school.

- ◆ **Huncote Leisure Centre update** – Huncote Leisure Centre was constructed in the 1970s. It was known and well documented the land to the rear of the building was the site of a former landfill site. As such the site has long been subject to landfill gas monitoring measures. On 02 November 2021, during the course of planned landfill gas mitigation work at the rear of Huncote Leisure Centre, contractors recorded the levels of methane being emitted from the site were much higher than expected.

As a result a major incident was declared, the emergency plan invoked and the leisure centre and surrounding site was closed.



A number of measures have been undertaken at the site since November 2021 including the installation of new bore holes, gas monitoring wells, a passive ventilation system and an upgraded flare stack. Officers in the Environmental Services Team have been undertaking landfill gas monitoring at the site throughout these works.

The Leisure Centre building, car park and Parish Council field were re-opened in October 2022 and work is ongoing with the contractor to re-open the field and footpaths to the rear of the centre.

- ◆ **Electric Road Sweeper trialled** – Back in June we were swept away by the trial of an electric road sweeper. The 'Bucher CityCat V20e' compact sweeper was used by the Council's District Cleansing team to clean the pavements and roadsides in villages across the local area.

Working on a 63KWh battery, the EV sweeper was able to operate on the same round as normal to its diesel equivalent with plenty of battery to spare. Crews were impressed by the noise difference compared to a diesel sweeper.



The trial of the compact sweeper and an EV bin lorry in 2021 are part of Blaby District Council's commitment to move towards fossil fuel alternatives to power its vehicles. Further work and a significant grant, which I will talk about later, is progressing this commitment.

- ◆ **A Place to Grow hosts open day** – The end of July last year saw the return of our annual A Place to Grow Open Day for the first time in two years. More than 250 people from across the District and beyond came to visit the garden in Enderby, which supports positive mental health and wellbeing.

Visitors got the chance to explore the garden and see the great gardening skills of the volunteers, as well as enjoying the host of events on offer and watching the LE8 Brass Band and a fantastic live family performance.



Some £907 was raised from the open day, with all proceeds going straight back to the garden for its upkeep. We are incredibly proud of our sustainable community garden and the positive difference it has made to hundreds of volunteers over the years.

Anyone interested in finding out more about the garden, including volunteering, can visit www.blaby.gov.uk/aptg

- ◆ **Sycamore Street case** – The appeal hearing for land off Sycamore Street in Blaby concluded in September with the Council presenting a strong and robust case to the Inspector.

The original application for a Gypsy caravan site and day rooms was refused in May 2020 after being considered to be inappropriately located and also harmful to the area.

A two-day hearing was held in September 2022 following an appeal by the applicant against the decision to the Planning Inspectorate. Here we highlighted the reasons for its refusal and responded to the case made by the applicant.

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

After deliberation the Planning Inspectorate upheld the Council's refusal of the application.

- ◆ **Trees snapped up at giveaway** – During Great Big Green Week at the end of September some 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.



- ◆ **Neighbourhood Plans** – In November there was the referendum in Cosby on their proposed Neighbourhood Plan.

Residents voted to adopt the proposals, as those living in Leicester Forest East, Blaby and the Fosse Villages have also done 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.

Our Elections and Planning Policy Teams worked extraordinarily hard to ensure this point was reached and I want to thank them for their fantastic efforts.

The Plan was formally 'made' – that is accepted – by Blaby District Council at the full Council meeting in January and now forms part of the Council's adopted Local Plan.

Glenfield Parish have also submitted their Plan to us and have undertaken a consultation so that local people can air their views before the document is adopted.

Along with our own District Plan these new Neighbourhood Plans will inform decisions on planning applications and what areas of land have significance in terms of historic value or green space.

These documents are important defences against unwanted, inappropriate or ill-designed development across our District.

- ◆ **Armed Forces Coffee Mornings** – Our popular Armed Forces Coffee Mornings continue and last November marked 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.

We are really pleased to say we secured £10,000 funding from the Covenant Trust Fund for the coffee mornings to continue until April 2024. We're delighted to welcome anyone to our events who is serving in the armed forces, a reservist, or veteran, along with their families to help build friendships. This year we will be hosting an event to mark both Armed Forces Day in June 2024 and Armistice in November plus a visit with our Coffee Morning attendees to the Cosby Air show in September.

We provide free drinks and a lunch in our warm and friendly environment at the Council offices. Find out the dates and join us by visiting www.blaby.gov.uk/armed-forces-support.



- ◆ **Archer's Festive Tractor Run** – I'm pleased to say two of our bin lorries took part in the annual Archer's Festive Tractor Run in December which this time around was raising money for the Leicestershire MS Therapy Centre and LOROS, Hospice Care for Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland. Our lorries joined hundreds of tractors and other heavy vehicles, all festooned with festive lights, on a tour of local villages including Blaby, Whetstone, Cosby and Countesthorpe.

This is always an amazing community event which brings out the crowds and raises money for fantastic causes and we are proud to support it. The event raised around £29,500.

- ◆ **Surprise Licensing checks** – Officers from our Licensing and Community Safety Teams joined forces with Leicestershire Police to carry out a series of surprise inspections on pubs and private hire taxis in the run-up to the busy Christmas season.

We wanted to make sure all aspects of their licences were being complied with, and in the case of taxis, that the vehicles were safe to be carrying passengers.

All pubs passed the checks but it was disappointing that only two of the six private hire vehicles checked at our Whetstone Depot passed without issue.

This goes to show how important it is that we as a council remain vigilant to ensure the safety of our residents.

- ◆ **Schools benefit from air quality lessons** – Local schoolchildren explored 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 worked 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 included 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.

- ◆ **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. Members from our Youth Council and the recently created Youth Green Forum 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 are being used to form campaigns moving forward. Students were also given the opportunity to write a letter to our local MPs Alberto Costa and Edward Agar 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 had some outstanding feedback from students and teachers, as well as 35 young people registering 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 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 have 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.



- ◆ **Homes England make visit to New Lubbesthorpe** – Sometime before the Secretary of State visited, our Strategic Growth Team were pleased to welcome Homes England to New Lubbesthorpe. Homes England is the Government body that works to fund new affordable housing and increase the number of new homes in the country.

The delegation spent a morning with Councillors and members of the Council's Strategic Growth Team looking around the development, which is now approaching its second phase of construction. Homes England's visit gave them the chance to learn more about what has made this award-winning development such a popular choice for new residents.

Alongside new dwellings, representatives also saw the infrastructure that has been put in place so far. A presentation by the Strategic Growth team explained the history and future of the site, as well as highlighting the key lessons that can be learnt for future strategic developments in the District.

We should all be incredibly proud of New Lubbesthorpe and we are thrilled that an organisation such as Homes England wanted to learn more about the development and explore best practice for new housing projects across the country.

- ◆ **Leicestershire Building Control Partnership** – April last year an exciting new agreement saw six Council's Building Control Teams come together into one service led by Blaby District Council. The Leicestershire Building Control Partnerships (LBCP) includes Blaby District Council, Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council, Melton Borough Council, Harborough District Council, Oadby and Wigston Borough Council and Rutland County Council.

This new partnership strengthens the Building Control offer across the county, the service's surveying team have a vast wealth of local knowledge and more than 100 years of experience, with some having worked on projects that have been entered into and won national recognition at the Local Authority Building Control (LABC) Awards.

We have a website at www.lbcpc.co.uk for both trade and the public to book their inspections, including helpful information on each stage of the process for those new to Building Control.

Leicestershire Building Control Partnership will pride itself on continuing the first-class customer focussed and responsive service offered by Councils before the new agreement began, including same-day site inspections if booked before 10am.

Service development and improvements for the customer will be at the heart of LBCP's operations.

This includes maintaining the 24/7, 365 days a year emergency call out service when responding to either dangerous buildings or aiding the emergency services during major incidents within the District.



As a regulatory service competing against the private sector for its work, the service will continue to look for efficiency savings and better ways of working and will always factor improvements around what matters for the customer in everything they do.

- ◆ **Waste Strategy** – In February 2023 the Leicestershire Resources and Waste Strategy was officially ratified by the Council. The strategy and its accompanying action plan outline how Blaby and other partners in Leicestershire plan to achieve a national recycling rate target of 65% by 2035, which is a significant challenge.

The implementation of weekly food waste collections, subject to full government funding, over the next five years is expected to drive much of the progress towards this goal. The strategy covers the period between 2022 and 2050 and was developed following a 12-week public consultation period and several stakeholder workshops.

The Leicestershire strategy aligns with the 2018 national waste strategy, which included significant packaging reforms such as consistency in waste collections, deposit return schemes for plastic bottles and metal cans and waste packagers' being obligated to fund waste collections. Although we are still waiting for full funding allocation for the food waste collections it is certain that the world of waste will be an exciting place in the coming years.

- ◆ **Novus era for transport in New Lubbethorpe** – It has been fantastic to see the launch of a new, sustainable transport service in New Lubbethorpe, as part of the next chapter in our award-winning community's story.

Vectare took over from Arriva Click, which served the area for more than three years. The Loughborough-based company introduced Novus Flex, taking over from the Click service, as well as Novus Direct, a new bus service to the city centre from New Lubbethorpe via Thorpe Astley.

This is part of our proactive efforts with the landowners to ensure residents at New Lubbethorpe have access to reliable public transport to popular locations in the District and to Leicester city centre.

I want to thank Arriva for their work over the last three years which innovated public transport in Blaby District.

- ◆ **Care Choices Dementia Guide Edition 3 Launched** – Earlier this year a new dementia guide was produced for people affected by dementia who live across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland. The practical guide is to support people who may have recently received a formal diagnosis or who may be struggling to get support or know what local support is available. The guide produced by Care Choices in partnership with Blaby District Dementia Friendly Communities explores all aspects of living with dementia. The guide has helped residents find dementia support available, in addition to helping them better understand the condition and how best to support those affected.

Guides have been distributed across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland to key services such as Age UK, Memory Service, Lightbulb and Social Prescribing Teams within GP practices. Dementia Roadshows have also been run within the District as part of Dementia Action Week which took place last week.

- ◆ **Fox Connect launches in District** – We are delighted to see the new County Council-backed Fox Connect service launch in the south of the District.

Fox Connect serves Thurlaston, Huncote, Littlethorpe, Croft, Cosby, Stoney Stanton, Sapcote, Aston Flamville, Sharnford and Narborough, as well as other villages in Harborough District. It offers journeys between each village and to special destinations including Narborough Railway Station, Fosse Park and Enderby Park and Ride.



This new service is a vital addition to our southern villages and as has been proved by the demand-responsive service in New Lubbethorpe, this type of public transport is the way forward. I'm pleased to see it spread to other areas of the District and benefit even more communities.

Residents can find out more by visiting www.choosehowyoumove.co.uk/public-transport/fox-connect

- ◆ **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 in Whetstone. It 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 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 late Majesty's Platinum Jubilee in 2022 which has since been extended to provide the opportunity to plant trees in memoriam to honour Queen Elizabeth II.

- ◆ **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 also being seized as they were not under control.

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

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

- ◆ **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.



- ◆ **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 specifically benefitting being our smallest parishes due to no applications being received.

It's interesting to note that demand for the grants scheme is back at pre-pandemic levels and there has been increasing interest and demand for Green Capital grants since the scheme launched. Our first funding round for 2023-24 is now open.

- ◆ **Love Blaby Lottery** – The Council's Love Blaby Lottery celebrated its fifth birthday in February 2023. The lottery has raised nearly £150,000 for local charities, community groups and sports clubs since its launch.

Despite the challenging times, during the last 12 months alone it has raised nearly £29,000 so we are thankful to everyone who continues to support by playing the lottery.

Some 54 different organisations are currently registered and fundraising through the lottery to help them continue to provide vital services and activities for residents in our community.

- ◆ **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.

Figures have shown 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.

- ◆ **Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund** – Following the success of Local Authority Delivery phase 2, Blaby has again worked with East Midlands Homes (EMH) and the Midlands Net Zero Hub to facilitate the retrofit of social housing in the District.

Addressing the carbon emissions from housing in the District is a key part of our journey to Net Zero by 2050.

In 2022 EMH were awarded more than £1m of government funding to upgrade more than 70 homes to a target energy efficiency rating of EPC C, or EPC D where this is not possible.

So far energy saving measures have been installed at more than 40 homes so far which will help those residents to save money on heating and reduce carbon emissions.

- ◆ **JUST programme** – JUST is a physical activity programme that provides opportunities for women aged 16 plus to get involved in a range of physical activity sessions across South Leicestershire.

During this year's JUST initiative 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 was 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 were handed 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.

- ◆ **Health and Leisure** – Our Leisure Centres are recovering well following the Covid closure, with more than 4,000 members at Enderby Leisure Centre for the first time ever, 2,000 young people learning to swim and 150 free memberships provided to Ukrainian refugees.

The Sport and Physical Activity service secured £75,000 from Public Health to deliver local initiatives to encourage and keep people active.

The Health and Wellbeing service secured funding for a local Neighbourhood Mental Health Coordinator.

- ◆ **EV charging** – The Council has benefited from a collaborative project called Flex D to share in a £2.3m 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 joined Leicestershire County Council and 16 other key partners and stakeholders in pledging to tackle climate change, nature decline and carbon reduction.

The Council was 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.



- ◆ **Air Quality grant success** – Blaby District Council 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, came through the government's annual Air Quality Grant and is being spent on an electric conversion kit for a diesel bin lorry and the purchase of Blaby's first electric road sweeper – following the highly successful trial last year which I mentioned earlier.

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.

The main emission concerns surround fine particulate matter and nitrogen oxides and the Air Quality Grants seek to support Councils in their efforts to tackle these, as well as other emissions, creating a healthier environment for everyone.

- ◆ **Fleet gets first taste of HVO power** – While we continue to make strides to ensure our service impact is as environmentally friendly as possible with investigations into electric vehicles it's important to say we have already made significant steps. Thanks to our move to alternative fuel – HVO hydro treated vegetable oil – some 90% of our fleet's emissions have been wiped out.



All of the Council's waste collection heavy vehicle fleet – 16 lorries – were moved to HVO. Our fantastic Neighbourhood Services Team empty more than 2,500,000 bins each year and we know we need to ensure our vehicles are as sustainable and environmentally friendly as possible.

- ◆ **Active Blaby launches** – I'm delighted to say 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 to get started.

- ◆ **New Climate Change section on website** – Our new Climate Change section has been live on our website for some time now. The brand new section provides a dedicated online space to promote what Blaby District Council are doing to tackle Climate Change as well as provide advice and guidance and toolkits to residents, businesses and the community on what they can do to reduce their carbon footprint and help us achieve our collective Net Zero ambitions.

Information on our Climate Strategy, Energy Efficiency, EV Charging, Solar Together, Help to Heat, Green Grants and more general green advice is available in one place for the first time.



- ◆ **Important prosecution successes** – We have been pleased with the 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 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 were 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.

- ◆ **No upheld complaints with Ombudsman** – We are please to say Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman have informed us that no complaints against the Council were upheld in 21/22.

None of the three investigations carried out resulted in any upheld complaints. Our figure of 0% compares incredibly to the 51% average of upheld complaints for similar organisations.

This once again highlights the incredible work of our Housing, Revenues and Benefits, Planning, Housing and Environmental Health teams. Their diligent and thorough work will always put the residents at the heart of everything they do and I want to thank them for the effort they give all year round.

- ◆ **Platinum Award for Litter Wombles** – On behalf of everyone at Blaby District Council I wanted to pass on our huge congratulations to those connected with the South Leicestershire Litter Wombles for their Platinum Jubilee Award.

The group has gone from strength to strength since starting up nearly four years ago and now has members collecting thousands upon thousands of bags of litter, both in Blaby District and beyond.

Their dedicated work has been recognised with a Community and Business Award from the Queen's Platinum Jubilee Awards, where local residents were given the chance to nominate local groups who make a positive difference to the community.

We are grateful for the work they do in the District and remain proud to support them via providing free litter picking equipment and working with the group to take away and dispose of the bags of litter they collect.

Thank you to every volunteer litter picker in the District and a big well done for the deserved recognition.



- ◆ **Community Awards** – The Community Awards are the Council's way of formally recognising and celebrating the contribution of volunteers and community organisations that make such a vital contribution to our District
 - ◆ This year we received 23 individual volunteer nominations (including eight Young Volunteers) and nominations for 11 Community Groups
 - ◆ Community Group of the Year was decided by public vote with more than 3,000 individuals getting involved in deciding their winners
 - ◆ Our winners were: Darren Callis (Volunteer of the Year), Kiya Kanani (Young Volunteer of the Year) and Epworth Forest Juniors FC as Community Group of the Year
 - ◆ The celebrations culminated in an event in the Council chamber in January 2023 with nearly 100 representatives from our voluntary sector
 - ◆ The awards were sponsored by the Love Blaby Lottery, Central Co-op, BHIB Charities Insurance and - our new sponsor for 2022 – Jessup Partnerships



- ◆ **Mental Health Support in schools** – For the second year running we worked with the Centre for Fun and Families to provide one-to-one support to young people experiencing mental health challenges in three of our secondary schools.

The scheme supports up to 84 young people during an academic year.

Evaluation shows the project is having a positive impact in reducing levels of anxiety and depression among young people referred as well as increasing their coping skills.

- ◆ **HMP Fosseway - ROTL Event** – A partnership event with Serco to explain Release on Temporary License (ROTL) and promote placements was held on 08 March 2023 at The Marriott Hotel with 13 businesses attending the event. Guest speakers from Fosse Way, Serco, Timpson Group, KEY4Life charity and two powerful presentations from ex-offenders all formed part of the event. District based businesses have expressed an interest in ROTL placements.

- ◆ **Garden Village ambitions receive funding boost** – A further £135,000 in Government funding was received to help Blaby District Council continue its ambitious plans for a potential future Garden Village site.

Whetstone Pastures, a proposed development in the south-east of the District, was one of only 19 local authorities to be awarded Garden Village status in 2019.

Some £135,000 was awarded for the next stage of this pro-active growth of the District to ensure larger-scale, sustainable development sites are utilised to be the home of future District residents and to help prevent existing communities lose their sense of identity.

Set against the challenge for local authorities to provide large numbers of additional new homes in the coming decades, the Council has worked proactively to carry out its responsibility of planning for this need.

Funding will be used for specialists advising the Council on matters including master planning, urban design, and viability. It is vital that developments like this are shaped to include those things deemed to be essential for a sustainable and future proofed true Garden Village Community.



- ◆ **Hinckley National Rail Freight Interchange** – Our Planning Team continue to take forward the important work of responding to this significant proposal.

Earlier this month developers Tritax Symmetry had their application for the Hinckley National Rail Freight Interchange (HNRFI) accepted by the Planning Inspectorate, and the statutory process has now commenced for its consideration.

Our Adequacy of Consultation response was submitted and our position is that we do not believe the consultation was adequate, we believe it was incomplete and inaccurate with vague information.

There remains insufficient recognition of the impacts of the increased barrier down-time at Narborough Level Crossing, questions have not been answered on landscape impacts and I am not satisfied that the highways issues have been adequately considered.

We are a statutory consultee on this major infrastructure project so we cannot decide on the application but I assure everyone we will be vigorous in our scrutiny of all aspects of the development and critique it at every point.

We are now moving to the next stage of consultation after the Planning Inspectorate accepted the plans. Residents can sign up to the Planning Inspectorate website to make comments on the plans up until 23 June.

We are pleased that every Council member is dedicated to ensuring a strong reaction to the application and we have set aside adequate funding to enable us to deliver a thorough response.

- ◆ **UK Shared Prosperity Fund** – During the year we were notified we will be receiving more than £2,135,168 worth of UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) funding to be spent over three years. This followed the submission of an Investment Plan in which we set out our commitment to nearly 30 projects which will benefit our local communities and residents. We have already received more than a quarter of a million pounds of the money and project delivery is underway.

- ◆ **Local Elections** – On 04 May the local elections took place across the country, including in Blaby District. Out of the 17 District Wards in Blaby, 16 were contested, along with five Parish Council elections. The Elections Team received extensive support from various departments, resulting in an efficient and accurate process.

As a result of the Boundary Review, the number of Councillors was reduced from 39 to 36. This change means we had to bid farewell to 14 dedicated individuals, who I wholeheartedly thank for their commitment and service. Simultaneously, we warmly welcome 13 new Councillors to Blaby District Council. Their presence will contribute to our ongoing efforts in ensuring that Blaby remains a wonderful place to live, work, and visit.



A GREAT PLACE TO *work*



- ◆ **Local Government Association Conference 2022** – I had the privilege of attending the LGA conference in June last year, the first face to face one since the Covid pandemic started, with Councillor Maggie Wright and Chief Executive Julia Smith.

We heard from some very interesting speakers about the future of local government, the challenges we face but also the opportunities and best practice examples.

Our own Lightbulb and Housing Enablement Team projects were featured as best practice examples of the work District councils do to positively impact on health and people's quality of life. It was great to see all of the work we do in local government and the positive impact we have on people's lives.

As part of the conference I had the opportunity to ask some key questions and raise some key issues for consideration including fair funding, implications of inflationary increases and opportunities around County Deals for Leicestershire.

- ◆ **Funding for Housing Enablement Service** – It's great news that our Housing Enablement Team has once again gained external funding of £783,400 for 2023/24 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 Leicester City, Leicestershire and Rutland Integrated Care Boards and Leicester Partnership Trust.

This is an increased amount and the funders have agreed in principle to continue this funding until 31 March 2026. This 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.

It means we can continue to provide our vital service for another three years and in more hospital sites, reaching more vulnerable patients. 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.

- ◆ **Depot Electrification Roadshow** – On 24 January this year we hosted the Electrifying Council Depots – East Midlands Roadshow. The event was well attended by Councils from across the Midlands and featured presentations by Midlands Net Zero Hub, Hilson Moran, National Grid (Western Power Distribution), BP Pulse and Dennis Eagle.

There was a tour of the Whetstone depot where delegates were shown how to get ready for EV's.

There were also demonstrations of an electric refuse lorry and a street sweeper by Dennis Eagle and Bucher Municipal.

Blaby's Depot at Whetstone features in the Electrifying Council Depots guide (produced by Hilson Moran and Midlands Net Zero Hub) which provides a route map for Councils to switch to electric vehicles by explaining the infrastructure requirements and how to get there.

More than £600 in income was raised from the event which will help other local authorities in their journey to Net Zero.



- ◆ **Our Job Fairs are a roaring success** – Three job fairs have taken place between June 2022 and March 2023 with a fourth planned for 28 June 2023 at the Council offices.

Job opportunities continues to rise with advertised vacancies up by 21% across the Blaby area over the last 12 months compared to 2021-2022. (Leicester and Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership (LLEP) labour information April 23).

15 June 2022 held at Everards Meadows.

165 job seekers attended and 22 stalls

14 Oct 2022 held at Blaby District offices.

170 job seekers attended and 25 stalls

15 March 2023 held at Blaby District offices.

195 job seekers attended and 25 stalls.



From the March jobs fair we know at least 35% of all attendees were unemployed, 15 people went on to have interviews and seven were offered jobs and are now in employment. Wider support offered at Jobs Fairs includes upskilling, training, access to DWP work coaches and volunteering opportunities.

- ◆ **Peer Review** – The Council was subject to a LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Review last March with a thorough 23-page report published following the visit.

We had excellent feedback from the assessors and as well as identifying some areas for us to focus on, the Peer Review highlighted the Council is financially stable, with strong leadership and a desire to challenge itself to make improvements.

The Peer Review report can be found on both the Blaby District Council and LGA websites, along with the Council's Action Plan. We also had a progress review in December to ensure work was being undertaken to strengthen in identified areas.

They were able to hear how we were responding to their eight key recommendations and what actions had been taken so far.

Their report is complete and has been published and another return visit has been confirmed. We are on track to deliver all of their recommendations.

- ◆ **LGA Healthcheck of Communications** – The Council invited the LGA to undertake a one-day health check review of the Council's communications activity, to give an honest assessment of its strengths and weaknesses following the Corporate Peer Challenge Review held last March.

The site visit took place on 30 November 2022 and the LGA health check team reviewed a range of information and also spoke to more than 30 people including a range of council staff and councillors, in eight meetings and focus groups.

The recommendations arising were included in a detailed report and it was useful to find the initial feedback was extremely positive with some specific areas of improvement to focus on.

The team who carried out the review were impressed with the Communications Team and the high standards the team adheres to particularly as it has a remit that is wider than many other council communications teams of similar size. The LGA team praised the amount and quality of the content being produced and said the team is hardworking and led by a manager who is well respected.

The feedback highlighted that good communication is everyone's responsibility and identified 11 areas for improvement including improving internal communications to ensure the success of the transformation programme, identifying key priorities for communications and the creation of a new overarching communications strategy. The areas for improvement have been incorporated into an action plan which is being delivered over the coming months to build on our success.



- ◆ **Officers work hard to support Ukraine arrivals** – We were extremely proud to ensure the safe arrival of displaced Ukrainian families in the district under the national scheme following the Russian invasion last year.

Work took place with partners in government and other local authorities to quickly establish a process to do this safely and efficiently. One important task was to assess whether the sponsors' homes had sufficient space and were safe for their Ukrainian guests to move into.

It took our Environmental Health team just two weeks to produce a procedure to inspect homes and send the information of 20 properties back to the relevant authorities on top of their already heavy workload.

The team prioritised the importance of making this process move as quickly as possible. Our Housing Team also dealt with three homeless families who arrived under the Family Visa scheme, with our Resident Support Team supporting these families. Customers Services Team and Benefits Team also dealt with enquiries from both sponsors and family members.

- ◆ **Community Volunteer Week supports local groups** – Early June last year saw more than 50 officers from the Council journey across the district to support some of the fantastic local community groups we have as part of Community Volunteer Week.

Returning for the first time since before the pandemic, 154 hours of work was completed across the week at a variety of projects, including gardening at Community Harvest Whetstone, painting at Narborough Bowls Club and reading with students at both Croft Primary, and The Winstanley School.

We were also joined by colleagues from Vodafone, who undertook a mammoth landscaping project at Greenfield Primary School in Countesthorpe.

A huge thank you goes to the officers and Vodafone employees, as well as the groups who gave us the opportunity to make a positive difference.



- ◆ **Energy Rebate success** – Council officers undertook an incredible effort to successfully distribute all of the £150 Energy Rebate payments to households in the District.

Every household registered to pay their Council Tax by Direct Debit before 31 March 2022 within bands A-D had their rebate paid directly into their bank account.

For those who registered to pay by Direct Debit after 31 March 2022 or paid by other means, letters were sent with information on how to claim their rebate from the Post Office.

More than £5m was handed out to the eligible properties in the District to help with the cost of living and the Council Tax team have done a fantastic job of sorting the rebates so quickly.

- ◆ **Business Breakfast networking supports businesses** – Our Business Breakfasts are popular regular events aimed at bringing District businesses together to network, share best practice and gain advice and support.

Events have taken place throughout 2022 and now into 2023. Last July's edition of the Business Breakfast for example took place at the Marriott Hotel with 19 District businesses from various sectors attending including logistics, hospitality, printing financial, facilities management, accountancy and engineering.



Attendees heard presentations from the Leicester and Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership about innovation and skills, the Sir Thomas White Loan Charity who offer interest free loans to Leicestershire businesses, Leicestershire County Council's Health Improvement Officer covered the Mental Health Friendly Places programme and Richard Stinson of Brookstone Creative Ltd gave a marketing overview.

We continue to attract top level speakers and at our February event we were delighted to have South Leicestershire MP Alberto Costa as our special guest.



A GREAT PLACE TO *visit*



- ◆ **Fitcation dives into the District** – A local tourism hotspot featured in a major new campaign to promote activity holidays in Leicestershire.

Stoney Cove Dive Centre is one of the District's hidden gems and is also the national diving centre for the UK. It became part of the Fitcation campaign from Visit Leicester, inspiring gentle adventuring with personal challenges through activity, experiencing a wide range of thrill-seeking challenges, adventure activities, trying a new sport and active family fun.

The official launch took place in June last year, with Councillors and officers in attendance as Stoney Cove became part of Fitcation. It further highlighted the great offering of activities in Blaby District, including open-water swim at Stanton Lakes and off road cycling with a standard, e-bike or tandem at Everards Meadows with Rutland Cycling. For families there is active play at 360 play or crazy golf at Congo Adventure Golf.

- ◆ **Summer fun with activity days and events** – The Active Blaby team had a successful summer hosting free activity days across the District for hundreds of local families.

Working with Leicestershire County Council's Children and Family Wellbeing Service, the team put on early afternoon activities through July and August in Cosby, Braunstone Town, Leicester Forest East, Blaby and Glenfield.

All events proved popular with parents and children alike, with archery, boccia, mini golf and football amongst the activities on offer. Active Blaby's work gave young children in our local communities access to an afternoon of practical activities to keep them active.

We also saw the return of some key events to entice both residents and visitors. There was the sold-out Theatre in the Park event in July and the Cosby Yarn Bomb was back including a Visit Blaby sponsored display the 'A-laska-salmon' installation.

Another year of GlastonBlaby showcased local talent and raised money for charity while the ever-popular Victory Show drew visitors from across the country and saw a rise in ticket sales.

You can find out about the events in the District at www.visitblaby.org.uk/events.

- ◆ **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 detailing 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.



- ◆ **Nature parks improvements** – The Council is proud of the beautiful parks and open spaces we have here in the District and works took place over the winter to improve infrastructure at some of these areas to help improve the visitor experience.

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

Fences were also 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, was also 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.

Our commitment is to uphold the same level of quality for all our strategic parks.

- ◆ **Inspiration Campaign** – The Visit Blaby District Inspiration Campaign launched recently, highlighting our key attractions and aiming 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.

- ◆ **Our Tourism and Heritage Service** – The service launched 12 Heritage trails covering the whole District and we increased our Visit Blaby District social media following by 1,800 people (we now have nearly 4,000 followers).



