

# Leader's Statement

## 25th July 2023

### Happy Blaby!

I'm absolutely delighted to say Blaby District has been declared the fourth best place to live in the UK – by our own residents.

The Office for National Statistics released data on how people rate where they live in terms of personal wellbeing and the results were recently discussed in Parliament.

People were asked to rate anxiety levels, happiness, life satisfaction and the feeling that the things done in one's life are worthwhile.

Blaby District residents responded with an average of 2.9 for anxiety, 8 for happiness, 8.1 for life satisfaction and 8.3 for a feeling that things done are worthwhile.

This meant our District was not only the top place to live in Leicestershire but fourth overall for the whole of the country – a fantastic result and something we should all be proud of.

### Industrial action

We continue to respond to the current industrial action at our depot site which is impacting on our ability to collect refuse, recycling and garden waste. We were notified in June by the GMB that they would be going on strike on the 28 June, 5 July, 12 July and 19 July.

On the 7 July we were notified they would be going on strike between 1 and 18 August. On the 10 July we were notified that as we were looking at the job evaluations for the roles that the strike action on the 12 July and 19 July would be suspended.

Our local GMB have requested a further 15% increase on top of whatever is agreed nationally for 23/24, this is unviable as we are required contractually to follow the national negotiations, not negotiate locally and we have every intention of continuing with this approach. From day one we have offered to look at the job evaluations of our staff as per our normal processes to ensure they are on the right pay scale.

The union have asked us to consider market supplements – however, we do not have a problem recruiting to these roles and as such our policy around this would not be applicable.

We are committed to our in-house service team and believe we pay well in comparison to similar roles, have great terms and conditions, a great pension scheme and really value our staff. We also have good career progression opportunities for those who wish to earn more i.e. loaders to progress to drivers and drivers to progress to supervisors etc.

We are hopeful the GMB will stop this action completely and continue to work with us to ensure we are supporting our workforce the best we can, creating a great environment for them to work in and giving them opportunities to progress if they wish to.

### **Comments submitted on rail freight hub**

Our latest comments on the Hinckley National Rail Freight Interchange (HNRFI) have been submitted to the Planning Inspectorate. This 'Relevant Representation' builds on previous submissions which have criticised the adequacy of the consultation carried out by developers Tritax Symmetry, questioned the need for the rail hub and raised concerns on the scheme's negative impacts.

The scheme, earmarked for 662 acres of countryside south-west of Elmhurst, is being dealt with by the Planning Inspectorate due to its size and scope and will ultimately be decided by the Secretary of State for Transport.

Our latest submission again raises the point that Tritax has failed to mitigate significant detrimental impacts arising from the development including issues with landscape, noise, air quality and ecology and biodiversity as well as transport and traffic impacts - in particular the increased downtime at Narborough level crossing.

As the application continues through the planning process with the Planning Inspectorate, we will continue to make our views known.

### **Youth Council letter prompts action by Government**

During the recent Youth Council annual conference attendees wrote letters to local MP Alberto Costa highlighting their concerns about vaping and how vapes were being targeted at young children. Mr Costa has now written back and not only acknowledged the letters and the Youth Council's concerns but has revealed the Government is set to take action.

In his letter Mr Costa says: "I am pleased to inform you that both the Prime Minister and the Government have listened to the points you outlined in your letters and are acting upon your concerns to crackdown on the marketing of vaping products aimed at young people.

"To this end, the Government will soon be closing a loophole that allows shops to offer free samples of vapes to children and they will also soon be introducing tougher fines for shops that illegally sell vapes to children. Further, the health risks of vaping will also now be included as part of the curriculum taught in schools, to ensure that more young people are aware of the dangers of vaping."

This is amazing news so well done to our Youth Council members – and keep up the good work.

## **Toursim bounces back in the District**

We are justifiably proud of the many attractions we have in our District and I'm glad to say visitors agree with us.

Tourist numbers are rising according to latest statistics from 2022 and visitor spend is now surpassing pre-Covid figures.

Last year saw a notable increase in people staying over - this was up by nearly half on 2016 numbers – when we introduced the Blaby District Tourism Growth Plan.

It's also pleasing to note that employment numbers continue to grow despite difficulties faced by the sector.

So we are on track with our Growth Plan which, by 2025, seeks to increase the number of visitors by 1.3 million, see the number of tourism jobs rise by 40% and grow the value of Blaby District tourism by £50 million to £209 million. In 2022 it was £190.31 million.

## **New supported affordable homes**

Recently I was privileged to go along to the site of a unique development which will provide specialist, supported housing for adults with mental health needs.

The site in Gove Road, Blaby village, will soon see the construction of 15 one-bed apartments, delivered by developers Pelham working in partnership with Norton Housing and Support and Modus Partnerships.

Together with Homes England we have partially grant funded this scheme - the first affordable supported housing scheme to be brought forward in the District for some time.

It's satisfying to see this project finally come to fruition as it has been four years in the making. Our Strategic Housing Team have worked closely with partners to progress the scheme, including providing evidence need and liaising with planners in order to make sure any site constraints were overcome.

## **Blaby toilets progress**

It's great to see work taking place to deliver new, modern, fully accessible toilets to Blaby village centre.

Contractors are now on site to ensure the safe demolition of the old brick toilet block and prepare the area for the installation of the new toilets, complete with a specialised Changing Places unit.

This has been constructed off site so will be ready for installation on arrival. Once in place, testing and remedial works will take place and car parking spaces will be reinstated ready for the toilets to open to the public.

I'm grateful to everyone involved who has helped bring this scheme to fruition – we are nearing the finishing line!

## HMP Fosse Way opens

The new £286 million Category C HMP Fosse Way prison was officially opened at the end of last month by Justice Secretary Alex Chalk.

It is being run by Serco and ultimately will house 1,715 male prisoners with the emphasis on rehabilitation.

Many of our teams have worked closely with Serco during the construction and pre-opening phase, including our Work and Skills Team who have helped promote job vacancies at the facility.

More than 1,100 local jobs have been created by the prison, which stands on the site of the old Glen Parva young offenders' institution.

As well as that it has been estimated by the Ministry of Justice that some £180 million has been spent with local construction suppliers during the build.

There is still work taking place on the site with a new block under construction which will cater for 250 inmates. We have enjoyed a close relationship with Serco while the prison was being built and I hope this continues going forward.

## Meridian Point access opens

One of the most important sections of a major £1.2 million scheme to improve walking and cycling routes for our residents has been officially opened.

The new link – the Meridian Point access point - will allow people from Braunstone Town to leave the car at home and instead quickly and easily access the Meridian Leisure Park by foot or by bike. The new access point is located between the Cinema and the Chiquito restaurant.

It's one of the first parts of the multi-agency scheme to be fully completed and work is continuing on various other routeways which will improve connectivity in the District and between New Lubbethorpe and Leicester city.

These include routes at Mossdale Meadows, Murby Way and Foxon Way, Kingsway and Aylestone Meadows as well as improvements at Meridian Way roundabout.

We are working in partnership on this exciting scheme with Leicester City Council, Leicestershire County Council, Braunstone Town Council, Lubbethorpe Parish Council, Sustrans and Meridian Leisure Park.



## **Work experience candidates welcomed at Council**

We were pleased to host a number of work experience candidates recently. As part of the induction process for them, they visited different departments within the council.

One of the young people had a particular interest in business growth. The Community, Business, Work and Skills Team were able to spend time with the young person to tell them all about what the team does and the sort of support that can be provided to businesses.

The young person was also invited to attend the Business Breakfast, this provided a real-life experience, meeting businesses and seeing the information and guidance the breakfast meeting provides.

The breakfast meeting also afforded the young person the opportunity to network and speak with Cllr Les Phillimore, who was also able to speak about the Federation of Small Businesses and his knowledge of the sector.

## **Kings Fund Report identifies Blaby DC as Best Practice**

A new Kings Fund report which focuses on driving better outcomes with integrated care systems has identified our Lightbulb and Housing Enablement Team as best practice. The report focuses on the valuable role district councils play in health as they directly influence the wider determinants of health, can act and react in fast and agile ways and have strong, close connections with local communities.

Recommendations in the report focussed on creating opportunities for district councils to lead, systems-based approach and place based projects, hence the use of Lightbulb and HET which are excellent examples of exactly this. I was at the launch of the report and it was great to see Blaby DC recognised for leading the way in this arena.

## **LGA Conference 2023**

I attended the LGA Conference in Bournemouth at the beginning of the month along with Cllr Ben Taylor, Julia Smith and John Richardson. The conference provided a great platform to hear from Ministers and MPs, share best practice and create strong networks.

We heard about particular issues we are all facing as a sector such as housing and homelessness, recruitment and retention and financial sustainability. The exhibition and seminars provided us with the opportunity to hear about current Government thinking, cyber security and our work with the LGA to influence how the next Government think about the cost of living, growing the economy, building more houses and acting on climate change – and how we are best placed to deliver on this. We were pleased to see our approach to health and Lightbulb again being featured on the DCN stand.



## Blaby District Carbon Neutral by 2050

### **Solar Together scheme**

Achieving Net Zero as an organisation by 2030 is one of our priorities and we are also committed to supporting the District in becoming net zero by 2050. One of the ways we are actively progressing this is by our involvement in the Solar Together scheme.

This helps householders to install solar panels from trusted suppliers at cost effective prices thanks to the power of group buying through experts iChoosr.

Residents can register for free to receive their own personal no-obligation quote. In Blaby District the first round of the scheme enabled 77 households to purchase and install solar panels on their homes and based on those installs carbon savings in the region of 114tCO<sub>2</sub>/year are being achieved.

Registrations are currently open for Solar Together and I would urge all Councillors to spread the news about this project which is bringing us closer to our Net Zero goals by reducing reliance on grid electricity and reducing carbon emissions.

