

Leader's Statement

16 July 2024

General Election 2024

Following the general election on the 4 July we are very pleased to welcome Alberto Costa as the MP for our South Leicestershire Constituency and Peter Bedford as our new MP for the Mid Leicestershire Constituency. We look forward to working with both of our MPs to ensure we are doing the best for our residents and businesses.

We say a fond farewell to Ed Argar who is now the MP for the Melton and Syston Constituency, we enjoyed working together with Ed for the benefit of our shared communities and wish him all the best in his new area of responsibility.

The election takes a huge amount of staff effort and organisation and I would like to thank all of the staff particularly the elections team for all of their hard work and commitment to democracy. We have already sent our congratulations to both of the MPs representing our areas and invited them to spend time at Blaby DC to understand the work we do and how together we can serve the needs of our communities as best we can.

As a result of the change in Government we will no doubt see some changes that will impact on us and our services. The Chief Executive, Director of Communities, Deputy Leader and I will be attending the LGA conference in October to understand better some of the new policies that will be applied and how we can prepare for them.

Hinckley National Rail Freight Interchange recommendation

We were informed just a couple of weeks ago that following the Examining Authority's six-month review of the Hinckley National Rail Freight Interchange (HNRFI) scheme, a report and recommendation has been submitted to the Secretary of State for Transport.

As I'm sure you are aware the plans, proposed by developers Tritax Symmetry, feature a rail port and warehousing earmarked for 662 acres of countryside south-west of Elmesthorpe between the M69 and the Birmingham to Leicester rail line. The Secretary of State will make the final decision on whether to approve or reject the scheme and will take the report into account but does not have to agree with the Examining Authority's recommendation.

The report won't be published until the final decision is made. When this happens both the report and a letter explaining the Secretary of State's decision will be published together. A decision is expected by 12 September 2024. We have raised objections at every turn on this proposal as it would completely destroy the rural nature of much of our District as well as having far-reaching negative effects on our wider communities. We await the Secretary of State's decision.

Youth Council activities

Members of Blaby District Council's Youth Council recently got a taste of the criminal justice system when they took part in a mock trial session. Run by a local Justice of the Peace (JP) the event provided a valuable experience with the Youth Council members learning about the workings of the justice system in a practical and engaging manner. Participants took on different roles within the courtroom setting, gaining first-hand insights into trial procedures, legal concepts and the importance of civic responsibility and upholding justice.

By taking part the young people were challenged to employ critical thinking skills and it proved to be a confidence booster for all members. The JP who oversaw the mock trial was impressed by the Youth Council's engagement and commented: "I could tell the young people really enjoyed the event, they were a great group and totally engaged."

Following this success the JP has offered to deliver some workshops at the Youth Conference 2025, if the Youth Council would like to take up the offer.

The Youth Council members have also been busy creating a video highlighting the issue of hate crime – Hate Has No Name Here. The idea for the video was born out of the Youth Council Conference, where hate crime was identified as a top priority by attendees. The conference served as a platform for students to voice their concerns and propose solutions to the issues affecting their lives and communities.

Hate Has No Home Here was produced by the Youth Council and filmed at Winstanley School featuring a number of their students. When it was launched at the school during assemblies in May it was met with resounding approval from both students and teachers.

Highlighting the harmful effects of hate crime and emphasising the importance of standing against all forms of discrimination, the video had a profound impact, sparking meaningful discussions among students about tolerance, empathy and action. One teacher said: "The video was incredibly powerful and has opened up important conversations among our students."

The success of the video launch has paved the way for further initiatives and the police, who have been closely involved with the school, plan to conduct in-depth workshops during Hate Crime Awareness Week in October.



Braunstone conservation area proposals

The centre of Braunstone has some fabulous characterful buildings which we quite rightly would like to see preserved. This is why we have proposed a new conservation area to protect the historic nature of the village.

A public consultation was launched last month allowing residents and those with an interest in the locality to comment on the proposals. The consultation is now at an end and we will consider all comments before a recommendation is brought back to Council.

Creating a conservation area introduces additional planning controls which help ensure any new development is sensitive to the historic nature of the village. The adjacent part of Braunstone village, which falls within the Leicester City Council boundary, is already an established conservation area. The City Council is also carrying out public consultation as it is looking to make some changes to its planning rules for that area.

If our proposals are approved, then we would work together with the City on managing the conservation area to preserve the historic nature of Braunstone for many years to come.

Hayes Gardens public engagements events

Together with Santander we are proposing an area of land spanning Narborough and Enderby be put forward into our new Local Plan. This strategic site includes land within Carlton Park, owned by Santander, and Enderby Golf Course which is primarily owned by ourselves with part of it owned by Santander.

The site, called Hayes Gardens, presents an opportunity to create a vibrant, sustainable community featuring green space and much-needed affordable housing. The development could contribute to meeting our planning obligation of delivering 687 new homes a year up to 2036.

To ensure comprehensive public engagement, Santander and ourselves enlisted independent consultants Meeting Place to carry out public engagement events in May and June as well as create a dedicated website.

We are pleased to report that this engagement process has been largely successful and constructive, with more than 500 comments received, demonstrating strong public interest and participation.

However, it is important to address some concerning incidents that have occurred during these events. While the vast majority of attendees have engaged respectfully and productively, a small minority have displayed unacceptable behaviour. We must emphasise that any form of abuse, threats or physical aggression towards our engagement team, Councillors or staff will not be tolerated under any circumstances.

We are grateful to those who have contributed constructively and this valuable feedback will play a crucial role in shaping the future of Hayes Gardens and contribute towards determining the sites suitability for inclusion in the Local Plan. The emerging Local Plan will be consulted on in the coming months and will guide how the District is developed up until 2041.

Ice House tours and new children's trail

We are justifiably proud of the work the Tourist and Heritage Team have done to restore the historic Ice House at Blaby's Bouskell Park to its former glory and it's always gratifying to see how successful our summer tours have become. This year our tour guide, local resident Jo Thomson, has devised a new interactive trail to engage the younger generation.

The children's trail features an activity map with puzzles to solve and really brings the park and the Ice House to life for youngsters. It sits alongside our normal tours so any children who accompany adults can take advantage.

Recently Year 1 and 2 pupils from Thistly Meadow Primary were invited to test out the tour and it was a resounding success. They children were particularly excited to see the adult and baby frogs which seem to have made the Ice House their home.



Solar Together latest round launched



I'm pleased to announce we have launched our latest round of the group-buying scheme, Solar Together, helping our residents in Blaby District invest in solar panels to save on energy bills and cut carbon emissions.

Aligning with our ambitions for a net zero District by 2050 we are working with neighbouring authorities as part of the Green Living Leicestershire Partnership and have again teamed up with independent experts iChoosr to offer householders a cost effective and hassle-free way to transition to green energy.

The scheme, under the Solar Together Leicestershire umbrella, puts homeowners in touch with fully vetted, pre-approved firms, taking the stress out of searching for the best solar panel and battery deal.

iChoosr's group-buying initiative works on the basis that the more people who take part, the bigger the savings which can be negotiated with trusted installers. Residents can sign up for free and registrations are now open.

I would urge all my fellow Councillors to encourage their communities to look into the scheme. There is absolutely no obligation to take up any offer but it just may help some people go green and save money too.