

Leader's Statement

24 September 2024

Braunstone Town events

I think I can speak for everyone here when I say the tragic events of Sunday 1 September in Braunstone Town have deeply affected us all. The death of 80-year-old grandfather Bhim Kohli, a long-standing and respected member of the community, and the subsequent charge of murder against a 14-year-old boy is truly shocking.

I know our Community Safety Team have been working closely with Leicestershire Police in helping support the community and provide reassurance that this is a dreadful but isolated incident. Our residents' safety remains a primary concern and we will act in any way possible to ensure this is the case.

Our thoughts are with Mr Kohli's family, friends, neighbours, and anyone who knew him.

HNRFI decision delayed

We learned earlier this month that the Secretary of State for Transport was delaying making a decision on the Hinckley National Rail Freight Interchange.

The recommendation from the Planning Inspectorate's Examination Authority, after their six-month review into the scheme, was that it should be rejected. I'm sure you will all agree this was absolutely the right recommendation.

So I'm hugely disappointed that the Secretary of State, Louise Haigh, has not thrown the scheme out. Instead, while saying she is 'minded to refuse' the hub she has asked for more information and delayed the final decision until March 2025.

Developers, Tritax Symmetry, now seem to have another chance to convince the Secretary of State the monstrous project should go ahead. I simply cannot fathom why Ms Haigh has not followed the recommendation and refused permission.

At every stage of the process Tritax have failed to address key issues and impacts in relation to traffic, landscape, noise and nuisance. How is this going to change? This project would destroy the rural nature of our District forever and must be vetoed. But again, we must wait for government to decide our fate.

Contaminated land update

The Environmental Services Team are making progress on the delivery of the work streams detailed within the Contaminated Land Strategy which was adopted in November 2023. A new Contaminated Land Officer has been in post since April 2024.

Council advice helps local business secure major contract

Supporting local businesses and encouraging a flourishing economy across the District is one of our priorities. So, it's splendid to report a recent success with a Glen Parva engineering firm which secured a £3 million parts supply contract with the assistance of one of our Business Growth Officers, Alfred Bawak.

Alfred's skill and knowledge around grant and loan opportunities enabled Summit Engineering to access £200,000 in funding. This helped towards a £850,000 investment in the new top-of-the-range machinery required to fulfil the contract.

It means Summit can recruit new staff as well as safeguard existing roles and be in a better position to exploit untapped markets and quote competitively for more new work.

This is an excellent example of our business advice service in action and shows what can be achieved when we work together with local companies.



Sport and physical activity highlights

Our Health and Leisure Team have recently announced some fantastic engagement results for last year and the first part of 2024-25.

In 2023-24 there were 24,488 attendances and 2,995 participants in our physical activity programmes. We delivered 40 programmes as well as four standalone events.

This helped lead to a 44% increase in physical activity levels in residents taking part in our programmes, with 61% mentioning an improvement in mental health and an outstanding 90% mentioning increased friendship and social interaction as a benefit.

There were 278 self-referrals in the first quarter of 2024-25, the highest number in the whole County, and we have secured £126,903 external funding for this year.

Another fabulous result is that when asked, 100% of people who took part in any of our activities, said they would recommend our programmes to a friend.

These are truly impressive results and our congratulations to go everyone involved in helping support our residents to achieve their health and fitness goals.

District Tourism Growth Plan

We have an ambitious vision that by 2025 Blaby District will be one of Leicestershire's leading and most welcoming and sustainable tourism destinations, attracting stay-over and day visitors from across the UK.

Our three main aims are to:

- Grow the value of Blaby District tourism by £50 million
- Increase the number of visitors by 1.3 million
- Increase the number of tourism jobs by 40%

As our existing District Tourism Growth Plan is coming to an end, we have started planning for 2025-2030. This includes a review of our progress to date and consultation with the Council, the Tourism Partnership and key stakeholders, ready to launch in the new year.

Our latest data shows a strong recovery post covid in all areas. In particular, the growth in the value of tourism, has been incredible, standing at £216.84 million, surpassing our ambitious target of £209 million already.

The Tourism Growth Plan plays a vital role in moving forward the Blaby District Plan 2024-2028, to help achieve the vision of ensuring Blaby District is a great place to visit. It is key to 'growing and supporting our economy' and 'keeping you safe and healthy', through increasing visitor numbers, spend and employment in the District.

It will also play a pivotal role in the Active Travel Strategy, Community, Health and Well-being Plan and the Economic Development Framework, making Blaby District a welcoming and sustainable tourism destination for both residents and visitors.

Update on Local Plan

We continue to work on our Local Plan which will guide growth across the District up to 2041, shaping where housing, employment and retail sites should be developed and where development should be restricted.

However, now the government has launched a consultation on changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), we will need to review our proposals in the light of this.

The consultation provides guidance to all local authorities about development, including the reintroduction of mandatory housing targets. The consultation ends today and we have provided our best response.

We will be keen to learn how any changes will impact our plans, timescales and potential housing numbers. Whatever the outcome we will be lobbying government to ensure we are provided with the resources needed to meet any new mandated targets.

Active Travel Strategy

Our new Active Travel Strategy is progressing as we encourage people to make walking and cycling their first choice for short journeys in the District.

We will be working with external partners to enhance existing pedestrian routes as well as create new ones. A project group is being established, made up of community organisations, Parish Councils, schools and businesses, which will help inform the delivery of the strategy.

We realise an essential aspect will be public engagement, including educational campaigns, aiming to help change people's perceptions and promote the benefits of active travel.

Close liaison with housing developers will also be essential. This will ensure new communities feature attractive, safe and comprehensive walking and cycling connections, making active travel easier and more pleasant so people will want to make it their first choice.

Job Fair

Tomorrow, we host our final Job Fair of 2024 at the Council Offices with a host of businesses keen to recruit to their current vacancies.

Our Work and Skills Team put a great deal of effort into organising these events and we wish them every success in helping firms access candidates and local people gain employment or pick up whatever work or training support they need.

If you know anyone looking for a job or thinking about changing career, then why not suggest they pop along to see what's on offer tomorrow between 3pm and 5.30pm.



New electric sweeper



Our first ever electric street sweeper is now out and about in the District with its distinctive 'zero emissions' livery.

The sweeper was purchased with part of the £573,701 Air Quality Grant we received from central government last year, with the rest going towards an electric conversion kit for a diesel bin lorry.

It is part of our ambition to tackle pollution and reduce emissions, helping us become a carbon neutral District by 2050. We expect the electric bin lorry to be ready in the autumn.

Solar Together success

Our group-buying scheme Solar Together has seen another successful year with almost 500 households registering an interest in investing in green energy.

The initiative helps people navigate the complexities of solar panel installation by offering quotes from vetted and pre-approved firms following a reverse auction.

Support is offered every step of the way to make the transition to renewable energy as hassle-free and cost-effective as possible.

For every household which installs solar panels, battery storage or even electric vehicle charging points - all available under Solar Together - we move towards our net zero aims.