

Leader's Statement

28 January 2025

Flooding

Last year Storm Henk brought chaos as we welcomed in 2024 and, sadly, again the new year has brought with it devastating flooding to the District. As well as roads made unpassable and fields submerged, more than 100 properties were affected, both internally and externally. Once again our teams, my fellow Councillors, partner agencies and communities went above and beyond to help those in need.

During the emergency we opened rest centres in Whetstone and Braunstone as information signposts and warm spaces. We delivered sandbags, found accommodation for those who were displaced, transported residents to hospitals due to ambulance shortages, sourced dry clothes, helped provide food and drink and advised people where best to seek further, appropriate assistance. Volunteers visited the worst-hit communities, going door to door, checking on the most vulnerable to ensure they had the necessary support.

As the flooding eased we began the clean-up of the impacted areas with our mechanical sweepers as well as arranging free bulky collections for goods damaged by the waters and operating extra waste collections.

It was impressive to see how our communities pulled together and how partner agencies worked in unison to deliver the help required.

Now we turn our attention to lobbying the Government for funding to get our residents and affected businesses back to normality, and understanding the causes of the flooding.

Devolution

Following the publication of the Government's White Paper on English Devolution I have been meeting with fellow local council leaders across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland to understand how to get the best devolution deal of Leicestershire.

There is a long road ahead as this process and proposed local government reorganisation will take time. We must be at the forefront of leading those changes.

We must ensure any new local government model delivers not only the best results for our residents but also recognises the value of our services and our highly skilled and dedicated teams.

The County, City and Rutland written to the minister requesting the areas inclusion in the priority programme meaning that County Elections would be cancelled, a draft proposal be submitted in March and final proposal in May. We should find out if we are accepted on to the programme by the end of January.

I acknowledge this is an uncertain period of time and as mentioned at Cabinet, we will continue to keep members informed of discussions and ensure our staff are up to date and engaged in the process.

New Lubbesthorpe topping out ceremony

Cabinet colleagues, officers and I recently visited New Lubbesthorpe to see the initial completion of the new local centre for the development, known as the Book Centre.

Once finished the centre will house a supermarket, medical centre and café, it was great to see it taking shape and providing a fresh landmark in the development of our pioneering community.

Councillors and residents have been eagerly awaiting the building of the centre, and I look forward to seeing it opened and providing essential services for existing and future residents.

Council Tax premiums consultation results

Following changes made to Council Tax regulations by the Government, authorities are now able to charge extra premiums on empty and second homes. The aim is to encourage owners to bring the properties back into use for the benefit of our communities where housing is much needed.

We ran a six-week consultation on our proposed changes and I'm pleased to say the response was heavily in favour of the increased charges. Cabinet Executive considered the consultation and agreed the new charges be introduced from next year, April 2026.

Youth Council anti-hate school artwork competition

Our Blaby District Youth Council have been working for some time on one of their priority messages, Hate Has No Home Here. The latest activity in spreading this important message was organising a competition for local schools, challenging students to create a piece of artwork which included the tag line - Hate Has No Home Here.

The contest was a great success and in December students from the participating schools visited the Council Chamber to showcase their work. A panel of judges including Julia Smith, our Chief Executive, Nathan Murrell, the Chairman of Blaby District Youth Council and Alison Newcombe a Leicestershire Hate Crime Police Officer reviewed the work and were overwhelmed with the quality.

The winning schools will receive prize money which can be used by their Parent Teacher Association and the artwork will be incorporated into a hate awareness campaign by the Youth Council and the Blaby Community Safety Partnership.

I congratulate the Youth Council in raising awareness of hate crime and am delighted their efforts are making a difference to young lives.

Going Green at the Depot

The work to harness renewable energy from the three depot roofs is now taking shape and is well on track to be completed by the end of March just in time for making the most out of the day light savings. Even the freezing temperatures and the havoc wreaked by the floods haven't put the dampeners on the project's progress. The first panels have been installed this week, with over 300 panels to be installed by the end of February. In March the whole system will be commissioned so we can look forward to much lower energy bills in 2025.