

Leader's Statement

8 April 2025

Rail freight hub rejected

We heard last month from the Secretary of State for Transport that she had rejected plans for the Hinckley National Rail Freight Interchange.

The decision from Heidi Alexander MP came as a huge relief following years of campaigning against the scheme. I'm delighted the Minister took on board the many concerns expressed by ourselves, residents and other interested parties.

The negative impacts of the rail freight hub far outweighed any benefits and common sense has prevailed. We must now see if the developers Tritax Symmetry accept this decision or attempt to fight on.

Local government reorganisation

Our North-South-City, three unitary proposal, as agreed with Rutland County Council and the other six local Councils in Leicestershire, is now with the Government for them to consider as part of their plans for local government reorganisation.

After exploring a number of possible options we believe this proposal puts collaboration, evidence and communities front and centre. Before submission we gathered a huge amount of feedback from stakeholders. Large numbers of businesses, organisations and local residents supported our approach - creating Councils that are large enough to deliver devolution but close enough to respond to the needs of our communities.

We will continue to develop our proposals over the summer and into the autumn and will submit a final proposal to Government on 28 November. During that development time we will continue speaking with residents, local organisations and businesses, to make sure we keep collaboration and communities at the heart of our final proposal.

We will continue to engage and consult as this proposal develops and I hope you will join me in encouraging as much feedback as possible.

Flooding funding

Following the devastating flooding experienced by some of our residents at the start of the year we partnered with the Environment Agency, Leicestershire County Council and flood and resilience experts RAB Consultants, to offer the hardest hit households a free flood survey.

Funded through our UK Shared Prosperity Fund grant the surveys were designed to assess flood risks and identify suitable defence and resilience measures.

Take up has been positive with 58 households, who would otherwise not have benefited from this support, taking up the survey option. All checks were completed by the end of March.

We hope residents will be able to take advantage of this tailored advice to improve property protection and reduce the impact of any future flooding.

County Council elections

As we are all aware the Leicestershire County Council elections take place on Thursday 1 May.

The deadline for people to register to vote is looming – this Friday 11 April at midnight.

I'm sure we would all want to encourage our residents of voting age to make sure they are registered, if not already. Local democracy remains as important as ever, despite these times of change, and we urge residents to exercise their suffrage.

Fresh tourism strategy

Our new Blaby District Tourism Growth Plan was approved recently, outlining successes from the last five years and looking ahead to how we will continue to drive the District's visitor economy.

It is important to note what a vital role tourism plays in the District, boosting economic growth, supporting local businesses and jobs and enriching community life for both residents and visitors.

Tourism is an opportunity to enhance our profile and reputation and I'm pleased to see this plan set out some ambitious targets including increasing both economic benefit and visitor numbers by 10%.

We have a sound foundation to build on as the latest available figures show that in 2023 tourism contributed £216.84m annually to the District's economy and supported more than 2,000 local jobs.

A BIG THANK YOU AND GOODBYE TO BEV WELSH

I was saddened to hear about the resignation of Councillor Bev Welsh after 14 impeccable years service to residents in Glen Parva. I am sure members will join me in wishing her well for the future and sending heartfelt thanks on behalf of all of those she has supported during her time as Councillor. During her time Bev has taken an active part in all aspects of the Council, from sitting on the Community Grants Panel to Planning Committee where I know her input has been valued by officers and members alike.

Blaby District – Carbon Neutral by 2050

Energy storage schemes approved

As a Council and a District we made progress in our ambition to tackle climate change and improve sustainability with the approval of two innovative energy storage schemes.

Our planning committee members gave the green light to the schemes, at Enderby Leisure Centre and off Thurlaston Lane in Huncote.

The Huncote site was specifically chosen due to its proximity to the Enderby substation as links to the National Grid are critical for such systems.

Basically they are battery storage units which harness excess renewable energy to be used later when low carbon sources are unable to generate enough electricity – such as when it is not windy or sunny.

It means we can maximise the use of renewable power and provide flexibility at times of variable generation and demand. For example the Huncote system will store and supply the National Grid with up to 900MW of renewable energy which will provide clean energy to power all homes 48,170 households in our area for 108 hours.

The second Energy Storage System is a micro energy storage system on an unused grass verge at Enderby Leisure Centre. This is designed to provide additional low voltage capacity at local level without the need for costly grid upgrades and saving ~160 tonnes of carbon each year. will be on an unused grass verge at Enderby Leisure Centre. As a Council we plan to install a solar canopy and EV chargers at the centre and while the energy boxes here are a separate development, again they demonstrate our commitment to being carbon neutral as a District by 2050.