



A great place to live, work and visit

# Annual Leader's Statement 2026



**Councillor Ben Taylor**  
Leader, Blaby District Council

**Full Council Tuesday 12 May**

## Introduction

Our commitment to ensuring that Blaby District is a great place to live, work and visit is underpinned by our annual corporate priorities. We have continued to deliver against those and ensure we are delivering for residents and communities across the District. Councillors recently met to agree our priorities for this new financial year, and I would remind you all that the actions in our corporate action plan are long-term endeavours which will take more than a year to complete.

Of course, each year is different, bringing with it challenges and opportunities. This last year we have seen the beginning of what will become the biggest upheaval in local government for 50 years – reorganisation and creation of unitary authorities. We await the government's decision on the future in Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland, and are already working with councils across the region to ensure we continue to deliver for our communities.

Against this backdrop and the uncertainty we continue to face we have still delivered strong results across key areas of our Corporate Action Plan, with programmes either completed, substantially progressed, or positioned for further delivery in the coming year.

Environmental milestones included successful, on-time implementation of weekly food waste collections which launched on 30 March and so far have seen more than 250 tonnes of food waste saved from landfill. We continued progress toward Net Zero, including installation of solar panels at Enderby Leisure Centre and the EV charging project at our Whetstone depot.



At a time of rising homelessness cases and an increase in the cost of living, this year we strengthened support for vulnerable residents through a continued focus on homelessness prevention. This included agreement for two new prevention officer posts, and improving our temporary accommodation offer through a new 13-unit property and agreeing the purchase of new 41 homes.

Our work to support the local economy has included the establishment of the Blaby Business Board, which led to the recent launch of our pilot Blaby District Business Grant scheme. We are continuing to work with partners across the public and private sector to support enterprises and see the district grow.

**Councillor Ben Taylor**  
Leader of the Council



# Our Work

## Enabling our communities and supporting our vulnerable residents

### ◆ Tackling homelessness

One of the major issues facing us over the year has been the huge increase in people facing homelessness challenges. Of course, our area is not alone in seeing a rise in the number of local people needing temporary accommodation. There are many reasons behind this - a lack of affordable homes becoming available or being built



each year, people fleeing domestic abuse, the continued surge in the cost of living and people being asked to leave the homes of family and friends. People are also being priced out of an expensive private rental market in the District compared with other areas, with rates which often sit well above Local Housing Allowance levels.

We have pledged to tackle this problem head on and have made significant progress; officially opening Frost Court, a dedicated supported living scheme in Blaby village for people with mental health needs, as well as giving planning permission to a 100% affordable housing scheme in Leicester Forest East.

It was also with great pleasure that I, fellow Councillors, officers and guests attended the official opening of our own temporary accommodation at Dallington House in Enderby at the start of the year. The building, with its 13 self-contained independent living units, is another vital step for us in our efforts to ensure people break free from a cycle of homelessness.

Having Dallington House in particular means we can reduce reliance on unsuitable bed and breakfasts when people come to us because they have nowhere to live. The accommodation it offers and the tailored support we can provide will help those who may struggle with retaining tenancies move forward, gain skills and experience stability.

Thanks to government funding we have committed to purchase six homes at a new development in Glen Parva, and in Countesthorpe we plan to buy 35 more, delivered over the next three years. This will give us a steady and reliable pipeline of new, high-quality affordable homes for homeless families and individuals.



◆ **Glen Parva Community Fridge handover**

Around a year after our Community, Business, Work and Skills team opened a Community Fridge in Glen Parva it was successfully handed over to the parish council. The work put in by our team really brought the fridge to life, with enthusiastic volunteers and a sociable and welcoming atmosphere.

Community Fridges are all about preventing surplus food from being wasted with produce donated from local supermarkets and growers. During its inaugural year the fridge has saved almost two tonnes of food from landfill. The fridge now joins a wide range of services offered by the parish to benefit local residents and I'm sure it will continue to be an incredibly useful resource for the community.



◆ **Community Awards**

This was the first year that I have had the pleasure and privilege of compering our annual Community Awards prize-giving evening. It was truly an honour to be among so many unsung heroes who are so dedicated to making a difference to the lives of others across the District. This year there were four categories - Volunteer of the Year, Young Volunteer of the Year, a new category - Sport and Physical Activity Volunteer of the Year and Community Group of the Year which is always chosen through a public vote. For the other categories it was, as always, an immensely difficult job for our judges to choose between the nominees as everyone is a winner in their own way and in their own right. I'm so very proud, we as a Council, get the chance to highlight and reward these remarkable people.



## ◆ Love Blaby Lottery anniversary

This year our Love Blaby Lottery marked its eighth anniversary and what a bumper year it has been. A record-breaking £40,585 has been raised to help good causes provide services and support for District residents, bringing the total since its launch in 2018 to an amazing £254,707. More than £11,500 in cash prizes has also been paid out to lottery players during 2025, a bumper amount of winnings which brings the eight-year prize total to more than £58,000. Over the last eight years the lottery has provided a vital source of funds for local groups, in some cases ensuring they can continue to operate in the face of ever-rising costs.

It's also important to remember all the people who play the lottery, choosing which good cause to support, and celebrate them as the real force behind its success. Without their patronage we couldn't pass on the funds to all those groups in need. So if you ever get the chance then please encourage people to sign up – 60p from every £1 ticket goes to a good cause and there's weekly prizes of up to £25,000, it truly is a win-win.

## ◆ Armed Forces Covenant re-signing

As part of our ongoing efforts to support our Armed Forces, in January I and chief executive Julia Smith re-signed the Armed Forces Covenant. We were joined by local MPs Alberto Costa, representative for South Leicestershire and Peter Bedford representing Mid Leicestershire. The Armed Forces Covenant is a UK National promise ensuring the armed forces community



receives fair treatment, they are not disadvantaged due to their service and their sacrifices are recognised. It is backed both nationally and locally through government, local authorities, businesses and charities signing pledges. Our re-signing reinforced our continuing commitment to ensure the armed forces community receives support across various aspects of life, including healthcare, housing, education and employment. As well as this we continue our regular Armed Services Coffee Mornings, offering a welcoming, social session with activities, advice and signposting. In November, for the first time, we organised a Business Breakfast with a difference, connecting regional armed forces support organisations with Leicestershire and Rutland businesses, highlighting how employers can tap into the skills, experience and talent of current and former armed forces personnel. We hope this work will strengthen our ambitions to build on the success of achieving a Silver Award in the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme and progress to earning a Gold Award.



## Enhancing and maintaining our natural and built environment

### ◆ Embracing green energy

Last autumn we completed a project to install more than 490 solar panels on the roof of Enderby Leisure Centre, generating clean energy to cut costs and carbon emissions. Funding of £140,000 from the UK Government's UK Shared Prosperity Fund, alongside our own investment of £109,000 brought the project to fruition, ensuring Everyone Active, which operates and manages the centre, can reduce reliance on the grid and protect against rising energy bills. We will go further this year with the introduction of EV charging at the leisure centre, under a countywide scheme, as well as making progress on our ambition to install electric vehicle charging infrastructure at our Whetstone depot as part of plans to transition to an electric fleet.



### ◆ Huncote open space plans

There have been significant changes to the land at the rear of Huncote Leisure Centre as we move forward with plans to rewild the site. Last year we installed new monitoring and gas venting equipment as part of our active management of the site, with it being former landfill, and commitment to ensuring the area is safe for future public use. The former BMX track was also levelled. Since then wildflower seeds have been spread in certain areas and mown paths introduced. As we head into the summer we hope to take down any remaining fencing to allow the fields to be completely opened to the public to be enjoyed responsibly.

### ◆ Planning and strategic growth

This year we have been successful in a number of planning and enforcement appeals. Notable successes include Leicester Road, Sharnford, where the Planning Inspectorate agreed with the Council to refuse 134 homes, and at Sapcote Quarry, an enforcement notice to cease the use of the land for the storage of vehicles was upheld. We have also continued our excellent work with stakeholders on the award-winning development of New Lubbethorpe. This has included the delivery of a new local centre which features a small supermarket and GP practice with plans for a coffee shop in the pipeline.

Over the last 12 months the Planning and Strategic Growth Team has also generated over £1.4 million in income. This has given us the resource to look at each area across the district individually, and plan development in a way that reflects the needs of the environment and existing community, against a backdrop of ever-changing planning legislation.



# Growing and supporting our economy

## ◆ Job and skills fairs

Our regular Job and Skills Fairs are a successful staple in the Council calendar. Dozens of local employers, support organisations and training providers attend, showcasing how people can take the next step in their career, whatever stage they may be at. It's always pleasing to note the presence of new businesses using our fairs as a platform to recruit fresh talent while it's satisfying to know the events are warmly welcomed by residents who appreciate the opportunities presented to them.



## ◆ Business and skills support

Over the past year, we have made strong progress in supporting local businesses, employment and skills across the district. Through targeted support, we have helped small and medium-sized enterprises secure more than £365,000 in grants and business loans, supported the creation of 70 new local jobs, with a further 60 jobs in development, and delivered 59 tailored business action plans through direct one-to-one advice.



Our work has also helped 15 new businesses to start up, enabled over £200,000 of apprenticeship levy transfers to support 14 new Police apprenticeships, and provided skills and employment opportunities for young people across the district. We continue to bring businesses together through networking and engagement, with our programme of business

breakfasts attracting over 500 attendees in total.

Alongside this, continued investment in tourism, employment land and regeneration projects is strengthening the local economy.



◆ **Job and skills fairs**

I'm delighted to say our new Blaby Business Grant Scheme recently launched as a one-year pilot. The scheme is open to local micro enterprises, employing less than 10 people, and provides them with the chance to access funding to help them grow. There's a grant pot of £25,000 and two types of grant, a Shop Front Improvement Grant and a Decarbonisation and Business Growth Grant to help ventures enhance their premises, cut emissions or elevate products, services or ways of working. With around 90% of businesses in the District being micro businesses we expect the scheme to be popular and help make a positive impact for those concerns which would otherwise struggle to obtain funding.

◆ **Supporting tourism**

Tourism is an important way of promoting our District both locally and beyond our borders, putting us on the map, regionally and nationally as well as bringing in visitor spend. Visitor spending has risen to over £231 million, with more than 3.1 million visits recorded last year, helping to make Blaby a thriving place to live, work and visit.

We have a number of core experiences and events but as part of our Tourism Growth Plan we are ever keen to launch new promotions.

Just recently, to mark English Tourism Week, our Tourism and Heritage team launched the first two of a new series of special cycle routes, offering a leisurely way to take in the sights of the District by bike. Starting from Everards Meadows, which already connects to the National Cycle Network, the routes link up local attractions, including our historic Bouskell Park Ice House, providing a sustainable option for riders of all ages and abilities.



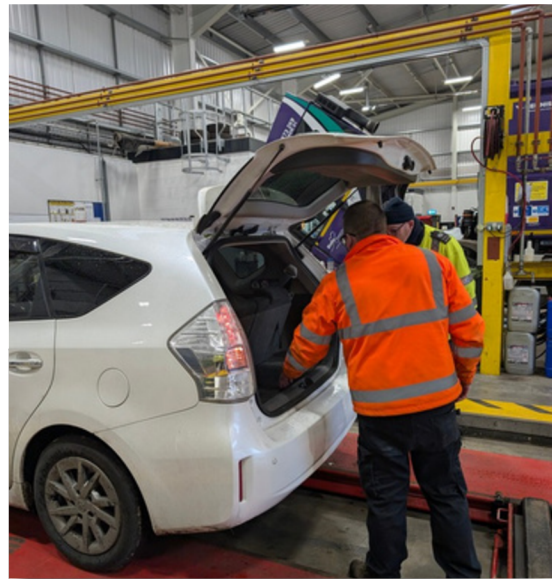
## Keeping you safe and healthy

### ◆ Joint taxi inspections

Just before Christmas our licensing team partnered with colleagues from the City of Wolverhampton Council for the first time to carry out surprise taxi checks. As part of our licensing conditions, all vehicles have to undergo a six-monthly check. However, licensing laws also stipulate we are only able to stop and inspect taxis operating in our District if they are licensed through us. With the growth of ride-booking apps, many taxis working in our area are licensed elsewhere, for many different reasons.

The City of Wolverhampton Council is a significant licensing authority for around 2,700 ride app drivers who live in Leicestershire alone. Working with them meant we had the option of checking more vehicles for safety issues and in fact all of the 15 vehicles which were stopped and inspected happened to be licensed through the City of Wolverhampton Council.

Their team were able to take immediate action on the taxis which were not meeting standards, ensuring any unsafe vehicles were taken off the road. The initiative was a great success and we plan to organise further joint operations with them while still undertaking our own regular checks on our licensed taxis.



### ◆ Health and wellbeing festival

We were proud to host the latest Blaby District Health and Wellbeing Festival at our offices recently. The annual event is organised by the South Blaby and Lutterworth Primary Care Network with input from local practices and a range of wider stakeholders as part of our local Integrated Neighbourhood Team. This year people were able to take advantage of free health checks including blood pressure, heart health, height and weight measurements and general lifestyle advice. Dozens of NHS, charity and community organisations were in attendance to show just how much support there is locally for residents and how that support can be easily accessed. Our very own team from Active Blaby were on hand too, showcasing how our programmes can make a difference and help people achieve their health and wellbeing goals. Activities ran on Narborough Park, giving a taste of the JUST Get Involved initiative, providing a fun, friendly and inclusive environment to encourage women to enjoy exercise. A great day all round with an amazing turnout from interested residents.



# Ambitious and well managed Council – valuing our people

## ◆ Food waste recycling success

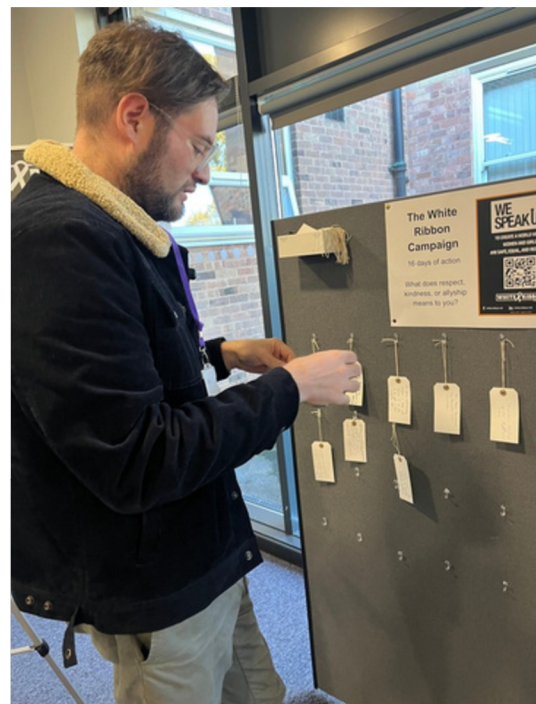
None of our services are possible without our hard-working and dedicated teams, and our most visible service for residents is waste and recycling. At the end of March we launched our new weekly food waste recycling collections in line with the government's Simpler Recycling Reforms.



This was the culmination of many months of planning, hard work and co-operation between diverse teams, all pulling together to ensure the service launched smoothly. I'm delighted to say the service is going well and every household who has embraced the 'scrape, bag, bin' message is making a difference, diverting food from landfill to create clean, green energy and fertiliser for farms. In just the first 10 days almost 120 tonnes of food was saved from going to landfill where it would rot and release harmful methane. That's equivalent to the weight of a blue whale or around 20 African elephants. A brilliant start and we can only hope that this continues.

## ◆ White Ribbon campaign

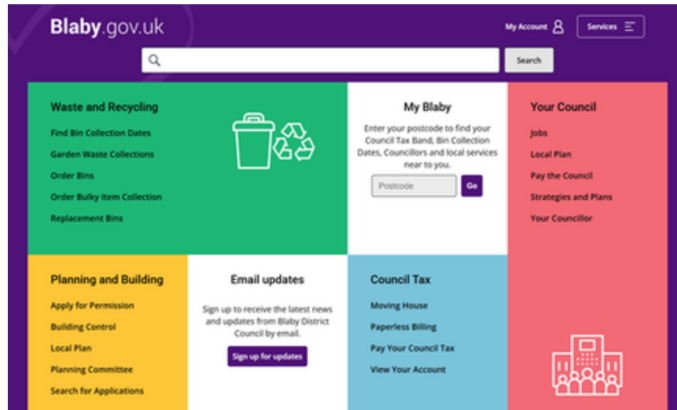
During November and December we ran activities and events focused on the White Ribbon Campaign and its message to end gender-based violence against women and girls. I was proud to see so many people take part, sign pledges and attend our Lunch and Learn workshops. It can be a difficult message to get across as clearly most boys and men would never think about being violent to women and girls. But we have to remember there can be more subtle types of abuse, cat-calling, misogynistic language and leering, which can sometimes happen without being recognised as damaging. Such actions all perpetuate sexism in society, reinforcing dangerous gender stereotypes and making it seem like it's OK to denigrate women. Our work will continue on not letting sexism slide, helping create a safer, more respectful environment for everyone.



◆ **Website accessibility - [www.blaby.gov.uk](http://www.blaby.gov.uk)**

I'm delighted to say we are consistently ranked number one on a national index measuring website accessibility for UK councils. We have held this position, either solely or jointly, since January 2024 — a fantastic achievement and real credit to everyone involved, particularly our Communications Team as guardians of the website.

The index is published by [Silktide](https://www.silktime.com/), which uses automated checks against internationally recognised accessibility standards. This matters because an accessible website ensures that residents with disabilities — including visual, hearing, motor and cognitive impairments — can access information easily and independently.



As well as being a legal requirement, accessibility is simply the right thing to do. Regular testing through Silktide helps us stay compliant, but more importantly ensures the information we share is clear, usable and inclusive for all our residents.

◆ **Implementing in-house ICT**

Over the past year we have made significant progress since bringing ICT services back in house. This decision has strengthened our core systems, improved cyber security and resilience, and enabled us to regain greater control over costs, performance and risk. Just as importantly, it has ensured ICT is better aligned with our priorities and the needs of our services.

The transition has reduced our reliance on external suppliers and allowed us to build stronger internal capability and skills. Over the last 12 months we have:

- Achieved Cyber Essentials accreditation, providing assurance around our cyber security arrangements
- Received consistently positive user feedback, with 97% rating ICT support as excellent and the remaining 3% as good
  - Delivered a 20% reduction in cloud hosting costs
  - Made ICT performance reporting visible across the organisation, improving transparency and accountability.



Alongside these improvements, a range of practical enhancements have been delivered, including improved meeting room technology, upgraded chambers streaming, and ongoing staff communications to support safe, effective use of systems.

