



DATE: 22nd February 2023
MY REF: RW/CCouncil
PLEASE ASK FOR: Mrs. R. Whitelaw
DIRECT DIALLING: (0116) 305 6098
E-MAIL: rosemary.whitelaw@leics.gov.uk

ORDER PAPER, QUESTIONS AND POSITION STATEMENT

- Order Paper and Questions. (Pages 3 – 16)
1. To receive position statements under Standing Order 8. (Pages 17 - 22)



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MEETING OF THE LEICESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

WEDNESDAY, 22 FEBRUARY 2023 AT 2.00 P.M.

ORDER PAPER

EVACUATION PROCEDURE

In the event of having to evacuate officers will be able to advise and be on hand to assist any people with disabilities.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 1 – CHAIRMAN’S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The CHAIRMAN will make his announcements.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 2 – MINUTES

(Pages 5 to 22)

The CHAIRMAN will move and the VICE-CHAIRMAN will second:

‘That the minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 7th December 2022, copies of which have been circulated to members, be taken as read, confirmed and signed.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 3 – DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The CHAIRMAN will invite members who wish to do so to make declarations of interest in respect of items on the agenda for this meeting.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 4

QUESTIONS ASKED UNDER STANDING ORDER 7(1) (2) & (5)

(A) Question by MR HUNT

- “1. A recent highway application [2022/0946/07 (2022/RegMa/0069/LCC)] contains a response to the Climate Change Emergency [Paragraph 100 Climate Change/Sustainability] which states:

It is considered that the proposed development is aimed at easing congestion within the wider Coalville Area and providing for non-motorised users to access Coalville Town Centre via proposed walkway/cycleway. Thus, it is considered that the proposal would have broad sustainability benefits and there are no concerns in this [climate change emergency] regard.

Now that the authority is planning to meet Net Zero Carbon by 2030 (our own operations) or 2045 (for wider Leicestershire) to what extent do such developments contribute to our new Net Zero Carbon target?

2. Was the report suggesting that road schemes which reduce congestion also reduce the carbon emissions, even if traffic is increased.

3. How can the decarbonising effect of our highway schemes be consistently measured in in future applications?

What increase in traffic is projected by the A511 scheme as a whole in the period of our Net Zero Carbon Strategy to 2045?”

Reply by MR PAIN

- “1. The Bardon Link Road application forms part of a wider package of measures set out within the Coalville Transport Strategy (CTS). This Strategy was developed to help alleviate the highway impacts associated with the planned growth across North West Leicestershire, without which congestion would likely increase along with vehicle emissions, thereby having a detrimental impact on the environment.

In line with Department for Transport (DfT) Guidance, the Council has prepared a Carbon Management Plan, which utilises the Carbon Reduction Hierarchy – as illustrated in Figure 1 below.

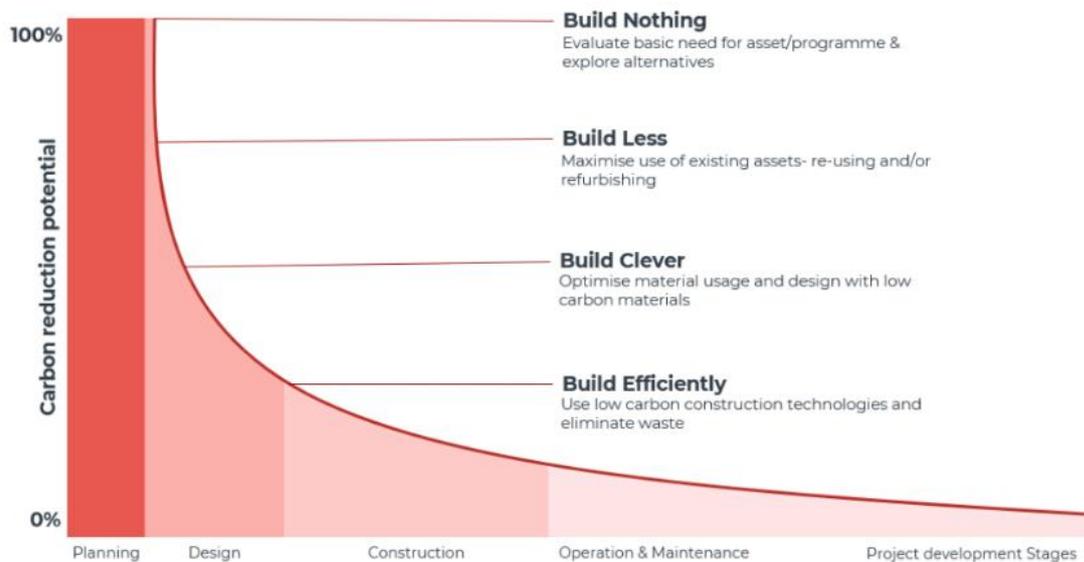


Figure 1: Carbon Reduction Hierarchy

The Carbon Management Plan (CMP) will quantify the baseline carbon impact of the project, which will be agreed with the DfT, and a suitable reduction target set.

Throughout the planning and design stages, the project team has examined ways to reduce the amount of new infrastructure needed and where this is not possible, the team has turned its attention to building less or designing more efficiently. The A511 Project Team has committed to appointing a Carbon Co-Ordinator who will take ownership of coordinating and ensuring the successful delivery of the CMP.

As the proposed scheme moves into the pre-construction stages, this work will continue with the selected Contractor to examine ways in which the scheme can be built efficiently using low carbon technologies wherever possible.

2. The proposed scheme is not designed to increase traffic, but simply accommodate for traffic generated by planned housing and employment growth across the Coalville area.

Without these improvements, traffic congestion along the A511 would likely increase having a detrimental impact on air quality.

Furthermore, the proposed scheme itself incorporates enhanced facilities for pedestrians and cyclists with a view to increasing modal choice and helping to maximise the use of sustainable modes.

3. The Department for Transport will soon be publishing Quantified Carbon Reduction (QCR) guidance; once it has been published and reviewed by the County Council, the QCR may be of assistance in establishing how the decarbonising effect of the proposed scheme can be measured as the construction stage of the proposed scheme is approached.
4. The proposed scheme does not generate traffic but has been designed more efficiently to facilitate trips associated with planned and committed developments across the Coalville area.

Due to a projected increase in population and employment, traffic flow along the A511 at certain points is predicted to increase in the morning peak from 1,788 vehicles (2017) to 3,061 vehicles by 2031, and in the evening peak from 1858 vehicles (2017) to 2,216 vehicles by 2031. This represents an increase of 71% and 21% respectively.

Scheme specific traffic flow data is not available for the year 2045.”

(B) Question by MR PARTON

“In regard to the proposed saving PH8 ‘Review approach to homelessness support (-£300k from 2024/25), I am concerned this is being portrayed locally as a reduction by the County Council in the core funding of a charitable organisation, the Falcon Centre, when that is not the case. That has been explained to the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee but I will be grateful if the Leader can clarify and put the position on the record at this budget meeting of the County Council?”

Reply by MRS RICHARDSON

“The homelessness support service costs Leicestershire County Council around £300,000 a year, with the work contracted out to Falcon Support Services and the

Nottingham Community Housing Association (NCHA). The current contract ends on March 31st 2024.

The service provides a broad range of support to adults who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. This may include such things as supporting them to find secure stable housing, running benefits advice surgeries, supporting them to access appropriate health services or helping find training, employment and volunteering opportunities.

The funding does not pay for the running of homeless hostel buildings, including the Falcon Centre.

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 placed a new duty on district councils (as the housing authorities) to prevent and relieve homelessness. The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities has provided district councils with a homelessness prevention grant to deliver on these duties. In effect, the current service isn't a statutory duty for the County Council to provide specific services for individuals who are homeless, and the Council has not been a recipient of any grant funding that is focused on preventing or relieving homelessness."

(C) Question by MRS HACK

"With many Leicestershire Communities having lost a physical Sure Start facility due to funding pressures it was good to see an addition £1m had been awarded for 'Family Hubs' in Leicestershire. Please could we receive information on the work that is planned within the funding for Family Hubs:

1. Where will the Family Hubs be located, will these extend services within existing well established 'sure starts' or are we anticipating new facilities?
2. What is the timeframe of the support?
3. We note that this money is for transitional services, so what will happen after the funding period?
4. The case made in this council to close sure starts, was based on need, what need hasn't been met which has led to the bid for additional money?"

Reply by MRS TAYLOR

- "1. Family Hubs are a blend of physical spaces and on-line/web-based services.

The principal idea behind Family Hubs is that they will support all families with children 0-19 (up to 25 with SEND) to access information, advice and where needed, services.

The project commits to working with families and communities to ensure the Family Hubs provision is planned around local needs. The County Council is working towards establishing a hub and spoke model with one hub in each

locality outlined below.

The hubs (both physical and on-line) will act as a central access point to all services available to families. The Council's ambition is that the hubs will be the first point of call for families needing support and information around services such as social care, relationship support, mental health services and health services. The hubs will support other delivery/information sites in each locality.

The initial plan is to have the hubs in the Children and Family Wellbeing Centres in the following localities:

- North West Leicestershire
- Charnwood
- Melton
- Harborough
- Blaby, Oadby, Wigston
- Hinckley

In addition, officers are working with Library Services to explore how best to make use of library facilities in areas which do not have a Children and Family Wellbeing Centre. For example, they are talking to Midwifery Services about the spaces they need to deliver clinics to pregnant women in some of the more rural areas. Officers are also looking at how they can provide appropriate training (for example, Mental Health First Aid, Trauma Informed Practice, Making Every Contact Count) to library staff so that they are able to advise and signpost families to relevant services.

These libraries will become Family Hub 'spokes'. This will all be supported by the development of a Family Hub website which will become an on-line one-stop-shop of information and resources for both families and professionals.

The County Council will not be creating any new facilities, i.e. there is no funding for new buildings; this is about making best use of existing spaces and ensuring all families can access the right information and support needed.

2. The funding is in place until March 2024.
3. All the work being undertaken is building sustainability into the approach.

For example, a 'Maternity Champions' pilot is being launched in Loughborough to reach out to women who are not attending maternity appointments. It is known that Black and Asian women have an increased risk of dying during pregnancy and childbirth, so it is important that officers work with communities to understand barriers to accessing services.

The pilot will identify, train and support 'maternity champions' to help spread knowledge and information around pregnancy, childbirth and the early years within specific communities. These champions will then be supported by the Children and Family Wellbeing Service Volunteer Scheme.

4. Whilst buildings have a role to play in the delivery of Family Hubs it is not an entirely buildings-based programme.

There is significant emphasis on use of digital and on-line resources enabling families to access information and advice in ways that suit them and at times that suit them.

The Council will be developing a website that will serve as a one-stop-shop for information, advice, and resources. Work is being undertaken with partners to ensure the website contains appropriate links to partner services. Self-help resources will also be developed for families, as well as resources which professionals from all agencies will be able to use to support their work with families.

Since Covid, families have been accustomed to accessing services in different ways and this funding is helping us to align more closely with what families need. It will also enable digital poverty to be tackled by providing more public-access technology in the centres for those who do not have access at home.

Additionally, opportunities for integrated service delivery are being explored with partners, again looking at making best use of existing buildings. An example of this is the work being undertaken with maternity services to support their outreach to women who do not live near health facilities. Officers are also talking to Adult Social Care about closer working in cases where for example a parent has mental health difficulties and needs specialist support.

Family Hubs have a much wider remit than the Sure Start programme which was focused entirely on the 0-5 age group. Family Hubs certainly build on the foundations of Sure Start but encompass some newer developments such as the Reducing Parental Conflict programme. Research states that relationships between parents impact whole family relationships, even when parents are no longer together. The impact of children being exposed to frequent unresolved conflict between their care givers can be significant and long lasting in terms of children achieving good outcomes across health, education, and social care.

Through the Family Hubs programme, a much wider cohort of public facing staff (i.e. in libraries and other public access buildings) will be trained to be able to recognise issues such as parental conflict and provide information, advice and signposting so that they can access the support they need.

(D) Question by MRS HACK

“How much money has the County Council invested in the Investing in Leicestershire Programme (previously known as the Corporate Asset Investment Fund) on a year-by-year basis since it was created, could this be shown by each asset type?”

Reply by MR BRECKON

“The Investing in Leicestershire Fund (ILIP) has been successful in promoting economic growth and providing a steady and increasing investment return to support local services including those to vulnerable people. In the current financial year a net return of £6.5m is expected and total returns since its inception are £28.5m. In addition £8.6m of capital receipts have been generated. These assets will continue to generate income going forwards, including £47m over next four year MTFS period, including £17m of capital receipts. If the fund had not been established this revenue would not have been available.

The table below provides the detail by asset type.”

ILIP Summary of Investments made										
Does not include capital value changes										
									(Forecast)	
Asset Class	15/16	16/17	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21	21/22	22/23	Total	
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	
Direct Non Core Commerical Holdings										
Development	Note 1	0	105	2,181	9,059	18,212	12,185	617	615	42,974
Rural	Note 2	0	3,460	0	0	0	0	0	0	3,460
Direct Non Core Commerical Holdings		0	3,565	2,181	9,059	18,212	12,185	617	615	46,434
Direct Core Commerical Holdings										
Offices		0	61	24,705	4,762	13,859	5,401	18	0	48,806
Industrial		0	4,747	163	3,392	7,695	116	77	0	16,190
Distribution		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other		0	0	0	3,141	8	0	0	0	3,149
Direct Core Commerical Holdings		0	4,808	24,868	11,295	21,562	5,517	95	0	68,145
Capital receipts		0	0	-5,334	-2,371	-60	0	-257	-564	-8,585
Core and Non Core Holdings		0	8,373	21,715	17,983	39,714	17,702	456	52	105,994
Diversifiers										
Pooled property funds		15,000	4,996	0	2,500	2,500	0	0	0	24,996
Private Debt	Note 3	0	0	7,000	13,000	-757	-3,972	7,966	3,995	27,232
Pooled infrastructure funds		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8,780	8,780
CRC Bank Risk share		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10,000	10,000
Diversifiers total		15,000	4,996	7,000	15,500	1,743	-3,972	7,966	22,775	71,008
Total ILIP		15,000	13,369	28,715	33,483	41,457	13,730	8,422	22,827	177,002
Notes										
1. Non returning until transferred to direct core holdings										
2. Low returning. Held to provide new farm business opportunities, supports rural economies and delivers stream of capital receipts										
3. Shows the net position by year, investments less capital distributions										

(E) Question by MR GALTON

- “1. How many children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) are still waiting for a school place for this academic year?”
2. How many SEN cases have gone to Tribunal in each of the last 5 years?”

Of these, how many cases were conceded by the LA before the decision was made by the Tribunal? Please could you provide figures for each year.

Please could you provide a breakdown of the outcome of Tribunal cases i.e., cases found in favour of the Child and against?”

Reply by MRS TAYLOR

- “1. There are currently 48 children with an Education, Health and Care Plan who are awaiting a specialist SEN placement who do not currently have a school place. This number changes week on week as new children arrive and children are placed in schools. The reasons behind the 48 children awaiting a place include: the child has just moved into Leicestershire and a search for a placement is underway, the child has left their named placement and a search is underway for a new placement, the child is awaiting a start date for their identified placement. There are also a number of children who have been offered a placement but the parent/carers are not happy with the offer of placement made, therefore the Department is working with the family to seek to resolve matters in order to place the child in specialist provision.

Securing a suitable placement to meet the needs of children with special educational needs is a priority for the department and officers are working hard to ensure all children with SEN have a placement that can meet their assessed needs.

2. The table below sets out the numbers of SEN cases that have gone to Tribunal in each of the last five years. It includes the number of cases resolved prior to the hearing and the reasons for this, as well as a breakdown of the outcome of Tribunal cases.”

Calendar Year	Resolved prior to a hearing				Resolved by hearing		Ongoing	Total Tribunals
	Resolved prior (Parent)	Resolved prior (LA)	Transfer red	Consent Order	Order ed	Dismiss ed		
2022	118	4	0	4	31	3	76	236
2021	73	7	0	17	41	4	1	143
2020	27	3	1	35	32	5	0	103
2019	60	11	1	23	12	5	0	112
2018	25	40	1	2	18	4	0	90

**AGENDA ITEM NO. 5 – TO RECEIVE POSITION STATEMENTS
FROM MEMBERS OF THE CABINET**

(Note: Standing Order 8 provides as follows: -

- (a) A position statement may give rise to an informal discussion by the Council.
- (b) At the conclusion of the discussion a formal motion may be moved to the effect that a particular issue relevant to the statement be referred to the Cabinet, the Commission, a Board or a Committee for consideration. This shall be moved and seconded formally and put without discussion. No other motion or amendment may be moved.
- (c) The discussion of any position statement shall not exceed 20 minutes but the Chairman may permit an extension to this period.)

LEADER

The Leader will make his statement.

**TO CONSIDER REPORTS OF THE
CABINET, SCRUTINY COMMISSION, SCRUTINY COMMITTEES,
AND OTHER BODIES**

**AGENDA ITEM NO. 6
REPORTS OF THE CABINET**

(Pages 23 - 314)

Principal Speakers: -
Mover of motion (as appropriate)
Leader of the Opposition (Mr M Mullaney)

MR BRECKON, with the consent of the seconder of the motion, will seek the agreement of the Council to move the following altered motion:-

- (A) Medium Term Financial Strategy 2023/24 – 2026/27

MR BRECKON will move and MR SHEPHERD will second:

- (a) "That subject to the items below, approval be given to the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) which incorporates the recommended revenue budget for 2023/24 totalling £512.1m as set out in Appendices A, B and E of

this report and includes the growth and savings for that year as set out in Appendix C as amended by paragraph (a) (i) and (ii) below;

- (i) That the list of growth and savings proposals as set out in Appendix C of the report be amended as follows:

	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27
	£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s
Delete the following savings item:				
ET9 Review expansion of community speed cameras	55	55	55	55
Add the following new growth item:				
Revenue funding of capital spend to finance the purchase of community speed cameras	45	45	45	45
Reduce the Service Reduction contingency	-100	-100	-100	-100

- (ii) That any residual funds not required from the Service Reduction Contingency be used for Highways Maintenance;
- (b) That approval be given to the projected provisional revenue budgets for 2024/25, 2025/26 and 2026/27, set out in Appendix B to the report, including the growth and savings for those years as set out in Appendix C, allowing the undertaking of preliminary work, including business case development, consultation and equality and human rights impact assessments, as may be necessary to achieve the savings specified for those years including savings under development, set out in Appendix D;
- (c) That approval be given to the early achievement of savings that are included in the MTFs, as may be necessary, along with associated investment costs, subject to the Director of Corporate Resources agreeing to funding being available;
- (d) That the level of the general fund and earmarked reserves as set out in Appendix K be noted and the use of those earmarked reserves as indicated in that appendix be approved;
- (e) That the amounts of the County Council's Council Tax for each band of dwelling and the precept payable by each billing authority for 2023/24 be as set out in Appendix M (including 2% for the adult social care precept);

- (f) That the Chief Executive be authorised to issue the necessary precepts to billing authorities in accordance with the budget requirement above and the tax base notified by the District Councils, and to take any other action which may be necessary to give effect to the precepts;
- (g) That approval be given to the 2023/24 to 2026/27 capital programme as set out in Appendix F;
- (h) That the Director of Corporate Resources following consultation with the Lead Member for Resources be authorised to approve new capital schemes, including revenue costs associated with their delivery, shown as future developments in the capital programme, to be funded from funding available;
- (i) That the financial indicators required under the Prudential Code included in Appendix N, Annex 2 be noted and that the following limits be approved:

	2023/24 £m	2024/25 £m	2025/26 £m	2026/27 £m
Operational boundary for external debt				
i) Borrowing	262	262	275	309
ii) Other long term liabilities	1	1	1	1
TOTAL	263	263	276	310
Authorised limit for external debt				
i) Borrowing	272	272	285	319
ii) Other long term liabilities	1	1	1	1
TOTAL	273	273	286	320

- (j) That the Director of Corporate Resources be authorised to effect movement within the authorised limit for external debt between borrowing and other long-term liabilities;
- (k) That the following borrowing limits be approved for the period 2023/24 to 2026/27:
- (i) Upper limit on fixed interest exposures 100%;
- (ii) Upper limit on variable rate exposures 50%;
- (iii) Maturity of borrowing:-

	<u>Upper Limit</u>	<u>Lower Limit</u>
	%	%
Under 12 months	30	0
12 months and within 24 months	30	0
24 months and within 5 years	50	0
5 years and within 10 years	70	0
10 years and above	100	25

- (iv) An upper limit for principal sums invested for periods longer than 364 days is 20% of the portfolio.
- (l) That the Director of Corporate Resources be authorised to enter into such loans or undertake such arrangements as necessary to finance capital payments in 2023/24, subject to the prudential limits in Appendix N;
- (m) That the Treasury Management Strategy Statement and the Annual Investment Strategy for 2023/24, as set out in Appendix N, be approved including:
 - (i) The Treasury Management Policy Statement, Appendix N; Annex 4;
 - (ii) The Annual Statement of the Annual Minimum Revenue Provision as set out in Appendix N, Annex 1;
- (n) That the Capital Strategy (Appendix G), Investing in Leicestershire Programme Strategy (Appendix H), Risk Management Policy and Strategy (Appendix I), Earmarked Reserves Policy (Appendix J) and Insurance Policy (Appendix L) be approved;
- (o) That it be noted that the Leicester and Leicestershire Business Rate Pool will continue for 2023/24;
- (p) That the Director of Corporate Resources following consultation with the Lead Member for Resources be authorised to make any changes to the provisional MTFs which may be required as a result of changes arising between the Cabinet and County Council meetings, noting that any changes will be reported to the County Council on 22 February 2023;
- (q) That the Leicestershire School Funding Formula is subject to capping and scaling continues to reflect the National Funding Formula for 2023/24;
- (r) That the funding rates for early years providers, as set out in paragraph 114 of the report, be approved.
- (s) That the additional investment of £0.5m for Highways Maintenance described in paragraph 36 be approved.”

An amendment will be moved by MR GALTON and seconded by MRS HACK:

- (i) That paragraph (a) of the motion be amended to read as follows:
 - “(a) that subject to the items below, approval be given to the MTFs which incorporates the recommended revenue budget for 2023/24 totalling £512.1m as set out in Appendices A, B, and E of the report and includes growth and savings for that year as set out in Appendix C thereto, as amended by paragraph (a) (i) and (ii) below;

- “(i) That the list of growth and savings proposals as set out in Appendix C of the report be amended as follows:

	2023/24 £000s	2024/25 £000s	2025/26 £000s	2026/27 £000s
Add new growth items as follows:				
G21 Additional funding for subsidised bus policy, post covid	500	500	500	500
Revise the following item to state:				
Service Reduction contingency	500	500	500	500

- “(ii) That it be noted that the budget shortfall of £500,000 will be met by the revision to the Service Reduction Contingency outlined in (i) above;
- “(iii) That approval be given to the projected provisional revenue budgets for 2023/24, 2024/25 and 2025/26, set out in Appendix B to the report including the growth and savings for those years as set out in Appendix C thereto and to the undertaking of such preliminary work, including business case development, consultation and equality impact assessments as may be necessary towards the achieving of savings specified for those years including savings under development, set out in Appendix D.”

AGENDA ITEM NO. 7
NOTICE OF MOTION

(A) Hinckley National Rail Freight Interchange (HNRFI)

MRS WRIGHT will move and MR ALLEN will second:

- “(a) That this Council notes:
- (i) The submission by the developer Tritax Symmetry to the Planning Inspectorate (PINS) of an application relating to the construction of the HNRFI on February 3, 2023;
 - (ii) That the County Council has no powers of veto but is a statutory consultee in relation to this application and will respond in both its capacity as a Local Highways Authority and more broadly in relation to its wider responsibilities including flooding, public health, net zero, economic impact and ecology;

- (iii) That the Council has already submitted an Adequacy of Consultation response to PINs expressing the paucity of engagement and consultation with stakeholders by the developer; and (iv) That if the application for the HNRFI is accepted by PINS the final decision will ultimately be decided by the Secretary of State for Transport.

(b) That this Council also notes:

- (i) That the HNRFI is a major proposal that will have significant impacts on local rural communities and local rural infrastructure, including the local highways network;
- (ii) That the scale of this proposal, and of its potential impacts, means that it is also of sub-regional significance for the wider Leicester and Leicestershire Housing Market Area;
- (iii) That it is critical that any development of this scale should only proceed if it is accompanied by the necessary funding and infrastructure to satisfactorily mitigate its impacts on local communities and existing wider infrastructure; and
- (iv) That 440 acres of agricultural land will be lost, the impact of which should be tested against the Government's Food Security Strategy.

(c) Therefore, should PINS accept the application, the County Council will:

- (i) Play its full part in comprehensively assessing the application through the submission of relevant and written representations to the Secretary of State on behalf of residents;
- (ii) Work closely with our strategic partners and other statutory consultees such as Blaby District Council, Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council and National Highways in the preparation and submission of a Local Impact Report as invited to do so by PINS;
- (iii) Expect the developer to fully engage with local communities and stakeholders on the impact of its proposals;
- (iv) Seek to ensure local communities and stakeholders are regularly updated on the progress of the application;
- (v) Robustly carry out its statutory duties on behalf of affected residents and communities affected by the proposal for the HNRFI."

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 22ND FEBRUARY 2023

POSITION STATEMENT FROM THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

Support for Ukrainian Refugees

On February 24th of last year, almost exactly a year ago, Russia mounted its illegal invasion of Ukraine. That triggered a humanitarian crisis with millions of refugees fleeing the warzone. I am very proud of Leicestershire's contribution in response to this crisis. To date 957 Ukrainian refugees have arrived in the county due to the generosity of Leicestershire residents who have hosted Ukrainian families and individuals in their homes. In many cases this hosting has lasted nearly a year. Council staff working with partner agencies and the Ukrainian Centre in Leicester have facilitated the welcome and integration of people from Ukraine by administering payments to hosts and guests, helping families access school places, signposting people to much needed services and staffing a welcome desk at East Midlands Airport. To mark this sad anniversary, but also to reinforce our warm welcome to those seeking refuge and to thank sponsors and staff for their outstanding efforts over the last year, an Oak Tree was planted in a ceremony attended by myself, the Deputy Leader, Chairman, hosts, guests and two representatives from the Ukrainian Centre. We all hope for a speedy and just resolution of the conflict and I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who have contributed to Leicestershire's response.

Earthquake in Turkey and Syria

My thoughts are very much with the victims and survivors of the earthquake in Turkey and Syria and their families. I am proud to announce that four Leicestershire firefighters formed part of the International Search and Rescue Team, which comprised over 70 highly trained volunteers and search dogs helping with the search operation to rescue survivors. The firefighters were deployed on 7 February and safely returned to the UK on the 15 February. During their time in Turkey they rescued many people in the most challenging of circumstances. Their bravery and achievements will be formally recognised by the Chief Fire and Rescue Officer in the coming days.

Asylum Seekers

Several members have had to deal with understandable local concerns when the Home Office and their contractors, SERCO, have taken unilateral decisions to take over hotels to accommodate asylum seekers. The shortness of notice if any, the absence of consultation, the unwillingness to recognise the impact on services, particularly in our case education provision, and the

failure to recognise the implications for local communities, continue to be completely unacceptable.

On local services, our Children's Services are at breaking point trying to deal with the children of asylum seekers and individual young people. Also, we receive no extra funding.

I am aware that our MPs affected have made their concerns known to the Home Office but I do not see any evidence that the Home Office have learnt any lessons from these bad experiences.

So we have found out in the last few days that the Yew Lodge Hotel in Kegworth is going to accommodate asylum seekers from next week. The County Council will work closely with North West Leicestershire District Council to ensure the strength of local opposition and community concerns, already loud, is conveyed to the Home Secretary and the Immigration Minister, whose own constituency is not far away.

We can have no confidence, however, that the Home Office are in listening mode and so we do need to ask wider questions. Why is it that Leicestershire has had more hotels identified than Nottinghamshire, than Derbyshire, and than Northamptonshire? Is it the case local hotel chains and owners are offering the use of more hotels in Leicestershire than elsewhere or because of some separate Government criteria?

It is also worth noting that the City of Leicester is being asked to accommodate more asylum seekers than Nottingham or Derby.

These are questions I am asking officers to pursue with the Home Office and I will also ask our MPs to use their own channels to try to get answers.

Coronation Bank Holiday Weekend

Over the Bank Holiday weekend for the King's Coronation, it is hoped that many of our communities will hold street parties and celebrate the Coronation Big Lunch which will be on Sunday 7th May. To assist communities the County Council will be waiving any costs associated with road closures as well as providing organisers with free traffic cones, signs and guidance about where to place them on the highway. If anyone wishes to apply to close a road they must do so by Friday 31st March. Further information is available on the Lord-Lieutenant's coronation web page (at www.leicestershire.gov.uk/coronation). I would encourage Members to promote this within their divisions.

Children and Family Hubs Award

We are one of 12 local authorities that were successful in our bid to secure funding of £944,000 from the Government's Family Hubs Transformation Fund to create a network of 'family hubs' in the county by March 2024. This funding

will transform how we deliver services to our families in their communities. Family Hubs are a mixture of physical and virtual spaces where all families can easily access a range of information, guidance and support, to help give all children the best start in life and ensure families with children 0-19 (or up to 25 with SEND) have the resources they need to improve long term outcomes and reduce inequalities.

Suicide Prevention Conference

200 attendees from across public sector organisations and the voluntary sector attended this years' 'Time to Talk' Suicide Prevention Conference, held at the King Power Stadium, on Thursday 2nd February. The event raised awareness, knowledge and understanding of suicide amongst professionals, shared information about new and upcoming work and challenges in the area; and raised awareness of the 'Start a Conversation' campaign.

Presentations were delivered to the audience by a range of local and regional partners and services. The programme also included personal stories delivered by individuals with experience of suicidal ideation or family experience of suicide.

Buses – innovating schemes, DRT, Fox Connect

We recognise the challenges affecting bus services across the county. Commercially provided services make up around 90% of the bus routes across Leicestershire and therefore working with commercial operators is a priority for us. We have delivered on our commitment to create an Enhanced Partnership with local operators to improve bus services and passenger experiences for our communities.

The harsh reality is however that current expenditure on our existing contracts for our subsidised bus routes will be £1m over budget for the coming financial year due to increasing cost of fuel, labour and reducing patronage. Putting £0.5m back into buses therefore will not stop the need for a review of our services and ultimately, some of those being withdrawn. Given that the subsidy levels on some of our services are up to £22 per passenger and therefore represents very poor value for our spend, we need to continue with the review of all of our subsidised services to ensure that the funding we do put into buses represents good value for the Leicestershire tax payer.

Where commercial operators cannot provide services, we are looking for innovative ways to connect people to important amenities through modern demand responsive services. We took the opportunity to be part of a pilot project to bring an app based flexible service to Leicestershire through our successful bid to the Rural Mobility Fund. We received over £1m and the FoxConnect Service is now operating in rural parts of south-west Leicestershire with key destinations such as Magna Park, Next Headquarters, Carlton Park, Fosse Park as well as Narborough and Hinckley train stations.

We will use this experience to drive future thinking of flexible ways to connect people in Leicestershire.

Network Rail Performance

Network Rail is currently undertaking significant works on the Midland Mainline through Leicestershire and will continue to do so for years to come with the electrification of the line. We have found in the past, however, and continue to find that, unfortunately, Network Rail is poor at engaging with us in time to meet its programme and repeatedly ignores the Highway legislation we must operate under. Officers are continuing to press senior Network Rail officers to collaborate with us and take on board within their programme the required processes to comply with highway legislation, to minimise highway disruption and ensure safe working, while giving Network Rail confidence in its work programme to implement essential rail improvements.

Leicestershire Climate and Nature Pact

Following approval of the Net Zero Leicestershire Strategy and Action Plan at County Council in December, our plans to work with residents and stakeholders to achieve a net zero county by 2045 are progressing at pace. On the 28 February we launch the Leicestershire Climate and Nature Pact alongside our key stakeholders, demonstrating our collective commitment to tackling and adapting to climate change and protecting and enhancing biodiversity. We have secured additional funding from Innovate UK to progress our plans and flagship projects such as improving the energy efficiency of homes in the county and continuing to attract grant, enabling us to do more to cut emissions and support households through the cost of living crisis.

Nursery Partnership with the National Forest

We are developing a new tree nursery in partnership with the National Forest Company (NFC). The project is to develop a new community-focused nursery involving local groups and organisations to help collect seeds and grow new trees to plant across Leicestershire and the National Forest.

The project – which aims to produce around 20,000 trees per year - will be trialled for four years with ambitions to inspire other communities to start up tree nurseries. Work on the site located in the heart of the National Forest in Moira is due to start soon, with phase one of the project involving the development of the site, access, infrastructure, polytunnels and growing beds.

Mr N. J. Rushton

Leader of the Council

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