

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 8TH JULY 2015

LEADER'S POSITION STATEMENT

Combined Authority

A fortnight ago myself, the City Mayor and the seven district council leaders announced proposals to create a combined authority for Leicester and Leicestershire to further improve how we collaborate and deliver on key issues, including economic growth, skills, transport and planning.

I am delighted that we have put together a strong initial proposal which has been submitted to Greg Clark, the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, for his consideration and which responds positively and speedily to the new Government's devolution agenda.

There is strong local support for the proposal, from the LLEP as well as from the local authority leaders, and this is especially pleasing as it demonstrates that we have in place an effective coalition of the willing. I was able to convey this message to Greg Clark when I met him at the LGA Conference last week, to which I will also refer later.

The establishment of a Combined Authority will provide robust governance across the functional economic area, which will enable us to make key decisions in support of economic growth and job creation. Having such governance in place is also a prerequisite for the devolution of funding and powers from Whitehall to local areas.

Our proposals include:

- The preparation of a long term strategic growth plan (looking to 2050) which will identify future growth locations and corridors and set a single consistent framework for future local plans and economic and infrastructure investment plans. This will give us the platform our area needs to plan for the area's long term economic prosperity and give investors and developers confidence that we are serious about growth. Alongside this we will also look to prepare a joint strategic asset management plan which will seek to maximise the contribution existing land and assets in the public sector can make to economic growth;
- Preparation of a joint strategic transport plan with clear investment priorities and supported by long term transport funding commitments from the Government;
- The devolution of funding and commissioning of skills programmes to the local area, with the LLEP taking on the role of commissioning body on behalf of the Combined Authority; and
- Enhanced funding and finance powers through the establishment of new Enterprise Zones, including at Loughborough University Science and Enterprise Parks and the East Midlands Enterprise Gateway.

Setting up a combined authority will help accelerate the growth of the local economy and create more jobs for local people. Available evidence suggests that when decisions about the economy are made locally, rather than in Whitehall, it is much

more likely that their impact will be maximised, overcoming local barriers to growth and supporting local priorities.

Further work is underway to support development of the final proposal, which will be subject to consultation and then submitted to the Secretary of State later in the year, with a view to a Combined Authority being set up by the end of 2015.

LLEP

I am delighted that Blake Pain has joined the LLEP Board alongside David Slater as a representative of the district councils and also welcome the re-appointment of Nick Pulley as Board Chairman and the appointment to the Board of two new private sector members, Andy Reed and John Hill.

As more funding is channelled through, or influenced by, Local Enterprise Partnerships it is increasingly important that the Council works closely with the LLEP to ensure key schemes and initiatives in the county receive necessary funding.

We will particularly seek to maximise funding from the Local Growth Fund to support delivery of key capital infrastructure to support growth, and from the European Structural and Investment Funds in relation to employment and skills, and business support programmes. In addition our success in securing LEADER status for East Leicestershire will bring benefits to many rural businesses and communities.

Midland Mainline Electrification

Later on the agenda we will be debating a motion regarding the 'pause' in the electrification of the Midland Mainline but I wanted to take this opportunity to say a few words on the matter.

The electrification of the mainline is not only critical to economic growth in Leicester and Leicestershire, it would support growth for the whole area from Northamptonshire to Sheffield. It would get the journey time from Leicester to London down to under an hour. This would boost more inward investment and growth. A modern electrified route with upto date rolling stock is an essential part of delivering a modern, fit for purpose transport network for the city, county and region.

I was therefore dismayed at the announcement that work on electrifying the Midland Mainline was to be 'paused'. Over the years Ministers have consistently highlighted the importance of infrastructure investment and only recently the Chancellor talked in positive terms when he launched the 'Midlands Engine for Growth' concept. Such a concept will struggle to gain public and more importantly business credibility if the Government cannot deliver on its existing investment commitments. I have, therefore, along with the city and other county council leaders across the East Midlands, written to Patrick McLoughlin expressing our concerns.

Great Central Railway

As I advised the Council at its last meeting, the Heritage Lottery Fund has earmarked funding of £9.5million for the development of a new Railway Museum to sit alongside the Leicester North terminus of the Great Central Railway (GCR). £500,000 of this earmarked fund has been released to help the GCR to work with

partners to progress the plans and apply for the full grant later this year. GCR has invited the County Council to join its Project Board to help develop the bid and I was pleased to accept this invitation personally.

The plan is for a new build glass frontage museum which will provide a clear view of trains arriving at the Station. The Museum will house collections of locomotives together with personal histories and smaller objects which will help interpret the railway's role in everyday life. Exhibits will be drawn from the prestigious National Rail Collection in York and the Director of the National Rail Museum has stated that he is keen to work in synergy with the GCR events programme to provide greater opportunities for learning and tourism.

Work on the Museum will create a short term increase in construction jobs but more importantly it is estimated that, when completed, the Railway and Museum will be worth some £39million to the local economy as well as providing education and training facilities. Whilst a significant part of this will be in the City, members should note that the majority of the Great Central Railway line runs in the Charnwood area and there will be opportunities offered to communities and businesses in those areas.

Work is also currently underway to connect the Great Central Line to the main rail network. When this is completed it will further enhance the opportunities for tourism to the area.

Police and Crime Commissioner

As I have commented in the answer to Mr Charlesworth's question, the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) has put out a statement this morning to say that he hopes to return to work next week. The PCC has previously said that he has been suffering from severe back pain for several months. It is good to know that the medical treatment he has been receiving appears to have been successful and I wish him well in his return to work and hope that he is able to manage his discomfort.

I am particularly concerned that the PCC should have challenged Joe Orson's integrity and that of County Council officers. They have my full support and confidence. It is also unfortunate that the Police and Crime Panel was not made aware of the inconsistency between Sir Clive's letter to the Panel saying that he was incapacitated and would be away for an extended period, and his tweet earlier on the same day saying that he hoped to be back in a couple of weeks. If the Panel had been made more aware, it seems probable that they would have at least asked the question as to whether it was necessary to appoint an Acting PCC.

On the matter of an Acting PCC, I remain of the view that the PCC would be well advised to appoint a Deputy and also that the legislation as currently framed is a nonsense. It simply cannot be right that the powers of a PCC can pass more or less automatically to an unelected official.

LGA Conference

All tiers of Leicestershire councils were well represented at this year's Local Government Association's national conference held in Harrogate.

The Chairmanship switched back to the Conservatives, after one year under the stewardship of Labour's Cllr David Sparks, after the strong district council election results on May 7th. I understand that Conservatives will retain the Chairmanship at least for the next two years. My congratulations go to Cllr Gary Porter, of South Holland District Council, who was elected as the new LGA Chairman, and to Cllr David Hodge, leader of Surrey County Council, as the new LGA Conservative Group Leader.

Together, they will make a strong team and bring considerable experience, working alongside the new Communities Secretary Greg Clark MP, who has promised to "be a good friend to local government". I know he will be a man of his word. I had several ad-hoc conversations with the Secretary of State at the LGA Conference, particularly on fairer funding and our Combined Authority bid. I noticed that he listened intently, took copious notes and asked pertinent questions of us and what we expected from him and the Government. He seems to be the kind of man we can do business with. I very much look forward to forging a special relationship with the new Secretary of State and expect him to be true to his word when dealing with Leicestershire.