

## COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 21<sup>ST</sup> MARCH 2018

### POSITION STATEMENT FROM THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

#### **Fair Funding**

Over recent Council meetings I detected a hint of scepticism that our Fair Funding campaign will be successful. I too understand the scale of the task and the powerful forces that are rallied against change from the status quo. We have put our head well and truly above the parapet, and will continue to do so given the gross unfairness of the current system.

The Deputy Leader, Byron Rhodes along with Officers, met with Rishi Sunak Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. I am also very pleased that Neil O'Brien, MP who is leading on Fair Funding for all Leicestershire MPs also attended. At the meeting the unfairness of the current distribution of funding, especially for low funded authorities like Leicestershire, was explained along with the Leicestershire model.

The meeting was very useful and the discussion was wide ranging. Byron continues to put considerable drive and energy into this campaign and it feels like we are making progress in putting our case to Government. It now seems accepted that London authorities are very generously funded and things need to change.

The recent Fair Funding Government consultation is evidence of this with a lot of the comments mirroring the work we have done.

#### **Local Industrial Strategy**

The County Council is full square behind the development of a local industrial strategy for Leicester and Leicestershire, as advocated by the Government This Strategy, which is being developed through the Leicester, Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership, will showcase our ambitions for supporting growth in the County by setting out the need for up front funding for the A46 Expressway and accelerated housing as well seeking sector deals for the following key industries:-

- Life Sciences
- Logistics
- Engineering and Advanced Manufacturing
- Space/Data and Digital Technology
- Textiles: Design, Manufacturing and Technology.

I met with Neil O'Brien MP last Friday who shares our ambition and has agreed to champion our case with other Leicestershire MPs and key figures in Whitehall and Parliament. His support will be helpful in getting to the front of the queue when our proposal is submitted.

I am aware of the interest of the Scrutiny Commission on this issue and I look forward to constructive engagement with them in the development of the Strategy.

## Midlands Engine/Connect

The County Council is fully supportive of Midlands Connect and is an active Member of it. Officers are currently involved in a number of Midland Connect projects that are directly related to the successful delivery of our Prospectus for Growth, including improvements to rail services to places such as Coventry and Birmingham, and the A46 Expressway, which is also a key element of the draft Leicester and Leicestershire Strategic Growth Plan. These projects will not only greatly enhance people's ability to travel efficiently and safely around and through Leicestershire, but will also enable the provision of much needed houses and jobs to meet the demands of the area's growing population.

It is crucial, however, that we move as quickly as is possible from thinking about projects to their delivery on the ground. This is why we are also fully supportive of Midlands Connect becoming a Sub-national Transport Body, with a current target date to achieve this in 2020. Government is increasingly seeing such Sub-national bodies as having a key role to play in influencing its future spending decisions; thus Midlands Connect becoming such a body will strengthen its hand considerably in influencing and shaping Government decisions on future investments in the Midlands transport infrastructure, to the benefit of Leicestershire residents and businesses. Officers are continuing to work on the details of the proposals with their Midlands Connect colleagues and I look forward to being able to provide further updates on this matter.

I attend the Midlands Connect Strategic Board and was pleased to hear Sir John Peace emphasise the need for Midlands Connect to up its game in clearly demonstrating to the Government its ability to collaborate effectively and deliver to drive forward our growth agenda. On a similar note, the HS2 Strategic Board on which we are represented by Blake Pain, is currently giving serious consideration how we, as the East Midlands, drive delivery of the HS2 Growth Strategy for Toton thus again demonstrating our collective strength.

My final point on this is to draw to your attention the recent publication by TfEM setting out our top 6 priorities for the East Midlands. These are:

- Making the most of HS2
- A Midland Main Line fit for the 21st century
- Improving access to East Midlands Airport
- A46 Growth Corridor & Newark
- A5 Growth Corridor
- Transforming East-West connectivity.

Only by work collaboratively and with one voice, will we be taken seriously or even heard by Government.

## **Housing Infrastructure Fund**

I am pleased to advise Members that today we have had confirmation from Government that they would like to work with us to develop schemes that will help unlock planned housing growth in Leicestershire. The draft Strategic Growth Plan for Leicester and Leicestershire has a housing need of 118,000 homes by 2036 along with significant infrastructure investment, including roads and schools. Today's announcement is a positive step forward in helping us secure the necessary funding to deliver the key infrastructure required.

We are pleased that Government have recognised Leicestershire's commitment to delivering growth in a sustainable way. Opportunities such as the Housing Infrastructure Fund are an important part of enabling local authorities to be proactive and prepare for growth rather than reacting to speculative development. We welcome Government's support on this and look forward to working collaboratively with them.'

**N. Rushton**

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