

This year was always going to be problematical with all the uncertainty of parting company with our friends in Europe which was confirmed by the General Election the previous month. Our precarious national situation which is reflected in the dire financial state of the County Council left everyone exposed to the Covid pandemic, a crisis which continues to grow despite the most welcome breakthrough with the vaccination project. At the time of writing the number of cases continues to grow alarmingly. On Christmas Eve I received a call asking if I would agree to Hinckley's Leisure Centre being used.

Led by the NHS and all the other caring professions we have all done our best to keep life going. Our methods of working have changed but all the other challenges we face are still with us. I set out here some of the other issues with which I have been involved this last year.

A 46 Expressway

It is now some years since the concept of a motorway standard road skirting the east and south of the city was presented to us. Colleagues and I opposed it from the start as it merged at junction 2 of the M69 and would have resulted in even more traffic piling through Burbage and Hinckley. It is good news that Midlands Connect and Highways England have withdrawn their support but we need to keep monitoring the situation

A5

Despite claims in Parliament by the Minister of Transport there are no immediate plans to improve the road across our area and no plans to improve the situation at the infamous railway bridge which now has the dubious record of having the most HGV impacts in the country. We still maintain that a new road is needed to the south taking it over the railway and away from people who live nearby.

Air quality

It was sobering to learn from the Director of Public Health that poor air quality accounts for a quarter of all deaths in this area, a factor that has to be borne in mind by the promoters of even more heavy vehicle movements and warehousing. We are paying the price for the upsurge in on line shopping in more ways than one.

Battling Brook

During the course of the year we have asked whether more could be done to strengthen the natural vegetation alongside this attractive brook which runs through the Hollycroft Estate and indeed enhance all the other hedgerows which are such an important feature in the landscape.

Big Pit

Along with colleagues I have continued to express concerns about flooding in this part of town if this development proceeds. The decision to destroy the lake which has long been an environmental asset confirms my view that the Government's Planning Inspectorate is not fit for purpose.

Bloors development off Normandy Way

With the roundabout on the A47 now nearing completion, this massive development is now clearly underway. We must ensure that all the mitigating measures materialise including the speed limit reduction on the A47 and the contributions to the Hollycroft Medical Centre. With most primary schools in the town at capacity the school promised on the site is now essential.

Brodick Road Park

The trees on this site are maturing nicely and together with the other parks in the Hollycroft area, Langdale Road, Clarendon Park, Battling Brook walkway and all the other spaces we have a number of natural areas which have been appreciated all the more with the restrictions.

Burbage Common

Together with colleagues both here and across south Leicestershire I have been much concerned with the threat of a massive warehouse complex on the edge of the common. An area the size of Burbage is involved and it would have a permanent impact on the common and woods and further afield if the Government gives it approval. The promoters have given no indication of the amount of additional traffic we could expect to see on our local roads.

Cinema

Before it was forced to close its doors as a result of the pandemic the cinema proved to be an attractive modern venue. Those of us who fought so hard to bring cinema back really look forward to when we can once again enjoy visiting the cinema, restaurants and of course the Concordia Theatre.

Climate Change

The present crisis should not distract from the need to tackle this challenge head on. Councils at all levels signed up to go carbon neutral but so much more needs to be done at national and international level.

Combined Authorities

A dull heading but this could entail all councils coming together in the East Midlands under an elected Mayor but would this bring benefit to those of us who live on the edge of the region? We have as much in common with the west as well as the east Midlands. For the time being it looks as though the Government's plans have been shelved.

Coventry and Warwickshire Local Economic Partnership

Working with this organisation has made me realise the benefits of working with people determined to bring worthwhile investment into the area with the news of the Giga Factory at Mira being an example of what can be achieved. We need to take advantage of straddling both regions.

Coventry Road

Numerous challenges face us along this most important entrance into the town from the new development near to the town centre to the impact of the flats now being built on Paddock Way. The key issue will always be trying to reduce the speed and amount of through heavy traffic especially during the night and when there is any hold up on the A5 or motorway network.

East Midlands Councils

I continue to serve on this body and can see at first hand how the region fares worse than most other parts of the country in terms of funding for education, health, transport and the police. The prospect of a truncated HS2 and continued lack of funding for the electrification of the Midland Main Line serves to underline the point. The Levelling Up agenda could effectively be levelling up north.

Education

This is now largely removed from elected member accountability even though two thirds of the county rate goes towards education. Accurate information is not readily available but I am not impressed with anecdotal reports of ceilings falling in or of the pensioning off of senior qualified staff as juniors are less expensive. The system needs to return to some form of local accountability.

Five year Housing Land Supply

Another dry sounding heading but it regulates the provision of houses throughout the country. In this area we have just over a 5 years' supply which means we have some measure of control. We have to agree 452 houses very year. If we drop below that rate the Government can impose whatever housing it chooses. Landowners and developers will decide for themselves and we will have even less local accountability. Some uncomfortable decisions have to be made.

Flooding

This last year I served on the County Council's working party looking into this vexed matter which climate change is exacerbating. Hopefully our recommendations will result in improved partnership working if implemented in full.

GP surgeries

I regret to have to report that I have seen little evidence that the availability of GPs, nurses and premises is adequate to meet the needs of our growing community. Needless to say all involved have been stretched to the limit in the current crisis and we have all learned to appreciate the dedication of all involved.

GDPR

Possibly the most useless and damaging set on initials imposed upon us.

Heritage

This has not been the best year to encourage shop owners to improve the appearance of their premises but a successful bid for a grant was submitted for Hinckley's town centre and I look forward to bids being made for the funds which are now available.

Hospitals

Having been involved with the proposed reconfiguration of Hinckley's hospitals and health centre for about 15 years I am bemused to learn that we now seem to be starting the process all over again. The needs of this community continue to grow and the present crisis has only added to the problem.

Hydes Pastures

Another industrial proposal is under consideration taking up the land bordered by the A5, Long Shoot and railway line. It is mostly in Warwickshire but it will have a serious impact on Dodwells Roundabout and the ability to improve the A5 if implemented.

National Forest

Having been involved with the initial successful bid to create the forest over 20 years ago I have now supported a renewed bid to bring this most welcome feature further into the Hinckley & Bosworth area.

Speeding

Irresponsible speeding accounts for more complaints from residents than virtually any other issue. Spot checks do take place but somehow the speed merchants somehow invariably evade being brought to book. The County Council set up a number of trial cameras around the county with a view to the fine income being retained to pay for improved safety measures. Unfortunately the Government declined to support the scheme. The scheme still exists in a rural location with one device installed in each district area. None have been installed in Hinckley.

Strategic Economic Plan 2014 – 2020

The plan being followed by the Leicester and Leicestershire Economic Partnership is now due for renewal. I am asking for a total review of the concept of the Golden Triangle which effectively encourages industrial growth in the M1, M69, A5 triangle and makes no reference to the need to protect the countryside, the villages or indeed the needs of the people who live in the area. Although the bulk of the designated area is in Blaby, it also extends well into Harborough and Hinckley & Bosworth. It is driven by the fact that we are only about 3 hours from all the major ports.

Strategic Growth Plan

Similarly I am pressing for a review of this County Council led plan which is based on the assumption that 140,000 homes are needed in the county with a major part built around the proposed expressway. These wide ranging plans will change this area for ever and I suggest that they should only go ahead if supported by the people who live here. The Burbage Common proposal is a warning about what could happen to the rest of the area.

The Paddock development

The five blocks of flats are nearing completion at the time of writing but the flooding of the site still shows little sign of being tackled. In my view it is further testament to why the Planning Inspectorate is not fit for purpose.

Unadopted roads and open spaces

The increasing tendency of developers to leave roads and open spaces unadopted is leading to problems throughout the area. New buyers do not seem to be aware that they will remain responsible for the maintenance of the roads and drains. There is a lack of sustainability and transparency and the system clearly needs national attention.

Summary

This report can only touch on a number of main topics but behind this there is a myriad of problems which affect so many streets and the households of the area. In common with everyone else elected members do their best to represent everyone but we increasingly have to rely on being made aware of issues and finding ways to tackle them. With so much normal activity now denied to us we must all keep our eyes and ears open and be prepared to speak out when necessary. We have to look out for each other.

David Bill

County Councillor