

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 7TH JULY 2021**POSITION STATEMENT FROM THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL****Police and Crime Commissioner**

I would like to begin by placing on record my congratulations to Rupert Matthews on being elected as the Police and Crime Commissioner.

Deborah Taylor and I met with him to discuss ideas for his policing plan and areas of mutual interest. These included county lines, Supporting Leicestershire Families, Domestic Violence and rural crime.

It is important that the County Council has a good working relationship with the PCC and I have invited him to an all-member briefing in October.

East Midlands Global Gateway (Freeport)

Members will be aware from a recent report to the Cabinet that the Government has approved an expression of interest for a Freeport based around East Midlands Airport, the current Ratcliffe on Soar power station and a site owned by Severn Trent close to the Toyota site in Derbyshire.

This is an exciting opportunity for the East Midlands and the Freeport will bring together a mix of industries at the heart of the country. An independently chaired interim Board comprising private and public sector representative has been set up and we hope to capitalise on our strengths in the areas of advanced manufacturing, automotive and logistics and build on emerging opportunities for green growth to create new jobs, aid the economic recovery from Covid and contribute to the levelling up agenda.

Linked to this I also had a meeting with Ben Bradley, the newly elected Leader of Nottinghamshire County Council. I am pleased that he is taking a keen interest on a number of regional matters such as HS2, the East Midlands Freeport and like us, is prioritising environmental and highway improvement/maintenance schemes.

Fair Funding

Several members of the Cabinet recently held a Teams meeting with MPs Andrew Bridgen and Neil O'Brien to run past them the latest strategy and campaign ideas.

We hope to enlist the support of 20 low funded authorities and their respective MPs, into a new campaign to highlight the unfairness of the current funding system. Together with the MPs we believe this campaign can run alongside the government's "Levelling up" agenda.

I do not believe that we will be able to achieve a root and branch reform given the impact this would have on a large number of Authorities who are currently well funded. However, I believe that we could push for an additional injection of funds for local government to begin to right the historic wrongs.

Tree Strategy

Last year we agreed a Tree Strategy and action Plan with the aim of significantly increasing tree coverage in the County. Leicestershire is one of the least wooded counties in the country and this will only get worse as we deal with the effects of Ash Die Back.

Our Strategy will make a significant contribution to increasing tree planting working with partners and landowners and help to deliver the manifesto commitment of planting 700,000 trees, one for every resident in the County.

A high level action plan is under preparation and I would urge the new Environment and Climate Change Scrutiny Committee to contribute to the emerging Action Plan and monitor its implementation.

Covid Memorial Walk

Finally, on 21st June I was privileged to be at the opening of the Covid Memorial Walk in Watermead Park.

The idea for the memorial walk was put forward by the County and City Council – particularly in our case by Pam Posnett when she was Chairman last year. Dozens of individuals and businesses supported the project through a crowdfunding campaign for which I am grateful.

58 trees have been planted along a 2.6mile route that links the city side of the park in the south to the county side in the north. The new trees including aspen, cockspur thorn, elm, hornbeam, maple, oak, rowan and silver birch now form a tranquil trail through the park.

Benches have been installed along the route to encourage people to use the space to relax and reflect. A small plaque on each bench has been engraved with lines of poetry, or a quotation from literature, to provide words of comfort or hope.

Covid-19 has been mentioned on the death certificates of some 2400 people in Leicester and Leicestershire and the memorial walk will last as a tribute to them and the thousands of key workers who risked their lives for others during the pandemic.

As we move out of lockdown, I would urge people to recognise that the virus is still prevalent and to ensure that we still take precautions.

Mr N. J. Rushton

Leader of the Council

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