

## **Annual Report by Richard Shepherd for 2023 – 2024**

I have again enjoyed the pleasure and privilege of serving the residents of the eight Parishes in the Division of Sileby and The Wolds.

### **What have been the main issues locally during the past year?**

**Flooding** – the heavy rain experienced during the year, notably in Hurricane Henk and Hurricane Babet, caused serious disruption. There were severe physical consequences and great anxiety for those whose homes were flooded or in danger if being so. The County Council and others responded well, but resources were very stretched. Some issues are still being dealt with, in Burton on the Wolds, Seagrave, Sileby and Wymeswold. I appreciate the pressure flooding across the County has put on the Authority. As Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) I know it has had to investigate and coordinate responses as required, perhaps hampered by a name – “LLFA” – which may give the impression that the Authority’s role is to carry out all work required itself. It seems that, regrettably, we shall all need to be “Flood Aware” and “Flood Prepared”, and follow advice given.

**Buses and Highways** – the restoration of a bus link between Sileby and Leicester, albeit limited, was helpful. Later in the year came news of Network North funding, which aroused interest, including as it does Bus Service Improvement Plans as well as Resurfacing Funding and the Local Transport Fund. I communicated some details locally and explained it could not provide a “quick fix” as funding was in tranches over a period of year and work had to be developed.

The condition of the roads, and the volume of traffic, speeding and parking, remain issues of concern, which I have been following up, and the apparent breach of weight restrictions by HGVs. I have given information about how to report such apparent breaches. I have also been asked about ownership of land and responsibility for the maintenance of vegetation.

**The Members Highways Fund** – items requested have now all been installed. I think the scheme has proved useful as a way of responding to local issues.

**Working with Parish Councils** – There are six Parish Councils covering the eight Parishes in my Division. It has been my practice to attend their Meetings as often as possible to provide reports and receive requests for help or information. Owing to personal circumstances I have been unable since January

to attend in person, and am grateful to those Councils which have been able to give me access remotely to their Meetings. In the case of other Councils I have been submitting written reports and maintain communication as appropriate with the Clerks. I am grateful to all Clerks for their helpful communication with me in between their Council Meetings.

**Communication** – On another aspect of communication, I quite often circulate LCC media releases and other information items to the Parish Councils and Borough Councillors within my Division. This provides a means of letting people know about the range of responsibilities and offers of support which the County Council has. It was notably valuable as a way of passing on information about responses to flooding and Network North funding. I also contribute news articles to two local magazines, and Sileby Parish Council kindly hosts a Blog from me on their website.

### **Liaison Meeting**

I am a Council representative on the British Gypsum (Barrow Project) Liaison Committee. This position has enable me to keep informed about the company's work and plans. Some residents are concern about the speed of vehicles which serve the company's site and travel along Paudy Lane. I have been raising this matter and proposed monitoring measures with the company.

### **And what of wider County Council matters?**

Inevitably, the pressure on LCC's finances and the consequent constraints on what the Authority can do has been a significant part of my thinking during the year. I have been especially close to this problem as a Member of the Council's Cabinet, and of two associated Committees, the Cabinet Strategy and Co-ordination Group and Cabinet Briefing, supporting the Lead Member for Resources.

Highways is the Council issue most visible to many members of the public, but the Council has a wide range of responsibilities, as I mention above. Adult Social Care and Children's Social Care are the ones which take up much of the Council's budget. The Council's website and the newsletter for residents, "Leicestershire Matters", provide information about the Council's work. I alert Parish and Borough Councillors when a distribution of the newsletter is about to start and ask to be told of any issues with distribution.

It is acknowledged that local government finance is in a precarious position. I share with my colleagues an ambition to make the best possible use of the money we have. It was pleasing to hear at the Council Cabinet Meeting on 26<sup>th</sup> March that data shows that Leicestershire remains one of the best performing County Councils in the country. A comparison against 31 upper-tier and county unitary areas places the Council second for adult social care delivery, second for highways and transport, and fourth for school quality and access, even though the Council is also acknowledged to be poorly funded. Details of research undertaken is included in the Cabinet Report. Council officers carried out an analysis using 250 indicators from the previous year across 13 themes, including metrics used by the recently established Office for Local Government (Oflog). The data used was all obtained from nationally published sources.

In addition to the Cabinet appointments mentioned above I have served during the past year on the Employment Committee and the Constitution Committee, and on the Local Pension Board. I also continued to be Chief Whip for the Conservative Group, assisting in the conduct of Council business. That means ensuring that the Group works as an effective political unit, within which each Member has the opportunity to contribute as they wish and fulfil their aspirations, conducting themselves according to the Nolan principles. It also includes acting as a channel of communication between the Group's leadership, particularly the Leader, and other Members, and providing pastoral care to any Members who may be experiencing personal difficulties.

### **Training and Development**

The All Member Briefings which have been held have been a good source of information about a range of Council matters, giving details which deepen understanding. I have also received continuing training about pensions to assist me as a Member of the Local Pension Board. I find pensions to be a fascinating subject in its complexity.

### **Do I enjoy being a County Councillor?**

I have always found the role enjoyable and rewarding, and still do. It is interesting, despite the challenges posed by the Council's finances, to contribute in any way to finding a way forward. It is also interesting to interact with Parish Councils and members of the public, to hear at first-hand what is of concern and assist as far as I can.

However, I have now stepped down at my own request from the Cabinet and its associated Committees, and did not seek re-election as the Conservative Group's Chief Whip in May of this year. I decided some while ago that I would not stand for election again to the County Council in 2025. Having served on the Council since 2005, and being of a certain age, I feel it is now time for me to make that move. I was honoured and delighted to be elected to serve as Vice-Chairman of the County Council at the Annual Council meeting on 15<sup>th</sup> May 2024, taking on a new role for the final year of my Council service.

Richard Shepherd

June, 2024