

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 18TH FEBRUARY 2026**POSITION STATEMENT FROM THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL****One Million Trees**

Today, I am proud to announce that the Council is increasing its tree-planting ambition. Building on the existing pledge to plant 700,000 trees, we are now setting a new goal: to plant one million trees across Leicestershire by 2032.

Leicestershire is one of the least wooded areas in the country, with only around 6% woodland cover—significantly below the national average of 10% for England. This is something we are determined to change.

As one of the county's major landowners, Leicestershire County Council has been working hard to identify areas across our own landholdings where new trees, woodlands and hedgerows can be planted. This forms a key part of our commitment to protect and enhance our natural environment for generations to come.

We will continue to work closely with our valued partners, including the National Forest, the Woodland Trust, district councils and local community groups, to help us reach this milestone. Thanks to these partnerships, and the dedication of volunteers and residents, we have already made significant progress. By December 2025, 494,240 trees had been planted through joint efforts across the county.

This new target will be delivered through our Tree Management Strategy, ensuring that we create and maintain a healthy, diverse and resilient tree population. This strategy also equips us to respond to the increasing challenges posed by diseases such as ash dieback.

Together, we can grow a greener future for Leicestershire. I encourage residents, landowners and community groups to join us in this vital effort. Every tree planted brings us closer to a more sustainable, biodiverse and resilient county.

Flooding Prevention Initiatives

In response to the increasing number of flood events that have devastated communities across Leicestershire over the last couple of years, we allocated an additional £2 million towards flood mitigation initiatives and to adapting services to mitigate the impacts of severe weather events.

Part of that funding has gone towards purchasing stock of an alternative to traditional sandbags and on 5 February, we hosted a demonstration session at County Hall which was attended by over 45 parish councils all of whom were given a volume of stock to hand out to their communities. This was very positively received and will go some way to help reduce flood water entry to properties in Leicestershire. More will be handed out to communities in due course. We are also planning further spring public drop-in sessions to hand more out and offer more opportunities for the public to meet the responsible agencies and learn how they can Be Flood Ready.

In January, applications for our Community Flood Recovery Grant were opened. This funding aims to build on local resilience and reduce flood risk through practical support to communities. We are aware that at least 10 communities impacted by Storm Henk and 6 January 2025 flood event are seeking to submit bids for this funding. We would encourage other communities to apply for grant funding where they have a specific initiative that could help minimise their flood risk.

In addition, we will spend just over £3m this and next financial year on a programme of local flood risk management schemes across the County which also draws in national flood funding. The largest scheme in 2026/27 is Stoney Stanton, which includes highway drainage improvements, watercourse improvements, and Sustainable urban Drainage Assets (SuDS) at Manorfield Primary School.

We are also in the progress of delivering SuDS for school initiatives in two schools who have been flooded previously. Both schemes are funded by the Department of Education with great engagement from the schools involved.

£1.3m of the additional £2m we allocated to flooding is being spent on our highway drainage assets over the next three years including:

- a) Proactive culvert maintenance – we are introducing a proactive programme, where the current approach is reactive, and undertake high priority repairs and or replacements.
- b) We will start a project to develop a system of management for SuDS on the Highway as they become more commonly adopted.
- c) An increased gully emptying trial will commence, introducing a 40-month cycle for priority 3 gullies rather than solely inspections.
- d) Further mapping of underground drainage assets will be carried out to improve the Council's ability to investigate issues and plan maintenance activities.

Some key facts and figures to note on our flood related work:

- We have assisted 157 homeowners from across Leicestershire in obtaining national property flood resilience repair grants totalling over £759,000 following Storms Henk and Babet.
- We used Local Transport Grant funding to deliver a flood scheme for Oakthorpe this year and have allocated over £400,000 to develop and deliver seven projects in the coming financial year.
- Our Highways Drainage team are on target to clean the 89,560 gullies programmed for routine gully cleansing as well as cleaning over 2,000 more gullies in respond to customer enquiries.
- We have recut 51,428 rural drainage grips across the County.

- We are on target to re-map the underground drainage assets at eight village locations and complete six pipe re-lining schemes which provides a cost-effective solution to repair damaged pipes that can extend pipe life by 50+ years.

In addition to the extensive work being carried out by our Flood and Highways teams, I am pleased to announce I have asked the Lead Member for Environment and Transport and the Director of Environment and Transport to undertake a review of how the Council and key partners approach flood prevention and mitigation work. The objective will be to identify improvements that could be made to the approach in Leicestershire for responses to flooding and how we support our communities in dealing with the significant challenges they face.

Melton Mowbray Distributor Road

Work on the £134m North East Melton Mowbray Distributor Road (NE MMDR) began on site with advanced works in February 2023. Three years later, we are now nearing completion of the 7.1km new road. The NE MMDR will be key to improving access as well as reducing congestion and pollution in the town by diverting significant levels of through traffic and HGVs from the town centre. It is a key element of the Local Plan which incorporates significant levels of growth, including over 6,000 dwellings and 3,400 jobs.

The NE MMDR is now in the final phase of construction. All six roundabouts have been completed, and all four major bridges are in place, including the 47-metre new railway bridge, a major engineering achievement in itself. We are currently working towards completion with final earthworks, landscaping, surfacing, safety barriers and signage underway.

The aim is to have completed the road and hold an opening event in late spring 2026; the weather is currently the main determining factor on exact dates. Details of the opening event will be announced in the coming weeks. Recently, we held a press “open day” to give an advance look at the scheme. We will also be carrying out a public vote to choose the name for the new road.

We look forward to the opening of the new road shortly and seeing it benefit the people of Melton and travelling public in Leicestershire.

Rural Strategy

As part of our commitment to farming and Leicestershire's rural economy a review of our Rural Estate Strategy is reaching its final stages. The strategy seeks to create a Rural Estate that provides valuable opportunities for people to start farming on their own account, supports the rural economy and communities and makes an increasing contribution to the Council's wider objectives.

In developing the strategy, we have engaged in a comprehensive consultation process involving our own farm tenants and industry stakeholders including the National Farmers Union, together with the people of Leicestershire. I would personally like to thank them all for the valuable contribution they have made to the shaping of the final strategy which will be considered by Cabinet in April with the aim of adoption later this spring.

Local Government Reorganisation

The Government has now formally launched its consultation on proposals for Local Government Reorganisation across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland. This marks an important moment for our area, giving residents, partners and stakeholders the opportunity to have their say on the future structure of local government.

Our proposal, submitted to the Government following extensive planning and engagement, sets out a clear, evidence-based case for creating a more efficient, resilient and community-focused model. It prioritises putting residents first, empowering local communities, reinvesting in frontline services and ensuring long-term financial sustainability. It also reflects strong cross-party support and the valuable scrutiny input received to date.

Over the coming weeks, we will continue to engage proactively with partners, MPs, parish councils, businesses, staff and residents to ensure the consultation is widely understood and accessible. Work is already underway to coordinate communications activity across the county and support stakeholders to share their views. At the same time, we will prepare the Council's formal response ahead of Cabinet consideration in March, supported by further member briefings and scrutiny oversight.

I encourage everyone to take part in the consultation and help shape the future of local government in our area. This is a significant opportunity to secure a modern, effective structure that strengthens local services and delivers better outcomes for all our communities.

Rejoining the LGA and CCN

I'm pleased to announce that we are now engaging fully with the Local Government Association (LGA) and County Councils Network (CCN). This represents an important step in strengthening Leicestershire's voice nationally and ensuring we are fully represented in the debates shaping local government.

It will enable stronger collaboration, better access to intelligence and support, and a more influential platform from which to represent our residents and our workforce. With major national policy changes underway, this is the right time to rebuild these connections and ensure we are at the table where the future of local government is being shaped.

Partnership Working

As Leader of the Council, I am committed to strengthening the partnerships that sit at the heart of successful local government. Our ability to deliver high-quality services, support economic growth, and respond to the needs of our residents depends on effective, respectful and collaborative relationships both with the business community, universities, health colleagues, district and parish councils.

We will work closely with businesses to ensure that Leicestershire remains a place where investment, innovation and economic growth can flourish. I am planning a

breakfast meeting with key local businesses where I can hear directly from local employers about the challenges and opportunities ahead and demonstrate our commitment to supporting the wider prosperity of Leicestershire.

With numerous partnership bodies operating across the county, effective collaboration requires openness, aligned priorities and a shared willingness to work together in the interests of residents. The current complexity in local structures only reinforces the need for a clearer, more coordinated approach that helps partners engage confidently and consistently with local government.

Parish councils also play a vital role in representing local identity and shaping neighbourhood priorities. Strengthening our dialogue with them will be key to improving community-level decision making and ensuring local voices remain central in our shared work.

By approaching these relationships with transparency, mutual respect and a shared sense of purpose, we can build a more unified, resilient and prosperous Leicestershire

Efficiency Review

Our Efficiency Review is now well underway. Working in partnership with Newton, we are carrying out a thorough, evidence-based assessment of how we operate and the outcomes we focus on delivering for the people of Leicestershire. This work will help us identify opportunities to enhance services, improve lives, increase efficiency, and address the financial pressures we face. The review is focussed broadly on four themes:

1. **Managing demand and improving lives** for the people we support through service excellence
2. **Increasing value for money and financial sustainability**
3. Innovating to further improve lives and value for money – focussed on **prevention and commissioning**
4. Operating more **efficiently** and setting up LCC to be **fit for the future**

The review will conclude in spring, and once we have a view of all opportunities in these areas and what it will take to deliver them, the next step will be to develop a single, integrated programme of change and improvement.

I will be able to share specifics about the opportunities being identified and the expected impact of the solutions that we are working to develop in the spring. The evidence is still being developed and tested and we want to make sure it is robust before finalising anything.

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