

**COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING - 23<sup>RD</sup> MAY 2007**

**POSITION STATEMENT OF THE CABINET LEAD MEMBER FOR  
COMMUNITY SERVICES ON THE ENVIRONMENT**

I am pleased to report to the County Council on actions taken by the Authority to improve the quality of the Leicestershire Environment.

- The key environmental issue facing us all is Global Warming. Following the debate at the County Council in November last year the Nottingham Declaration on Climate Change was signed by the three Group Leaders on 21<sup>st</sup> December 2006. All Leicestershire Districts have now done the same and we are placed within the first region of England where all Local Authorities are now signed up to the Declaration. This fact will be celebrated shortly at a ceremony at Conkers.
- The Nottingham Declaration requires us to prepare a Plan to address the causes and effects of climate change and to secure maximum benefit for our communities. Following the preparation of a Climate Change Strategy by Enable, an Action Plan has now also been prepared and was reported to the Leicestershire Together Board yesterday. It will be considered by its various partners in due course.
- Within the Authority, an Energy and Water Strategy has been successfully prepared through a 5 Member Scrutiny Review Panel and has been approved by the Cabinet. Two immediate items to come out of it have been the establishment of an Invest to Save fund for measures that improve our resource efficiency and a doubling of the size of the Energy Management Unit within the Corporate Resources Department to ensure that appropriate projects are brought forward. Clearly the Authority has a long way to go in meeting the level of reduction in emissions that the Government and international obligations require of us all (60% by 2050). However, as a result of switching to renewable energy supplies for County Hall and Highway lighting, our carbon dioxide emissions have been reduced by 21% over the last 3 years.
- The County Council's own Environment Strategy has been successful at focussing action on what is needed to put our own house in order. This has been regularly reported to the Cabinet since its adoption in 2004. The Cabinet is anxious to ensure that our work in this area is properly focused on the three key areas of Energy, Waste and Procurement. I therefore welcome the establishment of a 5 Member Scrutiny Review Panel to consider the whole of the Environment Agenda and I understand this will be starting its work soon.

- Much of our performance in the Environment sector is to support action identified as priorities by our communities and in this regard SHIRE Environment Grants have this last year supported 64 schemes providing grant funding of £191,907 in schemes costing £805,000. Similarly, our FLAG scheme (funded through the Aggregates Tax) has supported 10 schemes with grants of £285,000 in schemes totalling £490,000. On the SHIRES Historic buildings side the County Council supported 60 schemes with grants of £195,000 (£150,000 of which came from partners such as English Heritage, Leicester Shire Economic Partnership (LSEP) and the Districts) in schemes costing £860,000. Our bid to English Heritage in partnership with Melton Borough Council to run a Partnership Scheme in Conservation Areas in Melton Mowbray has been successful. Our work in the public realm has been very successful working in close partnership with the LSEP and the Districts. We have spent £1,260,000 on schemes across the County (including Ashby, Loughborough and Hinckley) improving the quality of life of our citizens. 11 Shop front Improvement grants and 7 Living/working over the shop schemes were completed which drew in some £200,000 worth of private sector grants for the £67,000 worth of grants given out. The capacity of the County Council to deliver such schemes is a major part of our success in ensuring that the quality of our Towns and Villages is so high.
  
- As County Planning Authority we:

Engage at Regional and District level to ensure investment in the environment is secured;

Seek appropriate contributions from developers, and are currently appointing a Section 106 officer;

Plan for sustainable mineral development and waste management through the development plan and control system;

Continue to liaise with East Midlands Airport on monitoring night time noise pollution.
  
- Partnerships

  1. Continuing the theme of partnership I am pleased to report that the Partnership for Environment Protection – involving all the Districts, English Heritage, Natural England and the Wildlife Trusts continues to expand. North West Leicestershire District has recently signed up as a full Member and we are now undertaking a full ecological survey of the area.

2. The Stepping Stones Project which has successfully brought forward a proposal for a Community Woodland and Greenspace Initiative around Leicester has completed Strategies for all the Green Wedges in the countryside around Leicester.
- National Forest and Heart of the Forest Foundation - The County Council continues to support the development of the National Forest, which has now reached 17% Woodland coverage. The County Council was successful in securing two National Forest Tender schemes last year at Sheet Hedges Wood and Donington-le-Heath. The Foundation runs Conkers and is developing the Heart of the National Forest Park which will ultimately reach 1,000 acres. The County Council has supported the development of a new Youth Hostel and Caravan and Camping Club site at Moira, which will be opening later this year.
  - The Country Parks Service continues to rank highly amongst the public and in the last year has secured a Green Flag for Market Bosworth Country Park and is nearing completion of a complete refurbishment and revitalisation of the Bosworth Battlefield Visitor Centre and exhibition which will be opened this summer.
  - The National Forest Wood Fair will be run for the third time at Beacon Hill on 27<sup>th</sup> August.
  - The Rights of Way Service continues to improve the state of the footpath network across the County and is placed in the top 10% of County Highway Authorities against the National Performance Indicator. Through the Rights of Way Improvement Plan considerable emphasis is being placed on extending access to a greater range of users and ensuring that the links to health improvements are understood and secured.
  - Other external funded schemes currently operating successfully include the Community Heritage Initiative, which continues to inspire local Leicestershire people to record and explore their local environment; and the Historic Landscape Characterisation Programme which will provide new insights into the history of Leicestershire's environment.
  - The County Council's Land Improvement Programme also attracts considerable public and private investment into the County. The Phoenix Green Bridge in Coalville was completed last year and has been enhanced by murals painted by young people in the Town. The current focus of the programme is the restoration of the Ashby canal and the refurbishment of the Measham Station Building.