



COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 5 DECEMBER 2007

POSITION STATEMENT BY THE LEADER

The Connect2 Project – Watermead Country Park

- The Big Lottery is reaching the final stage of competition for a single award of £50 Million which will be decided by a public vote. The only scheme which would spend money in Leicestershire is the bid by Sustrans for Connect2, a partnership of 79 schemes around the country which are designed to make the connections necessary to encourage people to walk or cycle rather than to reach automatically for the car keys for local journeys.
- The competing schemes are all single point schemes focussing on major local improvements. The grant of £50 Million would lead to a total spend of some £140 Million in schemes that will improve local communities and their health nationally. If Connect2 is successful then a grant of £700,000 will be made towards works costing £1.4 Million in and around Watermead Country Park to improve access for local communities into, across the Park, and via the riverside paths into Leicester. Online voting started on the 26th November and telephone voting will open on Friday. I urge all Members to vote for this very worthy scheme and to encourage as many people as possible to do likewise.

The Council's Disabled Workers' Group

- It has been an exciting year for disability equality in Leicestershire. The Council's first Disability Equality Scheme was published and good progress is being made on implementing it. The Disabled Workers Group has been very busy developing its profile and web pages and has been actively publicising itself throughout the Council.
- The group held its 3rd annual conference at Loughborough University on 3rd December – International Day of Disabled People. More than 70 people attended, including staff from other authorities as far afield as Oxfordshire. Mrs Pendleton and I were very pleased to be there. Seven disabled employees submitted case studies celebrating their successes at work and in their personal lives.
- The conference focused on the themes of 'upward mobility' and the Council's 'Work Well' programme on flexible and mobile working. Some

of the issues around upward mobility were tackled through a workshop and panel session looking at the new recruitment and retention strategy. Workshops on the Work Well programme considered its impact on the working lives of disabled people and identified disabled people's priorities.

Melton Mowbray By Pass

- Members will recall that in my position statement to the last meeting of the Council I indicated that the County Council had become part of a lobby group campaigning for a bypass for Melton Mowbray. Most recently this has involved the presentation of "Keep Melton Moving" petition to the Prime Minister on Tuesday 20th November.
- This is something that has wide support amongst local people, local businesses and local politicians and it is hoped the Government will respond positively by making resources available so that a scheme can be prepared and implemented without delay.

Local Government Finance Settlement

- We are expecting the Local Government Finance Settlement on Thursday 6th December. It is unlikely to be good news for the County Council. Figures for 3 years have been promised and the settlement is likely to be very complex with changes to formula grant, specific grant and Area Based Grant. It will undoubtedly take some time to assimilate. Excluding Christmas week there will be only 12 working days between the receipt of the settlement and the deadline for circulating papers for the Cabinet meeting on 10th January.
- Members of the Council should be aware it will obviously be impossible to circulate a full report in this timescale.

Community Forums

- Most of the 27 Community Forums have now met. Despite initial concerns, County, District and Parish Councillors have engaged positively in developing the opportunity by agreeing working arrangements, including the election of chairs, and the issues that they want to discuss at future meetings.
- Except for the Harborough Forums (which already met with the public present), the first round of meetings have involved elected members only. The next round of meetings will be in February/March when the public will be invited.
- On Monday evening this week I was in Charnwood where we have agreed as a pilot to introduce some delegated budgeting and to start some joint budget consultation with the Borough Council and our Health and Police partners.

- Most of the Forums have had the opportunity to influence the place - based priority outcomes in the Sustainable Community Strategy and the next meetings will look at these again in the light of the consultation response. A number of Forums have decided to use these priorities as a basis for shaping future agendas.
- The Government has published guidance on the Comprehensive Area Assessment and this makes it clear that the County Council and its partners will be assessed on how well they engage with local members and the public through Forums and other means. This means that we need to ensure that the Forums have a strong influence on service delivery improvements in their areas.

“Most Innovative Local Authority of the Year”

I am very pleased to report that the Council won this national award from the Highways Magazine. The judges said that the Council had provided “an excellent submission, which illustrates how collaborative working, innovation and customer focus are embedded in the organisation”.

The Council was complimented for exceptionally high levels of customer service and on ground-breaking collaborations with other local authorities, plus modern approaches to contracting services.

This is a magnificent achievement by the staff of the Highways Department and confirms the County Council’s reputation as being at the forefront of local authority innovation. I am sure the Council will want me to extend our congratulations to the Director and all his staff.

Inspections

Ivan Ould and David Sprason will shortly be making statements about more outstanding achievements by the services and staff for which they have Lead Member responsibilities. We have not yet received the report from the CPA inspectors and the results will not be public until February. However, the feedback we received at the end of the inspectors’ time on site was very positive. I am grateful to everyone in the Council, members and officers, and our many partners who supported the Council during the CPA and the other inspections.