

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 24TH SEPTEMBER 2014

POSITION STATEMENT BY THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

Leicester City FC

I would like to start by congratulating Leicester City for beating Manchester United. It is not often a sporting event, an achievement, lifts the spirits of everyone as much as Sunday's result did, but the manner of the performance of the players was magnificent. They deserve all the accolades which have come their way.

The UK Constitution

It was apparent on Friday morning and has become increasingly apparent since then that something must be done to remove large elements of unfairness in our constitution. I have never seen why, for example, English taxpayers should subsidise the Scots. Another striking example of unfairness is shown in the report on today's agenda on the Council's financial position.

Something has to be done and I support all meaningful attempts to do so. Cross-party accord must be a good thing, but a solution or solutions must not be allowed to drag on.

I also want to see the political and public debate focus as much if not more on devolution within England as devolution to England. I certainly do not support an English Parliament. The last thing we need is more politicians, more parliaments, more assemblies and more cost. The public won't put up with that. What they do want is English votes for English people. I think the best way to achieve that is the wholesale devolution of powers to the Counties and Cities with perhaps a federal structure for the UK parliament.

Some of the points made by the LGA and the CCN since last Friday have been good, but rather than just press for the devolution of powers and resources, we must be careful that the terms of devolution are acceptable and seize the opportunities the Scottish referendum has given us. It is vital therefore, that there is a fundamental review of the current local government funding system- including the reform of the Barnett Formula- and not one which is signed off only by the Government. I shall be pressing these points home when we again meet with Leicestershire's MPs in the near future.

Boundary Review

In June, following a discussion with the other Group Leaders, we wrote to the Local Government Boundary Commission asking for a review to be carried out in Leicestershire because of the increasing imbalance of County Council electoral divisions.

The Commission has now written to advise that a review will commence in April 2015, to be completed in March 2016. The intention is to lay an order before Parliament leading to electoral changes in time for the County Council elections in 2017.

A report on the timetable and key stages of the review will be made to the Group Leaders' next meeting and I will ensure members are kept informed of the process and how they might contribute. There will be ample opportunity for all members and political groups to submit views and evidence to the Commission.

East Leicestershire LEADER bid

I am delighted that the County Council is playing a pivotal role in championing a Rural Development LEADER bid for East Leicestershire. 30% of the County's population and 40% of our businesses are based in rural areas so it is essential that we support the rural economy and the provision of jobs for local people.

If successful, the bid will secure £1.75m of European Funds to create and safeguard 150 jobs in the most rural areas of our County, including the whole of Melton and Harborough districts and adjoining areas in Charnwood and Blaby. The bid has been overseen by the Leicestershire Rural Partnership which is chaired by the Lead Member, Pam Posnett CC.

Over the six year programme the LEADER funds will:

- support local farms to invest in innovation and new technologies to increase their productivity;
- provide confidence for small and micro businesses to expand, diversify and ultimately create jobs; and
- establish a strong tourism short-stay destination maximising the renowned food and drink and heritage offer of the east of the county

Through the Local Action Group, LEADER will give local partners, businesses and communities the opportunity to help direct how these funds will be invested; ensuring that development is sustainable, whilst maximising the benefits to the local economy, local businesses and local people.

Re-interment of King Richard III

Plans to reinter King Richard III at Leicester Cathedral are ongoing. Reinterment will be on Thursday, 26th March next year and the seven day programme of events will include on the first day, Sunday 22nd March, an event at Bosworth Battlefield. The King's remains will have been taken there from the University of Leicester earlier in the day and an appropriate service will be held before the remains are taken in procession to Leicester and the Cathedral with the dignity and honour which was not the case when he was killed in battle.

Details of the seven day programme will be available in due course for members and, of course, the wider public. I am pleased to say that in connection with the event at the Battlefield, local communities are being consulted and advised.

Green Plaque Awards

The Green Plaque Awards Scheme for Leicestershire was launched in December 2013 and the public were invited to nominate people and places they felt were worthy of commemoration by the County Council. The Scheme attracted over 50 nominations.

When the public vote closed, a total of 4,289 votes had been cast. Plaques have now been or will be erected for:

- The John Taylor Bellfoundry, Loughborough;
- Brigadier-General James Lochhead Jack, awarded the Distinguished Service Order, Kibworth;
- Flight Lieutenant Geoffrey Rice DFC RAF VR, Dambuster pilot, Burbage;
- Charles Booth, social reformer and philanthropist, Thringstone;
- Alice Young, missionary and teacher, Enderby;
- Graham Chapman, comedian and writer, Melton.

I was delighted to be present at the unveiling of the plaques for Charles Booth and Flight Lieutenant Geoffrey Rice. The plaque commemorating Alice Young will be unveiled on 15th October and that for Graham Chapman on 10th December. Subject to the necessary planning permissions the plaques for The John Taylor Bellfoundry and Brigadier-General James Lochhead Jack will be unveiled in the new year.

The people and organisations that were unsuccessful with their nominations in this round have been encouraged to nominate again in the next round with a maximum of three entries for the same person/place permitted over the course of the Scheme.

The aim of the Scheme has always been to encourage community involvement and the residents of Leicestershire appear to have taken the Scheme to heart by nominating and voting for those people and places they feel deserve recognition for their contribution to our County. I hope that members will continue to support the project, which helps bring people together to recognise and celebrate the achievements of others.

Environment and Transport Customer Service Centre

As reported to the Environment and Transport Scrutiny Committee on 4th September, the Highways Customer Service Centre has improved its performance in relation to the reporting and resolution of highway related enquiries. Actions taken have led to a significant reduction in the time taken to respond to, and resolve, highway defects

(reduced by a minimum of 50% and by a maximum of 73%). Service reliability has also improved, with response times being more consistent than before.

I would like to thank the Member Reference Group (Byron Rhodes, Peter Osborne, Simon Galton and Max Hunt) for their work on this project and thank officers for this positive first step which demonstrates that we can improve services in a time of reducing resources.

Whilst this is a welcome improvement and we would recognise there is still more to do, we can also note this is a positive first step in one of the 24 projects within the Council's Transformation Programme.

Ivan Ould, Lead Member for Children and Families Service

I am sure the Council will want to extend its congratulations to Ivan, who was recently elected chair of the F40 Group, the Campaign for Fairer Funding in Education. Ivan has been heavily involved in F40 for a long time and has been instrumental in its successful, cross-party lobbying of Ministers. When he speaks later, he will tell us of the latest success.

I would also like to congratulate Blake Pain on his appointment to the LGA Culture, Tourism and Sport Board. Ivan is a member of the Children and Young People Board and Leicestershire is increasingly, and rightly, represented on these national bodies and exerting influencing.