

Position Statement of Leader of Council - 18 September 2012

Mr Mayor, fellow Councillors, members of the public, officers and representatives of the media -

The agenda for the meeting tonight contains a number of major issues, which affect and reflect on the operation of this Council and which will have an impact on many parts, if not the whole, of the Borough over the next few years. These include:

- * The Final Outturn Report for 2011-12 - showing how well we managed our scarce resources in an ever more difficult period;
- * The Statement of Accounts - underpinning that performance;
- * The Annual Governance Statement - reflecting the transparency with which this Council manages its resources;
- * The use of our Reserves - even more important in the next three years. This paper arises from a thorough review, based on sound financial management in previous years, and makes recommendations to ensure effective planning for the future;
- * The Property Assets Management Plan - to ensure that we maximise the use of our physical resources for the future.

We will consider also the longstanding issue of the future of the Argents Mead site, once the Council transfers its operations to the Hinckley Hub in January 2013, to be joined there by a number of other partners later in the year, and agree changes to our Housing Revenue Account (HRA) budget, as part of our development of strategies and actions to provide and support improved social housing facilities under the new national financing regime.

Members will see also a number of Motions for debate, reflecting the many, sometimes conflicting/unclear initiatives from central government, which local authorities, especially District Councils like ours, must put into effect, with our eyes and minds fixed clearly on what makes most sense for local people.

Mr Mayor, I would now like to turn to the issue of the Barwell SUE. I make these points as a response to those who have come to the council offices tonight and who have demanded that I and the Chief Executive take time out from this meeting to address those assembled outside the offices at 7.30pm. As I take the role of Leader of this Council very seriously, rather than disrupt the meeting and/or not be present during important debates, I had offered (with the Chief Executive) to meet representatives from those protesting immediately after this meeting

That offer, along with an alternative offer to meet with representatives on 25 September, has been rejected. As a result, and not wanting to appear to have ignored the protesters gathered in the gallery or watching these proceedings on the screen downstairs, I have delayed making my usual Position Statement until the point when the protesters are in a position to hear the remarks which follow on the Sustainable Urban Extension (SUE) for Barwell.

At the outset, can I remind all those involved, residents and Members, of the main reason behind the decision to promote Barwell (and, indeed, Earl Shilton) as an SUE. It was and remains the urgent and long-standing need to secure the facilities and infrastructure which are needed and deserved. Hinckley is already on the regeneration journey and it is imperative that Barwell is not left behind. Whatever may be said to the contrary, the plain fact is that this government and its predecessor have driven and expect economic growth based on increased housing numbers. As local authorities, we have little, if any, choice in the matter. By linking housing development with the provision of infrastructure, we will be able to deliver both; one depends on the other.

Be in no doubt that the Council, as with most others across the country, does not have the resources to deliver what is needed on our own. We have relied on Developer contributions in the form of Section 106 in particular in Hinckley and this, along with Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and New Homes Bonus (for as long as that lasts) will be the case with Barwell. Without the incentive of housing, the private sector will not deliver infrastructure either.

The demand for growth based on housing has been reinforced by the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) launched earlier this year, on the back of the Conservative General Election Manifesto. Very recent announcements by the government carry the threat of further (forced) erosion of green belt and other green space; initiatives which my Administration locally will strongly oppose.

It is also worth pointing out that the developers have options on the land in Barwell. It is not and much of it never has been owned by the Council. The Planning Application is live and discussions/consultations on the SUE have been ongoing since 2006. again, contrary to the propaganda circulated around Barwell and beyond, there have been over 30 separate consultations on this development; it is **not new!**

As a 'live' and legitimate Planning Application, it must receive proper consideration, through a report by Officers to the Planning Committee, with recommendations based on evidence and evaluation. Any decision on the Application must be made solely on Planning grounds.

Can I conclude this element of my Statement by confirming that we have not moved in this direction without full consideration and thought. There is a single fundamental principle underpinning what we are doing: to secure longer term quality of life for the people of Barwell by ensuring the facilities they deserve are provided for them and their children – a long term, not a short term view!

On other matters, Mr Mayor, the 2012 Olympic and Paralympics events proved to be a huge success, both nationally and locally. There was success for Bosworth Academy (Desford), which promoted both events and has been awarded with numerous 2012 related opportunities, including:

- * working with artist Tine Bech to produce the artwork that was mass produced and displayed in the athletes' apartments at the Olympic village.
- * students performing a guard of honour welcoming athletes from the Olympic village into the Olympic stadium as part of the London 2012 opening ceremony;

- * receiving Olympic football tickets and funding to deliver Paralympic taster sessions for Hinckley and Bosworth schools.

In addition, winning schools from across the Borough have competed in sport against other winning schools from across Leicestershire and Rutland, as part of the government's School Games' initiative. After numerous Super Series events and fantastic performances at the school games' championships on 10 July, Hinckley and Bosworth were victorious at the top of the medal table, securing the overall title of 'School Games Champions'. I hope all Members will agree that this was a *tremendous* achievement in a very successful Olympic year. In total, Hinckley and Bosworth secured 23 medals from 43 different competitions - 10 gold, 7 silver and 6 bronze.

Whilst no decisions have been made as yet, I should remind Members of the significant work being undertaken in relation to the development of a single framework scheme for Council Tax Discount across the county, the implications of which will be far-reaching and which we will be asked to approve at our November meeting, as we attempt to balance a 'fair' scheme against an effective reduction in this budget of around 14%, not the 10% headlined by the government; the potential 'pooling' of Business Rates across the county, to secure a bigger collective 'pot', on which we will be asked to decide in October; early preparations for Universal Credit from later next year; and a nervousness about what the Chancellor of the Exchequer might say in his Statement on 5 December. All things to which we can 'look forward'!

Finally, Mr Mayor, can I advise Members of the following decisions made by the Executive last week:

- Support for and Council representation (Cllr Bill) the Police and Crime Panel for Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland
- The draft recommendations of the all party Community Governance Review
- The Cultural and Sport Strategy for 2012-2017; an excellent document!
- The Local and Neighbourhood Centre Review (February 2012)*
- The New Green Wedges Topic Paper*
- Temporary/experimental traffic arrangements for Regent Street in Hinckley, for which we could give only 'in principle' financial support, as the County Council is refusing to contribute what, for them, would be a relatively small amount (£50,000) to match funding from this Council and the BID.

Mr Mayor, I don't apologise for the longer than usual Statement as, with so many people present to hear my views on the Barwell SUE, it has been important to incorporate that within this Statement. I hope that the other points I have raised have been of similar interest and commend his Statement to the Council.

Cllr Stuart Bray
Leader of the Council

