

Position Statement of Leader of Council - 16 December 2014

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

As this is the last Council of the year, I wanted briefly to look back, as well as forwards. Whilst 2014 has been a difficult year for the Council, as with many others across the country, we have achieved a great deal.

Work on the Crescent development is well underway, as you have all seen in the last few weeks, and by this time next year, Sainsbury's will be trading locally (their Investment Board has confirmed) and Cineworld and other shops, cafes and restaurants will be bringing people and vibrancy to the whole town, not just that area. This will be a just reward for the faith this Administration put into Tin Hat, Sainsbury's and Cineworld. Many people, including some in this Chamber, said it wouldn't happen - it is and it will!

Work has started in earnest also on the new Leisure Centre on Argents Mead. The preparation was not without its difficulties, but again the Administration formed an excellent partnership with Places for People and Pellikaan, resulting in a design and facilities of which the Borough will be proud when the centre opens in early 2016. We were able to facilitate a time capsule being buried by pupils of Saint Mary's school last Monday to mark a milestone in the project. We will be seeing steel work erected by the end of February.

Work has also started on the new squash Club which this Council has facilitated and, by doing so, has ensured that Hinckley Squash and Rackets Club continue the very long and successful history of providing squash facilities for the people of Hinckley. Also, by our intervention, we have enabled the facilities to be enhanced to provide 4 high quality squash courts.

Mr Mayor, these flagship developments, long-awaited and involving difficult decisions, which have been taken in the long-term interests of the people who live in our Borough.

We have led also on the work on the A5. Again, this road has been a problem for a long time and the work now being undertaken will open up that significant artery for our local economy for the future. We welcome the recent announcement in the Autumn Statement over the commitment to dual the section between Dodwells Island and Longshoot This has been, and will continue to be, a major partnership with other authorities along the A5 and again we can be proud of our taking the lead in getting something done. We will continue with our efforts to secure even more investment for the extended dualing between the M69 and M42.

All this has been actioned against a background of reducing funding from central government - and the County Council - and increasing demand for our services. Despite that, we continue to maintain a balanced budget for 2015/16, a Medium Term Financial Strategy which is the envy of many of our neighbours (and beyond) and services which perform to high levels of quality and efficiency. I am sure that you will all join me in thanking our award-winning management and staff for for such a splendid achievement.

We continue to struggle in the face of a draconian planning regime, in which the views of local people seem to carry little, if any, weight and where there is an unfair bias in favour of development and land supply. I am pleased that recent judgements by the Secretary of State (unusually) have put the Council in the relatively positive position of having a supply covering 5.25 years - for now, at least! Last Friday morning Cllr Crooks and I attended the RTPI's centenary event at Loughborough University and I put these points to the local MP and Secretary of State for Education, Nicky Morgan, who promised to put these back to Eric Pickles

Last Friday also Cllr Bill and the Chief Executive attended a meeting of the Councils which are members of the Coventry/Warwickshire City Deal; Members will know that we are members of that Deal, as well as the one covering Leicester and Leicestershire. Whilst the meeting did not reach any firm conclusion, it was very constructive and considered all potential structural options to optimise our joint economic future. This included exploration of economic prosperity boards and combined authorities. All were in agreement that any decision about future arrangements will only be made once all implications and benefits to their councils, businesses and residents are fully explored and understood. It was agreed that a further meeting would be arranged early in the new year to continue these discussions.

I am pleased to announce that we have secured £694,000 of Transformation Bid funding for our ICT partnership with Oadby and Wigston Borough Council, Blaby District Council and Melton Borough Council. This funding will enable further centralisation of ICT functions here at these offices and for implementing channel shift, so that users of our services are served even more efficiently and effectively than they are at present.

I am pleased to confirm this Council's achievement in receiving yet another award. This has been for our flagship Atkins Cultural Quarter Regeneration Project for which we have been given Green World Ambassador status for securing a coveted Green Apple award at a recent House of Commons ceremony.

Finally, on a very positive note, I am sure that you will all join me in congratulating Jill Stidever from Markfield, who followed up her BBC East Midlands award for 'Get Inspired Unsung Hero' by being presented with the National award at the BBC Sports Personality of the Year Awards for 2014 on Sunday evening. Jill has spent nearly 60 years supporting people with Special Needs through swimming. This is the second time in three years a coach from this Borough has won the national award – a tremendous achievement for both of them and for their supporter, Graeme Chilvers; himself very much an 'unsung hero!'

Mr Mayor, we do have a number of items to consider and decide tonight, more than is usual for the pre-Christmas Council, but it shows the amount of work we have to undertake.

We have achieved a great deal, just in one year, let alone in those which preceded it, and this will pave the way for a brighter future for our communities. So, I can truly wish everyone a Merry Christmas, in the knowledge that, for the people of Hinckley and Bosworth, it will be a happy New Year.

Councillor Stuart Bray
Leader of the Council
16 December 2014