



Leader's Report to Council – 24th February 2016

A lot has happened since my last report to Council. The half way ceremony for the new leisure centre has taken place. Progress is good and this excellent new facility will be open in the summer. All those who have visited have been impressed by what is on offer, and I hope colleagues will take up the opportunity to attend one of the tours that are being arranged. The county council continues to make good progress with the Hoo Brook link road, which will also open later this year.

Another project that is moving forward to successful completion is the work to improve the street scene in Kidderminster Town Centre. The final phase at Exchange Street and outside the Town Hall looks impressive and I am sure colleagues are looking forward to seeing the finished product. There was full consultation in advance about the music heritage theme that has been incorporated in the street furniture and public art. People will always have subjective views about such matters but the vast majority of people I have spoken to are positive about the improvement that has been made to the Town Centre, in what is the largest capital investment for a generation.

The leaders of Worcestershire councils have confirmed their participation in the programme to accept Syrian refugees. We have agreed that the county will take about 200 refugees over the lifetime of the Parliament and up to 50 are expected to arrive in Worcestershire in 2016. Officers from the seven councils are working closely together to make the necessary arrangements. A meeting is being held with the West Midlands Regional Migration Partnership and a Home Office Minister tomorrow to discuss next steps.

The meeting about Worcestershire's devolution proposals that had been scheduled to take place with the Secretary of State in January was postponed because Greg Clark had to appear before the Communities and Local Government Select Committee. At the time of writing, the revised date has not been confirmed for a meeting with a Government Minister to discuss the proposals. I will update Council once the meeting has taken place and we have some feedback from the Government. In the meantime, the Worcestershire Leaders' Board is examining what elements of the proposals can be taken forward in any case, where they are not dependent on additional powers or funding being devolved from Government.

Colleagues who knew him will have been saddened by the sudden death of Roger Hollingworth at the end of January. He was leader of Bromsgrove District Council from 2005 to 2014 and stood down as a councillor only last year. My predecessors worked closely with him as members of the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership and in developing the range of shared services that were put in place while he was leader, including North Worcestershire Economic Development and Regeneration. Councillor John Campion represented me at the funeral last week, and the Chief Executive and Director of Economic Prosperity and Place were also in attendance.

I am pleased to report further positive progress with securing additional private sector tenants for Wyre Forest House. The Cabinet and Corporate Leadership Team move to the ground floor at the end of this week, in order to free up the executive area for premium lettings. There are already two companies that have signed “heads of terms” for offices in this area, in addition to the existing tenant Just2easy. Formal announcements will be made shortly. On Thursday, Moo & Goo (<http://mooandgoo.com/>), a consultancy and events agency for shopping centres and the retail industry, will move into the office on the 1st floor that used to be occupied by Stoke College. I would like to thank Alison Braithwaite and other staff who have secured these additional tenancies that generate thousands of pounds of extra income which ensure we are maximising the value of Wyre Forest House and protecting front line services.

Finally, on a personal note, Jennifer and I would like to thank all colleagues for their good wishes and congratulations on the arrival of Louis Daniel. I am taking a short period of paternity leave and would like to thank Councillor Ian Hardiman in particular for assuming some of my commitments during this time.

Councillor Marcus Hart
Leader of the Council