

STATEMENT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL TO FULL COUNCIL – 15th FEBRUARY 2023

Submitted by: Councillor Simon Tagg

Portfolio: All

Wards affected: All

Purpose of the Report

To provide an update to Members on the activities and decisions of Cabinet, together with the Forward Plan.

Recommendation

That the statement of the Leader of the Council be received and noted.

Reasons

To update Council Members on the activities and decisions of the Leader and Cabinet and to allow questions and comments to be made on the Statement.

1. **Cabinet Meetings**

Cabinet met on 6th December 2022, 10th January 2023 and 7th February 2023; detailed below is a selection of decisions and other actions of the Leader and Cabinet since the last Leader's Statement.

2. **Walleys Quarry Odour Issues**

The gas odour issues from Walleys Quarry remained a top priority for the Cabinet. Complaint levels for the second half of January showed an increase, although only a fraction of the complaint levels of January 2022, reflecting the substantially reduced levels of Hydrogen Sulphide exceedances being recorded at the four monitoring stations. Cold, still, weather conditions have previously been associated with problematic odours from the site and whilst January saw some increase in odours compared with historic data, suggests that there are real grounds for optimism that this problem has been reduced.

Since the settlement of the legal action with Walleys Quarry Ltd, and the Abatement Notice being in place, the operator has been in regular dialogue with Council officers regarding the management of odour issues. In January we saw this translate into the company making a proactive statement via their website, explaining an issue on site which had likely given rise to the increased odours. We have long called for the company to be more open with the community regarding issues on site, and so this practice is welcomed.

In March the five month "stand still" period required by the abatement notice comes to an end, and I have asked officers to prepare a report for the Cabinet in April detailing the current position and this will be shared with the Economic Development Scrutiny Committee. Residents can continue to access up-to-date information on Walleys Quarry via the Council's website.

3. **Newcastle-under-Lyme 850 Celebrations**

The Council and partners have launched a year-long celebration of the 850th anniversary of the Borough's first Charter of Incorporation which aims at bringing together residents, businesses, and visitors to mark this historic milestone through events, activities, and projects.

The celebration will include the recognition of community heroes through the 'Newcastle Borough Heroes' awards ceremony, planting of a Lyme Forest, a medieval re-enactment weekend, history talks and themed markets.

The 850th anniversary is supported by various organisations, including Keele University, Aspire Housing, the Community Foundation, Staffordshire Chambers of Commerce, Options Management, Betley Show, Chesterton One Stop Shop and local MP Aaron Bell.

Many events will involve community groups and school children and will hopefully leave a lasting legacy, while commemorating the past and celebrating the contributions of Borough residents past and present.

4. **Urban Tree Planting Programme**

The Council's Urban Tree Planting Strategy aims to increase tree cover in urban areas to achieve our net carbon zero goals. The latest phase is now under way which includes a Lyme Forest with 850 lime trees to tie in with the 850 celebrations, as well as additional planting in Clough Hall Park, Kennet Close, Moreton Parade, and St. Edmund's Avenue. Residents have helped shape the plans via a consultation on the Council's website.

In the past two years, 265 trees have already have been planted on eight sites as part of an ongoing effort to enhance a network of over 60 green spaces for nature recovery and carbon capture. Further environmental initiatives, with community involvement, such as wildflower meadow planting are planned for the future.

5. **Future High Street Fund update**

Cabinet received an update on proposals to regenerate the Ryecroft and York Place. Plans are progressing for a new Castle Car Park on Ryecroft which will be the first stage of the long awaited redevelopment of the site which also includes a new headquarters for Aspire Housing and homes for over-55s. A business case is also being prepared for a midrange hotel on the middle of the site along with a linear parkway linking into the town centre.

A planning application has have been submitted for a new development on York Place which will include ground-floor food and drink outlets or retail units and office units or accommodation above.

The regeneration of Ryecroft and York Place are part of the wider plan to regenerate Newcastle town centre to help strengthen its position at the heart of economic, social, and community life in the Borough.

6. **Electric Vehicle Charging Strategy**

The Council is supporting the County wide development of a future electric vehicle charging network through a strategy that aims to meet the needs of communities and businesses as electric vehicle usage grows. This involves collaboration with the County

Council, other Districts and Boroughs and the energy sector to facilitate private sector roll out of charging points, such as rapid charging hubs, public and private car parks, on-street charging, and residential properties. The Strategy supports the Council's commitment to carbon reduction and air quality improvement, and outlines steps to encourage workplace and off-street charging installations. The Council has already worked with partners to install a number of EV charging points on surface level car parks and plans for the new Castle Car Park multi story include 39 EV charging bays.

7. **Staffordshire Wide Climate Change Communication Plan**

As part of the Council's commitment to the Staffordshire Sustainability Board, it has joined other County and District authorities on a joint communication plan. This plan will help us all to share clear, consistent messages with our residents, businesses and communities about the climate change challenge and how they can make a positive impact.

A calendar of events has been created which will include climate change and sustainable messages around key National days throughout the year such as Valentine's Day, Easter, World Environment Day and Christmas. To increase public engagement there will be events in the town centre such as Carbon Bubble and Recycling Roadshows.

8. **Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner (PFCC) – Safer Streets Round**

The PFCC has secured over £140,000 from the Government's Safer Streets Fund to tackle anti-social behaviour in the Borough. The funding, part of the fourth round of safer streets, will be used for a range of initiatives including additional lighting and CCTV, environmental measures, alley gating, street pastor schemes and community awareness campaigns. This forms part of the Commissioner's preventative approach to reducing violent crime, which also focuses on tackling the root causes of crime.

The Safer Streets funding is also contributing to the Council and partners effort to tackle violence against women and girls, which includes initiatives focused on night-time safety and the establishment of a Violence Against Women and Girls Commission.

9. **Forward Plan**

The Forward Plan can be found at:-

<http://svmma/documents/1141/Printed%20plan%20Cabinet%20Firward%20Plan%20-%20Valid%20from%201%20February%20to%2030%20April%202022.pdf?T=4>

Councillor Simon Tagg
Leader of the Council