

'Take a little poison'

Leicestershire council leader Nick Rushton urges colleagues in A46 Expressway debate

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Nick Rushton says the idea is controversial but the best way to deal with huge future housing demand in Leicestershire

Councillors have been urged to 'take a little poison' and back a plan that could see nearly 40,000 new homes built along a major new road in Leicestershire.

County Council leader Nick Rushton is trying to persuade colleagues to endorse a controversial long-term strategy to find space for new housing and infrastructure over the coming decades.

The strategic growth plan (SGP) will be discussed by County Hall's cabinet on Friday as other council's across Leicestershire decide whether to sign up to the long-term vision.

The SGP is underpinned by a proposed A46 Expressway – a major road that would start at the Hobby Horse roundabout near Syston and loop round the east and south of Leicester before joining the M1 at a new junction near Whetstone.

It would then continue past Hinckley to the M69.

The new road would create a corridor along which 38,000 homes and employment sites would be built and the plan has been heavily criticised by

campaigners who do not want to see the loss of a large swathe of currently undeveloped countryside.

Coun Rushton said he was encouraged that North West Leicestershire District Council, Charnwood Borough Council and Blaby District Council had backed the plan.

He said: "I'd now like to see the others come on board especially Harborough. I know it's hard as it (the A46 Expressway and housing) will hit them the most but they need to take a little poison now, so it is not worse in the long run.

"We need to be strategic as we need to build the house in a way that gets us the infrastructure.

"They are going to get the houses anyway and if we don't build them along the road every village is going to have to take 200 – and we don't get any infrastructure.

"We have to be strategic.

"This is the only game in town."

The exact route of the A46 Expressway has not been confirmed nor has the cost though it has been estimated at at least £1 billion.

Coun Rushton said it would ease congestion on the A46 north of Leicester and the M1.

Harborough's Tory MP Neil O'Brien said: "I completely agree with Nick about the need to be strategic, but this is not the right strategy.

"The main problem is congestion on the roads into and out of Leicester and building a road around the city won't solve that.

"Building a road that nobody is asking for is not the answer."

What Harborough District Council thinks

Harborough District Council leader Coun Neil Bannister said the figures in the SGP were a 'best guesstimate'.

He said: "These numbers are indicative numbers at best and they are likely to change.

The revised strategic growth plan

"Having said that, you still need to plan for the growth we know is to come.

"The council wants some control in shaping that growth."

He said villages in Harborough had already suffered from 'bolt on' developments.