

Questions raised over 38,000 homes plan on A46 expressway, says newly elected council leader

www.leicestermercury.co.uk 15th May 2019

A change at the top could trigger a change of approach on massively controversial plan

Controversial plans to build some 38,000 homes along the route of a proposed A46 Expressway through east and south Leicestershire need to be re-visited, according to a newly elected district council leader.

Councillor Phil King, who took charge of Harborough District Council this week, says other options need to be properly looked at before settling on a plan that involves ‘carpeting over hundreds of acres of green land’.

The proposed [A46 Expressway](#) would broadly run in a loop from the Hobby Horse Roundabout near Syston before arcing round the city and joining the M1 between Junctions 20 and 21 and then continuing to the M69 at Hinckley.

No precise route has yet been disclosed but the expressway would create a corridor where some 38,000 homes could be built.

It is a key part of the Leicestershire Strategic Growth Plan (SGP) – a strategy designed to plan future population growth in the city and the county which indicates 180,000 new homes will be needed by 2051.

Harborough District Council endorsed the SGP in principle in 2017 along with the county’s six other district councils, Leicester City Council and Leicestershire County council.

However, Coun King says it is time to look again at Harborough District Council’s position after he was chosen to take over the leadership by fellow Conservative councillors.

Coun King beat former council leader Neil Bannister in a crunch leadership vote on Monday evening.

He said: “When this (the SGP) first came before us in 2017 we were told it was the only option.

“But it is controversial, and councillors and the public have said we need to look at it again.

“That’s what I want to do. I want to see if there is another option that doesn’t involve carpeting over hundreds of acres of green land.

“I have not had any alternatives put in front of me and I want to be absolutely clear that if there are other ways they must be looked at.

“Our area will be one of the most affected by this plan as it stands and I want to ask our other partners if they would also like to look again at this.

“With the general political situation in the country at the moment I don’t think people like being told there is only one option and if you don’t like it that’s tough.”

Coun King said he was sceptical about Leicester City Council’s assertion there is not enough room within its boundaries to accommodate its Government set housing growth targets.

That has meant other councils have agreed to to take portions of the city council’s housing share in their areas.

Coun King said: “The city needs do more and build housing at greater density.

“If the jobs will be in the city in the future, it makes sense to have the homes near to them, so people don’t have to travel.

“The other week it refused permission for a scheme at Lee Circle which looked very good to me and would have provided hundreds of new homes.”

The new leader will be confirmed at the district council’s annual general meeting on Monday.

He heads a 22-strong Tory group which retained control of the council in [the elections earlier this month](#).

He said: “I’m absolutely delighted that my fellow councillors have placed their faith in me to become the Leader of Harborough District Council.

“The feedback from the doorstep tells us that we face a number of new challenges in addition to the election commitments we have already made.

“Voters like how we kept Council Tax down to less than it was 10 years ago but are unsure what we do for them except empty bins and planning applications.

“They liked how we now have a local plan, and 21 neighbourhood plans but we need to do more to restore confidence and trust in communities- blighted by developers and builders.

“My focus will be on strengthening community cohesion; the social ‘glue’ that helps to bind residents together, to help communities feel they belong.

“I am honoured that my colleagues have given me this opportunity and I look forward to leading them, and the Council, forward over the next few years.”

Supporters of the SGP, including Labour Leicester mayor [Sir Peter Soulsby](#) and Tory county council leader Nick Rushton say it is the best way to try to manage future development.