



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

Nick Rushton CC, Leader of Leicestershire County Council
John Sinnott, Chief Executive of Leicester County Council
County Hall, Leicestershire Road
Glenfield, Leicester
LE3 8RA

Dear Nick and John,

15 June 2021

RE: Leicestershire County Council Decision to Reject HIF Funding for the Southern Leg of the MMDR

I write to urge Leicestershire County Council to accept the Housing Infrastructure Fund grant secured from Government in 2019 to build the southern leg of the Melton Mowbray Distributor Road as was envisioned in Melton Borough Council's Local Plan and which is vital to the delivery of Melton's Southern Sustainable Neighbourhood.

At this juncture it is worth noting the following statement by LCC, published on the Leicestershire County Council website¹, on November 1st, 2019:

The major cash injection of £14.7m - through the Housing Infrastructure Fund - has been awarded to Leicestershire County Council and paves the way for the southern section to be constructed from the A606 Burton Road to the A607 Leicester Road...The successful bid is aligned to Melton Borough Council's Local Plan, which provides for the development of nearly 4,000 new homes, including the proposed 1500-home Melton South Sustainable Neighbourhood.

I note too the words of then Councillor Byron Rhodes, Deputy Leader at the time, and a dear friend to Melton:

This is excellent news and emphasises the strong track record we have in securing funding and working with partners to make sure development is planned strategically and not in a piece-meal way. For Melton, it is particularly momentous as it enables the final piece of the relief road to be completed. The future prosperity of the town and surrounding area hinges on the distributor road and I look forward to preparation work starting on the north and eastern stretches next summer.

The ambition for Melton you expressed in November 2019 was admirable. Since my election we have engaged considerably on this issue. Your position is that LCC cannot take on the risk of the MMDR south, for which this HIF funding was secured. Instead, LCC has asked Melton Borough Council to shoulder financial risks greater than its annual budget, despite MBC being neither the transport authority nor the body that bid for HIF funding. Indeed, MBC's budget is 100 times smaller than your own. LCC has not made clear under what legal authority it can require MBC to take on risk for building the distributor road when it is LCC who is the transport authority.

Furthermore, LCC has accused MBC of failing to produce a viable masterplan for the southern leg, despite the fact that it was explicitly envisioned in the original local plan to which Leicestershire County Council agreed. Additionally, Leicestershire at that time tried to pressure Melton Borough Council to relinquish its statutory planning responsibilities, something MBC had no ability to do.

¹ <https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/news/success-in-%C2%A315m-bid-to-complete-melton-distributor-road>



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

I have had to secure the intervention of central Government and Homes England on the MMDR many times over the last 18 months, and throughout they have expressed confidence in this scheme, as has MBC. Indeed, this HIF bid was included in the December 2020 spending review, at the height of a period of significant economic difficulty as it is a priority piece of infrastructure for Leicestershire. LCC appears to be the only level of government with no confidence in this scheme, despite LCC expressing such enthusiasm when the funding was first secured.

I accept that LCC has many responsibilities and commitments across the County. I also note that in terms of funding LCC remains one of the lowest funded in the country. On this matter I have been steadfast in my work to secure an improved funding formula, and I hope to see this bear fruit in coming months. I further accept that these very real pressures, in light of the pandemic in particular, may mean LCC is wary of taking on further financial obligations. However, I do not accept that rejection of the HIF grant is the right decision for Melton or for Leicestershire.

The Leaders of all but one Leicestershire District Council have felt they had no option but to write to you twice to protest against your approach to this project and your apportioning blame to MBC. They conclude that they “stand united in saying this is unacceptable, and no way to secure the infrastructure needed. Furthermore, your approach is doing serious damage to Leicestershire’s reputation and potentially our ability to secure funding in the future.” I believe we can come back together as Local Authorities and build a better future for all of Leicestershire, and that starts with LCC accepting the HIF bid and working in true partnership with MBC.

I am committed to continuing to work with you, MBC, Homes England and central Government to ensure that Meltonians and indeed everyone in Leicestershire get the benefits from this vital piece of infrastructure. It is not too late. I urge you and your Cabinet to accept the HIF funding and deliver for the people of Melton on your promises and the needs of our communities.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alicia Kearns".

Alicia Kearns
Member of Parliament for Rutland and Melton