

News You Can Use on the Doorstep

Leader's Monthly E-Newsletter for April 2019

From the Leader of the Council

Some good news as you campaign in the sun after Easter.

May 1st is Staffordshire Day when we will celebrate and showcase all that is great about our county. Really we need more than a day but this annual event is now a feature and highlight on the Staffordshire calendar. On Wednesday, May 1, Staffordshire's industrial heritage will be celebrated with a packed programme of events, activities, special offers and competitions to mark the fourth Staffordshire Day. This year's event, coordinated by Destination Staffordshire, with the help of the County Council and other local authorities, has the theme Made in Staffordshire. In 2018, more than 60,000 people attended Staffordshire Day events, generating more than £1 Million for our economy.



Following an Ofsted inspection of our children's services we have retained our overall rating of **Good**; one of only three councils in the West Midlands to achieve this rating. This is a significant achievement given the pressures of supporting increasing numbers of children in our care. It recognizes the absolute dedication of county council staff who work with families every day, often in very challenging circumstances, to keep Staffordshire children safe and well.



Also on the education front, 94% of parents applying for a primary school place for their child were allocated their first choice and 99% were allocated one of their top three preferences.

And at the start of the month we announced that more than nine out of 10 parents had been allocated their first choice secondary school for their child. Of the almost 8,000 applications made for transfer at age 11, nearly 92% of parents were allocated their first preference, with 95% allocated one of their top three preferred schools.

We achieved this through forward thinking, early action to manage future demand for school places, despite increased pupil numbers putting pressure on admissions. In 2019/20, we plan to deliver 360 extra secondary places, by investing nearly £10 million in Staffordshire schools.

Staying with families, there was further good news when it was announced that we had successfully bid for funding to support parents whose children need additional help with their early speech and communication skills. Nearly £800,000 of special government funding will be used in Staffordshire and Stoke-On-Trent to ensure local children have the language skills needed to thrive at school. The bid will see already

successful early learning projects in the county and city extended to benefit more people.

Further good results continue to be delivered through our Community Learning offer in Staffordshire. Latest statistics (for the 2017/18 academic year) show that almost 900 courses were delivered to 4,658 learners. This really continues to be a huge success story in terms of offering learning opportunities particularly in Maths, English and IT and wider STEM subjects to targeted groups. Almost 80% said they were looking to take up further education and employment - and as well as being equipped with new skills many reported increased an increase in their self-confidence too. With the first job statistics of the financial year out today it really is great to see not only low employment in the county at 1.6%, but also more people being given an opportunity to get on to or move up the jobs ladder.

Our Highways and Transport Capital Programme for 2019/20 is separate to major investment projects such as the Stafford Western Access Route and instead looks at even more investment in tackling potholes and road maintenance, improving road safety and supporting transport schemes, such as improved access to local railway stations, with our partners. A complete list is at the end of this News You Can Use.



As I said good news you can tell the voters on the doorstep.

Philip Atkins
Leader Staffordshire County Council

Latest company moves to i54 South Staffordshire

A leading site machinery businesses is relocating its headquarters to the county council-built i54 South Staffordshire.

The site will provide manufacturing and office space for Morris Site Machinery to relocate from its current site at Four Ashes into purpose-built premises at i54. The business is renowned for its mobile lighting towers, generators, welders, pumps and pressure washers which it sells worldwide.



Trees at accident spot to be cut down

A decision was taken this week to cut down road-side trees involved in fatal accidents on the A518. Helen Fisher and local county councillor Mark Winnington made the announcement after speaking to representatives of Bradley, Derrington, Gnosall and Haughton parish councils.

The trees, near the Villa Cattery on the A518 between Stafford and Newport, have been the scene of fatal accidents, including one this year. Mark Winnington the local County Councillor said several replacement trees would be planted on parish council land in the centre of the village.



Ironman course to take in Stafford Castle

The Staffordshire Ironman run route will take in Stafford Castle, organisers have revealed.

Now in its fifth year, the event takes place on June 9th. The new run course becomes the first major alteration of the current version of the event since moving from Shugborough Estate to Stafford town centre last year. More than 2,500 athletes will take on a 1.2-mile swim at Chasewater Country Park, followed by a 56-mile bike ride and a 13.1-mile run.



Mark Winnington Cabinet Member for Economy said: “Last year proved to be a real boost for the local economy, with hundreds of families and communities coming out to support the athletes and taking advantage of what Staffordshire has to offer.”

Burton shop owner fined for fake tobacco sales

A Burton shop owner has been sentenced to 180 hours of unpaid work and ordered to pay over £1,600 in costs after trading standards officers discovered illicit and counterfeit tobacco on sale at a town centre shop last year.

Ramzi Mohammed, proprietor of Balaks Coffee Shop in Uxbridge Street, must pay £1,617.50 in costs and a victim surcharge.

Gill Heath Community Cabinet Member said: “Illicit and counterfeit tobacco can be particularly harmful to people’s health as they do not comply with safety and consumer regulations.”



Children’s services rated as ‘Good’ by Ofsted

The county council’s children’s social care services ‘Good’ Ofsted rating which, was announced last month.

Ofsted inspectors confirmed that the council had retained the rating and is one of only three in the West Midlands to achieve it.

Main findings included social care workers receiving additional funding, improved outcomes for children and reduced risks to children and families in the county.



Mark Sutton said: "It is a tremendous achievement when one considers the increasing numbers of children needing support at a time when funding from the Government simply isn't keeping pace with the cost of providing the necessary specialised services."

Details of county council building sales

Over a four year period between April 2014 and July 2018 the county council sold 87 assets, including former school buildings and land, day centres and youth centres.

Figures show that since April 2016, the council has spent almost £36m of the proceeds on financing reforms to allow it to save money – a scheme known as flexible use of capital receipts.

Alan White Deputy Leader said: “Rather than allowing buildings to stand idle or fall into disrepair, we are committed to maximising the return for taxpayers and breathing new life into sites to support health projects, housing and the local economy”



New parking restrictions come into force outside hospital

The first fines have been handed out to people parking on new no waiting restrictions on a main road outside the Royal Stoke University Hospital.

The restrictions have been introduced by the county council on both sides of the A34. It follows complaints about parked vehicles delaying ambulances trying to gain access.

Helen Fisher said the council wanted to ensure traffic could flow smoothly outside the hospital.



Burton town centre improvements to start

Burton's Station Street is set to undergo a £1million revamp thanks to a joint project by the county and borough councils.

The scheme will see the pedestrianised part of the street get a face-lift, with new paving, trees and floral areas being created to make the town centre street more modern and appealing. The work is due to begin in May.

Philip Atkins Leader of the Council said that rejuvenation of our town centres plays a vital part in the county's continued economic growth.



Work completed on £45m A50 project

Work is completed on the major multi-million highways improvement project on the A50 near Uttoxeter.

The work, which started in 2016, has seen an upgraded junction with the A522, a new bridge installed, the old one demolished and the building of three new roundabouts and slip roads.

Mark Winnington said "This major piece of engineering is a huge success story and would deliver many economic benefits, while also improving road safety."



Up to 145 jobs could go at Wedgwood

News that Barlaston-based manufacture Wedgwood could lose up to a third of its workforce was widely reported.

The company explained that the proposals were necessary for the long-term health of the business and would see a reduction in UK manufacturing and the transfer of some production to Wedgwood's other sites in Indonesia. A review of some of its current product lines would also be carried out.

Philip Atkins tsaid "This is a huge blow to local families and workers and the county council would do all it could to support people affected by the proposals."

Other ceramic firms are looking for skilled workers.



Staffordshire traders demonstrate responsible knife sales

Nearly all shops visited as part of a trading standards knife sales test purchase operation refused to sell to underage volunteers.

It was revealed that only one out of twenty-four shops in Tamworth failed the mystery shopper exercise.

Gill Heath explained that the team were very pleased with the high levels of compliance.



Plans to charge schools each time they expel a pupil dropped

The county council is dropping controversial plans to charge schools up to £15,000 when they expel a student. The proposals were being consulted on when the decision was taken to drop the plans.

A report drawn up for the county's schools' forum confirmed that there was a minority of education providers who continue to permanently exclude without any graduated response to challenging behaviours or by following 'zero-tolerance' approaches to one-off incidents.



Staffordshire celebrates English Tourism Week

Tourists were reminded to think of Staffordshire as a top destination during English Tourism Week. It's good news that Staffordshire's booming tourism industry is worth £1.8 billion per year, and is responsible for around 32,000 jobs.

The county is home to two of the UK's leading theme parks; Drayton Manor Park in Tamworth and the Alton Towers Resort, which opens its brand-new Dungeon attraction this year which takes guests on a hilariously hideous journey through Staffordshire's darkest history.



The county is also home to majestic countryside including the Peak District National Park, the National Forest and Cannock Chase – a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, while Staffordshire's extensive canal network is amongst the largest in the country.

Philip Atkins said: "Staffordshire truly is a wonderful county to visit with amazing attractions and locations. Whether it's world-class theme parks, historic buildings and gardens or acres of magnificent countryside we have something for everyone. "Tourism is really booming here in the county but for many people we are still a relatively hidden treasure. Our tourism businesses continue to do us proud and a great job, providing a high-quality offer and always innovating. We'll continue to work closely with our tourism partners, business community and our own teams like highways and countryside team to make sure we make the county as attractive to visitors as possible."

Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards

News that the county council has been reprimanded by the Ombudsman regarding the approach to deprivation of liberty safeguards (DoLS) hit national headlines this month. The story, in which the county council was criticised for the method of prioritising assessments, was widely reported.

Alan White Deputy Leader said: "No-one has complained about the policy of prioritisation since its introduction, no individual has suffered injustice and no-one's life or health has been put risk."



Business park welcomes top manufacturer

News recently was announced that the Meaford Business Park would be welcoming its first tenant.

Car part manufacturer Arctrend has agreed a 10-year lease to take 36,000 sq ft of industrial and logistics space.

Mark Winnington said: "Meaford Business Park is one of the county's flagship investment sites and so to see the first company locating there is a significant milestone.



"It has been built on what was one of Staffordshire's largest undeveloped brownfield sites and is another example of how councils, the LEP and developers work effectively together to bring more jobs and growth to Staffordshire."

Extra £5m for potholes

News that the county council would be investing an extra £5m to tackle potholes for the third year running, was welcomed by many residents.

The extra cash, along with an additional £20,000 allocated to each county councillor, will help the authority deal with more localised issues such as hotspot repairs, footway improvements or unblocking drains.



Helen Fisher Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport explained that maintaining such a huge road network was always going to be a challenge and where possible the council would focus on schemes which deliver the best value and longer-term benefits.

Fostering and adoption in the news

The launch of a new short film to help recruit more foster carers made it onto BBC Midlands Today breakfast news. Mark Sutton explained that the county council had an urgent need to find a further 60 foster families this year.

In a similar story, a new partnership between neighbouring Children's Services would help offer greater flexibility in placing children in happy homes via adoption, fostering or special guardianship.



Thousands sign petition against Cannock Chase fence off plans

Thousands of protesters have signed separate petitions against plans to fence off part of Cannock Chase - with more than 2,000 signatures reached in just a few days.

However the pilot scheme follows extensive consultation and would see up to six cattle grazed on 15 hectares, just 1% of the Chase in the Moors Gorse area.

Philip Atkins Leader of the Council defended the move and explained that the county council was obliged by law to preserve Cannock Chase's natural habitats and prevent it becoming overgrown. This is a natural way of achieving just that.



Protecting children's rights in the workplace

As part of Child Employment Awareness Month, local businesses who employ children between the ages of 13 and 16 have been reminded that they need permits to comply with employment laws.

This is about ensuring the welfare of children is protected and that their needs are being met by employers.

Mark Sutton said: "We understand that some young people will want to start part-time work as early as they can, but it is important that their rights are protected."



Nearly all primary parents get one of top three choices of school

Various local media reported that 99 per cent of parents whose children will be starting primary school in September got one of their top three choices.

Figures revealed this week showed that out of a total 8,883 places allocated, 8,393 received their first-choice primary school.

Over the past five years the county council has added nearly 8,000 primary and secondary school places at a cost of £61 million.

Philip White said through forward planning and investment in the provision of more school places over the past five years, the county council had consistently enabled 90 per cent of parents to get their first choice of primary and secondary schools.



Wild boars spotted in Burntwood

Wild boars have been spotted by a local resident in Chase Terrace this week. Graham Roe was out walking when he spotted a sow and piglets through the trees.

Gill Heath said the county council had been made aware of the sightings and that people should be cautious if they see the animals.



Stay safe and avoid counterfeits this bank holiday

Advice has been issued to people attending bank holiday markets and car boot sales at the weekend so they can avoid counterfeit goods.

Several market organisers have signed up to the Real Deal campaign – a county council-coordinated scheme which aims to prevent counterfeit goods sales.

Goods ranging from electrical items to cosmetics can be dangerous, shoddy imitations which can harm consumers and legitimate businesses.

Gill Heath said while counterfeit goods can be hard to detect, a knock-down price is usually a good indicator.



Libraries Gear Up for Staffordshire Day

With just a few days to go until Staffordshire Day on 1 May, people are being reminded to drop into their local library for this year's celebrations.

Author visits, quiz nights, local heroes competition, guided tours and arts and crafts activities are amongst the events already lined up for this year's celebrations.

Philip Atkins, Leader at Staffordshire County Council said: "Staffordshire Day is 1 May, and it's the day we celebrate all that's great about our county.



"Our last three Staffordshire Days were a huge success and I'm delighted that once again libraries will be joining in the fun with a whole range of exciting activities. From quizzes, history talks and walks, and local author visits, there will be something for everyone. Make sure the date is in your diary and try to visit your local library or take part in some of the many events running over the week."

- Lichfield Library are inviting people to their Authors Coffee Morning on May 1, where visitors can enjoy a chat and a cup of coffee with some local authors, including Mike Wetson, Barbara Herszenhorn, Lorraine Hellier, Kim Nash and Janet Lee. Find out what inspired them and buy copies of their books.

- Tamworth Library will be testing people's local knowledge in The Great Big Staffordshire Quiz on 30 April. £6 per team, max 6 members. Bring your own nibbles, tea and coffee will be provided.

- At Stafford Library, people are invited to Staffordshire Serial Thrillers – in conversation with a panel of Staffordshire crime writers on May 1.

- Burntwood Library are celebrating the 10 year anniversary of the discovery of the

Staffordshire Hoard for Staffordshire Day. On May 1, join in the Goldwork Embroidery Workshop, a fun adult craft session. Try your hand at gold work, an embroidery technique used on vestments and Saxon clothing, using silk thread, beads and wire. Booking required.

- Codsall Library are hosting a healthy 10 mile walk from the library through the countryside, as part of their Staffordshire Day celebrations. Departure is at 10am on May 2, with prices at £2 per person. Walkers should also bring a packed lunch and wear sensible footwear and clothing for the weather conditions. Booking essential.

- Newcastle Library are hosting a Literary Day on May 4, to coincide with this years' Staffordshire Day theme 'Made in Staffordshire.' This is an opportunity for local authors to promote their books. Kicking off at 10am with published author Mary Torjussen, followed by the 'Made in Staffordshire' local authors each reading 10 minutes from one of their books. There will also be a roving poet offering Poetry on Demand throughout the morning.

For further details on Staffordshire Day events, including activities in libraries visit: <https://www.enjoystaffordshire.com/whats-on/staffordshire-day>

Details of all 2019/20 Targeted Local Safety Schemes can be found at this link:

<http://moderngov.staffordshire.gov.uk/documents/s120603/Appendix%20B%20-%20Proposed%20Integrated%20Transport%20Improvements%201920.pdf>

Details of the overall investment of £29,776,000 at this link:

<http://moderngov.staffordshire.gov.uk/documents/s120602/Appendix%20A%20-%20Proposed%20Maintenance%20Investment%20Strategy%201920.pdf>

