

2020 has been a truly historic year. It's been a year of sadness for sure, but it's also been a year where our sense of community has been reinforced, a year where everyday parts of life (like shopping and going to work) have changed forever, and a year local democracy has been catapulted into the 21st century with the introduction of online meetings! From a personal point of view, it's a year which will be remembered in my house as we welcomed our second child just a few weeks ago. Still, what I now lack in sleep I make up for in hope that next year will be better than this one has been, that what's good about 2020 remains long after a vaccine helps end the devastating effects of coronavirus. There is real reason for optimism as we toast in the New Year.

County Council ready for winter weather

Leicestershire County Council's gritter teams are ready this winter, with their gritters going out for the first time in November. The authority has received more than 18,000 tonnes in preparation for the cold snap.

The team provided an excellent service last winter and were called out 66 times - spreading more than 8,000 tonnes of salt – and are keen to minimise any potential disruption. They will monitor the weather constantly and if freezing temperatures are forecast, our fleet of gritters will be ready to treat major roads and key routes, which equate to more than half of the county's road network.

In addition to the gritters, there are also a number of snow wardens based in communities across the county who grit paths, as well as farmers who during deep snow, fit ploughs to their tractors and assist the council in clearing roads. The authority is working with parish and town councils to encourage more people to sign-up to its Snow Warden Scheme and help keep the county moving during the winter. If you are interested in becoming a volunteer Snow Warden please get in contact with me and I will get more details to you (contact details below). Residents are also being encouraged to prepare themselves for the cold season by following a few simple steps:

- Familiarise yourself with the gritting routes and keep up to date with local weather using the local radio or following the council on Twitter;
- Make sure you have your seasonal flu vaccination. Washing your hands will help avoid transmitting coronavirus, cold and flu viruses. Free flu vaccines are offered to people considered to be at risk, more information can be found by visiting www.nhs.uk/staywell
- Keep your home warm. Set the timer on your heating to come on before you get up and switch off when you go to bed. The county council's Warm Homes service helps vulnerable people to save hundreds of pounds on their fuel bills, for advice visit www.firstcontactplus.org.uk or call 0116 305 4286.

Age UK launching Last Orders Project

Age UK are tackling the long-term implications of lockdown and how it has increased the levels of alcohol consumption with a campaign in called Last Orders.

Sales of alcohol from local stores and supermarkets have jumped in 2020 with more people than ever choosing to drink at home.

Age UK Leicestershire & Rutland's Last Orders Project is working alongside Turning Point to provide free support for anyone over the age of 50 in relation to alcohol or substance misuse. If you would like a confidential chat with the team about yourself or a loved one, please contact Jackie on 07734960241 or email hollie.hughes@ageukleics.org.uk.

As this is the my last article of the year I would like to take this opportunity to wish you and your families a very merry Christmas and a happy and peaceful New Year.

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