

Rushcliffe Borough Council Labour Group

Making local democracy more open, transparent and democratic.

I can hardly believe that it's been 12 months since the seven members of the Rushcliffe Labour Group were elected to the borough council. In some ways it's been a lifetime, in others the blink of an eye.



It was a huge honour to be elected first by the party members, then by the public, and then by the group as it's leader for the first year. To say the learning curve as a councillor and leader has been steep would be an understatement. As seven councillors we work well together, have a common purpose, but we are all individuals with strong and sometimes differing opinions on how to do things.

We've managed well in this first year and have pulled closer together as a group. We've achieved a great deal by tempering each other's instincts and helped each other with our different skill sets. We are learning together and finding out what it's like to operate as an effective team.

As a ward councillor it became very real, very early on, when a resident knocked on my door in tears as their son had been attacked by a gang of other children. Immediately I had moved from being a neighbour to a councillor, who needed to help them. Working with experienced local councillors we were able to bring together residents and local police to focus on the problem of gangs in the area.

Since then I've visited residents to help them work with their housing providers to improve their living conditions, and worked with local schools to improve the learning environment for pupils. One of my goals as a councillor is to help foster a sense of belonging and community in Lutterell Ward. The local response to the COVID-19 crisis has shown that we are a caring and compassionate community.

Juggling work, family, and council life is one of the biggest challenges as a councillor. Being organised and leading from the front in terms of work life balance and conduct isn't always easy. Remembering that we are first family members, parents, spouses, and friends is key to keeping going as a councillor. Treating everyone, no matter what the circumstances, with respect and courtesy is key to your own self respect and well being.

As an individual and as part of the group it's been a great experience to be a borough councillor and I'm looking forward to (at least) another three years.



Cllr. Naz Begum



Cllr. Ben Gray –
Leader, RBC Lab

The elation, and shock, of becoming elected officials for Ruddington subsided around month two. We had campaigned hard and felt the weight of responsibility that had been entrusted to us – the first two Labour councillors to have been elected in Ruddington's history.

It is no exaggeration to say that we have loved our first year and have thrown ourselves into it with all our heart and soul. Our mantra has been to increase democracy and we feel if we keep that at the centre of all we do then we won't go too far wrong.

We have joined forces with many people in our village this past year. We spend evenings speaking to the experts in our community about the proposed housing developments to ensure that they are done in the open and with full transparency so that we can find ways that makes it acceptable for both present and future residents.

We are part of volunteer groups supporting our High Street businesses. We have supported First Ruddington Scouts, Ruddington Bowls, the Parish Council's events team, Ruddington Mum's Community Christmas Party, Mustard Seed Fashion show, the Ear foundation and Rushcliffe students through the borough's Community Grant Scheme.



One of our most uplifting community efforts this past year has been to be founding members of the Ruddington COVID-19 Mutual Aid Group set up weeks before any government aid had been available. A grassroots, community-led organisation set up to reach out to those in need during this global pandemic. Reminding us of the importance of thinking small in a global world.

There have also been less pleasant, eye-opening, times. Being in opposition, especially by such a large majority, makes our ideas, suggestions and arguments difficult to be heard. We have had to learn the ways of the council chamber, which has been quite aggressive at times. The rules of common courtesy often do not seem to apply in the chamber, but then seem to immediately apply again as soon as you step outside. Well-established political attitudes of 'them and us' also make working relationships harder to form and makes trust between councillors tricky.

There is still much to learn and to understand about the workings of local government and how we as new opposition councillors can find the best way to represent and encourage our residents to become active citizens in their local democracy.



Cllr. Jen Walker



Cllr. Mike Gaunt
Chair, RBC Labour

What a year it has been. I had stood in a fairly unwinnable seat, but as I started campaigning I realised how much I enjoyed being a candidate and would probably enjoy being a councillor. Nonetheless being elected was a bit of a shock and I was worried how I would fit it around my job (scientist /higher ed teacher). I needn't have worried: it has been a great, if eventful year. As I understand it there are three parts to this role. First advocating for residents with the council and other public and non public bodies. Second scrutinizing the council. Third representing the Labour Party in the community.



 [Abbey Park Local](#) started this petition to Rushcliffe Borough Council

The Victorian Abbey Road Pumping Station is part of the old Abbey Road Depot site. The site has been sold for redevelopment and planning permission has been given for the demolition of this historic local landmark.

I love the working with residents: it is very different to my day job and it makes me wonder if I have been in the right career. I was very lucky that early on that a fantastic community gardener reached out to me and we have empowered each other to do a lot of work in the community. We worked with a resident to set up a community Facebook page and then with the help of a Labour Party Community Organizer, I called a community meeting in September which led to the establishment of a local community group. I am delighted to say that within weeks this group is up and running totally independently and sustainably. That group and others worked very hard to try to save the Abbey Depot Pumping Station – learning a lot of local history in the process- but unfortunately that was one battle we lost. We have also run a pothole reporting campaign- it had some success but there is always more to do when it comes to potholes!

I hoped to work with others to arrange some community events this summer but a one positive result of the catastrophe of COVID19 is the way that the community has grown together anyway. I have overseen the groups in Abbey that are supporting the residents with shopping and phone calls, sending letters to care home residents and gifts to the staff working in those homes, and supporting food banks and homeless charities.. In parallel with this there have been quite a few requests for help with individual matters including planning. Sadly I feel that often all I can do is be a listening ear in these cases but I can help people negotiate the system too.

The second part of the role- holding the council to account- is more tricky. We were given a lot of training on this at the end of the election but I am not sure I still fully understand this task, particularly being a small opposition group (ie there is large Conservative majority on the council). Politics shapes every aspect of our lives, but nonetheless some decisions are more logical than ideological- particularly many of those in which local councils are involved. We are in opposition, and clearly it is the right of the majority party to lead the council, but within reason I would have thought it would be sensible to welcome contributions, particularly since councillors represent such a highly talented community as Rushcliffe.



Cllr. Penny Gowland

I have been troubled by political point scoring that distracts from positive work on the council. More specifically I am on Planning Committee. There are a lot of problems with the planning system, including environmental sustainability, due to national legislation rather than council policies. This the existence of parish councils and local plans related to the rural part of the borough mean that inevitably planning applications are dealt with different for those areas to West Bridgford. We need to address this.

A year already – it's gone so quick, yet we've been able to connect and collaborate with our local community so much in these past 12 months. From Saving Lutterell Hall to talking with our local Police force and ensuring we're discussing the matters that are important to our residents.



It was great to win 12 months ago – the support has been phenomenal from everyone. And we're repaying that back to ensure we listen to resident, we act and we deliver. There's been all sorts of conversations with our residents, for example parking was a major issue for a resident on Park Avenue – and being in close contact with Cllr. Liz Plant from the Nottinghamshire County Council – we could ensure we had the right people looking at it.

There's been numerous planning applications in which we've taken a vested interest in – not only the Nottingham Forest Stadium, which Bal went along to, to understand more, ask questions (that residents had asked) but look at the plans in detail, to local planning issues and supporting residents where required - one being when a local resident reached out to Bal to ask for his support as the neighbour had submitted an application and she was concerned about the building.

We continued to hold our Councillor Surgeries – the last Saturday of every month at the West Bridgford library where it's great to interact with so many people. Unfortunately we've had to stop these for the moment due to Coronavirus but we're always available via phone or email.

We will continue to build on our success – such as supporting the group, which was set up to Save Lutterell (we continue to attend and participate at their meetings)... whilst we have somewhat saved Lutterell Hall, there's still a lot of work to be done.

It's great to see the local community come together and lead local support groups for families and those who need it the most. The local West Bridgford Community Group was set up by a local resident and Bal has been actively supporting the group, both online and in person where possible.

It's this great community spirit that shows what we are capable of when we come together and support each other.... Even if it is to ensure that Mrs Winston who lives four doors down has her supply of chocolate digestives!

There's a lot Bal shares on Social Media – both on Facebook and Twitter, there's also a YouTube Channel, where we promised to share a lot more! There's a few videos on there already, so feel free to click, like and share!



Cllr. Bal Bansal



Cllr. Jenny Murray