

South Kesteven has some of the most beautiful villages in the country and it is a privilege for me to not only represent the area, both as your ward member and as Council Leader, but also to live in the heart of the district.

Although we can boast four market towns ours is a primarily rural area and the smaller parishes and their communities very much reflect that.

At SKDC we are very conscious of this strong rural heritage and we are keen to give all villages a chance to shine and showcase all they have to offer, and to help make this possible we are once again running our popular Best Kept Village competition.

Summer judging

There are two categories – villages with populations between 100 and 500; and those with populations between 500 and 5,000. There are prizes of £400, £300 and £200 for the top three in each category, along with commemorative certificates and even a gold litter bin for the top award winners.

All villages will be automatically assessed throughout July, with help from the Lincolnshire Gardens Trust, looking at village facilities, grounds maintenance and street scene, front gardens and evidence of community pride.

This competition sees communities working together with a common goal and I would urge you to help spread the word among your residents and encourage them to play their part.

Community stars

On a similar theme we are also looking to celebrate those individuals, groups and organisations who really go above and beyond to help others, with the launch of the SK Community Awards.

This is a terrific opportunity to ensure those selfless people – and every community has them - are given the recognition they deserve.

Nominations can be made right up until July 18 and the winners will be announced in September. All those nominated will receive a certificate marking their efforts, and the winners will also receive commemorative plaques.

We want to celebrate the wonderful work of our community champions and, again I would urge you to nominate those who give up so much of their own time to help others and who make a real difference in your community.

There are several award categories and all the details are available online at www.southkesteven.gov.uk/SKcommunityawards

Visitor attractions

Over the Bank Holiday weekend I was lucky enough to visit one of the jewels in our district's tourism crown as Grimsthorpe Castle's 2021 opening coincided with English Tourism Week. What was a thoroughly enjoyable day out served as a reminder, if one was needed, that South Kesteven's visitor

economy has so much to offer and that these attractions are right on our doorstep. None of us should ever be stuck for ideas for a great day out.

Looking forward

At SKDC we introduced our Corporate Plan last October which set out our vision and priorities for the next few years.

Despite these uncertain times, when everything around us is constantly changing and evolving, our Corporate Plan provides the cornerstone of our promise to those we serve, and clarity for those we work with and those who work for us.

It is also a route to delivery based on five key priorities, each supported by an action plan to link vision with individual performance and key deliverables. Our priorities are:

- Growth and Our Economy
- Housing that Meets the Needs of All Residents
- Healthy and Strong Communities
- Clean and Sustainable Environment
- A High Performing Council

The Corporate Plan has ensured the council has a focus on delivery for our residents on the things that matter the most so that we truly do become the best district in which to live, to work, and to visit. We are determined, despite all the additional challenges presented by the pandemic, to stick to the plan and see South Kesteven recover stronger than ever before.

On to a winner

Our fundraising initiative for community groups, LotterySK, is celebrating another win after a lucky player pocketed £250 in the latest prize draw.

Players nominate their favourite charity, and each chosen cause receives 50% of the £1 ticket with an additional 10% going to further support the local community. Since launching in 2018 almost £180,000 has been raised for good causes – and the £25,000 jackpot has been won twice!

There are over 100 registered causes to choose from to help with a ticket purchase, so it's a great opportunity to buy a 'chance to win' and support the local community by playing.

Regular income is vital for charities and organisations. LotterySK has proved to be a lifeline for good causes as Coronavirus disrupted many other fundraising opportunities.

Go to www.lotterysk.co.uk for more information and to find advice for groups wanting help on how to encourage ticket sales.

Vaccination success

In what is a key achievement, the Local Vaccination Centre at the Meres Leisure Centre, Grantham, recently gave its 100,000th vaccination. It came just five months after the Meres LVC opened and only eight weeks since it celebrated reaching 50,000 vaccinations.

The vaccination roll-out has without doubt, been a huge success but the risk from Covid variants is very real and shows we are still not out of the woods.

We must continue to take responsibility for our own actions and exercise a degree of caution in what we do if further easing of lockdown restrictions are to be introduced from June 21st. I'm sure none of us want to jeopardise the next step on the road back to normality.