

## Leicester Builds Back Better Stories – Episode 006

**Rob Watson** [00:00:01] You're listening to Leicester Builds Back Better Stories, conversations about how communities across Leicester are planning for change following the pandemic. Over six programmes we'll hear from people at the forefront of civic society in Leicester. And we'll find out how they are planning to do things differently in response to Leicester's extended lockdown. For further information about each of the topics covered in the programmes, and extended versions of the conversations, go to the Leicester Stories website: <https://leicesterstories.uk>.

**Rob Watson** [00:00:37] The Corona Virus lockdown has got many people who volunteer and work for community and civic society groups thinking about what it means to build back better in Leicester. What are the challenges of the future that we must anticipate, and how can we support a new generation of community leaders with fresh and innovative ideas, to engage with everyone as we try to learn and improve? I'm Rob Watson, and over the summer I've been spending time chatting with people who work for charities and civic society organisations in Leicester, about what they think Building Back Better means, not just as a slogan, but in practise. What do we need to start planning for, so we're ready for the next set of challenges? Over six programmes we've been hearing from people across Leicester who've been telling us what they think about the city and in what way they think life in Leicester can be improved. In this final episode, we'll hear from Sarah De'ath, who's a computing sciences lecturer. We'll hear from Recce Stafferton, who's the editor of The Leicester Citizen, and from Rukhsana Hussain, who's a community campaigner. To start things off, Ryan Clayton, Leicester Stories community reporter, has been out asking people what they think of Leicester and what makes Leicester feel like home.

**Ryan Clayton** [00:01:55] And we're going around asking people about the Build Back Better slogan. Have you heard it before?

**Voice** [00:02:00] No.

**Ryan Clayton** [00:02:01] Any idea what it might mean if you saw it on, like, Twitter or social media?

**Voice** [00:02:04] Build Back Better? I think it probably would be something about after the Covid-19. It would be something about building back the society, and building back the things in a more efficient way and a better way. I read somewhere, probably, it's just, just out of my mind, that some people are talking about research. So probably that could be something else.

**Ryan Clayton** [00:02:26] Is there anything about Leicester or the country in general that you'd like to see built back better?

**Voice** [00:02:32] Well, I think, you know, Leicester is a very unique city. Very diverse. And we have been in a lockdown from last eighteen months or something. So out of all of the cities in the country, Leicester needs to be built back better more than anyone else. I think, I think to bring back the communities, they are... I moved to Leicester last year, I was, before I was living in Derby and before I was living in Southampton. And I felt like Leicester needs to bring back the communities. We have to build bridges amongst different communities. It's a diverse city, which is a unique point, which is a good thing. But at the same time, it needs to be organised in a way that different festivals, different communities, can be part of this decision-making process of the city as well.

**Ryan Clayton** [00:03:25] Yeah, I'm just with Leicester Stories, and I'm walking around asking people about Leicester. Just wondering how you felt about the city.

**Voice** [00:03:32] It's alright, it's not the greatest.

**Ryan Clayton** [00:03:36] Is there a is there anything about it that makes it feel unique, as opposed to other cities in the country, do you think?

**Voice** [00:03:42] Not really, no. I think we could develop a lot more, especially around the cities, and around areas of the cities as well, especially for younger children, get them off the streets.

**Ryan Clayton** [00:03:52] Yeah. Is there anything, you know, anywhere you can go, anything you can do, that gives you a sense of belonging in the city?

**Voice** [00:03:59] There's quite a few things. I quite enjoyed. The tree, Tree Top House Adventure Golf. It's just around the corner there.

**Ryan Clayton** [00:04:10] What about improvements? Is there anything you'd like to see changed different? Maybe make you feel more like you belong, give you more things to do, more things to see?

**Voice** [00:04:17] As I say, it is mostly anything for the younger generation. You've got no parks really that are within a walking distance to say, like, the city and stuff like that. There's no where they can go to get them off the streets, to stop any of the vandalism and everything that goes on around the city, so.

**Ryan Clayton** [00:04:34] We're walking around Leicester today asking people about the slogan Build Back Better. Have you ever heard that before?

**Voice** [00:04:39] Err, no.

**Ryan Clayton** [00:04:41] If you saw it on Twitter or Facebook, what do you think it might mean?

**Voice** [00:04:45] Probably for something after Covid, like money back or something.

**Ryan Clayton** [00:04:47] Yeah.

**Voice** [00:04:49] I think yes, something like post-Covid, trying to build society back better.

**Voice** [00:04:55] I don't think... I mean, there's a lot of hate towards the passport thing. The vaccine passports. because not everyone will want to get them, I guess. but it's personal choice. So I think that's kind of, yeah. I'm not really bothered by it. So, yeah,

**Ryan Clayton** [00:05:11] Yeah, I probably could disagree with that. I think, obviously, the country's been divided quite a bit in certain areas to do with Covid, and it's obviously a lot better if we come together, like we saw with the Euros. Everyone, just like, supported the common cause. I think if we can bring that into politics, it would do a lot of good.

**Ryan Clayton** [00:05:28] So you want to see a bit more community spirit?

**Voice** [00:05:29] Yeah, I'd say so. I mean, yeah, that's quite a lot to ask for though.

**Voice** [00:05:34] It's all just angry white people, really. Rich, white men in politics, to be fair, so.

**Ryan Clayton** [00:05:38] Yeah, well I can't find the lie there. there.

**Voice** [00:05:39] So, yeah.

**Ryan Clayton** [00:05:47] I don't suppose you've got a moment to answer some questions? We're just walking around asking people about Leicester. Are you From Leicester?

**Voice** [00:05:52] Yeah, yeah.

**Ryan Clayton** [00:05:53] I was wondering how he felt about the city?

**Voice** [00:05:55] It's alright. You feel good.

**Ryan Clayton** [00:05:57] Yeah. Is there anything about the city that makes it feel unique and stand out to you?

**Voice** [00:06:02] No. It's like a normal city?

**Ryan Clayton** [00:06:03] Yeah.

**Ryan Clayton** [00:06:04] What about, like, is there anywhere you can go, anything that you can do, that makes it feel like home to you? Like make you feel like you belong to any communities or?

**Voice** [00:06:13] No idea.

**Ryan Clayton** [00:06:14] No. What about improvements. Anything that you'd like to see improved at all?

**Voice** [00:06:18] No, it's alright like this, you know.

**Ryan Clayton** [00:06:21] Yeah. You just want to see things get back to normal?

**Voice** [00:06:23] Yeah.

**Speaker 5** [00:06:24] I mean, yeah, like in, in the day, to be honest, I come from a really populated city. So for me it's a bit empty sometimes. And when the students are not here, it becomes even more dull. Well, yeah, I think, I've been here for three years, and I think the city centre is like the best part. And the more you go away, it just loses... Because I am an architecture student and I've written a few essays on it as well, and it doesn't have a character. Like it's not known for anything. Like recently they discovered the King Richard III, his corpse, and that's the new identity we have now. But before that it's just... The textile industries don't exist anymore. And there's the issue of dark factories, which also cause the Covid in Leicester, and made it a red zone. And we I mean, I like it, but I'm moving in a month, yeah. So, yeah, I think it's a good experience for students. Living here, I wouldn't live here. For students I think it's a great place.

**Sara De'Ath** [00:07:36] Hi, I'm Sarah. So, I'm a lecturer, and I teach digital forensics, and I've got a background in I.T. and media technology. Basically looking at things that have improved since the pandemic hit, and the things that are still not working, and obviously working in a way to actually make things better for everybody, because there's lots of good things that I found, having taught through the entire pandemic online with my students. Which is interesting, shall I say. Basically there are things from that, that we pushed forward in higher education, and, and basically, there's things that we've left behind because we couldn't do them. Such as the big lecture. We've now moved things like that online, so it's more available for everyone all the time. They don't have to worry that they've missed their 10am lecture. In that instance, we can then do some more learning ourselves as lecturers and staff, and adapt the curriculum so more people are able to access it in a way that suits them more. So that's, that's what I've been basically working on now for the last few years, and will be working on more over the coming years as well.

**Sara De'Ath** [00:08:55] More community. I know that sounds like a bit of an easy way-out answer, but basically, yeah, more... Between those of us that are maybe are at university, and more of the local communities, there's, there's a little bit.... Well there's still a lot of divide there. I want to see that more, us more integrated with each other, and helping each other out and, you know, learning from each other in, however a way that may be. So basically engaging with our communities and helping them... If they need some skills that we can offer them, and work with them to develop those skills. And that would be something that I'd

be... I really want to see happen. And so, basically, be more friends with each other rather than having this divide there, and finding out how we can help them in the way that suits them, rather than let's push this out to these people, when actually that's not what they want at all.

**Sara De'Ath** [00:09:45] So from my point of view, I can see that there is a big IT based gap. I also help out with Scouts in Leicestershire, and I've also helped out in other areas as well. And basically sometimes those groups, as much as we'd like to move Scouting online, like we have done for the past year, in theory. Some of the actual participants don't have access to computers. And it's, that's a thing we see around the immediate Leicester area. But obviously in certain areas it's more affluent and maybe they do have computers. But a lot of the students, even that go to schools in a city centre, even that, may be, the sort of generic white standard families. They don't have access to computers either. So it's not just a one area, one minority. It's just a localised thing that I've seen across Leicester. So if it's IT skills, from that point of view, then I can help out because I've taught IT for a fair number of years. I'm still doing IT things now. If it's other things, then obviously we need to work out what those other things are, and then work out how we can help, help those people that want to learn those things, learn those things. To help them move forward in a job. Maybe they've lost a job because of the pandemic. That's obviously a common thing. But yeah, if we can help out like that, then that would be my ideal.

**Sara De'Ath** [00:11:00] Probably a combination of those things. Definitely, obviously, we need somewhere to do it, but then there are places, like, there must be empty spaces in the universities or the schools, and other campuses. And so it's finding a space and then working with what you've got. So if you have access to, in that space to IT, then obviously you don't need to fund any of it, but obviously other people to help. If it was just me on my own, then that would be a bit tricky. But obviously I'd need to probably teach other people some things if they're not coming in from a teaching background. They obviously may struggle at first. They may be all right, because obviously you can get natural teachers that just haven't done it as a career. So it depends on a lot of factors, really. And yeah, but it would be depending on the circumstances, and what access to facilities there where, and the available as well.

**Sara De'Ath** [00:11:47] But obviously because it involved, it could potentially involve younger people in the community, and obviously we've seen over the past year that the government are not really excited about paying for students, like children students, to have food in the holidays. So even things like that would, obviously, help and make it maybe even more, allow us to have a family affair. Where you don't just have to do it if you're the adult, or the children. You can do it as a family, maybe activities. So access for facilities to maybe have food, or, I don't know, counselling-type activities. I don't know, really off the top of my head. But just the government to have a bit more thought about the young people in our communities, and the fact that loads of us now are struggling with even providing basics during the down times of the year. If they are not at work, they're not getting food. If they're not at school, they're not getting food. Just that sort of thing. If they can help with that, because obviously no one wants to learn, or no one can easily learn on an empty stomach.

**Reece Stafferton** [00:12:47] Well my name is Reece Stafferton, and I'm a freelance journalist. I've been living in Leicester for five years, and I've recently launched a newsletter called Leicester Citizen. Which is a news content provider for the people of Leicester and Leicestershire. We've worked closely with organisations like the Bureau Local to investigate local issues, as well as providing news reporting. It's the reason why many independent publications get started. News media locally is often advertiser funded; it's got vested corporate interests. Whereas I wanted to create a platform where people are very much at the heart of the reporting. I have about a thousand readers, and a lot of people engage with the, um, the newsletter, and they give various ideas of what to investigate and what to report on. So it's really useful to have the community at the heart of it.

**Reece Stafferton** [00:13:46] Yes, I've got a degree in investigative journalism from De Montfort University, which was funded by Channel Four. So that was three years ago now. And for the last two years, I've worked in freelance journalism, and I've recently had a particular interest around local journalism and collaborating with other local journalists to produce various investigations and long-reads. I'm not from

Leicester, but I've spent my last five years of my life here, after graduating from university. And you look at other places in the country, like Manchester, which has a thriving news output. There's so many different publications and newspapers there. Whereas in Leicester, there's really just one major local newspaper, a couple of community news organisations, and that's it, really. Whereas, you know, Leicester's a big city, and there's, there's a lot to be discovered. Well, I think the BBC does great things locally, but they, of course, often here locally at least focus on radio and the wider East Midlands television scene. Whereas written content goes ignored. We do have Local Democracy reporters embedded the Leicester Mercury, which have produced some great written pieces. But I think with written newspaper journalism, traditional journalism, it's gone down a hole of advertorials and trying to get money through advertising, and focussing on clicks and page views. And that's not what journalism should be about. It should be about the community, investing in the future of cities and towns, and uncovering truths that weren't known before.

**Reece Stafferton** [00:15:32] It's just myself at the moment. It's a newsletter model. We publish on a platform called Substack. And I spoke to the people at Manchester Mill, and there's another publication as well, another newsletter called NN Journal in Northamptonshire, and they helped me get started as well. My kind of future hopes are perhaps to evolve this newsletter into more of a co-operative news media model, akin to the Bristol Cable or the Manchester Meteor. They are very successful print and online cooperative models, and we see with other publications like Positive News, they've gone nationwide with a co-operative model, and it really works well. I mean, if anybody cares about democracy, transparency, honesty, which goes amiss in journalism a lot of the time. If you have a passion for your local community, and reading more quality journalism, that isn't pandering to advertisers, then I'd say get in touch, because I'm just one person writing my newsletter every week, and quite simply, that isn't enough. We need more people on board. And I think a co-operative model could really help people come together and focus on democracy and local journalism in a way that's not being really seen in the city before.

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**Ryan Clayton** [00:17:09] I don't suppose you got a moment to answer some questions? Thank you.

**Voice** [00:17:13] What's the questions about?

**Ryan Clayton** [00:17:13] I just walking around asking people about the city? I was just wondering how you felt about the city.

**Voice** [00:17:18] Don't come in here very often. That's a pointless story, isn't it?

**Ryan Clayton** [00:17:22] Is that because you don't like it?

**Voice** [00:17:23] I don't like the town centre.

**Ryan Clayton** [00:17:24] Yeah.

**Voice** [00:17:25] I genuinely don't.

**Ryan Clayton** [00:17:26] Why not?

**Voice** [00:17:28] It's just a bit, I don't know, crowded for me. Not because of Covid, I just don't like crowds.

**Ryan Clayton** [00:17:34] Yeah.

**Voice** [00:17:34] Yeah. I've come in for her birthday.

**Ryan Clayton** [00:17:36] Ah, right.

**Voice** [00:17:37] Just to try and get some nice stuff. But most we do online.

**Ryan Clayton** [00:17:40] Is there anything about the city you feel, like, makes it unique, as opposed to the cities in England?

**Voice** [00:17:44] Yeah, it's five thousand to one, isn't it? You know what five thousand to one means?

**Ryan Clayton** [00:17:48] Yeah, when we wone the Premier League.

**Voice** [00:17:48] But it's my home as well.

**Ryan Clayton** [00:17:52] Oh, so you've lived here your whole life? Is there any anywhere in the city that makes it feel like home to you? Give you a sense of belonging, even if it's not necessarily in the city centre?

**Voice** [00:18:02] No, not really. Family, I suppose.

**Ryan Clayton** [00:18:04] Yeah.

**Voice** [00:18:06] That's it. Sorry mate, I didn't mean to be boring.

**Ryan Clayton** [00:18:08] Oh no, that's fine.

**Voice** [00:18:09] I'm not keen on the town centre. It's difficult to improve when no one wants to come in here.

**Ryan Clayton** [00:18:14] Thank you.

**Voice** [00:18:15] The more people come in, the more they're going to invest. But I don't know. I've never really thought about it, to be honest.

**Ryan Clayton** [00:18:23] I don't suppose you've got a moment to answer some questions?

**Voice** [00:18:26] I can do. Oh, yeah, I mean, I've lived here all my life, so that's usually all I can say really. I think it's okay, I've not really left. anywhere. So, I mean, at the minute, over there, and they've got all the rocket things going around, and I feel like the Richard III thing, when I see they found him buried, which is quite cool. I just going out for, like, drinks and things with my friends, and also just walking round and shopping, and things like that.

**Ryan Clayton** [00:18:54] What about improvements? Is there anything you'd like to see different about it?

**Voice** [00:18:58] I don't think so, no.

**Ryan Clayton** [00:19:00] Yeah. How do you feel about the city in general?

**Voice** [00:19:03] It's okay. It's, it's not the... I always tell people it's not the best city, but it's not the worst.

**Voice** [00:19:08] It's not the worst.

**Voice** [00:19:09] Definitely not the worst, but not the best.

**Voice** [00:19:10] Like we went to Nottingham the other day and we had to wipe our feet on the way out. It was abysmal. But Leicester's, definitely, it's not, it's not like having you wipe your feet on the way out of Leicester. Maybe a bit of, a like, clean, but it's not, like terrible.

**Voice** [00:19:23] There's some nice stuff if you look up. Like some of the nice architecture if you look up.

**Voice** [00:19:27] Yeah.

**Voice** [00:19:27] No, it's alright. It's got a bit of history, at least, you know. Because some places don't have a bit of history.

**Voice** [00:19:32] A little bit of culture.

**Voice** [00:19:35] Coventry. Everything got destroyed.

**Voice** [00:19:35] Yesh, everything got destroyed. But I don't know whether it's really room for improvement. There's a lot of homeless people to be fair. That's never good. A lot of homeless people.

**Voice** [00:19:45] That's one of the things, like...

**Voice** [00:19:47] You're going to get homeless people everywhere you go.

**Voice** [00:19:48] Yeah, well...

**Voice** [00:19:50] But we can help...

**Voice** [00:19:50] We've got to have some drastic change, man, we need some drastic change.

**Voice** [00:19:54] But Kasabian are probably one of the best things to come out Leicester, I think. That...

**Voice** [00:20:02] Engelbert Humperdinck...

**Voice** [00:20:02] Oh, did he come from Leicester.

**Voice** [00:20:02] That and Blind Faith.

**Ryan Clayton** [00:20:02] He dated my Nan apparently.

**Voice** [00:20:02] Did he? There you go. No, no, well that's about it. It's alright. I don't know if it's getting better or worse, really.

**Voice** [00:20:02] Both. Bit of both.

**Voice** [00:20:02] Yeah, a bit of both.

**Voice** [00:20:22] Leicester's not been good to me at all. No. I suffer from PTSD trauma, and the social services have treated me so bad, I never used to speak out, and I've been crying twenty-four-seven, asking for help. They are not doing anything. I've got muscle waste, also I've had a major operation. I lost my dad. I had a heart attack and died on the table. Nobody. And, I know, I've had to go out and get everything myself.

**Rukhsana Hussain** [00:21:02] So, Rukhsana, I work for the NHS. I'm a support worker in mental health, and I also have my own organisation called Outspoken. So we aim to provide a platform for everyone to have a voice, because we believe that everybody should be heard, and everybody's opinion is important. So I think

for me, setting up that organisation was always about what is it that other people want to speak about? And sometimes we say, you know, speak the unspoken. So that's what Outspoken does. I also do lots of voluntary work. I also volunteer for Leicestershire Police, and we've got a new initiative starting, and the launch will be on the 20th of August. And that's called Neighbourhood Active. So it's about building communities and stronger links between the police and the community. So we're sort of, that kind of, middle ground, and trying to, sort of, have a conversation with the police about what we think the community want, and then have a conversation with the community to then relay back to the police what they're saying. So it's about bringing them together and bridging that gap. So that's what I do.

**Rukhsana Hussain** [00:22:00] Well, when I hear a New Normal, I always go back... The first thing I always think is what's normal, you know. What's everybody's definition of normal? And I think normal is such an overused word that when we say new normal, I always think, well, that's definitely going to mean something different to everyone. Build Back Better, I think for me individually, is about what can I do that's going to improve on the stuff that I've already done. So what can I do that's better than what I was doing before? As a community, I think Build Back Better is more about rebuilding trust. So I don't think it's necessarily about building new things, but actually let's rebuild the trust, because I think a lot of trust was lost through the pandemic. And whether that was trust around the actual, the virus; whether it was trust between organisations and the community; or, whether it was between communities themselves, because we had a lot of issues in Leicester. And I remember being on the radio about this, about language barriers, where I brought up a point that if people don't understand what's expected of them, because they don't speak the language, or if it's sent in, say, publication, and English is not their first language, and they don't understand what they're supposed to be doing. If they're doing it wrong, then we can't really blame them. So are we sending out the messages in the right way that we should send them? So there was a huge discussion around that, and there was also things around Leicester being in lockdown the longest.

[00:23:19] So everybody was feeling that they were being treated unfairly. So there's a lot of, I think, rebuilding that needs to happen. So we need to rebuild that trust with organisations and with each other. And I think just rebuilding that trust that, you know, your neighbour is your neighbour, and they do care. And I think there was a lot of differences that came up. And I think a lot of people sort of wanted to be comfortable with what they knew and themselves, rather than other people. So everybody was in isolation and people just didn't trust people anymore. So they wouldn't, you know, you couldn't just knock on your neighbour's door and say, I've run out of milk can I have some, because that just wasn't happening anymore. And I think it's just given us a larger gap to work with. So build back better for me is more about how can we bridge that gap again? How can we bring people back together and build the trust within those? Because without trust there's no respect. And if haven't got trust and respect in your relationships within your community, there's not much else there, you know. You can put as much money as you want into communities, but that's not going to do anything if that trust isn't there.

**Rukhsana Hussain** [00:24:21] I think if we if we start from a level of humanity, one human to another, then the difference and diversity is just a bonus. That's just in addition to what we already have. Deep down, we are all the same. We bleed the same blood. We all got a heart inside us. It's there somewhere? And we all just need to really just find ourselves. And I think this is just as much about the individual themselves, as it is about the other person. So this is not just asking questions to others, but asking ourselves as well. Am I doing all the things I've always wanted to do in life? Am I fulfilling, you know, life in the way that I expected to? If I'm not, why not? What's stopping me? Is it my surroundings? Is it my environment? Was it me? So I think it's go beyond the limits. And I think that I would always say diversity is just the bonus. If you, if you live in a diverse area, or we live in an area with lots of different age groups, whether that's age diversity, whether it's, you know, men versus women, whatever that is, actually just, just actually, just treat someone as a human first and then take everything else as a bonus. And I don't think that will go wrong, because that's how I do it, which is why I think a lot of people when they asked me about this community initiative, with Leicestershire Police, and they said what, are you going to walk the streets at night like? Are you not scared? And I said no, because I've already done it. I was doing it before. They just happened to do a project that I actually just, on my own back was just, was doing. Because I was interested to know why there's sixteen-year-olds hanging around on the streets, or in the parks that night. And I would go out at nine o'clock

at night and walk around and ask people. And no, I don't feel scared. And the reason I don't feel scared is because I know who I am. I know what my intention is, and I know when I go out there, that I know how to be safe.

**Rukhsana Hussain** [00:26:02] So we empower ourselves first, and then we can empower others. So if I know what I'm doing, I know how I can get help if I need it. I know what I want from life, then I'm going to stand a much better chance to have that conversation with somebody else, who maybe doesn't know where they're heading, or doesn't know what they want, or where they are at in life. So it's really about that self-awareness, first of all. But also to share a little bit of yourself, going back to that mutuality we talked about earlier. Is where does that come from? Where's that mutuality? If we can find a connection with someone, we can build on that. And life is reciprocal. If I give you a little bit, you can give me a little bit. That give and take. We start to build on that. And that's what builds relationships. So I think it's all about that.

[00:26:44] I think for me it would be for people to live in an area where they feel safe, where they feel happy and where they feel able to ask for help if they need it. I think that they're the kind of sort of key things for me, because I think at the moment, we don't have that. And I think that if we were to say that we've got a better society, a better world that we live in, then those things have to be present. We have to be comfortable with where we are, comfortable with who we are. And also, if we need the help, we have to be able to ask, because they're the kind of things we don't have at the moment.

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