

Leicester Builds Back Better Stories – Episode 005

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 [00:00:36] Recovery from 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. Coupled with the climate crisis, there will be no returning to what was the old normal. What the new normal needs to be, however, isn't quite clear yet. I'm Rob Watson, and over the summer I've spent time chatting with people who work for charities and civic society organisations in Leicester, about what they think building back better means in practise and what we need to do, so we are ready for the next set of challenges. Over six programmes we're 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 fifth episode, we'll hear from Helen Patman, who is the editor of the Evington Echo, a community newspaper with a focus on local environmental issues, and from Ben Lowe, who is an environmental 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 [00:02:01] I was just out and about and we're asking people about the slogan Build Back Better. Have you heard of it before?

Voice [00:02:08] No, I'm not from here mate.

Ryan Clayton [00:02:09] Oh, right.

Voice [00:02:09] I'm from Scotland remember.

Ryan Clayton [00:02:13] It's basically about building things back better in the wake of the Corona Virus pandemic. Is there anything about this city, or anywhere else you'd like to see improved upon as a result?

Voice [00:02:26] Well to be quite honest with you, and I don't know how you're going to accept this, right. I thought the Corona Virus was a wee bit exaggerated myself. Now that things are back into play, just let everything, just ease on in. Get back to normal. Just ease into it dead slowly. Don't go all panic stations, and all that, you know what I mean. But erm, I've had my two jabs anyway, so I've been alright that way, you know. But erm.

Voice [00:03:13] I think the city needs a bit more support from the council, to be perfectly honest. I think that the infrastructure at the moment is still pushed mainly towards cars. Where you're looking a lot of people after Covid are bicycles, walking. A lot of them are trying electric vehicles. I think the council should be getting in the schemes with that as well, to start renting out things like electric scooters for people instead. I think the cathedral's really nice. The cathedral where Richard lies. I think that's a really nice piece. And I think they've done a great transformation around that area as well. I think the surrounding countryside in Leicestershire is phenomenal. I think that some of the best in the country. Leicester itself as a city? I don't think anything it's got really shouts out to the rest of the country to say come here.

Ryan Clayton [00:03:57] Yeah. Is there anything that you feel like could be built on better or improved?

Voice [00:04:02] The infrastructure. The infrastructure is shocking. Bus transport's terrible. All the public transport, terrible, to be fair. And then the council wonders why people take cars, and the reality is to take cars because it's very little choice for them.

Voice [00:04:13] Er, Leicester? Years ago it was a great place to live. Leicester now, if I had a choice, I wouldn't be living in it, let's put it that way. It's gone downhill very, very quickly. Very quickly. There's just too much drugs, too... It's awful. It's awful to live in Leicester now. Whereas years ago, you didn't get all this. This wasn't an issue in Leicester before all these fights and stabbing, and everything else. It's one of those, isn't it. Your used to argue, but that was it. The argument was over. You didn't run in the house and get a knife and come back out and stab somebody with it. So no.

Ryan Clayton [00:04:45] Yeah, yeah. I don't suppose you've got a moment to answer some questions.

Voice [00:04:49] Yeah sure, why not.

Ryan Clayton [00:04:51] I'm just walking around asking people about the city, wondering how you felt about it?

Voice [00:04:54] What today, or in general?

Ryan Clayton [00:04:56] Just in general. Today. In general?

Voice [00:04:58] I think there's a lot to do in Leicester, actually. I've been here for five years, and, and you know, I've enjoyed the town centre. I love the fact that it's multicultural. So you get to meet lots of different people. And yeah, I just... I'd rather be in London, but yeah, Leicester's nice, Leicester's nice. I think.

Ryan Clayton [00:05:18] Is there anything about the city that you feel makes it stand out, makes it unique?

Voice [00:05:20] Especially the Space Centre, I think. Yeah, I love the Space Centre, and I think the way they've done the town centre, it's really nice. Especially the food court. And maybe more things to do, and even more activities and stuff, I think. But no, I wouldn't change too much.

Les [00:05:41] Build Back Better? Build Back Better? My immediate reply is, A, I've never heard of that slogan. And I would have, I would have to give it serious thought before I could give you an intelligent answer. Poverty. I mean, before I came out here, I looked at my news feed on the computer screen, and what immediately caught my eye was, in the north, northern part of England. Social services are seeing quite an increase in the number of requests of, for children to be put into homes because families, parents can't afford to feed them and clothe them. You know, the responsibilities that go with having a family. And I just, I just... Before I came out here, I want to do my shopping before the rain comes down, and I just thought there's something fundamentally wrong with the economic modelling, if I could describe it that way. Where, you know, there are far worse off that have difficulties, immense difficulties. Something's wrong, you know, something's wrong.

Chris [00:07:33] I'm not really sure it's been, and it's one of those quite nebulous phrases that could mean all sorts of different things. And I got the impression it was just kind of a, you know, vaguely positive, kind of, a broad, a broad appeal message to try and sort of say, all right, yeah, let's do it. I don't think that it's, there's certainly not any lengthy explanation as to what the government means by that, as far as I'm aware. Well, I mean, I would say to Build Back Better would be to acknowledge, you know, the absurdities that have been revealed by the pandemic. Let's say, you know, to build back better, you know, shouldn't mean, you know, work very hard to build back to where we were. Particularly with work culture. I mean, I think the fact that with the technology that we now have, everyone's sort of working from home in quite an efficient way. I think that really needs to be jumped upon. Forcing people to spend all their time beyond what they're actually, you know, beyond the capacity that they have to actually work, is just going to bring out not the best of them. You know, it's going to be inefficient. And I think, like, yeah, if you if you want to build back better, you should build that more efficiently. And yeah, having this kind of archaic work culture, where everyone's grinding for the majority of their lives, really doesn't seem to be particularly conducive to that. I think everyone has a limited capacity for work. And I think billing it, not as... I think unfortunately, I

think billing it as something that's beneficial to people is not necessarily the right way to bill it. That should be part of the messaging, but I think, you know, really selling it as proven to be efficient, and proven to actually, you know, get better results is the way

Tara [00:09:33] It's quite a hard question, that is. Because as we're talking about it now, I'm not just thinking about the environment. I've started to think about how, how are we going to react in society, and how our feelings are going to be. And we've all kind of switched off emotionally. And I'm already finding it difficult to be around people. You know, I'm feeling overwhelmed at the moment. And I think, you know, people that are depressed at home, they are going to find it the hardest, because we've not known anything better. Nobody's had the support, you know. You know, I didn't think this was going to happen after this pandemic. But it's really difficult. I've not really enjoyed it. I have been out on a social. I went to a party just a couple of weeks back, and it was a graduation party they did in the garden. And I didn't realise until I was in the moment that I was finding it too overwhelming. I was getting headaches. I couldn't sit in the crowd. I went inside and everybody was saying, what's wrong with you? This isn't you, Tara. You know, you're normally bubbly and you like to keep the crowd going. I couldn't do it. I sat on my own in the corner. I put the TV on, because that's all I know. And this was a full-blown party. And I had the TV on, and I just I just didn't like it at all. I thought there's too many children running around, and all it's about is food, and everybody just getting merry. But I'm not used to this. I can't adapt just like that. It's not a switch of a button. I've learnt that I can adapt. I can like go into myself, and just be with my own group of, say, me and my daughter. Because when it was the pandemic, I had a bit of an abusive relationship. So I ended up leaving my partner and my son as well. So from four of us in the household it became two. And I don't know if that's made me get worse off. And now I'm so used to it, just me and my daughter. I don't really like visitors coming.

Helen Pettman [00:11:52] My name's Helen Pettman. I'm from the Evington Echo, which is a local community news sheet-letter, that goes out once every two months. And we rely totally on volunteers to, to help us do that. Um, we've been, been running for a long time, forty years. But recently we, we've made sure, we've had to look at our insurance and everything else, and what we are wanting to do. And so we formed a charity called Friends of Evington to run the Evington Echo, and also to run environmental things as well. And it's all been very problematic to, to think through how we work with Leicester City Council. But, and knowing who's who in Leicester City Council, so we know who to talk to, has been incredibly difficult. I think, well I interpret it because I have my environmental interest in meaning that the people that are around can have an input into making their streets and their, their spaces better, and, and actually make a difference with this climate change thing. That is very scary. So that we can have a bio-diverse places, and we can input, and we can learn through doing, as well as being told what we should do. It's... I think it is about helping them to get over the, the obstacles that we had to get over. You know. They... Sometimes it doesn't work to have a committee approach. When you want to actually do something, it's better to just have a leader in the community who, who will go for it, and have, and have, and that leader may have, will hopefully will discuss the rules that they want for their group. But, but they make their own rules up, and, and they, they don't have to go through all the selection processes. But then again, I always think, well, you do need some democracy. And, and so the idea we had was to have one local group that, that had members, that members could join, and that that was democratically run. But again, it's been... But that can be overturned with people who want, want power, and want to take over that group. So we have to be very careful to, to keep and make sure that who we have as trustees are good people that are dedicated to really helping.

Rob Watson [00:15:15] You're listening to Leicester Builds Back Better Stories, conversations about how communities across Leicester are planning for change following the pandemic. For further information about each of the topics covered in the programmes and extended versions of the conversations, go to Leicester Stories website: <https://leicesterstories.uk>.

Ryan Clayton [00:15:42] I don't suppose you got a moment to answer some questions? I'm Just walking around the city asking people how they felt about the place?

Voice [00:15:48] This place is good, it's chill. To relax, and enjoy staying here.

Ryan Clayton [00:15:54] Is there anything about the city that stands out in your mind, that makes you feel unique?

Voice [00:16:00] Personally, I think it's, it's very quiet. It's very chill. It's a good place to enjoy retired life. Yeah, that's it.

Ryan Clayton [00:16:11] Is there anything you'd like to see improved or done differently in the city?

Voice [00:16:16] For now I think there's nothing to improve. Yeah, I think it's good for me for now. Yeah, I enjoyed it.

Ryan Clayton [00:16:23] Is there anything about the city, anywhere you can go, anything that you can do, that that gives you a sense of community or belonging?

Voice [00:16:30] For now, I haven't been here for long. So yeah. Excited to try out all this.

Voice [00:16:37] Yeah. Yeah. Nice. I like this city here. Really good.

Ryan Clayton [00:16:41] Is there anything about the city that makes it feel unique for you?

Voice [00:16:44] Erm, there are museums and stuff like that, you know. The old heritage buildings. Yeah.

Ryan Clayton [00:16:51] Any improvements you'd like to see in the city?

Voice [00:16:54] Improvement?

Ryan Clayton [00:16:56] Perhaps something that's not here and you'd like to see here, or something's not quite working well?

Voice [00:17:01] Maybe some playgrounds for children, maybe and more. I don't know. Nothing really. It's quite nice here. Yeah.

Ryan Clayton [00:17:09] Is there anywhere you can go in the city, anything you can do that makes it feel like home for you, where you get a sense of community, belonging?

Voice [00:17:16] I'm not sure. Everything feels like home. It's really nice. You can sit down if you want, you know, you can walk around if you want. Drink tea, coffee or whatever.

Voice [00:17:28] So I don't know Leicester too well, but I've liked it because there's lots of independent cafes and restaurants. That's what I've got today. Yeah. But yeah, I like it. I think it's quiet, because we're from Birmingham, so it's quite a bit smaller. Contained. But I do like it. It's got a good vibe about it I think. Yeah.

Ryan Clayton [00:17:45] So you're from Birmingham, you've come into Leicester today?

Voice [00:17:47] Yeah. Well my mum's from Leicestershire, so she's taking a little trip today. Day out today.

Voice [00:17:54] But I think it's a bit sad.

Ryan Clayton [00:17:56] Yeah.

Voice [00:17:57] Like this used to be like the main shopping centre, and now it's still a shopping centre, but it's... The nature of the shops have changed. The vibes changed. But that's time, you know, time moves on, people go online. That's why we've got Poundland. Everyone loves Poundland, you know.

Voice [00:18:16] It's a dump mate. A terrible, filthy dump. You know when I was young, this place were beautiful.

Ryan Clayton [00:18:23] Yeah.

Voice [00:18:23] There's too many homeless people on the street. I know it's not their fault. Too many drug addicts, too many aggressive beggars, not enough police around. And tell you what, my mother is nearly ninety now, she won't come into town anymore. She's still fit, she's able. She's too scared to come in. You go down to that bus station down there, they're all hanging around, round there. You make a complaint to the council they don't do nothing. Leicester City Council, I'll tell you, they're a total and utter waste of time. Honestly, a total to waste your time. Don't matter what complaint you've got about your own housing. They just take no notice of you.

Ryan Clayton [00:19:03] How do you feel about the city?

Voice [00:19:05] Well I love it. I'm originally from Manchester. I moved here seven years ago, but I think it's brilliant. So there's loads to do. Lots of nightlife is brilliant as well.

Ryan Clayton [00:19:14] So seeing that you have had experiences with other cities, is there anything, anywhere, anything about the city, sorry, that makes it feel unique?

Voice [00:19:23] I don't know. They've got a lot of nice country areas, and the like that. And the council has really invested in stuff, in gardens and stuff, and I like to go for walks and stuff. It's nice. I like the Highcross shopping centre as well.

Ryan Clayton [00:19:34] Is there anything about the city you feel needs improving?

Voice [00:19:41] More cycle lanes would be nice. Not mainly, not on Beaumont Leys Lane, where it's an irritant. But yeah, it would be nice to have more cycle lanes. Probably, like, more of the city centre cordoned off from cars. I would prefer that, you know, around that... I don't know the street names, but around, you know, where the ice cream shop is, and all that. A bit further out. I'd like all that cordoned off that would be perfect, so you could walk around without panicking about. If there were more cycling stations. We went York, and there was like electric bikes everywhere. Them things would be nice as well.

Ben Lowe [00:20:14] I'm, I'm Ben Lowe, and I'm the group coordinator for Greenpeace Leicester, which is the Greenpeace, the local group representing Greenpeace in, in Leicester and Leicestershire. So the surrounding area. And what we do is basically promote and, and deliver the green, the main Greenpeace UK campaigns. Basically, which can be on a whole number of different issues, which they can involve a lot of different things. So sometimes you have like a direct campaign against a particular, sometimes it can be the government, or sometimes a particular, sort of, corporations about various different issues. They are always, always, obviously, kind of, having, and always environmental issues. But sometimes they, kind of, sort of cross over into other things, other issues as well. So at the moment, there's, we're running a campaign called Operation Ocean Witness, which is about these things called Marine Protected Areas around the, around the UK. Which is like a, like a conservation area at sea. And unfortunately, these areas aren't really providing any protection for what they're, for the biodiversity in those areas. So the current campaign is to call on the government to, to basically make sure the protection is there. So that's sort of the type of thing. So, you know, the sort of thing that we cover.

Ben Lowe [00:21:44] Before that, there was a campaign against Tesco, which is about the deforestation being involved in our supply chain for meat. So the meat that they were buying was, had connections to the

forests being basically cleared in Brazil, in the Amazon. And we were calling on them to, to basically cut that out of the supply chain, and move towards a more plant based, sort of, alternatives. So, and we deliver these things in a lot of different ways. So sometimes we go out and actually do, do street stalls. Speaking to people. Sometimes, you know, things like marches, things like, sort of, more direct action. So you might take an action in a store. So you might go to a Tesco store and, you know, deliver... For the Tesco campaign, for example, we delivered messages from an indigenous leader, from the Amazon, to which, was a message from her to, to Tesco. And we delivered that to the store managers in all the various, different stores throughout Leicester, Tesco stores, throughout Leicester. And obviously there is also a political element to it. So there's a few different things. So we also get in touch with leaders. There's a whole sort of part of Greenpeace, which is dedicated to speaking to you or to your MP, and getting them to do something basically about whatever issues it might be you know, whatever issue it might be. Effectively like a form of green, green lobbying, but on behalf of basically, well, people and the planet, which is what Greenpeace is about. So that's in a nutshell, that's, that's really what we do.

Ben Lowe [00:23:22] Well, from a Greenpeace perspective, Build Back Better would mean, it would refer to a concept that they have called, what they call a Green Recovery. So the idea was that obviously had an economic, kind of, fallout from the pandemic. So you had two crises. So, so you had the, the pandemic, which was a crisis, and then you also, at the same time, you had these other crises, crises going on in the background. So we have, like, a biodiversity loss crisis that's going on, and where basically species are going extinct at an alarming rate. And then we also have the climate crisis as well, which is, you know, just well, we all, we've all, I think we've sort of experienced events like heat waves and droughts and flooding. They're all just examples of that happening all over the world. So, yeah, so, so following that, obviously, you had other, all the multiple crises to deal with. And then the thing is sometimes... Because of the pandemic being, like, right in our face, effectively, you kind of, is, people can almost forget that the other things are happening in the background. And also, they can be there can be worse. So anyway, so there's this concept of the idea of a green recovery, which is the idea that you, the government, and this is something that applies not just the UK, but as a concept for any, any place, any government, to basically invest strategically, to deal with, to deal with the economic problems that the pandemic created, and also at the same time deal with the environmental, the climate, you know, the current climate crisis, the biodiversity crisis that we've got at the same time. So you sort of basically killing two birds with one stone, and that's what we, that's what Greenpeace and many environmentalists would recommend, is a green recovery.

Ben Lowe [00:25:27] And the thing is with this as well, it is like a win-win. The thing that can go through people's minds is, am I really making any difference here? Well, you, what you've once... You do a number of things. So let's say if you email your MP, then you let your, your actual MP know that you bothered about this problem, for example. And, and if an MP gets enough, if an MP gets enough people being bothered about a problem, they might even, it might not even be even a tenth of the people that voted for them. So it kind of comes into their awareness, and they're like, oh, well, this really matters to people. I need to I need to kind of stand up for this. And then they can really, you can you know, there are stories of the people in the, the lobby network in Greenpeace who have dealt with... There is one guy from, from the Leicester area, who is an MP. He dealt with him over many years. And his MP was just like, why are you bothering me with this? But over the years, he actually, he kind of got behind it. And so you can that can be something. So if people, if people make those connexions, and they also they, they realise there actually, there still is hope and other people care about it. And, you know, we can, we can do something. And also if they're made aware of the of this sort of injustice that that's happening, whether it be to other people, or the unfairness maybe I might say that instead of instead of injustice. But I think both words probably apply, you know, then that kind of can be sort of something that will galvanise people to get involved.

Rob Watson [00:27:19] You've been listening to Leicester Builds Back Better Stories, conversations about how communities across Leicester are planning for change following the pandemic. For further information about each of the topics covered in this programme, and to hear extended versions of these conversations, visit the Leicester Stories website: <https://leicesterstories.uk>. Leicester Stories are supported by the Audio Content Fund, and was developed with assistance from De Montfort University, the Documentary Media

Centre and the Zinthiya Trust. Thanks to Ryan Clayton for additional content production. This is a Decentralised Media production by Rob Watson.