

## **Our City, Our Community and Our Region**

The period since our last Full Council meeting in September has seen an amazing array of successes, challenging times and celebrations for communities across our wonderful city of York and our broader region of York and North Yorkshire. I have spent time with our communities in need of support and compassion, communities remembering those who gave their lives in service for our country, sports teams, new innovation centres at the University of York and York St. John's University and our community heroes. It's important that our city leaders participate in the good times, the not so good and the commemorative. York has a long and proud history and continues to look to an optimistic and bright future. Working together, supporting those in need and offering sanctuary and understanding.

I was honoured to be asked to attend the York Interfaith Group 'Prayers for Peace' meeting in mid-October along with Cllr. Lomas and The Lord Mayor. Faith groups coming together from across our great city to show each other that in times of adversity, great hurt and wounding we can support, understand, and appreciate each other. I quote from their collective statement 'Following the recent events in Gaza and Israel leading to the horrific loss of many lives, young and old, the religious leaders of York Interfaith Group stand in solidarity for peace and calm based on its longstanding values of mutual understanding, respect and dialogue. Our prayers are for all communities in Gaza, Israel and York as we are united in our actions for hope, harmony and peace.' Our city comes together at times of need, and I continue to work with our communities to make sure that the council is responding in ways to enable this to continue into the future.

We remembered those who have given their lives in conflicts across the centuries and across the world at remembrance events held in York on Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> November. I continue to be in awe of our Normandy veterans, their fortitude and drive to keep contributing to our communities. I was also very honoured to meet some of our youngest service personnel on a visit to The Royal Signals at Imphal Barracks with Cllrs Whitcroft and Ravilious. A tremendous insight into the opportunities, dedication and challenges our current service personnel and families face during their service when living, working and studying in York.

Our Council continues to work with the Royal British Legion and the Reserve Forces and Cadets Association to make sure York is a city where serving personnel, veterans and reservists are treated with fairness and respect in public and commercial services.

I'm very proud to say that I've now met the players of York's most successful sports team of all time on a number of occasions. York Valkyrie beat Leeds Rhinos to take the Women's Rugby League Super League title in October. It is I'm sure a great source of pride for all of us that York is now home to the first professional contracts for women playing Rugby League in the country. They are a fantastic team and show an amazing cohesive, winning team spirit. A heartfelt thank you to all the management, support staff and sponsors that have made this possible.

Another great source of pride was to attend the York Press Community Pride Awards and present the Public Sector Hero award to Emma Greenall, for her role as Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Support Worker at City of York Council. Cllr Kilbane and I attended along with CYC staff members who had been nominated by their managers and colleagues for their excellent contributions to our organisation. I'd like to thank them all for their service and commitment to York.

I spoke at events across the city and region including the launch of Hull York Medical School's, The Skin Research Centre, York and North Yorkshire Business Summit 2023, MySight York's Annual Meeting, a Ministerial Board focussed on regeneration with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC).

It was also a joy to welcome our Dijon twinning partners from both the city's civic and political offices alongside the Lord Mayor. A tremendously interesting and thought-provoking opportunity for discussions around the similarities, opportunities and challenges our communities face. The Dijon party enjoyed visiting the York Minster, University of York Institute for Safe Autonomy, and the York Food Festival. I look forward to getting to know our partners from Dijon in more detail and learning more from them about how their city is currently tackling the challenges of local energy production and food security with groundbreaking technology, systems and community action.

## **Partners and City Leaders Council Plan Launch**

In early November it was wonderful to see approximately 60 of our city partners from sectors including business, city development, housing, civic society, the voluntary sector, health, culture and the arts and education come together to participate in the launch of the Council Plan 2024-27. An opportunity for our city to see in action the new administrations priorities and the Council's focus areas for the coming four years. Our priorities are summed up under the acronym EACH which stands for Equalities, Affordability, Climate and Health. The response was tremendously positive and collaborative. An understanding that our plan is ambitious, reflects the priorities of the people of York and will be best delivered in true partnership.

Valuing the skills, expertise and resources we can all bring together for the long-term benefit of our city. I look forward to this open and welcoming partnership approach bearing fruit over the coming months. In the meantime, it has been great to see the efforts of the council's officers and Executive Members bring forward accelerating progress on initiatives and decisions to set up the York Fund, the first step to vastly improving Blue Badge holder access to the city centre. Decisions on the Free School Meals Pilot programme at Westfield Primary School and Burton Green and bringing forward 100% truly affordable housing on Council owned land at the Ordnance Lane, Willow House, Woolnough House and 68 Centre sites are imminent. All of this is made possible through partnerships across our city. Working with the vast source of expertise and good will we are fortunate to find in York and regionally in North Yorkshire.

## **The Place at Paul Sanderson House in Chapelfields**

I'm very glad to be able to confirm that The Place at Sanderson House on Bramham Road has now opened. It provides a new and improved location for the community groups that were running from the site alongside The Place, a venue, right in the heart of the Chapelfields, that provides support, fun and respite for the residents of Westfield. The main focus of the venue and the partnership is to provide a safe space for children and young people to learn and grow, and for adults to connect and access support.

I'd like to thank the University of York, Chapelfields Residents Association, York High, Westfield Community Primary School and the officers of City of York Council for working so closely and collaboratively together to make this happen. I encourage you all to find out more about The Place as its programme of events and services develops. This is a very positive development for the children, young people and adults who live alongside them in Chapelfields and I look forward to seeing how it goes over the coming period of time.

## **Devolution and the creation of the York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority**

Progress towards the creation of the York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority continues to move positively forward. The constituent authorities, City of York Council (CYC) and North Yorkshire Council, officers and lead members, have been working hard to ensure the process progresses through Parliament at pace. Both authorities are working together to ensure the best benefit from the Combined Authority can be realised by both York and North Yorkshire. We were finally given notice by the Minister for Levelling Up that the Order, the legal document required to be approved by Parliament, was laid in the Houses on 7<sup>th</sup> November 2023. This means the Order can be approved before the Christmas recess on 19<sup>th</sup> December 2023 and will, if all proceeds to plan, allow the creation of the Combined Authority in January 2024 and the election of the Mayor for York and North Yorkshire on 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2024.

Our primary aim is to develop a combined Economic Framework, the Constitution to govern it and a pipeline of projects ready for presentation to the Mayor upon election, so that our region is ready to start projects that will quickly bring visible positive benefits to our residents. On 23<sup>rd</sup> October projects to deliver on our Net Zero and climate agenda were approved and are ready to go upon the creation of the Combined Authority. For York this provides £3.3 Million of investment including £343,500 in revenue funding for the business case development of Elvington Lane Solar Photo Voltaics, Harewood Whin Green Energy Park and North Wigginton Onshore Wind Project Development.

Also £2.96 Million in capital funding for the delivery of The Electric Cow Project at Askham Bryan College, Renewable Heating System Upgrade at Alex Lyon House in Tang Hall, Heat Pump Communal Heating Upgrade at Honeysuckle House in Dringhouses, York Street Lighting LED Conversion and Commercial Buildings LED Lighting Renewal

Project. This funding is critical in allowing our city to move towards our Net Zero goals and reduce our collective carbon usage leading to a cleaner, greener future for our residents and tenants. As soon as the Combined Authority is created CYC will be able to get on and start delivering on these projects. I look forward to being able to announce further good news to you before Christmas bringing funding for Brownfield Housing Development Sites in York from the Combined Authority.

As we have all acknowledged along this path towards devolution for our region, with Local Authority budgets continuing to be heavily squeezed and focussed on delivering Statutory Services, large scale economic, regeneration, net zero and strategic housing projects will rely upon our ability as a Local Authority to work effectively within the Combined Authority and secure funding for our city. The future is optimistic in this respect, and I look forward to being able to bring you further good news.

### **York Central Update**

The delivery of the infrastructure necessary for the York Central development continues to change the landscape of the tear drop site between York Train Station and Water End. At the time of writing, our key landowner partners are awaiting the imminent announcement of the result of the procurement process for the Master Developer for the site. I hope to be able to bring you further news at our Full Council meeting on 23<sup>rd</sup> November. This is a crucial time for the project. As soon as the Master Developer is announced partners across York will be engaging with them to make sure they are fully versed in the hopes, wants and aspirations we all have for the site and its effective integration into the structure of our existing city. Strong political leadership and a clear, achievable vision is essential from me and my administration at this time. York Central needs to work for the people, business and organisations that will call it home. Our vision of a thriving community, substantial affordable, sustainable housing for York people, a breathing lung with ample green space and biodiversity, clean air and good quality jobs for all is crucial.

### **Council Finances and External Funding**

My administration continues to work hard with Council officers to produce a budget for CYC for 2024-25 that is balanced, delivers essential statutory services such as Adult Social Care and Children's

Services in a responsive, caring, effective manner and recognises that in order to do this some other services the Council currently delivers will be forced to rationalise. This is a challenging but necessary process. A process no administration comes into power for. While our revenue budget continues to diminish in its spending power due to the pressures of increasing demand on services, inflation and complexity of need, we are fortunate in York that we have the opportunities brought to us through devolution and the Combined Authority and our broad, committed and innovative partners across the city willing to work with us to deliver the ambitious projects our residents, businesses and organisations want to see, that our Council Plan outlines. Through December and January businesses, the voluntary sector, residents and other partners will have the opportunity to hear how CYC is going to approach our budget. I encourage everyone, including all members in this chamber, to participate in this process and offer input where you possibly can.

### **York Poverty Truth Commission Update**

I have been participating in the York Poverty Truth Commission as a Civic Commissioner and alongside a tremendously inspiring and insightful group of Community Commissioners since I became Leader of CYC in May 2023. The Community Commissioners have given a vast amount of time, energy and thought to the process. Telling us, Civic Commissioners, about their experiences of living in poverty in York and where they feel our organisations can improve to bring humanity, empathy and kindness to the way they all deal with the people who use their services. The Commission is still working together on a monthly basis to refine and decide where the focus of its actions will be. We will be working together until the spring of 2024 on this process. I would like to thank everyone I have met and worked with through the Commission. It's an invaluable learning process for us all and can only lead to our city being more responsive and compassionate to the people in our communities who need it most.