



Labour Leader of City of York Council  
Report to Full Council – July 2014

**Tour de France**

I want to thank everyone involved in making the Tour de France Grand Depart such a success for York and for the whole region. The people of Yorkshire turned out in huge numbers to support this fantastic event and it has taken York to an audience way beyond those who already know what a great and beautiful place this is.

It has required an investment but that investment is one that will benefit our economy for many years to come. York is a popular tourist destination but we can never be complacent about this and must take opportunities such as the Tour de France to continue highlighting what the city has to offer.

I would especially like to thank all those staff involved, local volunteers and the Cabinet Member responsible, who've all gone the extra mile in recent weeks and months to ensure the event passed off successfully. Thank you to those businesses who've embraced the Tour and helped create the atmosphere, along with the thousands of visitors to the city, that showed York off at its best to the world.

Council staff across Yorkshire were the backbone of the Tour and they deserve our thanks.

The estimated number watching the event in York was 100,000 people.

**Unemployment**

Unemployment continues to fall in York, something I'm sure all Members will welcome. The latest rate was 1.3%, which is below pre-recession levels. Clearly we want this downward trend to continue, but we also need to be focussed on increasing wage levels to support self reliance and the principle of a fair day's pay for a fair day's work.

The council introducing the Living Wage was the first step in seeking to achieve this but more can be done. Our economic strategy will help the city to attract better paid jobs and provide more employment opportunities for local people. I don't subscribe to the leader of the main opposition group's view that

anything positive that happens in the local economy has nothing to do with the council or council policy, which presumably means economic development would play no part in a Conservative-led council, however unlikely that outcome might seem. The work we are involved in has borne fruit and recently one business said it was locating to the city specifically because of the investment Labour is making in the city. Since May 2013 the number of people claiming job seekers allowance has decreased by 35.2%. 1.3% is the lowest proportion on record since 2006.

### **Volunteers Celebration Event**

I was honoured to attend and speak at a celebration of volunteers event held here in the Guildhall. We had volunteers from members of residents associations to charities and community groups.

Volunteers are one of the things that make this city special and if we are to achieve our aims then people need to be involved and take ownership of the future.

I was pleasantly surprised to hear from one long standing volunteer that this was the first such event they recalled being held by the council.

Under Labour the council will continue to show its appreciation to the city's army of volunteers.

### **Shelter Report on Affordable Housing**

The recent Shelter report on housing affordability in York shows exactly why boosting housing supply in a meaningful way is necessary for thousands of families living here. A lack of affordable homes comes as no surprise to many of us but only 1% of property being affordable to families in York shows the problem is even more severe than I had thought.

Opposition parties continue to pretend that their housing targets are sufficient, when it is obvious that they would not make a dent in the affordability problem that York families are experiencing. Under Labour the council is being realistic, which we know will attract criticism, in advocating higher housing numbers because it is the right thing to do and what the city and significant numbers of residents need. Increasing supply in a significant way will be the only way to begin to reduce the ratio between earnings and house prices.

The affordability issue is not as simple as being unable to afford to buy a home. For those fortunate enough to have a deposit on a home, the mortgage they can get as a first time buyer is very likely to give them a lower monthly cost than if they were renting, which is increasingly becoming out of reach for many people

on low incomes, putting further pressure on social housing. Something must be done and Labour is the only party in York prepared to do it.

### **Fairness Conference**

On the 9th June, York held its first International Fairness Conference. This followed a recommendation from the independent York Fairness Commission. The conference was attended by residents, people from different cities in the UK and internationally, charities and think tanks, businesses, MPs and a cross-party group of council leaders. For those that could not make it, all the sessions and further details of the conference can be found on the conference website - [www.yorkfairness.com](http://www.yorkfairness.com)

We are now looking at next steps to address poverty in the city, building on our existing poverty strategy. This will focus on the specific issues we face in York such as promoting good growth and better jobs. In this we should be building on our success on the Living Wage, where York has been singled out as an exemplar city for partnership working in this area.

### **Nestle Becoming Living Wage Employer**

Nestle confirming it is to become a Living Wage employer is great news as a major employer in the city. I'm keen to encourage many more employers to follow this example, particularly those above a certain number of employees. I realise it is not easy for many employers to offer the Living Wage but there are many benefits for those that can, including increased retention of staff. I hope Nestle will be one of many in the months and years ahead.

### **City Apprentice Campaign**

The council led campaign to find 100 apprenticeship placements in York in 100 days has finished with the target being surpassed by more than 50 per cent.

The York Apprentice Challenge resulted in 160 pledges being made by 104 businesses in and around the city.

Pledges from the campaign came from a variety of sectors and will offer young people opportunities in areas including; engineering, marketing, business administration, hairdressing and more.

The 2014 challenge was led in partnership with training providers, not only surpassed its target but saw an increase in business involvement compared to the last time it was staged in 2011, when 80 businesses participated.

## **York and the Rail Industry**

It was disappointing the Government decided not to back York as the location for the High Speed Rail College. However, we are in discussions with Network Rail about other rail education opportunities using land on York Central. I have given backing to the bid from Doncaster and I have encouraged leaders across the region, along the East Coast Mainline and in the North East to also back Doncaster to at least bring the college to Yorkshire.

I will be leading the launch of the business case for investment in the East Coast Mainline at both the Palace of Westminster and Holyrood. The aim is to get across the importance of current investment in the rail line from both the UK and Scottish Governments. This has been the culmination of many months work through the East Coast Mainline Authority group that I set up and chair.

I look forward to working in partnership with both Governments as well as the new franchisee to achieve the required investment.

York is to join a similar group being set up by Manchester to secure investment in the Transpennine route.

## **Tablet Computers in Schools**

I was delighted to get the opportunity to visit Burton Green Primary School to meet with pupils benefiting from Learnpad tablets, donated by the council and the Little Society charity. The charity works to improve opportunities to those from more vulnerable social and economic backgrounds.

It was great to learn that the tablets are already improving reading abilities and I hope the council will be able to get involved in similar initiatives in the future.

This is a pilot scheme to see what the education benefits are of using such technology. I am personally keen to see this scheme extended to all school children, but we must ensure it is the right course of action and that it is financially achievable.

I found it encouraging that some parents have begun to learn to use these tablet computers for the first time. It means learning becomes inter-generational whilst providing transferable skills to adults and children alike.

I proposed the pilot scheme to the Little Society charity and I thank them for taking this up.

## **Employment fair**

The jobs fair held in May proved very popular with over 1200 people through the doors of the Railway Institute. These events have become increasingly popular as word spreads not only about the range of employers and support agencies attending, but also the level of jobs many are advertising. I have already referred to the goal of increasing average wages and many of the vacancies available will contribute towards that boost. It's essential that these events continue and that those looking for work or looking for a career move get the help they need.

I have already ensured these events are held more frequently.

## **Hungate Redevelopment**

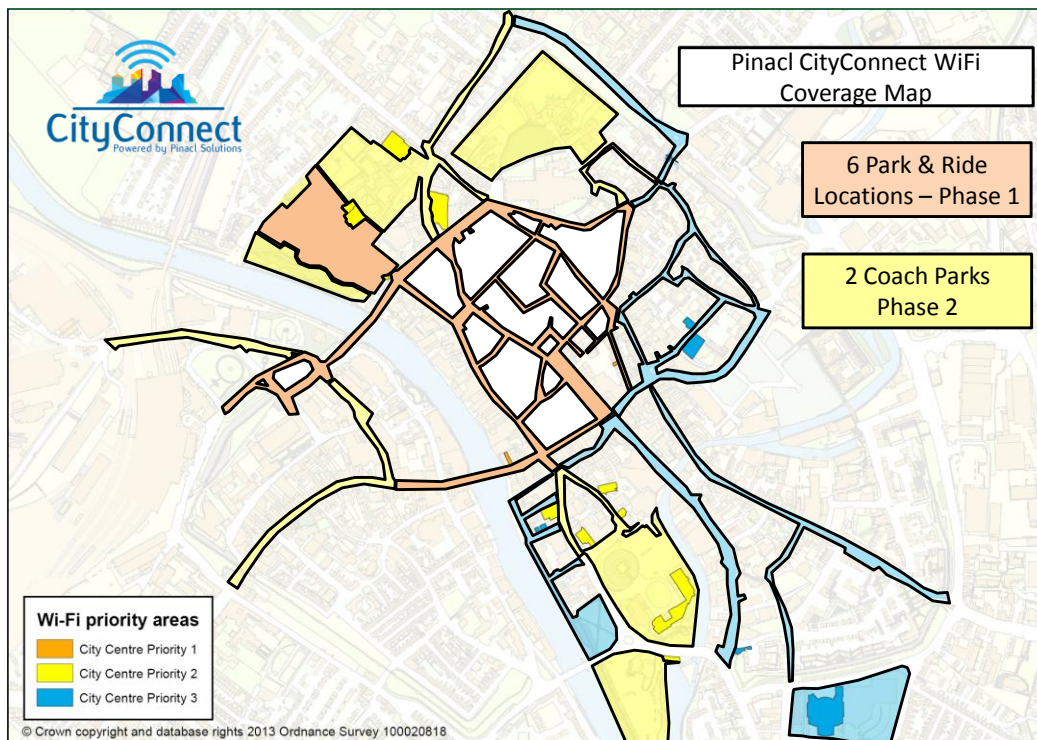
Under the Liberal Democrats the council wasted £1m of public money on the aborted Hungate council office development. When Labour won control of the council we inherited a derelict site with little progress being made.

I am pleased since then we have managed to attract the national insurance company, Hiscox, to relocate its head office to this site, bringing with it 350 jobs. Hiscox has received planning permission for an ambitious and iconic building and the council is to invest £175,000 in the public environment in the area. Both will help transform the area as an important entrance to the city centre.

## **City centre Wi-fi**

The City Centre wi-fi project went live in time to benefit the visitors who came to York to celebrate Le Tour de France. The project has been supported with funding from the DCMS Super- Connected City programme and substantial investment from Pinacl, the supplier who successfully bid to own the wi-fi concession. The map below shows the proposed coverage with phase 1 in place and phases 2 and 3 for completion by November 2015.

Free quality wi-fi is excellent news for residents, business people in the city centre and visitors. It also provides opportunities for city centre businesses. The analytical system supporting the wi-fi will allow businesses, including smaller independents, to target city centre customers. We are working up a programme so we can demonstrate this opportunity to city centre businesses.



Notes: Phase 1 completed June 2014, Phase 2 planned for completed July 2015 and Phase 3 planned for November 2015

## **Gigabit City**

We have seen three significant steps as we move York towards being one of the best digitally connected cities in Europe.

I have vigorously promoted York as a location for new private sector investment. In April a new joint venture, comprised of City Fibre, Talk Talk and Sky, announced a £30m plus digital investment that would transform York into the UK's first gigabit city. All premises within urban York will have the opportunity to have a fibre connection to the premises. This will provide 1000 mbps connections – the average speed in York is currently 16mbps. Implementation is expected to take place over a two year period commencing later this year. This is a transformational initiative and will allow businesses to have a significant competitive advantage and will open up new opportunities for communities. Planning work is underway involving our street works team to ensure that disruption to pedestrians, roads, households and businesses are minimised.

The Gigabit City is focussed on urban York and I am anxious to minimise any possible digital divide between "urban" and "rural" York. The Council has successfully bid for resources from the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) as part of the government's rural programme, and I am seeking to

double this funding to bring it above £0.5m with European Commission funding. Working alongside West Yorkshire local authorities we are working up an implementation plan which will involve research to ensure we are targeting public resources only on areas where the private sector will not invest unaided, looking at the technology options and procurement processes. Implementation is planned to commence in July 2015.

## **Biovale**

As the world shifts away from its dependence on fossil fuels, new multi-billion pound markets are emerging for bio-based products. The US, China and Europe have all declared the bioeconomy a priority and put in place ambitious policies, while across Europe the bioeconomy sectors have a reported worth of some € 2 trillion in annual turnover and employ over 22 million people. With oil prices rising and corporate, government and customer demands changing, huge markets are developing for bio-based products in the food and drink, chemicals, energy and manufacturing industries.

Yorkshire is at the forefront of this global paradigm shift, driving change through the growing BioVale innovation cluster bringing together the region's internationally-leading research, innovative agriculture and extensive bioenergy, chemicals and food and drink industry supply chains. This expertise is already making an impact globally, whether through increasing yields of anti-malaria medicine in Africa, or creating commercial products from biodiesel waste.

BioVale is developing and promoting Yorkshire and the Humber as an innovation cluster for the bioeconomy. It aims to establish the region as an international centre for bio-based research and development, stimulating sustainable economic growth and encouraging inward investment. BioVale also acts as a gateway to bioeconomy projects and businesses throughout the UK.

## **Local Growth Fund**

The final allocations for the Local Growth Deal were announced on the 7th July. The competitive element of the Local Growth Fund was £2 billion. Both of the Local Enterprise Partnership's (LEP's) that cover York received a greater than average share of the total fund but less than the overall amount identified in their Strategic Economic Plan.

York, North Yorkshire and East Riding LEP received around £110 million (compared with the fair share on a per capita basis of £13.9million). Leeds City Region LEP received £573 million from the Local Growth Deal.

For York, this will provide funding for key projects including York Central and BioVale. In addition, Leeds City Region received £1bn over 20 years to

deliver the West Yorkshire Plus Transport Fund. All these projects are crucial for the city's future economic growth

### **York Pride**

York Pride once again passed off as a fantastic celebration for York and goes from strength to strength each year. For my party this event reflects our values in celebrating diversity and respecting people for who they are. I was delighted to attend and was pleased to see politicians of all parties there too.

Many people appreciated the Rainbow flag flying above the Mansion House. At the start of June I spoke of how this event has become an important part of our civic calendar and how all parties now back the symbolic flying of the Rainbow flag after initial opposition from some members. It shows how attitudes have changed in just a few years towards the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community and rightly so.

Councillor James Alexander

Labour Leader of City of York Council

8<sup>th</sup> July, 2014