

Executive Member for the Environment and Climate Emergency Report to Full Council, July 2024

The challenge to reduce emissions and restore nature is immense, and it is easy to become despondent or cynical. York has done neither. It retained the highest rating - A - in 2023, by CDP-ICLEI Track, which rates council actions on emissions and climate. We have ensured that Climate and Environment are considered as one of our 4 core priorities in all council decisions, with a lot of work done to ensure that our Climate Action Plan is a dynamic piece of work, project managed jointly by our carbon reduction team and Directors of services.

We are increasing carbon literacy training and accreditation for staff and have introduced quarterly cross-portfolio meetings between Environment, Transport and Housing and Health, ensuring that we are working as a whole Council for the benefit of York residents and our planet's health and wellbeing.

The city's Climate Strategy aligns directly with the Council Plan, One City of All – where our climate objectives are clearly set out.

Our commitments are to tackling health inequalities and carbon emissions that arise, in roughly equal portions, from Transport, Housing and the built environment, and from Energy, alongside our need to reverse environmental loss, and adapt and thrive in a world of changing and more extreme weather.

I want to thank our **Carbon Reduction** team for the significant funding – over £8 million - they have brought into York this year, targeted at making the biggest difference to reducing carbon emissions and to meet our ambitions for low energy costs, clean air, warm homes, and healthy living. This includes:

- 1) Almost £3 million from the Combined Authority's Joint Committee for allocation of funding from the Mayor's Net Zero Fund. This funding is being used to complete an outline business case for a potential green energy park at Harewood Whin, which could lead to a reduction of 8,125 tCO₂e per year and power the equivalent of 10,000 households, while generating revenue and creating demand for new skills and local employment opportunities.

The project is also exploring the business case and potential to deliver strategic benefits associated with relocating the Hazel Court household waste recycling depot to a more convenient location, especially as the City grows. We are also exploring two large-scale renewable generation projects, including onshore wind near North Wiggington and Ground-mounted Solar near Langwith, a strategic site in the Local Plan. In total, these projects could contribute 65MW of new renewable generation for the city.

- 2) Our local area energy plan outlines the scale of change needed to enable emission free, low energy cost, clean air York; 73,000 heat pumps installed in homes, 44,100 homes improved with insulation, draught proofing and double glazing, 24 % of homes generating their own electricity with rooftop solar, 920 MW of large scale renewable electricity generation. The City Leap Accelerator Project – a partnership with the MCA and NYC, has received £2m of funding from the Department for Net Zero and Energy Security to test the replicability of the Bristol City Leap model in our region, accelerating delivery and investment of net zero projects at scale.
- 3) Innovate UK has invested over £3m into The Retrofit One-Stop-Shop for York. A third of York's emissions come from housing and buildings, and residents need help, advice and trusted suppliers to make the changes needed. Developed in close partnership with 7 different local organisations, the one stop shop has the potential to address significant emissions from the domestic sector. The project will develop a digital platform to support householder decisions throughout the retrofit process, together with building much needed green construction and retrofit skills benefitting both the city and its residents. Two council homes are nearing completion as local demonstrator projects.
- 4) Other Net Zero Funded projects include installation of renewable heating to improve comfort for tenants at Honeysuckle and Alex Lyon House. The replacement of inefficient heating systems and associated fabric improvements will reduce carbon emissions, and bring cosier homes and a 50% reduction in heating costs for residents. The LED improvement projects will result in carbon and cost savings for the council of around £80,000.
- 5) 9 York schools have now benefitted from our partnership with Solar for Schools, with 3 of these being fitted in the last 12 months, and a further 4 in the final stages of negotiation. Lord Deramore's Primary is notable as the programme's largest school solar installation in the country.

Housing

The Ordnance Lane housing scheme was expanded to enable an increase from 60 to 101 affordable homes, all certified Passivhaus standard. Our retrofit policy of tackling voids first, enabling work to be done faster and without inconvenience to occupants, has dealt with mould and insulation as a priority and significant progress has been made in clearing the backlog. The Local Energy Advice Demonstrator (LEAD) scheme is making good progress in providing advice for residents in conservation areas and on Traveller sites amenity buildings, including arranging access for specialist designers or heat engineers to deliver advice and surveys, helping residents understand and decide on their options. CYC has continued to partner with York Community Energy to deliver York Energy Advice with new funding in 2023 from the Shared Prosperity Fund. We are shortly launching a new partnership project to encourage uptake of benefits and energy efficiency measures via the Eco Flex scheme, which will maximise residents' energy efficiency via funds paid for by the energy companies. Officers continue to deliver decarbonisation of heating and insulation for homes not on gas via the Home Upgrade Grant (HUG) 2.

Congratulations are also due for winning the Regional Large-scale project of the year award at the Yorkshire Energy Efficiency Awards for the SHDF Wave 1 project.

Transport emissions represent nearly a third of all the city's emissions, and I am really delighted that Executive will be invited to approve the Local Transport Strategy in July which, at its heart, has a new Movement and Place Plan. By prioritising people, especially our children and young adults, and valuing our City as a place where work and play co-exist. We can adapt our ancient road network to better suit our travel needs and improve the health and wellbeing of all. This will help to reduce car dependence, and associated carbon emissions, freeing up road space for those that most need it.

Air Quality Action Plan 4

Air quality has continued to improve; Holgate has come in under the target for NO₂ in 2023 for the first time, with a reduction of 10% across the City. Having spent over a decade walking past the air monitor on the corner of Blossom Street with prams and growing children myself, and watching children from Scarcroft, Millthorpe, All Saints, St Pauls, Acomb, Our Lady's, Poppleton Road, York High and The Mount trekking up and down this stretch, breathing in this air, this is a significant milestone.

Gillygate residents, you are not forgotten – we need more reductions across the whole City, and our Transport Strategy will play a significant role in bringing clean air to all. We strengthened our commitment by aspiring to WHO standards as our target, whilst acknowledging that some air pollution is caused by factors including global weather patterns that are outside our control.

We are launching an Air Quality alert platform which will show areas of concern and advise people in York how to avoid them, as well as encouraging us all to take steps not to add to pollution on days of poor air quality. The alerts will also be shown on road signs. The AQ team ran an awareness campaign on the dangers of solid fuel fires last Autumn, which release the more damaging small particulates of 2.5 micrograms and under and wrote to over 350 farmers outlining the dangers to air quality posed by ammonia based fertilizers. A lot is achieved by our dedicated team of two.

We relaunched the **York Climate Commission** in January; over 100 representatives from organisations and business across York attended, and ten working groups have formed, under the areas of Biodiversity and Nature, Connecting with Green Spaces, Buildings, Retrofit and Energy, Education and Youth engagement, Food, Future Green Economy, Health, Transport, Waste and circular economy. This was no mean feat with no additional funding or capacity, but the response has been so inspiring and welcome. I would like to thank everyone involved, who is willingly giving up time to help our City adapt and thrive even as our climate changes, and our colleagues at the Stockholm Environment Institute who have recently offered designated admin support.

No one person or organisation can effect the changes necessary, and the Commission members have an important role, not just in reviewing and agreeing the York Climate Change Strategy and providing leadership and accountability for progressing activity with the strategy and action plan, but working as a whole City, creating a network of collaboration and co-operation, sharing knowledge and best practice, and celebrating the actions that are being taken.

We have planted **2,550 trees** out of our Council Plan target of 4,000, in the first year of White Rose Funding of Green Streets. Trees bring multiple benefits; cleaner air, much needed shade and cooling as temperatures rise, increased biodiversity and nature on our doorsteps, as well as carbon storage.

I am looking forward to work that is in the pipeline for a Tree Strategy across our City, to ensure that we protect and replace our existing trees as well as increase our Tree Canopy overall. In all planting we prioritise areas of greatest need alongside benefits.

The Living Heritage Fund awarded £39,000 to celebrate the King's Coronation earlier this year, to invest in two new micro-woodlands for the city. Based on the Miyawaki planting method, these entail high density planting that is fast growing and deliver a high level of biodiversity. The public response to suggestions for sites was enthusiastic, and we are keeping a long list of sites that are able to be planted on with future funding.

I am also delighted to complete the tree update part of this report by announcing that the **York Community Woodland** will formally open on 20 August, with the Civic Party and invited guests celebrating 250,000 trees in the new woodland just outside of Knapton. My thanks go to my predecessor Executive Member for the Environment, Cllr Widdowson, for the work she put in to help make this happen.

Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

Work is nearing completion across York and North Yorkshire after a series of consultation sessions across the region to identify key habitats and species for protective action. Some of this overlaps with B-Lines, a project to restore and create a series of wildflower-rich 'insect pathways' across the country to mitigate the loss of 97% of wildflower meadows since the Second World War, but is much broader in outlook, encompassing many different types of habitat and species.

Additionally, the **LINC** project is currently out for tender. Local Investment in Natural Capital is a DEFRA funded programme supported by the Environment Agency, to support a small cohort of local authority trailblazers; City of York and North Yorkshire Council are joined by Cornwall Council, West Midlands CA and Northumberland County Council, to facilitate mobilisation of private investment to deliver projects relating to nature recovery, climate adaptation and climate resilience.

Both these projects are supported with work that we have already identified in the City to map spaces ensuring that CYC land is managed in the most beneficial way for biodiversity, climate adaptation and resilience, helping inform our nascent inseting and offsetting and adaptation policies. Our new Ecologist is now in place and work on this will be starting soon.

Buzz About York

Acting on our pollinator strategy we are building climate resilience and increasing pollinator friendly spaces by introducing sustainable planting in selected areas in the City centre and changing our management of verges and open spaces.

The City centre planting has swapped bedding plants for ecologist-selected, climate resilient, pollinator friendly perennials, which do not need replacing each year. This also cuts transport costs and emissions, staff time and waste.

We are trialling 'one cut and remove' on some arterial routes and areas in the City. We do not have the equipment to remove grass cuttings, (necessary to deplete nutrients in the soil and allow a wider variety of local plants to thrive, rather than just nettle and bramble) but have worked with Lower Derwenthorpe Nature Reserve to share their equipment this year and are grateful for their support. Already we can see huge successes for pollinators and biodiversity. On one trial area 80 different species of plant have been recorded, including Bee and Pyramidal orchids, and Creeping yellowcress and Lesser swinecress, which are not particularly common for York, and already represent an increase on the baseline assessment last year. If you see a 'Why the Long Grass' sign, those are good facts to remember.

A considerable amount of work has gone into improving our knowledge of how different areas of the city are managed over the last 12 months and mapping this is ongoing, as is uploading the information to YorMap. As well as the designated trial sites there are an increasing number of areas and verges that many residents want to manage for wildlife. This is much more difficult for our operatives to deliver than a single management plan for all green spaces, and I am grateful to all our public realm staff for their support in helping us ensure that from park to pavement edge we are working alongside Nature wherever possible. Members can help support this mapping work with feedback of local knowledge where you think it is missing.

Our Eco Team continue to support Friends of Groups and our parks and green spaces, and I am looking forward to the opportunity to thank them and volunteers at the upcoming Green Flag awards this month.

Residential Verges

We reduced residential verge cuts to 6 times a year, partly in response to our need to find savings against a background of insufficient funding,

and partly due to successful commitments to deliver biodiversity benefits, allowing different shorter plants to flower throughout the season. In addition, climate change has made grass management even more difficult this year than last.

Our thanks go to all Officers but those in public realm have faced a particularly challenging year. Changing weather patterns with increased incidents of torrential downpours have also put extra burdens on the public realm team managing clean up events after flooding.

Garden waste

We made the difficult decision to introduce a garden waste subscription scheme in response to the financial challenges that York, and all local authorities are facing. We recognise the difficulties for those hit hardest by the cost of living crisis and halved the subscription rate for those on council tax support. Our first priority has to be to keep York City Council solvent; the impact on the residents of Birmingham following bankruptcy, where council tax is now at 20%, is painful to watch. Joining over 70% of local authorities across the country, including North Yorkshire, in introducing a charge for a non-statutory service is difficult, but preferable to cutting other valued services which support our most vulnerable residents. Disposal options at Hazel Court or Towthorpe remain, but composting at home is the most environmentally beneficial and free alternative. The previous scheme was not available to all residents. A charged scheme can be offered to more parts of the City including the newer developments in future years. We will of course monitor negative impacts.

Developing a subscription scheme is a large and challenging piece of work and I want to thank Officers for all the work they have done to bring this forward, whilst also dealing with all the usual, considerable, day to day operational activities, in an already challenging year of extreme weather and budget cuts.

I would like to highlight an example of our Officers going above and beyond with thanks to Ben Grabham and Jodie Dunn for spending the hottest Saturday afternoon of the year, out of work hours, shovelling nearly 17 tonnes of free compost for the many residents who took part in the giveaway at Harewood Whin in June.

Weeds

In line with our commitment to reduce the use of glyphosate, the number of sprays has been reduced from 3 to 2, with the option for streets to opt

out of spraying if Residents undertake to remove weeds by hand, which many areas across the City are now doing. There is a balance to be struck; we also have a commitment to accessibility and protecting infrastructure, and we will be learning lessons from this year and inviting feedback from Members and community at the end of this growing season. We are also keeping alternatives under review, whilst being mindful of our current budgetary constraints.

City centre cleansing

We are the proud owners of a new piece of equipment - a Goupil – which is able to work across the city centre, combining a jet wash and capacity to empty bins, at times when the larger waste lorries may not be able to. This will cut down staff time of walking across the City and increase efficiency.

Electric charging at the Hazel Court waste Depot

Is now fully installed and functioning well!

Our Public protection team have continued their work to keep York a safe and healthy City for all.

We have 2,094 food premises in the city, of which (79%) are FHRS '5' rated, and 93% are rated above '3' i.e classed as 'broadly compliant'. To help compliance and achieve the highest ratings, we continue to offer pre-inspection advice visits on a cost recovery basis – last year saw the highest ever number of businesses taking up the offer. 193 food standard assessments have been carried out to ensure that 'food is what it says it is', and that allergens are declared. There have been two successful prosecutions of food businesses where poor standards continue.

We are keen to reduce the burden of plastic on our City, and our planet. Following the ban on single use plastic in cutlery in October 2023, Officers advised the small number of premises where disposable plastic cutlery was still being used that this was no longer lawful.

No further incidents of disposable plastic cutlery have been found in 805 food safety inspections since. Make it York have banned single use plastics from all events they organise including the Christmas Market.

Trading Standards Officers have conducted test purchases with the aid of volunteers for sales of vapes and alcohol. There is one prosecution pending for the illegal sale of a vape to a 14 year old. Officers have also seized illegal vapes worth over £13k.

The National Trading Standards team, based here at City of York Council, continues to successfully prosecute scams affecting consumers nationally and recovering the proceeds of crime. Examples include an international modelling agency scam, unfair practices in the resale of concert tickets including Ed Sheeran and those assisting scammers offering to fix bogus computer problems.

In Licensing, eleven new hackney carriage licences were made available to black, low emission, wheelchair accessible vehicles. At the time of writing there are eight such vehicles which are regularly seen on the road, and a further three are being sourced by taxi drivers. The team are consulting on a new taxi licensing policy (consultation closes on the 14 July) and includes proposals to encourage more environmentally friendly and wheelchair accessible vehicles into the city's taxi fleet. There have been two successful prosecutions of taxi drivers illegally plying for hire. Officers are continuing to identify unlicensed dog breeders and bring them into the licensing and inspection regime where required.

The work of the Public Protection team provided support to the BID in helping the city to renew its Purple Flag award, recognising a vibrant and diverse night-time economy whilst also promoting the safety and wellbeing of residents and visitors.

Public Toilets

CYC agreed a contract a decade ago with Healthmatic that runs until 2029. The contract provided for a stakeholder group to be set up, but this has never been enacted. I have now held two meetings with city representatives. There is no magic wand, nor magic money tree, but having open, frank conversations with partners, traders, accessibility groups and the contract provider is encouraging shared understanding and ownership of difficulties.

We are looking at how to increase and improve the 'Take a Seat' campaign, event requirements, better signage, and scope for joint work with the MCA. Positive news is that refurbishment of the two Changing Places toilets has recently been completed.

Partners

I was really delighted to welcome the Keep Britain Tidy annual conference to York in March this year and celebrate the unsung heroes of York and all local authorities. Our street cleaners, litter pickers, neighbourhood enforcement officers, grass cutters and waste teams do hard, heavy work, day in day out, and they deserve our thanks. I was very happy to boast of York's volunteers – we are in the process of building capacity, but previously our lists included 930 litter pickers, 284

gardeners, 63 Friends of, 38 Tree wardens, 105 people helping lock/unlock parks, 8 trail builders, 293 snow wardens, 1 balsam basher, 35 power tools, 2 beck clearers and 30 leaf clearers.

I am really pleased to report that joint working is flourishing between York BID, CYC, YCT, and Make it York with ongoing cleansing and rejuvenation projects. CYC and York BID dovetail their litter picking and city cleansing operations and the rejuvenation days, one of which I was pleased to take part in, have transformed benches, bins and other street furniture. Thanks to all the volunteers who have taken part in this, and the York businesses who have donated paint and equipment. More days are planned for September; all Members and residents are warmly welcomed to volunteer.

It was a privilege to outline the fantastic work that York Cares does at their Stakeholder meeting, and to thank the amazing volunteers at their Awards Ceremony. York employers and employees give their time so generously to help our City and its people, and, alongside our Eco team and St Nicks, have helped transform so many of our public spaces, including schools and parks. Over 1,260 people took part in transforming 36 sites, culminating in the Big Community Challenge last year at Foss Islands park, restoring the beck, clearing rubbish, and a beautiful mural. They are starting work on North St Gardens this month, and I can't wait to see the magic that happens at this year's Community Challenge, the theme of which is 'Changing Landscapes'.

St Nicks continues to help improve our City and green corridors in really significant ways, and are helping York build resilience and restore nature. Joint work on more stunning wildflowering of portions of the Bar walls is underway for next year, as well as a very exciting project in the River Ouse.

Joint work by the EA, CYC and St Nicks in Hull Road has resulted in confirmed sightings of water vole; an endangered species on the Red List of English Mammals. This is a fantastic achievement in a City Park. York is so lucky in its people; I am very proud to belong to a City with such a rich volunteering and philanthropic heritage.

Cllr Ravilious and myself were pleased to help support UoY in launching the first ever City Nature Challenge here in York. Over the course of a long weekend in April, people were asked to record sightings of all kinds of flora and fauna via the iNaturalist app, bringing people closer to Nature, increasing interest, and providing a valuable data bank from citizen science.

York residents rose to the challenge magnificently, coming a very close 2nd place for the number of observations, making a total of 12,833

biodiversity observations, 3rd place for number of observers with 221 people recording observations and received Gold for the total number of species observed with 1487 different species, showing the amazing diversity of wildlife here in our City. We came 47th out of 690 cities globally, punching well above our weight, and I look forward to building on this fantastic result next year.

Against the really challenging backdrop of local authority underfunding, I have spent a lot of time in my first year going out to the City talking to people and partners, everywhere, most of whom are also struggling with cost of living and climate challenges. Building these bridges and connections is so important. By having open, honest conversations and not losing sight of our aspirations makes us a stronger community, helping us achieve far more than we could do alone. I am humbled by the hard work of so many of our teams and the generosity in time, skills, support and enthusiasm of all the people I have met, to help make York a climate resilient, green leafed, wildlife wonderful, healthy, happy city for all.

Cllr Kent

Executive Member for the Environment and Climate Emergency

8 July 2024