

Leader's Report to Council

Enterprise Zone

It was great to hear last month that the York Central Tear Drop site had received approval from the Chancellor to be an Enterprise Zone (EZ). This will have vast benefits for York and the surrounding area in terms of business jobs creation and new homes. Something of the order of £100 million of business rates will close the viability gap and make the delivery of what is estimated to be 7,000 jobs and something of the order of 2,000 new homes a reality. Getting to this point has been due to great work by our officers, the York North Yorkshire and East Riding Local Enterprise Partnership (YNYER LEP) and other partners, but in many ways this represents the end of the beginning of the journey. It is vital we work closely to bring the good quality jobs York needs and this includes promoting the city via the recently approved Business Improvement District.

Local Plan

We have continued to make good progress on the Local Plan and have a clear plan going forward to deliver a plan well in time for the Government's 2017 deadline. We have reduced the level of demand to one backed by evidence and will do further work on the supply side including windfall provision. It was also welcome that the Local Plan Working Group supported Executive in steps to ensure greater protection of communities including protection for pubs. Work on brownfield sites, including York Central as earlier, will also help to reduce the need to build on greenfields around York.

Lilac Housing

Similarly on the theme of housing it was enjoyable to go to the Lilac Housing project in Leeds with Council colleagues as well as members of YorSpace. Lilac is a relatively new project and offers a great way for us to learn from their experience. They seemed to offer a way into home ownership which is achievable for those with limited finances. But equally there was a very distinctive community who all lived closely together in a way it is a shame more neighbourhoods don't. The project also had strong green credentials in terms of insulation, growing their own food and reusing. There were numerous lessons to learn as we as an

Executive see what can be done to try and help the likes of YorSpace.

Council Tax Support

Following the decision of Labour to turn down transitional grants and impose the highest level of minimum Council Tax payments it is right that we have looked at the level and whether it is working effectively. I am pleased that we completed the consultation and thank all those who took part. Whatever has been decided by the Executive to put to Full Council by the time this report is read we must not forget Council Tax is just one part of the ways we can assist the most financially disadvantaged and we must ensure money is effectively spent.

Devolution

There is unfortunately relatively little to report as with the exception of South Yorkshire the rest of Yorkshire struggles to agree on the geography of what regions should be involved in devolution. We remain committed to getting the best deal for York and it is disappointing that key parties are reluctant to discuss the issues together and seem to have very set in stone positions. The Northern Powerhouse is an area of vast potential but that will mean working together whether on coast to coast rail or as significant trading blocs. The ability to agree governance specifics of an area is in reality trivial compared to the greater need to all work together.

Comprehensive Spending Review

The Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) delivered welcome news on the EZ but there was also good news as with the long term economic plan working and the deficit reducing the Chancellor was able to move away from the proposed tax credit changes and police reductions. There was also good news on funding for northern infrastructure and the ongoing protections for health and education spending. We continue to closely watch the situation on business rates where the Chancellor's earlier announcement on letting areas retain them has great potential for York.

Arts, Digital and Creativity

This is a big area and one which has had a mixed press. This has not least been from politicians and I amongst many others have wrongly called the Arts Barge a vanity project when it is not, I did not support Labour giving it funding in the way they did over other areas but the project itself has some great people and it is excellent to see them moving towards a mooring in York. Additionally we have seen the plans for the Guildhall reshaped so that the centre can be part of the creative sphere but ensuring it stacks up financially. It was a great pleasure to last month go to the film studios at Church Fenton where also there were people from York University and a leading figure in the video game industry. They all gave an inspiring vision into the potential of this sector, when done in the right way with strong business brains, and what it can bring to York. Most recently we have seen the anniversary of one year since York became a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) City of Media and Arts, the potential is vast but the delivery must be tightly focused.

York Winning Awards

It was great to see Bishopthorpe Road recently win the British High Street of the year award and huge congratulations must go to Cllr Johnny Hayes and all the team at 'Bishy Road' traders but of course also all the community that makes the area what it is. The Executive will help wherever it can, but the greatest potential for York is in using the expertise of 'Bishy Road' to help revitalise other high streets whether in Acomb or Haxby or Micklegate with the exciting plans for the new 'Micklegate Run'.

Further on the awards front it was great to be at The Press Business Awards, which has thrived over the years, to celebrate York businesses whether large or small, old or new and to see how well everyone works together. Closer to home, this week saw the CYC VIP awards which were hosted by future stars of the big screen and theatre, Jon Stonehouse and Sally Burns. It was great to see some well deserved recognition for our hardworking staff – all of whom, including councillors, I wish a Happy Christmas and Prosperous New Year.

Cllr Chris Steward