

Leader's Report to Council

Flooding

The floods now seem some time ago, but we must remember some residents and businesses are still not back in their properties. Aside from Budget Council this is the first time Full Council has met since the floods and it is therefore right we put on record our thanks for all those that helped. Many have also worked hard on the recovery effort and getting people the support they need, whether council staff, Make it York or other agencies. Amidst the horrors of the floods we have seen some positives in the great community spirit and the willingness of volunteers which we must further utilise and I think it has also given a new impetus to some businesses including the likes of the new organisation launched to support our excellent businesses. The message remains that York is absolutely open for business. We must however learn lessons and this is therefore why we set up the Independent Inquiry.

Community Stadium

Executive will hopefully approve the plans for the Community Stadium. I have always been clear that I support the stadium and we will deliver it, to not do so would let down football and rugby fans and would also see the broader population miss out on the community facilities being built. Officers have done some great work recently in bringing down the costs from the project we inherited but ultimately I believe the previous administration was wrong to expand the project as they did and also to give the contract for so many different aspects of the project to one provider. This is not a model that has been followed elsewhere and that is for good reason. However none of that changes our commitment that we will deliver the stadium, we cannot travel back in time to amend the things we would have done differently.

Schools

Over recent months we have seen a number of schools convert to academies and it is likely by the time this report is published the Chancellor will have increased the pace at which schools will be converting. Views differ in the chamber on the benefits of academisation and Free Schools but we must discuss what we can as local politicians do and what is best for children. We have also seen significant interest in the plans for new school places in the

Micklegate area and I think Executive and Cllr Brooks in particular, have done well in listening to these views in the way we have consulted with residents and furthered the consultation to give people more say. It is hugely welcome and of course understandable that residents are so passionate and we have endeavoured to engage fully, I also think the Micklegate ward councillors have worked hard in this area.

One Planet York

I am sure Cllr Waller will touch on this in his report but this is an important part of the administration's focus as we look to make York one of our greenest cities. We have seen good news on green buses, ultra low emission vehicles and we are investing in new lighting technology and we are keen to reduce air pollution and improved sustainability. One Planet York covers numerous areas of focus and there are ten areas in which we will look to improve lives of residents. It is something all councillors can work together on.

Business

It is pleasing to see the new Business Improvement District about to go live with the appointment of a new BID manager. I reiterate my thanks to all who have worked so hard on the BID. As I take a place on the board I am very mindful that the services will be very much in addition to what the council provides. When the vote to renew the bid comes due in a few years we must look to turn businesses who were rightly concerned about a new outflow of funds to being supportive due to the difference the scheme has made. It has been pleasing to see unemployment in the city continuing to fall and also the positive recent events promoting apprentices.

York Central

We have seen the consultation on York Central and I am grateful to all that have involved themselves. We as a city need to work better on a cross party basis and York Central is a great example of where we can do this. My door is open to any councillors who wish to discuss the project and I do feel this engagement is a better way forward than the press releases some instead choose to submit of their concerns. Officers have done a great job on the plans but the consultation is just that, it is not a done deal, I am

therefore grateful to the many people who have approached me and Executive colleagues to share their thoughts and legitimate questions which have provided much food for thought.

Transport

Issues of transport remain a key issue for the city whether congestion at a local level on the Outer Ring Road or our key place in the rail network. It was good to recently have David Higgins in York discussing High Speed2 and what it means for York and hopefully in the budget we will see positive news on HS3. York Central as a site is of course significantly aided by its location next to the station and this is a key part of the necessary joined up vision.

Devolution

We have continued to work hard as the administration to get the best deal for York, but unfortunately as people will be aware the path to a deal has been a far from smooth journey – primarily unfortunately due to politics as well as the lack of a clear and obvious geography. The Labour leader has said their group believes York's future is in the West Yorkshire Combined Authority, seemingly whatever the evidence of economic geography or the views of residents. It may well be that things move fast in the weeks ahead or equally it may be that no deal emerges, but we will only do a deal that is right for York rather than having a pre-set unchangeable position.

Military

It was a great honour for me to recently represent the Council at the Memorial Gardens Gun Salute to mark the Queen's accession to the throne. Her service to the country has been superb and as ever with the military the day ran like clockwork. Full Council rightly signed the Military Covenant to commit to helping the military whenever we can in recognition of the way they serve and help us. Given York's large military presence, with of course soldiers helping recently with the floods, it is right we continue to focus on any ways we can help whether serving military or issues like homelessness or mental illness which unfortunately often disproportionately affect our former troops.

Cllr Chris Steward