

LEADER'S REPORT TO COUNCIL: 15th DECEMBER 2016

West Yorkshire Transport Fund

One of the most significant decisions taken by the Executive since the last meeting of Full Council has been to agree to join the West Yorkshire Transport Fund (WYTF) which will allow us to access £72M of funding to be used for major upgrades on the A1237 ring road, on the Guildhall project, and to progress work on providing access into the York Central scheme.

Devolution and the WYTF

Let me be clear about our decision to become a member of the West Yorkshire Transport Fund. It is perfectly possible for York to be a member of the WYTF without becoming a full member of the West Yorkshire Combined Authority. Our position on devolution has always been to remain flexible regarding all options put forward for Yorkshire but to constantly keep at the forefront the results of the 2015 public consultation that any devolution decision has to maximise outcomes for York, that the interests of York should be central to any decision, and that the heritage, identity and culture of this ancient city are as important as financial factors. Whilst it is true that devolution seems to have taken more of a back seat since the Brexit vote and the change in national leadership, the concept of devolved government remains very much on the table and we continue to engage constructively with prospective partner authorities in finding a devolution deal that will work best for York.

Spark

The approval at our last Executive Meeting to take this proposal forward is an opportunity to give an innovative community interest company the chance to create an interim start-up music, food and arts venue on the old Reynard's Garage site on Piccadilly prior to the site's permanent redevelopment. It is an unconventional project and some have been sceptical about descriptions of empty shipping containers stacked near the city centre. However, it has the potential to bring new urban life into a part of the city centre which has hitherto been difficult to engage with

commercially. The proposal is temporary but it will of course require planning permission which is where its use, form and appearance can be examined in detail. Nevertheless, I am pleased at the cross-party support the proposal has attracted and it is understood to be the first scheme of its kind outside the capital to create this type of 'urban buzz' and it will put to good use a site which would otherwise lie vacant for a period pending redevelopment.

Closure by MoD of Army Facilities in York

It was with shock and regret that we learned just a month ago that the Ministry of Defence's estate rationalisation programme had earmarked the closure of the Army's facilities at Strensall and Towthorpe Lines by 2021, and Imphal Barracks by 2031. Regrettably, jobs will be lost and there is also the danger that many of York's historic links with the military will be severed although with the closure of Imphal so far into the future, it is hoped that a plan can be developed over the coming years which might allow those connections to be preserved. To those opposition groups who claim that the possibility of including these MoD sites in the emerging draft Local Plan will cause unwarranted delay and risk breaching the Government's deadlines for submission of the draft Plan, we would say that this is not the case. Our officers have held very productive discussions with the Department of Communities and Local Government, who appreciate that the investigation of these sites for potential inclusion in the draft Plan is required and the resultant delay is not of the Council's making.

Taxi Regulation and Uber

Concern has been raised by York's taxi trade regarding the licensing and conduct of private hire drivers following changes in legislation and the introduction of Uber to the city. Evidence that out-of-town drivers have been operating in York has formerly been reported but under the Deregulation Act this activity is now permitted. Over a year ago, the Conservative Group made representations to one of our Members of Parliament that this would cause problems and that indeed has turned out to be the case, but these drivers, providing they have been pre-booked, are not breaking the law.

What will not be tolerated are any breaches of the licensing conditions regarding picking up, ranking, approaching customers etc. Enforcement procedures have been increased, and since the end of October the Council's Licensing Officers have been out on York's streets on ten evenings, in addition to joint operations carried out with Leeds City Council Licensing Officers, and North Yorkshire Police. Both local and out-of-town drivers have been targeted, being checked for safety and smoking violations, as well as for unlicensed vehicles, lack of badges and illegal picking up. Licensing Officers have also been handing out business cards asking drivers to contact the Council with any complaints rather than take matters into their own hands.

As a result, Licensing Officers have four investigations currently underway, including for illegal picking-up, notably involving both York and out-of-town drivers. Up to now, officers have not been successful in flagging down any drivers as part of attempted test purchases. Inspections will be maintained, and the Council will continue to work with neighbouring authorities and the police in monitoring the situation.

Leader's Council Engagements

One of the many roles of Council Leader is to engage with the social, community, and commercial activities of the city and at this festive time of year, I make no excuse for recording some of the engagements I have attended, often with other Council members and the Lord Mayor, since I became Council Leader in May. We are very lucky in York to have so many opportunities to celebrate our city's heritage and traditions, to give back to our communities, and to recognise excellence and endeavour in so many areas of the city's life.

The events in which I have participated include: the Thanksgiving Service for HM The Queen's 90th Birthday in June; the 'Flood Hero' Awards at the Guildhall in July; the University of York Graduation Lunch in July; the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding for York Central with the Minister and Project Partners in July; the Service to Commemorate the Battle of the Somme in July; the Community Pride Awards in October; the Remembrance Day Service in the Minster and later at Imphal Barracks as Guest of the Army; the York St John University Graduation Ceremony in November; the Press Business

Awards in November; the Public Launch of the 'NoNeedtoBeg' campaign in November; hosting a business reception by the Consortium of East Coast Main Line Authorities (ECMA) at the House of Commons in November, and attending the City of York Council VIP Awards in December.

On behalf of the Council I wish to record my sincere thanks to all those who organised and participated in these events. I also want to place on record that the Chief Executive, the Deputy Leader and I took part in a number of Staff Road shows and 'drop-ins' both in West Offices and at the Eco Depot which were very well received. In that spirit of engagement may I take this opportunity to wish all members and officers a Peaceful Christmas and a Happy and Successful New Year.

Councillor David Carr

Council Leader