

Report of the Deputy Leader to Council on 17 December 2020

I would like to take this opportunity to wish everyone a well-earned festive break at the end of a truly unprecedented year, which as you may recall started with the worst floods since Boxing Day 2015 and quickly progressed to the working from home/, essential loo roll and pasta shopping/ daily one hour exercise experience.

Zoom, Skype and Microsoft teams meetings and socially distanced street conversations through a mask have become part of the new normal, with the added pressures of the hokey-cokey tier system for us to guide our residents and businesses through. To our credit, 'Let's be York' has worked well as a 'Hands, Face, Space' message, with the Covid 19 infection rate in York showing what we can achieve through collective efforts to limit the spread of the virus. That doesn't mean that we are complacent or that many people haven't had a truly terrible year, suffering personal tragedy though the health or economic impacts of the pandemic. But we must keep positive offering support wherever we can.

The Executive has also been working with senior officers to ensure that government funds get distributed as quickly as possible to individuals and businesses that need it, while starting the difficult discussions to identify budget savings that will be needed in the coming year. Our council tax support and financial inclusion funding will provide a cushion for some, but it is unlikely we will be able to avoid taking the maximum allowable council tax increase in order to fill the funding gap and maintain core essential services for our most vulnerable residents . A consultation on the budget will start shortly, with decisions being made at public decision sessions in January prior to consideration by the Executive and Budget Council.

We have also been taking forward the campaign for a devolution deal for York and North Yorkshire, setting out the case for the least disruptive model allowing York to remain a unitary appropriate for our unique civic heritage, Lord Mayor, not a council spread too thinly across half of the county. The 'We Back York' campaign launch on Facebook featured a wide range of representatives and set out a strong case for the approach which clearly has wide support across York. Whatever the public might think of this council, we are all accountable to and represent the York electorate, not Selby, Malton or Scarborough, nice as they are as places to visit when we are allowed to do so.

In terms of my portfolio area, the scooter trial is gradually extending to new areas of the city, including Bishophill, the station and York Hospital with close monitoring of the experience and a plan to add e-bikes in the new year. Bus operation continues to offer a covid secure means of transport for many, with an increasing number of new double decker electric buses operating on the park and ride services and featuring wifi and automated stop announcements.

A £10m improvement to the York – Harrogate line has just been completed, preparing the way for half hourly services. A recent announcement has given us the funding to prepare a full business case for a new station to serve Haxby / Strensall and the north of the city. Some 3500 responses have been received to the consultation on plans to dual the outer ring road from the A19 to Little Hopgrove and this will inform the final design to be brought forward in 2021.

As you will be aware, the Executive recently approved a plan for the city centre foot street arrangements to continue until September 2021, with more detailed plans to be developed during that time to implement the policy adopted by Full Council a year ago for a city centre which is largely free of non-essential car traffic. Along with other councils across the country, we have been awarded 'Active Travel Fund' money for a range of schemes to make walking or cycling more attractive and these will be reported to my January decision session with full consultation as is happening now for the North – South city-centre cycle route and Navigation Road Low Traffic Neighbourhood proposals. This is a clear example of how we want to maintain essential vehicle access while making life safer and more pleasant for local people having conversations with neighbours or walking to the local shops.

As part of our commitment to tackle the climate emergency by working towards zero carbon by 2030, as well as the health crisis it is really important that we make 'active travel' the most attractive option for those who can use this for local trips to school, shops or work. Our 'carbon reduction emissions pathway' will present tough choices, guided by our new Head of Carbon Reduction, the Climate Change Scrutiny Committee and the Climate Commission we intend to establish in 2021. 'Building back better' has the potential to create thousands of green jobs and York is well placed to capitalize on this if we work together on transforming the way we do things in the coming year.

Sorry no pictures or Shakespeare, so I'll end with a quote from David Attenborough:

“We already know many of the solutions – we just need the will to act. It's only when we have a shared understanding of the problems we face, and the solutions available, that enough change will happen. The biggest way we can make a difference is to put nature at the heart of our decisions.

In every moment of every day, there's a choice to be made. If we all make our choices with nature in mind, then together we'll find a way to live in balance with the natural world. After all, we are nature, and we need it to survive.”

Cllr.Andy D'Agorne

Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Transport