

As you will have already heard in the Leader's Report, our priorities since my last report (beyond the recently passed Council Budget) have been on keeping people safe, supporting businesses through Covid-19 and promoting the case for 'Keeping York, York' in the proposed local government reorganisation of York and North Yorkshire.

**Responding to the pandemic:**

With the first stage of the country's 'roadmap out of lockdown' already reached, the Council has been working hard to communicate with residents to thank them for their hard work in contributing to the dramatic fall of infection rates across the city since January, as well as to remind everyone not to be complacent in the crucial months ahead. This is particularly important as many young people have now returned to school and study in the city. We continue to plan actions that we can take to support Covid secure reopening of businesses in the city centre and elsewhere in York.

We are also beginning to consider carefully the ways in which City of York Council and our staff can retain the benefits of new ways of working found to be effective during the pandemic, whilst combining with a safe managed return to Covid secure working in West Offices - where this is the most appropriate option.

Home schooling and working from home have certainly been challenging for many, but the lessons learnt should allow for more flexible working patterns where the demands of home and work can be better accommodated in this way. Reduced travel at peak times with more home working could be an important element of our city transport plan, helping to reduce congestion and pollution, as well as contributing to our carbon reduction and climate change targets.

We are continuing to support the NHS COVID-19 vaccination programme, which is well on target to protect priority groups as quickly as possible. The Council has also supported COVID-19 testing and

symptom-free testing and contact tracing programmes. Testing in areas of higher rates of infection has also helped identifying cases effectively and addresses community transmission well. Our social care teams have been working closely with York Hospital to meet the increased need for acute care, as well as supporting the safe discharge of patients from hospital.

There is real hope that we can continue to support households and businesses recover from this crisis, but we must continue to follow the public health guidance and demonstrate the resolve that York has already shown.

### **Local Government Reorganisation:**

York has a proud heritage of 2000 years of history, an Army Barracks founded in AD 71, over 800 years as a city with our own Lord Mayor and Sheriff and nearly 25 years of relative autonomy, governing our own affairs as a unitary Council.

While regular boundary changes maintain broadly comparable representation, residents can identify with their ward and be reasonably confident that their Councillor and members of the planning committee are familiar with their local issues. A 'coast to city' Council, strung out along the A64 and A19 might only meet once a year in York, have Councillors and officers who only ever speak to residents by phone or on zoom and have half the current number of councillors to represent the city (i.e. two/ three member wards becoming single member wards or being merged into wards two - three times their current size).

If the East / West proposal from the 6 District Councils was to proceed, we would face at least a year of turmoil in terms of reorganizing everything from bin collections to education, social services, planning etc. with staff and records all having to be transferred to new systems.

Therefore, it is really important that everyone in the city, business, residents and local groups respond to the government consultation and support the current arrangements in the proposal from North Yorkshire

County Council, which retains City of York Council on its existing footprint.

### **Hazel Court HWRC opening hours extended:**

With lockdown restrictions still in place, many residents have taken the opportunity to carry out improvements to their home and catch up on outstanding household jobs. As a result, there has been increasing demand for access to the Household Waste Recycling Centre at Hazel Court. When this problem first occurred in school half term I asked for a review of traffic management in the area including signing to keep James St clear for general traffic.

To respond to this additional demand, the opening hours at Hazel Court HWRC were extended from the 8<sup>th</sup> March (and will shortly go onto the summer times). The Executive hope that extended opening hours will address the queuing issues. In addition to this, Yorwaste, who manage the sites, have made further adjustments to make bays clearer and have increased the number of garden waste and cardboard skips. In addition traders are permitted to use Harewood Whin to dispose of their waste. Commercial waste times are will remain the same Monday to Friday, between 8.30am to 4.30pm, not at weekends. Ultimately, we are encouraging people to only visit sites if necessary and to visit at quieter times of the day where possible until Covid restrictions are eased further. This helps to ensure social distancing guidelines can be followed and also reduces the traffic impact from queuing in the surrounding areas.

### **Snow Wardens:**

An extra 40 volunteer snow wardens have signed up this year, following the spell of black ice in January, meaning a total 294 volunteers supporting safety of residents the winter. This is particularly welcome given the recent and poor wintry weather we have seen. The wardens help keep local pavements gritted and clear of snow /ice. This year, they are also helping people make their essential journeys and take their daily exercise more safely. During lockdown, snow wardens have been

supporting the NHS, alleviating pressure on Accident & Emergency services by preventing slips and falls on the ice.

Volunteer snow wardens are given a health and safety induction and public liability insurance, as well as all the support and kit they need including, of course, a snow shovel. We also deliver grit to their home and send weather forecasts when the temperatures are set to drop. So, I would encourage everyone to spread the word about the scheme in order to build on the numbers we already have.

## **Highway maintenance and Transport Issues**

### **Potholes**

As usual at this time of year ice and snow has exposed the weak points in road surfaces especially locations where utility reinstatement has taken place and those subject to a pounding from buses and HGV's. Reactive repairs are carried out as quickly as possible and a recent national survey has shown that we have been among the best performing councils in this respect. However, depending on the conditions at the time of the repair, these can be very short term before we need to return to make more substantial permanent repairs so I would encourage councillors to keep reporting issues in their wards, particularly where they may present hazards to those on two wheels on foot. The highway maintenance programme for the coming year will be published soon (based on condition survey and scoring) and I would encourage ward councillors to check this and identify any local issues that you might want addressing as the work is done, if necessary with support of funds from the ward highways budgets.

### **Station frontage project**

In February planning permission was granted for a major enhancement of the area outside York Rail Station, with financial support from the Transforming Cities Fund through the West Yorkshire Combined Authority. This will see the redundant Queen St Bridge demolished after relocation of all the pipes and cables that are currently routed along this

structure, opening up a far more attractive arrival point with less traffic dominance and a new pedestrian route under the walls into the city centre. Provision for bus and taxi interchange and much safer cycling facilities are included in the overall design.

### **Car Parking and Footstreets Review**

Officers are currently working on an overall review of council car parking provision and its quality and suitability. The review also gives the opportunity to consider improved pedestrian access from car parks to the city, disabled parking and the whole question of how we can maximise the benefits of the experience of the past year including wider more effective pedestrian priority areas within the city centre.

### **TIER Escooters and E-bikes**

I am pleased to report that the roll-out of this one year trial is progressing well in spite of Covid-19, with fortnightly progress meetings involving myself and officers ensuring that each step in extending the network is closely monitored and adjusted in response to any difficulties experienced. The York experience for TIER has been exceptionally positive, with a steady rise in use, including hundreds of first time riders in 2021 and average hire length of nearly 30minutes. Additional hire bays have been created in consultation with ward councillors so that increasingly the escooters will be available within 5 – 10 minutes' walk of where people live or work. E-bikes will be available particularly in locations further out from the city centre from April and a new model of scooter will be introduced soon which features indicators and a different battery housing that makes re-charging easier. As available routes are extended any conflict points are identified and a 7mph speed restriction can be imposed; e.g. the cycle/ pedestrian route across Walmgate Stray, which gets very busy with university staff and students using it at peak times. Discussions with ward councillors are planned to look at making Escooters/ Ebikes available in villages outside the ring road, where they could help to reduce local car traffic. I am happy to facilitate discussion with ward councillors on this or any other issue they may have relating to the scheme.

## **TSAR scheme junction improvements**

Ageing and outdated traffic signals across the city are being replaced under a programme started in 2015 with signals replaced in the past year or so at Bishopthorpe Rd/ Scarcroft Rd, Scarcroft Rd/ The Mount, Albermarle Rd/ The Mount, and Lord Mayor's Walk.

When this work is done it is an opportunity to introduce layout changes to make the junction work more efficiently, cater for increased pedestrian capacity and make the crossings safer and more attractive to use. The new traffic signals will be cheaper to run, more reliable and will also link direct to the Council's Traffic and Control Centre, so that the Network Monitoring Officers can manage the flow of traffic better in busy periods by adjusting traffic lights to best suit traffic conditions.

### **Current schemes:**

Crichton Avenue / Wigginton Road junction signals are currently being replaced. Works began on the 8<sup>th</sup> February and are estimated to take 6 weeks, with better pedestrian crossing provision and safer access from the Foss Islands cycle path onto the road network.

### **Future schemes:**

The Council is currently seeking views of residents and businesses on plans for the replacement of signals at the Gillygate, Bootham and St Leonard's junction. There are two possible designs being considered. Both would increase the width of space for pedestrians waiting to cross Gillygate. Option 'A' would make little other change to the existing layout, while option 'B' would provide more pedestrian space, improve the historic setting of the area and allow for an 'all green' pedestrian phase across all arms of the junction, with no need to wait half way across when crossing from the Art Gallery to Bootham Bar. However reducing the traffic dominance of St Leonard's Place and the changed signal phasing in favour of pedestrians could increase traffic delays and queues at peak times, with potential impact on air quality from idling

petrol and diesel vehicles. Consultation runs until Wednesday 31 March, with a decision in May and implementation in the Autumn.

The next major junction that will come forward for signal replacement will be the Foss Islands Rd/ Jewbury/ Stonebow/ Layerthorpe junction.

### **Active Travel Fund schemes**

In November 2020 the Government announced that York had successfully been awarded £600k to support a package of walking and cycling measures which will be implemented following consultation and detailed design work.

One such scheme involves a safer North – South cycle route through the city centre from High Petergate to Navigation Rd/ Walmgate via streets that avoid the pedestrian areas of the city centre. The consultation held in December involved online and household leaflet responses from residents and businesses in the area. The scheme was approved in February for a trial partial traffic closure to reduce through traffic at the Hungate Bridge end of the route. For many years, local residents had concerns about the volume and speed of traffic using the road as a means of bypassing part of the inner ring road, rather than waiting at the traffic lights on Walmgate. In addition, concerns had also been raised by pedestrians and cyclists about conflict between vehicles entering or exiting the Rowntree Wharf Car Park and pedestrians and cyclists heading to or from Hungate Bridge. The scheme will be implemented shortly following final design work and implementation planning.

The other schemes are being designed and consultation on them progressed to deliver them by Mar 2022. At the time of writing we are close to progressing the Bootham cycle lane improvements with finalising of design on the Shipton Road segregated route from Rawcliffe Park and Ride site to Rawcliffe Lane and the safer walking and cycling route alongside the ring road between the A19 and Manor School /York Business Park. Acomb Road was resurfaced in 2020 and design work is underway to allow road markings to be reinstated that fit in with the design for segregated cycle lanes for as much of this route as possible.

One year on from a Sustrans trial 'People Streets' initiative at Carr Lane Junior we are working on a design that might be suited for application to other schools sites, learning from the London experience where 350 'school streets' have been shown to result in up to 23% reduction in Nitrogen Dioxide pollution, 18% reduction in parents driving to school and 81% of parents supporting the initiative.