

LEADER'S REPORT TO FULL COUNCIL: DECEMBER 2017

Visits and Events

In October, I was pleased to host the visit to York of the Israeli Ambassador, Mr Mark Regev with whom I paid a visit to Clifford's Tower; a structure which the Ambassador emphasised stands as a poignant reminder, albeit long ago, of the dark forces that antisemitism and bigotry can unleash.

In the same month, I was proud to attend, alongside members of the civic party and other Council colleagues, the Community Pride Awards ceremony, an important event in the Council calendar which recognises those in our communities who, unbidden and voluntarily, make a supreme effort to improve the lives of others.

Also in October, I attended a reception at the Principal Hotel as part of a day-long visit by the Manchester Chinese Delegation to York headed by Dr Sun Dali, the Consul-General. The Delegation included a wide range of senior Chinese business and cultural representatives and I was delighted to be introduced and foster relationships with those present.

The formal media launch of the Shakespeare Rose Theatre project took place at the end of October and, as might be expected of an event arranged by a theatrical production company, this was an exciting and entertaining piece of theatre in itself. I delivered a speech which centred on the cultural importance to our City of this innovative project and the legacy it would leave, particularly for younger people.

Last month, the Secretary of State for Transport, the Rt Hon Chris Grayling MP, visited York and I was able to have a wide ranging discussion with him centred mainly on rail transport, including the size and urgency of investment in trans-Pennine infrastructure and rolling stock, improvements to the York to Harrogate line, and the significant progress now being made on the York Central project.

Also in November, I was pleased to attend the formal launch by Indie York of their Map and Interactive Website, following the successful

introduction of their Phase 1 pilot scheme a year ago. Indie York is supported by the York BID and is a thriving association of independent businesses with presently 150 members and a growth target of 200 by the end of this financial year. Some 12,500 maps have been distributed already and there is significant social media activity regarding this initiative. Over 50 independent businesses were represented at the launch which serves to underline the contribution small and independent businesses make to the economic health of York and the need to ensure they are supported and facilitated.

York: Gigabit City

At the beginning of November, a further stage of the roll-out of the Ultrafast Fibre Optic broadband network in the City was announced. Funded both by Government and the private sector, this investment will make York one of the first, if not the first, cities in the UK to have a city-wide ultra fibre optic network, thus fulfilling the Council's ambition in making our City a true 'Gigabit City', a city in which a resilient, future-proofed, full fibre infrastructure is available to serve businesses, consumers, public-sector facilities, and mobile operators. A gigabit is 1000 Mbps and is one hundred times faster than standard broadband.

This level of ultra-fast and reliable internet connectivity will be a major factor in creating new jobs in the City, facilitating business growth, and making York an enviably prime location in the competition for inward investment. Over 125km of full fibre infrastructure is being rolled out in the city and as well as improving connectivity for businesses, this is supporting the UK's largest trial of 'fibre-to-the-home' with 15,000 homes already connected, and a further 40,000 homes targeted for connection in the next two years.

On a related note, the Council has recently won £2.85m of government funding for our revolutionary Smarter Travel Evolution Programme (STEP). Starting in April 2018, STEP is a cutting edge technology and will take advantage of York's ultra fast fibre optic connectivity by anonymously tracking vehicle movements from street-mounted detectors to transform the way the Council manages traffic lights, traffic

flows, the design of junctions, and more strategic traffic modelling and infrastructure planning. This will lead to improvements in air-quality and congestion, and will help to pave the way for the introduction of driverless vehicle technology in the City.

Yorkshire Devolution

Since the last Full Council, along with other neighbouring local authorities and interested parties, I have been promoting the case with the Secretary of State and the Minister for the Northern Powerhouse and Local Growth, for a devolution model for Yorkshire on the basis of a 'One Yorkshire' geography (covering North, East and West Yorkshire, plus Barnsley and Doncaster).

Government's response is however crystal clear; it expects the Sheffield City Region (SCR) devolution deal to proceed to conclusion and to include all four of that region's local authorities, ie. Sheffield, Rotherham, Barnsley, and Doncaster, in line with previously expressed commitments made by all of those four.

Furthermore, Government regards of overriding importance the need to maintain the integrity and cohesion of South Yorkshire (SCR) (where, for example, transport has been integrated for over 40 years) and has firmly restated it will not agree to any devolution arrangements which would fragment the Sheffield city region by allowing Barnsley and Doncaster to be included in a 'One Yorkshire' model. This despite the fact that both Barnsley and Doncaster Councils are each carrying out community polls to identify preferences for 'One Yorkshire' or Sheffield City Region, both councils having stated they will respect the outcome.

The consequences of the Government's position and the responses to it from all Yorkshire local authorities are likely to be played out in the near future, and we shall remain watchful to ensure that whatever devolution model and geography for Yorkshire eventually emerges, the economic and social wellbeing of our City and its residents remain the overriding priority.

Community Stadium

After a significant period of delay, and a series of false dawns, all the formal documentation for the development and construction of the community stadium and leisure project was signed last month. This is a huge step forward and construction start is expected before Christmas. Indeed, the establishment of the site compound, fencing and accommodation is now well under way.

As part of the development arrangements, the major funding institution, Legal and General, has agreed to make a £35m investment in to the site. This is a significant expression of confidence in our City's economy and its potential for growth, and is very much welcomed.

Castle Gateway

The next stage of the innovative Castle Gateway consultation (mycastlegateway.org) got underway at the end of November and will run until 22 December. It comprises a series of public events, walks and talks, drop-ins at 29 Castlegate, and regular updates and debates on social media. This further consultation is seeking views on the emerging masterplan ideas.

This is all part of the process to engage the public as much as possible in formulating the masterplan for this quarter of the city. Four main themes have already emerged; the closure of castle car-park and its replacement with a public space which will compliment and enhance the setting of Clifford's Tower and the Castle Museum; a new riverside walkway along the banks of the River Foss; a new building to improve the appearance of the rear of the Coppergate Centre; and a new multi-story car-park either on St George's Field or on Piccadilly.

The Council is a major landowner in this part of the city, and is therefore in a unique position to drive the regeneration of the area; an area which contains some of the city's most loved assets alongside some aspects which do not work, and which does not fulfil its true cultural and economic potential. It has been encouraging to hear that people are alive to the realities of regeneration, especially the funding of projects and the need to inspire and include adjoining landowners. The intention is to have a finalised masterplan for the area completed by Spring 2018.

York Central Access

Following extensive public consultation and a number of productive meetings with the York Central Community Forum and the York Central Action Group, at its meeting in November, the Executive considered a report into the various options for the location of the vehicular access into this significant and underused regeneration site, the development of which is essential to the future economic health of York.

York Central Partnership's professional advisors had put forward six possible options for the location of the access road into York Central. These were assessed for their community impact, constructability and timescale for delivery, indicative cost, and environmental impacts.

Of the six options, the three which would be accessed from Holgate Road/Poppleton Road were rejected due to reasons of funding and operational land availability. The three remaining shortlisted options, two accessed from Water End, and one at Chancery Rise, were then put out to public consultation and examined in detail.

In light of all the relevant considerations, the route most acceptable to all stakeholders (but not the lowest cost option) was assessed to be the more easterly of the two Water End options (the one nearer the river) subject to some further design refinements being made in respect of Millennium Green as a result of productive discussions during the community engagement sessions. This was duly approved by Executive.

Finally, may I wish all members and officers of the Council a peaceful Christmas and a happy New Year.

Cllr. David Carr
Leader of the Council