

Report of the Deputy Leader

29 October 2020

1. It seems a lifetime ago when councillors last met together in the Citadel building, before we were catapulted into the world of social distancing, zoom meetings and daily TV briefings from the Prime Minister.
2. I would like to start by paying tribute to our dedicated NHS staff, all key workers and City of York Council staff, plus the hundreds of individuals across the city who have gone the extra mile to support people who have been shielding. It seems like a long time ago now when the distribution hubs were set up to ensure food parcel distribution, within weeks of us breathing a sigh of relief from organizing flood defences across the city. While it understandably took time for 'working from home' systems to bed in, by the end of May we were well into a coordinated rapid response to allow businesses to restart their operation under the 'new normal' of social distancing.
3. During the month of June the city centre re-opened the cafes and non-essential business outlets; temporary toilets, hand sanitizers and signs appeared and it was reported that footfall was back up to approaching 90% of the summer average. Capacity distancing rules still presented a challenge to the viability of many businesses in small premises but rapid turnaround of pavement café licences and initiatives like the very successful pop up space on College Green were well received, boosted by regional tourism from 'staycation' trade steering clear of uncertain options for foreign travel. We made these investments despite the serious longer term implications for the council budget to do everything possible to maintain our local economy in a way that keeps people safe.
4. In terms of the Transport portfolio it has been an extremely busy time, with major resurfacing projects and signals replacement work continuing quickly after the end of lockdown to take advantage of the much-reduced traffic levels. Examples include Tadcaster Rd, Nunnery Lane, Fishergate – Fulford Rd (delayed because of the floods from February 2020), Monk Bar junction. We were also successful in securing funding through the government's Safe Spaces and Emergency Active Travel (EAT) Funds to implement the Department for Transport directive to 'swiftly reallocate roadspace' to facilitate social distancing and trial measures that might be become permanent under the 'Gear Change' plan

published in July, shifting provision towards active travel modes in urban areas.

5. This was reflected in our One Year Transport Recovery Plan which introduced the footstreets extensions, the free parking incentives (2 hours free in July and 1 hour free in August) and the trial blue badge user taxi service from Monk Bar car park. Other measures which were funded as trials to extend pedestrian space and promote cycling included the Bishopthorpe Road shops and Coppergate one way arrangements and the Castle Mills Bridge cycle lane. At the same time a longstanding housing regeneration led 'low traffic neighbourhood' trial in the Groves, which had been part way through consultation in February this year, has now been introduced from September as an experimental order for a period of up to 18 months.
6. A number of other measures to promote cycling were included in the EAT funding bids as reported to the Transport Decision Session on 20th October. The most significant of these is the planned 'park and pedal/ scooter' route from Rawcliffe Park and Ride along Shipton Road and Bootham. This has the potential to ensure those drivers who choose not to use the park and ride bus have alternatives to driving, thus helping to reduce congestion on this key route into the city centre.
7. Recent months have seen the launch of the electric park and ride buses as part of Yorkshire's only Clean Air Zone and the launch of the Tier mobility e-scooter one year trial, keeping York at the forefront of transport innovation. At the time of writing we still await news on our bid to become the UK's first 'Electric bus city' and the outcome of Tranche 2 of the EAT fund which could help to fund a new cycle route from Wheldrake and Elvington and one along Acomb Road. I hope to be able to update you at the meeting if an announcement has been made.
8. Looking forward, I hope that we will be able to incorporate the various initiatives which promote active travel into a formal Local Walking and Cycling Infrastructure Plan and the Local Transport Plan 4 to support the ambitions of the Local Plan and changes that have taken place in York since LTP3 was adopted nearly a decade ago. This is likely to link closely into the Transport Recovery Plan, the challenges we face to re-establish public transport as a viable alternative to travel by private car and a key component of reducing congestion and meeting our zero carbon ambitions.

9. Despite the overwhelming attention understandably being paid to keeping residents safe and maintaining operations despite the pandemic we have been able to make some progress on addressing climate change, from starting the installation of hyper hub charging points, setting out a plan for Passivehaus standard new housing, taking the first steps to creating a new woodland for the city to appointing a Head of Carbon Reduction. Despite the short term 17% cut in emissions in April, the biggest annual decline since the second world war, David Attenborough, Greta Thunberg and world events such as Californian, Australian and Arctic wildfires, Siberian 38 degree C temperatures, floods in China and Bangladesh, increased severity of extreme weather events and an unprecedented 417ppm CO2 level show how desperately urgent the climate change agenda has become. The cumulative effect of emissions means that action now to 'build back better' will have cumulative benefit and is a vital action which City of York can take to lead the way for others to follow.