

## **Report to Full Council from the Leader of the Council**

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As we fast approach the end 2020, it is important that we look back on a year like no other and recognise the hard work that has been put in to respond to the unprecedented challenges of the past months. With this in mind, I would like to give my thanks to the Council staff, key workers, residents, businesses and councillors for all their hard work over the past year and for representing the very best qualities of our city – I hope that you all enjoy a well-earned break this festive season.

### **Responding to COVID-19 and new national guidance:**

Since my last report to Full Council in October, the Council continues to focus on responding to the pandemic, with national guidance changing significantly over the past month.

On the 31<sup>st</sup> October, the Prime Minister announced a second national lockdown, in which many local businesses and organisations were forced to close for 4 weeks. Following the conclusion of the second national lockdown on the 2<sup>nd</sup> December, the Government have reverted back to the three-tier restriction system, albeit with some changes. Currently, York remains in tier-2 restrictions, despite a significant drop in the prevalence of the infection across the city. At the time of writing this report, York's rate of infection remains well below both the regional and national averages.

In response, the Council has continued to deliver frontline services and provide essential support to local residents, businesses and communities. For example, parks, public toilets and household waste and recycling centres have remained open throughout the lockdown period, and loading bay bans were temporarily removed to support local businesses in running delivery services.

The Council has also worked hard to process additional financial support for local businesses affected by the national restrictions. The Council opened its grant payment applications on the 12<sup>th</sup> November for

businesses forced to close by law under the national lockdown restrictions; businesses in the hospitality and leisure sectors; and businesses who had not previously received support from the Government, for example, nightclubs and dance halls.

In addition to this, the Council has worked with partners and local business leaders to decide the most fair and effective use of the discretionary element of the Additional Restrictions Grant. It was agreed that this discretionary funding would be used to support businesses who have been forced to close throughout lockdown, but didn't qualify for government grants (whether they are liable for business rates or not), and to businesses where their trade is impacted by more than 75% due to lockdown. The window for applications closed on the 7<sup>th</sup> December.

The Council has continued with its outbreak communications strategy, agreed at the Outbreak Advisory Management Board, to promote the latest public health guidance to a variety of different audiences. Over the past month, numerous Facebook Live events have been held and well-received, and for those not online, the latest edition of Our City is being posted through letterboxes this month. It is important to highlight that this work has been recognised with a Bronze Public Sector Communication Award, awarded to our Communications Team, underlining the excellent work the Council and partners have been doing to support communities during this difficult time.

### **Mass testing and contact tracing:**

I would like to thank our public health team and residents for their hard work in following the national guidance, and local businesses for making their businesses Covid-secure. This hard work has undoubtedly resulted in our infection rates dropping and currently, York has the lowest rate of infection in the region. However, we must not be complacent and continue in these efforts.

To support the hard work of the city in reducing the spread of the virus, we have submitted our expression of interest for mass community

testing. This will enable us to increase our testing capacity locally and offer targeted testing to care home visitors in time for Christmas; children's and adult social care workers; the voluntary sector; and school children and teachers in bubbles that had reported a positive case. The submission follows months of lobbying for additional testing capacity, and will complement the existing symptomatic testing in place in the city. The current limited targeted testing available for outbreak management and care home staff and care home residents will also remain in place.

Our local track and trace programme continues to have success. Since the 22<sup>nd</sup> October, York's local contact tracing service has reached 74.8% of those the national service was unable to reach, meaning 240 people were offered advice and support. This means we are able to identify more contacts than before who will then be asked to self-isolate. Reasons we are unable to get in touch with people can vary and includes people being in hospital. Those we were unable to reach, either through phone calls or a home visit, had a leaflet with advice put through their door with information about contacting the local service and the support available.

### **Government Spending Review**

Councillors will be aware of the announcements made in the Chancellor's recent Spending Review and the impact on Local Government finance. The increase in spending power for Councils is welcome, but despite the Chancellor's warm words, this funding comes predominantly from council tax increases and the social care precept. Therefore, once again, the risk sits on Local Government. The announcements in the Spending Review will do little to mitigate the economic impact of the pandemic on our city, as well as provide the necessary funding for all our services which have been so relied upon during this time of national crisis.

In regards to the Government's National Infrastructure Strategy, I welcome the confirmation that £400,000 has been secured to further develop proposals for Haxby Station. This follows the Council's

extensive lobbying efforts and work to develop a business case for the new station. We are currently awaiting further information regarding the details on the allocated funding and the next stage in the progression of the project.

Earlier in the year, as part of our submission to the Chancellor's Comprehensive Spending Review, we urged the Government to back York and provide the funding needed to enable us to lead the recovery in our region. Despite the disappointment of the recent Spending Review, we will continue to make these calls and seek the investment our city needs.

### **Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation**

Following our last Full Council meeting where Council agreed to formally adopt the position that City of York Council should remain a unitary Council on its existing footprint, the Council's case for York has now been submitted to the Government for consideration. To support this work, officers are currently putting together a further package of evidence to back York's case, in order to submit by the second Government deadline of the 9<sup>th</sup> December.

In addition to the work carried out by the Council, I am pleased that Councillors from different political groups and representatives from organisations across the city have come together to launch the cross-organisation campaign to back York. Launched on 20<sup>th</sup> November at a cross-organisation event, local residents and businesses have been asked to sign the petition to reject any notion of local government restructure in York, in order to protect York's unique historical identity, retain local decision making and protect residents from significant disruption and increase in service costs.

Over 1,000 residents and businesses have signed the petition so far, and everyone is encouraged to get involved in the campaign and show their support for York by visiting <http://www.change.org/WebackYork>.

## **York Central**

Following the confirmation of £77 million of Government funding for the project and approval from the Planning Committee, infrastructure works at York Central can now begin.

The Planning Committee approved the Reserved Matters Planning Application on the 12<sup>th</sup> November to allow the critical infrastructure work to go ahead. Initial site clearance has already started and the contractor is due to start on site in early 2021.

Government infrastructure investment of £77m was first announced in the March 2020 Budget and confirmed in August 2020. The infrastructure will unlock brownfield land with significant access problems and includes a new bridge over the East Coast mainline railway, as well as new cycling and pedestrian routes; drainage systems; and to allow for a new public park to be built.

The York Central development includes 2500 new homes; up to 1.2 million square feet of commercial development and improved visitor access to the National Railway Museum. The area has enterprise zone status, with 6500 new jobs expected to be created and a £1.2 billion boost to our local economy.

## **York Outer Ring Road**

I would like to thank residents, businesses and visitors who submitted their views about the proposed dualling upgrade of the York Outer Ring Road. The consultation, which recently concluded last month, looked at (Phase 1) from the A19 Shipton Road to the A1036 Little Hopgrove roundabouts.

Over 3,000 comments were submitted during the five week consultation. Officers are now reviewing the comments received and assessing what

changes might be needed to the scheme before a further report is presented to a meeting of the Executive early in 2021.

Alongside this, ground investigation works are set to take place both before and after Christmas along this stretch of the Ring Road. The works include creating several small boreholes to assess the local geology and will assist with the detailed design of the infrastructure moving forward.

### **Campaign for East Coast Mainline Investment**

The Council is supporting Invest East Coast Rail in their efforts to lobby both the UK and Scottish Governments to secure new investment in the East Coast Main Line. The campaign has conducted research showing that economies served by the line could see over £11 billion of wider economic benefits as part of a coherent package of rail schemes, including the full delivery of HS2.

The East Coast Mainline is critical to the future development of York's local transport infrastructure and of course, the economic prosperity of our city. In addition to being a strategic rail route linking York with London and other key cities and towns in the UK, it also provides important links to international gateways and ports. However, constraints on the line can lead to significant disruption and in 2018, with 12 major incidents occurred costing the UK economy £46 million.

It has also been found that localised and smaller incidents can cause significant disruption across the rail network but if the number of delays on the line over 10 minutes were halved, this would deliver an additional £62.8 million per annum to the wider economy.

Investing in the line now will not only improve its performance and deliver economic benefits for York and across the country, but it will also ensure the line is ready for the arrival of new infrastructure projects including HS2, Northern Powerhouse Rail, Midlands Engine, and East West Rail. The Government must commit funding to future proof the

East Coast Main Line and to develop a clear long-term investment plan for the line to ensure the route is ready to benefit from these projects in the future.

### **The Beehive – New Centre of Excellence for disabled children**

‘The Beehive’, which has been built in Acomb, has now opened to young people and their families to provide short overnight breaks for children with complex disabilities in the city.

The facility will also provide young people and their families with specialist support from a wide range of professionals, including clinical psychologists, and enable many young people to receive the support they need in York for the first time.

As highlighted in my previous report, ‘The Beehive’ name was chosen by the children and families who will use the facility and the ‘bee theme’ will be evident throughout the building, including bee-friendly names for the bedroom areas and honeycomb-like hexagons incorporated into the decorative features.

### **Yorkshire Day**

I am pleased to confirm that the next official Yorkshire Day Civic Celebration, which will be held on 1<sup>st</sup> August 2021, will be hosted here in York.

Yorkshire Day has enjoyed an increasing popularity and significance since it was first established in 1975 and we are delighted that York has been selected as the host for the 2021 event.

As I am sure many others will agree, York is an incredible city and as the historic centre of the Three Ridings, our city has played a truly unique role in the long and exciting story of Yorkshire.

The decision to mark Yorkshire Day with a formal civic gathering of Mayors, Lord Mayors, their attendants and other dignitaries was taken at

a meeting attended by The Yorkshire Society of local authorities within the boundary of the three Ridings and York at County Hall, Wakefield, in 1985.

### **Council backs York City Knights' bid to get to Super League**

City of York Council are backing York City Knights' bid to get to Super League in 2021.

With the opportunity now open for clubs to bid for a place in next year's competition, the Council is asking residents and businesses to show their support too. York City Knights have a proud history, particularly through their excellent work in our communities through its foundation.

We are delighted to support this bid and know that with our city's strengths and the Knights' growing fan base, York is perfect for Super League. We already have lots to start to look forward to in 2021 with the Rugby League World Cup and welcoming Super League clubs would be add to this excitement.

We would like residents and businesses to back the bid and be proud of their local team by sharing their support on social media using the hashtag #HeartlandExpansion.