

LEADER'S REPORT TO COUNCIL - MARCH 2017

1. My report this time provides an overview of the significant progress this administration is making across a wide range of important Council projects, activities and initiatives.

The Older Persons' Accommodation Programme

2. There is a shortage in York of accommodation with care for older people. This is caused by previous under-investment in this area, as well as the expected growth in the size of the over-75 population in the City, which is expected to increase from around 17,000 presently to nearly 26,000 by 2030.
3. The Older Persons' Accommodation Programme, which is now well underway, aims to address this shortfall and deliver a greater variety and better quality of accommodation with care for York's older residents, whilst at the same time replacing Council-run accommodation which is no longer fit for purpose. By 2019 we expect to deliver at least 230 new extra care apartments and bungalows, and to provide over 300 new care beds, with much of this new provision catering for the needs of those with dementia. Locations where investment in improved facilities has been made or is under way include Auden House, Glen Lodge, and Marjorie Waite Court. Locations where investment is proposed include Acomb Road, Burnholme school site, and Lowfields school site.
4. As part of this programme of change, people will move (54 residents in the past year) from existing care homes which are no longer fit for purpose or down-size from a family home into extra care accommodation. These moves must always be handled with sensitivity and care. The potential closure of a council-run care home will be subject to consultation, and where the home is closed, the Council follows a strict protocol to ensure that each individual 'Moves Home Safely' which includes a series of follow-up visits by Council officers. The feedback has been very positive, with many taking the opportunity to move closer to family or choosing to move from residential care to an extra-care facility, thus regaining independence and control over their own home, whilst maintaining a sociable environment which is an important factor in combating loneliness and isolation.

The Castle Gateway

5. This is a regeneration programme which aims to revitalise that quarter of the City lying just south of the city centre and bounded by the River Ouse and Piccadilly and including the confluence of the Rivers Ouse and Foss. It includes the area around Piccadilly, the Coppergate Centre, the Castle Museum, Clifford's Tower, St George's Field and the Foss Basin.
6. The character of the area may be described as generally under-invested, in parts semi-derelict, and mostly of poor urban quality, although it contains two of the City's major cultural attractions; Clifford's Tower and the Castle Museum. As one of the principal landowners in the area, City of York Council is taking the lead in shaping and facilitating an urban renaissance for this neglected part of the City and it is doing that by:
 - Formulating a vision and development framework for this part of the City which will inform the Castle Gateway Area of Opportunity Policy to be included in the emerging Local Plan.
 - Engaging with and partnering various commercial property interests, in particular Steamrock Capital, the head-leaseholder (from the City Council) of the Coppergate Centre and one of the principal landowners of other properties in the vicinity, in order to maximise private-sector investment in the area.
 - Developing a cultural partnership with owners of heritage assets and interested parties, for example, York Civic Trust, York Archaeological Trust, York Museums Trust and Historic England/English Heritage, both of whom have substantial investment programmes of their own, in order to enhance the significant, but under-used, areas of public space.
7. The broad aims of the project are to:
 - Improve the quality of the built environment of the Castle Gateway and contribute to the economic resilience and prosperity of the City.
 - Improve the quality of the public realm and the setting of the heritage assets to complement the investment set to be made in these assets.

- Improve pedestrian and cycle access to the area and enhance the setting of the River Foss.
 - Provide new homes and employment space.
8. This is a regeneration programme of significant ambition and complexity and it will not be realised overnight. The programme envisages a total period of at least 5 years, and is split into three broad overlapping phases:
- The first phase over the next 2 years is to bring forward commercial investment and development proposals, in partnership with Steamrock Capital, for example, revitalising the Coppergate Centre and Ryedale House in Piccadilly.
 - The second phase, starting later this year and lasting at least 4 years, is to reconfigure car-parking provision in the area by building a new multi-story car-park on Piccadilly and to allow parking to be relocated away from Clifford's Tower. It has been suggested that alternative car-parking might be provided by building an underground car-park on the present Castle car-park site and this possibility is being investigated. Also in this second phase will be improvements to the public realm including a bridge over the Foss and riverside walkways. The former Reynard's Garage site will be built out following the proposed 3 year occupation of the site (subject to planning permission) by Spark, a mixed-use 'pop-up' interim development.
 - The final phase starting next year will see detailed proposals worked up for St George's Field and the Foss Basin.
9. There are obviously constraints, challenges, and risks to a proposal of this magnitude. The principal ones of these are:
- Planning and conservation. Whilst it is self-evident that this part of the City has suffered from a lack of investment, both private and public, in the past, it nevertheless contains some significant and sensitive heritage assets and public realm.
 - Car-parking revenue derived from this area is an important element of the City Council's total income and this will be an important factor in commercial negotiations.

- The strength of the commercial property market and the health of the local and national economies.
10. Finally, beyond the partnerships already referred to, the evolution of these proposals will be subject to consultation with a broad range of stakeholders including the Ministry of Justice, the Guildhall planning panel, ward councillors and local businesses, and it is intended to gain exposure to this wider community through a series of public engagement events and other means.

The Guildhall Restoration

11. The Guildhall complex spans some 600 years of development on a riverside site which contains evidence of around 2000 years of urban settlement. The range of buildings making up the complex are listed at Grade I, II*, and II, thus making the site hugely significant in historic, civic, cultural, and heritage terms.
12. The Council vacated its former offices in the complex in 2013, and since then, its value has been under-utilised and furthermore, there has been an increasing amount of maintenance and repair which surveys confirm will cost over £2M to address. Since 2013, a series of proposals have been examined which aim to allow continuation of Council and civic uses of the complex, bring in new income-producing uses, and address the repairs and restoration backlog. A series of public consultation and engagement events were held during 2016 as the development proposals evolved.
13. The key elements of the final scheme approved by the Executive are:
- The refurbished Guildhall and riverside meeting rooms
 - A cafe unit to the south range
 - Refurbished and new build office space
 - A new riverside restaurant unit.
14. The most important factor in developing these new proposals has been to secure proper provision for Full Council meetings in the Council Chamber and to maintain Civic and ceremonial use of the Guildhall. The design proposals for Common Hall Yard also recognise the need for space to serve both the Mansion House and the Guildhall, supporting the Lord Mayoralty and the important civic role of both buildings.

15. The total estimated cost of the project including all design fees, project management and furnishing costs is £12.780M. This will be funded by prudential borrowing of £8.683M and a Local Growth Fund grant of £2.347M from the Leeds City Region Local Enterprise Partnership. The balance of £1.75M is covered by a capital budget approved in 2013 and covers project development work and emergency roof repairs.
16. The finally accepted scheme was granted planning permission last month. One of the conditions of the planning permission, which was endorsed in the Executive approval of the project's business case and capital budget, was the establishment of a Management Plan for the Mansion House, Guildhall, and Common Hall Yard to govern how the shared elements of the scheme will facilitate the operation of the Guildhall complex and the effective occupation of the Mansion House by the Civic Party. This will ensure the status of the Lord Mayoralty is protected and enhanced, with safe and effective management and use of the public space and amenity for the Civic Party in the Mansion House. It is intended that this Management Plan will be examined and reviewed by a cross-party working group, working with Civic and Democratic Services, both prior to its completion of the development and during its operation.

Joint Venture with Homes and Communities Agency

17. I am pleased to announce our intention to form a strategic partnership between the City of York Council and the Homes and Communities Agency, the Government's housing delivery arm of the Department of Communities and Local Government. This will bring capacity and funding to this important area of activity. We have a well-reported mismatch between housing supply and demand in York and this unique partnership will represent a radical step change for house-building in the City, focussing initially on speeding up delivery on Council-owned brownfield sites, for example, the former Askham Bar car-park site, the former Burnholme school site, and the former Lowfields school site.
18. This unique partnership will be one of the first of its kind in the country. It aims to increase the speed of delivery on sites from the house-building industry norm of 30 - 40 units per annum at a particular site or location to around 80 units a year, thus 'front-loading' the supply of new housing in the City. This initiative comes on top of the funding from the HCA of £2.75M announced last Autumn for the development of more shared ownership housing in the City.

19. This strategic partnership could deliver over 5000 homes over the next 15 years, with the potential for over 1000 in the next 3 years alone, all on brownfield sites. Future housebuilding in York is dependent on having an approved Local Plan, something that York has failed to achieve for several decades. This administration will put that right.
20. By partnering with the HCA, we will be able to achieve two key goals; to increase the speed of delivery to alleviate the housing situation now, and to deliver a more varied tenure mix to bridge the affordability gap. This includes increasing the level of our social housing stock, affordable rent, shared ownership, market-priced properties, self-build, and much more. Together with this initiative, we shall also be bringing forward proposals later this year to establish a Council-owned housing development company. This will enable us to maximise the potential of our own sites – quickly – and ensure that the right mix of housing is delivered, and thereby grow the affordable housing stock in the City.

Young People and Education

21. This administration is committed to remodelling service provision and achieving better results from the best possible use of taxpayers' money. A prime example of this is the introduction of Local Area Teams. This transfers support for some of our most vulnerable children into more localised facilities out in the communities, and making the service more responsive to needs. This has reduced the cost of the service by around £1.4M, but most importantly it has greatly improved the service. Last month, OFSTED complemented the Council on its vision and gave a rating of 'OUTSTANDING' for the Safeguarding Children's Board. We are only the second Council in the UK to have achieved this rating.
22. In Education, we have refocused government grant money to ensure school places are again available in the local community. This is investment which has made the City's results the best in Yorkshire and giving York one of the best educated workforces in the North of England, and with the City's best practice being recognised by Government. We are pleased to take part in the new 30 hours pre-school education project which is aimed at getting parents back to work whilst giving children the best possible start in life. Our strong partnerships have resulted in all our private providers joining the scheme.

Council Budget

23. The Council budget we passed last month has been greeted by most residents as a sensible compromise. As I said at Budget Council, the council tax increase of 3.7%, comprising a 3% adult social care precept and a 0.7% general increase, will be thought too high by some and too low by others, but this Council was faced with the need to keep costs at a reasonable level for hard-pressed taxpayers on the one hand, most of whom will see little increase in their wages over the coming year, and on the other hand those, particularly the elderly and the vulnerable, who rely on our services. I believe the budget we approved struck a fair and realistic balance between these two competing forces.
24. As an administration we pledged to concentrate on front-line services and to do these well. Our budget also included a much-needed long-term investment in roads and footpaths of up to £20M over five years, and a comprehensive increase in money for basic services such as gully cleaning, gritting and bins. We have provided more support for mental health services, which we consider to be an essential front-line responsibility of the Council, and we will continue to work closely with the city's mental health providers to improve this provision.
25. During this coming year, we will continue to work with officers and partners to develop ways of delivering better services at lower cost as we constantly re-evaluate how our Council can best respond to the needs of York residents.

Cllr. David Carr

Leader, City of York Council