

Report to Council from the Executive Member for Environment & Climate Change 15 July 2021

Following on from my last report, we continue to live in interesting times; flooding, a pandemic, more flooding, changing lockdown measures, as well as major investments across the city, including York Central, the Station frontage and more social housing, along with a full consultation on recycling and the creation of York's Climate Commission.

The newly created and appointed Head of Carbon is now finalising his team, which are all due to start before the end of summer. A new Head of Waste and Public Realm is also in place, his team is being recruited to deliver the neighbourhood model, which will ensure our residents continue to be involved and we deliver their services.

Building on the successes of the first 12 months, we can now be proud that we are delivering: 100% of the electricity used in council buildings and streets lights from renewable sources, the UK's first, and only, voluntary clean air zone, a programme to replace current <3.5T council diesel vehicles with electric, new waste vehicles, including 2 fully electric vehicles, a housing retrofit strategy to deliver our carbon neutral ambition for the domestic sector, £1.5M government funding for home energy efficiency improvements, FTSE4Good review of treasury monies, 3 solar-powered EV hyper hubs, successful pilot of e-scooters and e-bikes, new pilot for last mile delivery, increased pedestrianization of the city centre and the creation of York's Climate Commission.

The planning and delivery of this significant workload is only possible due to the dedication and expertise of our Council staff and senior officers. I would like to thank all of these teams, and the front line staff, for their hard work over the past 2 years and their continued energy in making a difference for our City.

In this report I will focus on the breadth and depth of change that has been achieved, in particular the new community woodland, increased delivery and funding from the Environment Agency to alleviate flooding, improvement of waste services and resident engagement, climate change strategy and the work of York's Climate commission.

New Community Woodland

This administration joined the White Rose Forest Partnership, which provides access to forestry expertise and funding. Council officers have consulted with residents across the city, successfully accessed Government funding and will have a final design to be reviewed in August 2021. The £3m project is set to receive approximately £1m of Government funding, meaning that, beyond the original land purchase, the woodland will be created at no cost to the Council. This will enable some of the allocated budget to be refocused on other specific environmental projects.

The new community woodland site has been visited by the Forestry Commission, the Northern Forest and the White Rose Forest and is being hailed as an exemplar for city woodland creation in England. Local schools have created a wildflower meadow on 5 acres, and the planting of 50,000 trees begins in earnest in November. This woodland will be the second largest stray in York, safeguarding the views of the city and creating leisure facilities for residents, whilst also increasing biodiversity and improving carbon sequestration.

Alongside the new woodland, the administration has also committed to increase tree canopy cover from 11% to 13% by 2050 and we will need our residents support to achieve this ambition. There are 90,000 homes and more than 210,000 residents across the City. We will be supporting and encouraging everyone to plant a tree and get us closer to our ambition.

Furthermore, the Council, with significant support from the Climate Change Scrutiny Committee, have adopted a pollinator strategy. This is feeding into our work practices, which are evolving and being updated to ensure we support our pollinators and York's biodiversity.

Flooding

We are working closely with the Environment Agency to support the delivery of flood alleviation schemes across the city, utilising the £100m Government funding. The Council has also identified funding to deliver £4m flood protection for Germany Beck and the Fordlands Road community. In all, this work will protect more than 2,000 homes and businesses.

On a separate strand of work, we have secured initial funding of £6m from Defra to begin work on innovative flood alleviation

schemes upstream of York and across the region. This will enable communities upstream to derive benefits from flood works as York is further protected from flooding. Once the concept is proven, the project will be awarded a further £45m to deliver the action plans, all of which will further enhance our innovative work in flood mitigation and management.

Waste services

The pandemic and Brexit have had major impacts on the waste service teams at the Council. Firstly, in terms of practical delivery of the service, with social distancing and self-isolation. Secondly, due to more than 100,000 HGV driver vacancies in the UK. The waste team continue to work very professionally, in difficult conditions and over long hours. I, as well as residents, am extremely grateful for their ongoing efforts.

The city centre has seen a resounding upturn as covid restrictions have eased and the number of visitors, both residents and tourists, has increased. The café culture has enabled more people to enjoy their leisure time, which has been supported by the work of our teams. As the number of visitors have increased, so has the amount of work required from the city centre team. Therefore, we have invested further in front-line services, enabling commercial collections of our bagged waste on a Sunday as well as increasing working hours to support the night time economy.

The waste team has also delivered a comprehensive review and consultation of recycling, receiving over 7,200 residents responses. We will be buying new low-emission diesel vehicles to replace an aging, unreliable recycling fleet, realigning rounds to further improve efficiency and extending the garden waste collection by a month (these collections will now run from March to the end of November). However, having listened to residents, we will not be introducing 3-weekly collections for recycling and we await clarity on central Government plans before we invest further in changes in this service.

Finally, the team are working on moving 6,200 homes from black bin bags to wheeled bin collections. Wheeled bins ensure that residents, and crews, reduce their risk of H&S incidents, reduce the risk of bags splitting and household waste attracting vermin, making the environment much more pleasant. We are also looking at extending garden waste collections into these areas with the aim for the changes to start in March 2022.

Climate change strategy and engagement

The York Climate Change Strategy will be a shared strategy encouraging collaboration and collective action to deliver our shared vision. The draft strategy will be available in August and is built on the research delivered by Prof Andy Gouldson of the University of Leeds, detailing York's carbon footprint and suggesting steps which will support rapid carbon emission reduction.

The Head of Carbon Reduction has launched a city-wide engagement to gather opinions, ideas and feedback to inform the strategy. It will ensure key audiences understand each other's perspectives and explore responses within the context of economic development and transport. The first step of this engagement is Our Big Conversation, which launched on 18 June in Our City, across social media and local press and radio. The feedback from research, experts and the survey will inform the climate change strategy, which is expected to be published in December.

Further to this extensive engagement, the communication strategy regarding the climate action we are taking is being improved. A new section of the Council website has been created, dedicated to climate change www.york.gov.uk/climatechange . The new section brings together carbon reduction, climate hazards, biodiversity and behaviour change to provide residents with the latest information on what the Council is doing to tackle the climate emergency.

A new monthly Climate Change e-newsletter was launched in June 2021. The newsletter, which already has over 200 subscribers, is another tool for informing and influencing residents. It includes updates on council projects, wider initiatives across the city and advice for reducing carbon emissions.

Climate Commission

York Climate Commission was launched in December 2020. It is an influential body, independent of the Council, with Council executives and officers playing a supporting role. The Commission has the task of prompting businesses and residents to act to jointly address the climate emergency. The members of the Commission feature representatives from industry, academia, health and SMEs,

with the 3 largest single source emitters of CO2 also represented on this board.

Over the past 8 months the Commission has analysed the report from the University of Leeds and looked at the City's priorities and delivered a series of projects:

1. A submission has been made to the Mayoral Bloomberg Challenge for a sustainable supermarket which would combat food poverty. Although the submission was unsuccessful, Nestle and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation are working to deliver the idea.
2. A project, led by First Group, is identifying all the business EV charging points across the City with the aim of matching need to operational efficiency.
3. The Chamber of Commerce have supported a project to understand how we tackle our domestic CO2 footprint – the largest part of the City's emissions. The work has brought together all social housing providers, both Universities, several developers and the Council's planning and housing departments. The aim is to build an action plan to deliver our aim of carbon neutral by 2030.

Summary

We continue to work hard and deliver to progress towards our shared aim of carbon neutrality, harnessing the drive and experience of our residents, businesses and visitors.