

Leader's report to Full Council 8th April 2010

1. Headquarters Update

The new Headquarters remains on target to be completed by September 2012 and the overall project delivered within the approved budget of £43.8m. The business case shows that this is still going to deliver a £5 million saving versus the status quo position which will benefit council tax payers.

The exchange of signed agreements between CYC and York Investors LLP has now taken place.

Following a very successful consultation event at the Mansion House in early March, where 400 people attended over the two day event, the developer is now working towards submitting a planning application in April 2010.



Display in Mansion House 5th and 6th March

There has been continuous consultation between the developer and the council's planning department and there have been a number of very positive and supportive meetings between the developers and special interested groups such as English Heritage and York Civic Trust who have been supportive of the outline proposal and enthusiastic in their endorsement of the sympathetic revitalisation of a major landmark building in the city.

Civic Trust representatives attended the exhibition and reiterated their enthusiasm for the scheme as plans have developed. I met a number of former railway employees at the exhibition who showed considerable interest in the scheme in the building because of its history.

Representatives from the developers design team are meeting with The Civic Trust again in April to brief them on the latest developments as they affect planning, architectural heritage and conservation. The proposed planning application has been sent to English Heritage for their written comment and they have committed to send the developers a response prior to the planning application being submitted.

Subject to a successful planning application and further development of the design detail, construction will commence on the site in November 2010.

Presentations and tours of the 'Office of the Future' continue with around 250 staff, managers and Members having visited to date. To cope with the demand, an additional programme of visits have been scheduled to run throughout April.

2. University Pool

We continue to work in partnership with the University to find a way to push forward the competition standard pool on the new campus. The University have undertaken further work on their design for the facility as they undertook to do. New design options are being considered that, whilst still very high quality, should result in a reduced construction cost thereby narrowing the funding gap. Once costings have been completed on the new design the University Pool Steering Group will be recalled to look at the proposal and make sure that it meets the city's needs. I expect to be able to report to Council on a way forward early in the summer.

3. Local Information System for York and North Yorkshire

On 2nd February the Executive considered the report for a Local Information System for indicators covering York and North Yorkshire. There were issues at the time of the launch of the 'One Place' website in early December that it was unavailable for officers to access directly to check data due the amount of traffic on the website. Therefore having a system which ensures that data is checked as it is loaded onto a website will assist everyone with the analysis of data.

The North Yorkshire and York Local Information System is being funded by the Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnership (RIEP) and so will not depend on City of York Council funds for development for the next three years amounting to £140,000. The Executive demanded that it need to demonstrate its worth in the value of a shared source for information, and for the amount of time that is spent on maintaining the records. If, as is claimed in the report, this process will save CYC officers time in the long run it is going to be worth doing. Indeed there was the suggestion that had this been available to officers at the time that the Kingsway West Project was being set up that time could have been saved, and so the new system will be able to assist with the roll out of the project to other areas of the city where there are pockets of deprivation. Given the pressure on public expenditure in the future this system should save time, and help with the co-ordination of all public expenditure in a given area which will be essential for Local Strategic Partner organisations. However, information systems in themselves do not improve the lives of residents, it is the policies and service delivery that result from decisions informed by the data. There will therefore be regular updates on what changes have occurred, and the measurable outputs.

4. Community Stadium

The Executive received an update report on 16th February on work that is ongoing for the Community Stadium and work with partners to see the development of a business plan to deliver the stadium. Feasibility work is ongoing, and there is further exploration of additional partnerships to achieve wider community benefits. To show

support to the project I went along to watch the match against Luton Town that evening despite the cold weather.

5. Taxi-card replacement for National Transport Tokens

The token system used in York for many years is essentially a relic of a bygone era. Where taxi cards have been introduced elsewhere they seem to have met with user approval. For taxi owners they offer a quick and easy method of reimbursement. There will be savings in administrative costs, and the value of concessions can be increased to £55 per annum.

6. Comments from the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee

In February the Executive received the report of the outcomes of the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee regarding the referral from the Executive for overspends in Adult Social Services. This was contrasted with the way in which the matter of the referral of similar expenditure pressures have been dealt with by the scrutiny process in the area of "Looked After Children". With there being no proposals for changes in council policy to address the situation the Executive had little to note from the report. I hope that we will not see similar partisan attempts to thwart the efforts of the scrutiny process to examine council processes and policies and to develop positive steps for progress.

7. Third Performance & Financial Monitor, Capital Monitor, and Treasury Management

The Executive received financial updates for Quarter three performance and financial reports which showed that officers were continuing to identify and implement actions to contain spending within budget by the end of the financial year.

Historically, Treasury Management has contributed to the Council's income, as money put on deposit earned interest. However, with the current low Bank Rate, there is little possibility of achieving the levels of income received in previous years. Forecasts of interest rates are highly speculative and of little reliability, as the depressed market begins to recover.

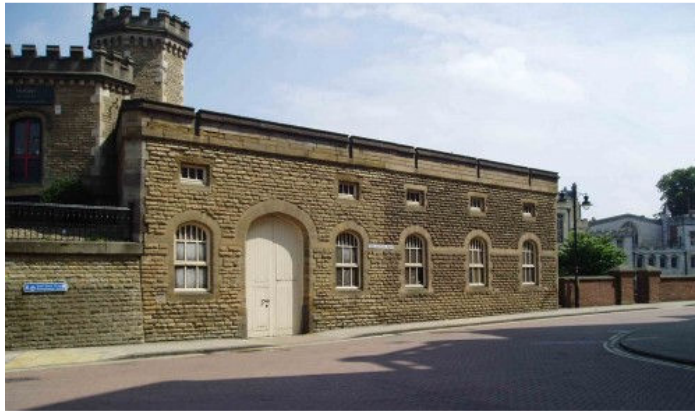
Although well below previous years' performance, the Treasury Management Team, through investment activity, have managed to achieve a rate of return of 2.37%, which is significantly higher than the London Inter-Bank Deposit Rate (0.45%) and the average base rate for the period (0.5%).

The Executive also received the papers relating to the Council's Budget which were the focus of the Council Meeting held on 25th February for which there has been substantial report and debate already.

8. Lendal Bridge Hub Station

The Executive received a report on 2nd March on the update on progress being made to convert the former electricity sub station at Lendal Bridge to become a 'Cyle Hub'

with Bikerescue as part of the successful Cycle City Campaign. The Executive agreed to release £270,000 from the 2009/10 City Strategy Capital Programme to fund the conversion of the building.



Former electricity sub station Wellington Row which will become cycle point with secure cycle storage

The scheme will create a city centre focal point for cycling, and will help to promote York further as a progressive centre for sustainable transport. There will be tremendous demand for cycle facilities in the nearby area from Aviva offices, and the new council HQ. Through the regular meetings that I have had with directors at Aviva I have made sure that they are aware of the proposals and the advantages that it would bring to have them so close by. It is also important that the cycle proposals for the Railway Station are done in "tandem" so that they are in co-operation and not competition.

9. Cycling City Update

The Executive noted the progress being made on the Cycling City project. There has been a lot of attention paid to the importance of providing safe, off carriageway, cycle paths and this has already contributed to a 7% increase in cycle usage over the last couple of years.

The Water End cycle path has proved to be an attraction for cyclists with use of the route up from 388 riders in a 12 hour period each day in September 2008 to 521 during September 2009. A 34% increase.

A large part of the Cycle City project is devoted to more low key activities including improving relations between cyclists and other road users. As part of this campaign signs are to be added to the boundary "City of York" markers which will remind drivers that there are a large number of cyclists using Yorks roads. The message is particularly important for the drivers of large vehicles who may not all be aware of the need to provide cyclists with an adequate safety margin.

This forms part of a "respect" initiative which is aimed at ensuring that cyclists also recognise their responsibilities. Police have been acting to deal with cyclists not using lights, riding on footpaths and ignoring traffic signals.

Another initiative is aimed at increasing the number of people cycling to the railway station. Secure cycling parking is to be provide there while separate access routes via both the south and north car parks are scheduled to be installed later in the year.

The proposed access from Lowther Terrace has gained the support of around 70% of those residents who have responded to the Blossom Street traffic survey over the last couple of months.

All in all, Cycling City has already proved to be a great success in York and I hope that this years programme of events and improvements will prove to even more people that using their bike is cheaper, quicker and healthier than the alternative ways of getting around the City. In order to demonstrate that the campaign is reaching those people who needed that 'bit of encouragement' to venture onto their bike more frequently there will be residents surveys to check the broader impact of the campaign.

10. The Campaign and Sustainability Update for 10:10

An update on progress that is being made for the achievement of the council's commitment to the 10:10 campaign to reduce carbon emissions by 10% in 2010.

There has been substantial work on reducing the council's carbon emissions, which will also have the benefit of reducing energy bills, and helping to establish a local supply of energy.

Whilst schools are excluded from the 10:10 plan they will in the long run be part of the carbon trading proposals for which the council needs to be ready. I hope that it will not be anything like the 'Landfill Tax' which has eroded the ability of councils to fund recycling schemes, and that a more supportive mechanism can be operated to deliver the objective of more efficient use of resources.

The changes in 'feed in' tariff means that from April there will be a dramatic reduction in the payback period for property owners and householders from the capital investment in Photo Voltaic cells. This has the potential for a significant increase in small scale generation in York homes, and as we have the Energy Saving Trust Office in York we should be making greatest use of the work that is being done to promote the benefits for households. In Germany this has been running for years, and has significantly reduced the unit costs for PVs, and the general capacity for renewable power generation in that country.

I met with Mike Childs national Head of Campaigns for Friends of the Earth on 12/03/10 with the intention of getting support for CYC officers for the implementation of the 40% reduction. This has been forthcoming and I am pleased to work with the local and national parts of Friends of the Earth. This links in with the Green Streets initiative.

The Executive has approved additional investment in modernising street lighting systems in the City over the next year. This will go some way towards achieving the ambitious 10:10 target. By using lighting units which deliver the same (or in some cases better lighting than the unpopular sodium lighting) levels of light, but at lower consumption of power, the council will achieve a reduction in tonnes of carbon emitted.

The success of the programme will over the next 12 months depend on changing attitudes to energy use particularly in Council buildings. Sustaining such a culture change represents a real challenge.

Effort continues to be put into achieving the council's own 2013 target of a 25% reduction in CO2 emissions. The council is on track to achieve this.

11. Review of Flood Defence Trial in Clementhorpe

A trial of Aquabarrier in the Clementhorpe area was reviewed in the light of an officer report identifying the problems due to underlying geology (medieval 'in fill' on the natural river bank) which has resulted in seepage as the river in flood is able to get under the temporary defences due to underlying porous ground. A meeting has been held with the Environment Agency and City of York Council officers to see how the EA proposed plans for a £2 million scheme for the Clementhorpe Flood Cell can be brought forward to provide better defences for the area which take account of the seepage problems. Officers are now involving Yorkshire Water which need to be engaged with the design of the work as this is currently an 'undefended' part of the city. Works will be needed for sewage pumping to continue in flood events and therefore an investment by Yorkshire Water will need to be encouraged. As the city's representative on the Flood Defence Committee I will be pursuing this scheme.

12. Other Flood Issues

A scheme funded by the Local Levy which all councils in Yorkshire pay into for schemes which do not qualify for national grant funding, but which has a positive impact on communities was finished in the Peckitt Street area.

A public drop in session was run by the Environment Agency for the Leeman Road area for the national 'Grant in Aid' funded scheme to improve the flood defences which were nearly overtopped in 2000, and which were due to be completed in 2009. I hope that with the funding being allocated for development work that it will remain on track for delivery in the next two years.



Peckitt Street Defences 22nd February with Helen Aird of the Environment Agency



Leeman Road Drop-in March 23rd with Bethany Gardner of the Environment Agency

13. Economic Issues

Clearly the announcements at Jarvis will have created concern amongst the staff based in York and I hope that these can be overcome. I am grateful that the other group leaders have agreed to an all-party debate on the issue at Full Council. Maintaining York's position as a 'railway city' is important for the critical mass of experience in the industry in the city.

Since my last report I have also met with Aviva, Nestle, Benenden Healthcare, Grand Central, Yorkshire Forward, North Yorkshire and York Primary Care Trust and the Chief Constable. I attended this year's Venturefest which was again very well attended and showing that York is a good place to do business.

Tourism in the region, which benefits the city as a key part of the regional offer, was showcased at the Y 10 event at Harrogate Conference Centre at which there was a good York contingent including Cllr Gillies and myself. Amongst the announcements made the 'Railway Children' will be produced this year in the former Waterloo International Station, and a Yorkshire Pass based on the York Pass run by Visit York which will be rolled out across the region.

Key items from the Yorkshire Museum are on loan to a display at the British Museum and I was able to see these on 17th March along with Cllr Taylor at an event to mark the century old link between the two museums. A great poster display from the British Museum encourages people to come and see exhibits from "England's other capital city".

I attended a meeting of Micklegate Traders (25th March) who are concerned about the impact of the valuation process on businesses in their area – one of which has seen a 300% increase in assessed value. I will be taking these items forward with the Local Government Association.

14. Festivals

The City has seen the successful Festival of Science and Technology run again to encourage greater awareness of science in the city. I attended the Rotary Club Technology Challenge with over 40 teams from schools across York at the National Railway Museum, and attended two inaugural lectures on liquid crystallography at York University on behalf of the city.

During Fairtrade fortnight I met with representatives from Fanteakwa ; Mr. Mike Yeboah (Chairman of the Fanteakwa/York link) and Mr. Eric Twumasi (Assistant Director of Education) with thanks to Cllr Janet Looker for setting up the reception with the Lord Mayor. I also met with Prof Makoto Ishikawa from Kyoto University to explain how York had become a Fairtrade city. I am now especially pleased that we now can offer Fairtrade drinks in the Guildhall.

15. Leeds City Region

The Urban Eco Settlement proposal at the British Sugar site received £275,000 capital in the recent budget for the development of demonstrator housing. There is also a share of £750,000 to the Leeds City Region for development and planning work to deliver this first phase.

I have been able to raise at regional meetings issues relating to the inclusion of York in the plans for the High Speed Rail link if it comes to Yorkshire, and the need in any case to electrify the line between Leeds and York.

Cllr Andrew Waller
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