

North Yorkshire County Councillors Report 2020/2021

It is now four years since my election as your County Councillor. Under normal circumstances, I would be up for re-election next week, but as I am sure you are all aware the County elections have been deferred until next year. It is hoped that plans for transformation into a Unitary Council will have been agreed and enacted by then.

The reason for this change has been prompted by government as a result of a proposal for a submission to them of devolution proposals for North Yorkshire. We remain as a County Council committed to the proposal of devolution and an elected Mayor as they have on Teesside.

The benefits of a Unitary Council will be huge, particularly financially, where savings of at least £25 million pounds per annum will be achieved. The finances of NYCC are currently projected to be in deficit of £82 million pounds over the next three years. It has to be said however, that this is a hugely better figure than would have been the case had it not been for significant grants from the government awarded because of the pandemic.

Health and Adult Services continues to be the major draw on finances at the County Council. Given our aging population, together with the additional pressures which covid will have brought, this is hardly surprising.

My first project when I was elected was to make it possible for towns and villages to purchase and use on NYCC Highways their own Matrix Boards. This initiative has in my view, been an enormous success in combating the problem of motorists exceeding the speed limit through populated areas.

Skeeby having speed bumps perhaps doesn't have as much of a problem as other villages, but some residents may dispute this. I am aware that at least 3 of the bumps are missing and have requested their replacement as soon as possible.

My next project is litter. The A66 is a disgrace in terms of litter and when I hear that RDC Litter Pickers clean at least 3 of the lay-bys every week it makes me so mad that a certain section of society see fit to dump their rubbish in the way that they do. Fly tipping is also a pandemic and the Government should be coerced into tougher penalties for offenders.

The construction of the Designer Outlet at Scotch Corner has now begun. I can't give you an anticipated completion date yet, but no doubt the developer will want it to be sooner rather than later.

The A66 upgrade at long last now appears to be on the horizon with 2024 being the anticipated start date. There are six sections of the road between Scotch Corner and Penrith to be duelled. It is likely that they will start at the east and progress west, one section at a time. My thinking behind this being that East Layton quarry was mothballed some time ago, but it can be reopened and will be capable of providing much stone for the project.

As with all such projects, the upheaval will be enormous not only to the travelling public, but to local communities. It will of course all be worthwhile in the long run and given the accident rate in the North Yorkshire section, should save lives for years to come.

The public consultation on the two Unitary proposals ended last week. It is now down to the government to decide which proposal to accept, if any. I supported the county proposal of one Unitary for many reasons, but principally the fact that two unitaries will mean that award winning services like HAS will be split in two.

The two unitary proposal is in my opinion already scuppered by the fact that both Hambleton and the City of York want no part in it. We have been advised by the minister that his decision will be announced in early July. It may be that he decides that we stay as we are, but I doubt it. Whatever happens, County Council elections which have been deferred for a year will now take place next May.

I have got used to zoom meetings which has taken some doing! But it has saved a considerable amount of money in travelling expenses for both officers and members. We will hear soon where we go next in terms of meetings, but the legal situation will have to be decided in terms of voting in remote meetings.

I look forward to working with the PC on behalf of residents over the next twelve months. Please don't hesitate to contact me if I can be of assistance on any matter.

Angus Thompson.

County Councillor for Richmondshire North.