

Annual Report to Parish Councils in Richmondshire North Division
By County Councillor Angus Thompson

It is now nearly 2 years since I was elected as the County Councillor for the Richmondshire North Division. It has been a very busy time with all sorts of projects ongoing such as the A11toB and the Gilling Bridge rebuild. A marvellous job was done at Gilling at a cost was £122,000 which was funded by central Government. There have been great difficulties on the A66 particularly near the Ravensworth, where there has sadly been more than one fatality in the last two years. We now have a temporary 50mph speed limit, but there is need for a much more permanent solution especially as there is little prospect of the duelling to commence before 2024.

I have been involved in the Richmond District Council finances since my election there four years ago but quickly found that the County finances are on a scale which is at times eye watering compared to District level. With an overall budget of very nearly £1 billion, the County struggles to balance the books especially in areas like health and adult social care. We are not unique in North Yorkshire in this respect by any stretch of the imagination and great pressure is being placed on the government to assist in the finance of Adult Social Care. Our MP Richi Sunak has been very helpful in this respect.

I and all other County Councillors have a locality budget to be spent on projects in villages, schools etc. with a minimum funding of £300. In the forthcoming year, which commences next week, I intend to donate £1000 to the Richmond Rover project which has provided for a number of years now, a very valuable service to the community in the Richmondshire North in terms of the Little White Bus. The funding of this service is projected to be £10,000 short in the year to come but with contributions as mentioned it is envisaged that the books will balance. This service calls through many of the villages in my division including Middleton Tyas, Melsonby and Eppleby to name but a few. Many residents take advantage of the service and it would be a great shame if it were to fold.

The A11toB project is thankfully now complete and villages like Gilling and Melsonby which became a rat run for motorists and HGVs alike when the work was going on, hopefully should now be able to get back to some sort of normality. However, there is always the ongoing problem of speeding motorists. Community Speed Watch initiatives have been set up in a number of villages and are working for particularly well in Melsonby and Gilling to name but two. It is disappointing to hear that the initiative has been disbanded in one or two villages.

I have funded the signs which are to be put below the village signs in Gilling and Melsonby saying 'community speed watch village.' I am convinced that eventually motorists will realise that speeding through our villages is just not acceptable.

When I was elected I made it a personal mission to persuade the County Council to change the rules regarding use of Vehicle Activated Signs. The current position within the County is that Matrix Boards can only be used if hired from the County Council at a cost of £3500 for 72 weeks use over four years. Our neighbours over the river in County Durham used to have such a rule but that was relaxed about four years ago and now many villages have purchased their own matrix boards. I have to say from the evidence I have seen are using them very effectively.

I am very pleased to be able to say that I and others have been able to persuade the Executive of the County Council to change the rules so that from the 1st of April the use of privately owned matrix boards by Parish Councils will be allowed. Exact proposals are about to be announced. A licence will be required for the Parish Council to use a board on Highways property. People have asked me why a matrix board can't just be stuck up on any lamp post but I think when you sit back and reflect that not only are these to be placed on Highway's property, but there may be safety issues too. There will of course be a cost to this license. I firmly believe that on the use of matrix boards will become much more prevalent within my division and assist greatly in the campaign against speeding motorists. If at all possible, I intend to use my Environmental Budget to purchase a matrix board and think that a number of villages could join together to share one and move it from one village to another on a rotating cycle.

I am really looking forward to getting this initiative underway and particularly in Stapleton where the speed limit is 40 mph not 30 as in most of the villages. I think it will be most beneficial. Time will tell!

In April last year I went on a visit to Allerton Park which is owned by the County Council and is situated just off the southbound carriageway of the A1(M) near Boroughbridge. This incinerator takes in all of North Yorkshire's rubbish together with that from seven other countries who pay to use the service and is capable of generating sufficient electricity to power 40,000 houses per annum, and of course has the great benefit of dramatically reducing the amount of rubbish which is going into landfill, hence reducing the landfill tax that that has to be paid.

Whilst I am a strong advocate of recycling, any metals and plastics which find their way to Allerton Park are separated and sold which again will generate income for the county.

It cost over £1 billion to set up and I think it is been tax payer's money very well spent. Visits can be arranged and I think you will find it fascinating to go and see around. There is no pollution generated by it and the only time you will see anything coming from the chimney is on a frosty morning when water vapour can be seen.

I have taken issue with Highways Area1 this week regarding two particular black spots when we have heavy rain. Whilst I appreciate the downpours were somewhat extreme in the week ending Saturday 16th of March, the flooding on the road south of Aldbrough heading to Melsonby was the particularly bad.

Another place where during these conditions flooding occurs is near Kilnsly House on the road from Moulton to North Cowton. Our highways officers have again promised to look very closely at the causes of these two particular black spots and I report back to me. I fully appreciate there are many others but these two seem to be the worst of all in my division.

On a brighter note the Tour de Yorkshire held in early May was a huge success. Great crowds of people cheered the competitors in glorious sunshine and I think that not only was a great time had by All but the financial cost to both the County and District will have produced a very beneficial return which will help communities, employment and businesses alike. I am very pleased that it has been decided to run the event again this year with similar funding at County and District level.

I look forward to working with Parish Councils over the next 12 months and as I have said at many meetings I urge the residents of villages and public alike to work closely with the Parish Council. I have often heard it said that the Parish Council hasn't done this or that or the other and my response is always 'Which meeting did you attend to take issue with the parish councillors and what was their response?' Invariably the resident has to say to me, 'I haven't been'. This never ceases to amaze me particularly in villages where the resident is contributing to the Parish Council through the precept.

Please residents support your Parish Council. No one is saying that you have to attend every meeting but when a controversial subject comes up as has happened recently in Middleton Tyas for example the turnout of local residents is staggering.

As ever if you need to contact me regarding any issue, please do not hesitate to get in touch but preferably by email if possible. I will do my utmost to resolve the issue or at least point you in the right direction if it is not something which I can get involved in. There will be many battles like be like this speeding yes you mentioned earlier which will take a long time possibly years to resolve but as the old saying goes 'where there is a will there is away'.

Finally, I was asked the other day by someone what my next project would be once the Matrix Board issue is resolved. I responded 'litter'. The person responded by saying, 'Litter isn't a County Council problem'. My response was, 'Litter in this country is everyone's problem.

Best wishes,
Angus Thompson.

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