

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

20 FEBRUARY 2008

STATEMENT OF THE COMMUNITY SERVICES PORTFOLIO HOLDER COUNTY COUNCILLOR HELEN SWIERS

DEVELOPMENT & COUNTRYSIDE SERVICES

Economic Development

The County Council is currently involved with its Leeds City Region partner authorities on how the City Region can meet the Government's new targets for housing growth. These discussions focus on two key areas: increased housing figures to be accommodated through the Regional Spatial Strategy and proposals for an Eco Town in the city region.

The Government is seeking to double the number of new houses built in the City Region to meet its Housing Green Paper national target. This target could mean 19,000 new houses per annum. City Region authorities are looking to undertake a full and robust review of housing potential to understand opportunities for growth, including consideration of sustainability and implications on the Green Belt. It is recognised that there are some local authorities, particularly in West Yorkshire, with considerable constraints on development in the short term. Within North Yorkshire, Craven has indicated that it could increase its housing figures.

As part of the Government's agenda to increase housing figures, it invited proposals from local authorities and the private sector to develop "Eco Towns" which will be new settlements of between 5,000 and 25,000 houses developed on sustainable principles. The City Region authorities proposed a study to identify a suitable site within an area of search to the east of Leeds, including areas within Selby district. Government received three proposals from the private sector to develop an Eco Town within the City Region. One of these – Willow Green – would develop a settlement of 15,000 houses in the southern part of Selby district around Eggborough. The County Council, Selby District Council and other local authorities have concerns about the feasibility and viability of these proposals. There were no consultations with the County Council as the major provider of services on the proposal at Eggborough. Urgent discussions are taking place with partners to seek to influence the Government's approach to Eco Towns ahead of an anticipated announcement in February on which sites Government is considering taking forward.

Community Engagement

The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 created a new duty to involve local communities in decisions and services, this is due to come into force in April 2009. The aspiration for the new duty is to embed a culture of engagement and empowerment. Work is developing to build on current engagement structures in conjunction with external partners, including District Councils and the

Police Authority, to develop an effective and consistent approach to community engagement across North Yorkshire.

Post Office closures

Following a six week consultation period (ending on 17 January 2008), the County Council submitted a formal response to Post Office Ltd challenging its proposed branch closures in North Yorkshire (excluding the Richmond parliamentary constituency). The County Council held a number of meetings across the county open to the public to provide an opportunity for residents to put their concerns to representatives from Post Office Ltd. In its own response to Post Office Ltd, the County Council voiced its grave concerns about the proposals for a significant down-grading of the branch network across the county, hitting both our rural and urban communities.

Post Office Ltd announced its decision on 8 February 2008. 21 branches will be closed and a further 18 branches will be replaced by a limited hours "outreach" service. Only the branch on Cold Bath Road, Harrogate has been given a reprieve. However Post Office Ltd have said that retaining the Cold Bath Road branch, means that another must close at Aspin Lane, Knaresborough. The Aspin Lane, Knaresborough branch will now face a six-week consultation before a final decision is made in April 2008.

By the time of the County Council meeting, Post Office Ltd will have published details of proposed closures in the Richmond parliamentary constituency. The County Council is again holding meetings open to the public to provide an opportunity for residents to put their concerns to representatives from Post Office Ltd, and will also voice its own concerns.

North Yorkshire Sustainable Community Strategy

The North Yorkshire Strategic Partnership (NYSP) is currently consulting on the draft Sustainable Community Strategy for North Yorkshire 2008/18 (closing date for comments is 22 February 2008). The draft Strategy is a key building block for the North Yorkshire Local Area Agreement and the priorities in this Strategy will guide the selections of the Indicators to be included in the North Yorkshire Local Area Agreement 2.

The nine priorities in the draft Strategy have been identified from the seven district level sustainable community strategies and the six countywide thematic plans together with subsequent consultation with partners and discussions at the NYSP Wider Partnership Conference in October 2007. The draft Strategy will be a key agenda item for the first meeting of the new NYSP Council on 13 March 2008 and will then be brought to the County Council for approval on 21 May 2008.

North Yorkshire Local Area Agreement

The first draft of the new Local Area Agreement (LAA) was submitted to Government Office in January 2008. This will supersede the current LAA and run to March 2011. It contains the proposed priorities for the next three years based on the priorities for improvement identified in the draft Sustainable Community Strategy. The next stage will be to confirm the priorities with Government Office and agree the targets to be achieved over the next three years. The agreement will then be brought to the County Council for approval on 21 May 2008 before submission to the Government for ministerial sign off in June 2008.

County Councillor Helen Swiers
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