

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

15 FEBRUARY 2017

**STATEMENT OF THE HIGHWAYS, ROAD SAFETY, ACCESS TO THE COUNTRYSIDE
(INCL BROADBAND, MOBILE PHONE COVERAGE) AND PASSENGER TRANSPORT
PORTFOLIO HOLDER COUNTY COUNCILLOR DON MACKENZIE****Highways and Transportation****Tadcaster Bridge**

Members will know that we have re-opened an improved Tadcaster Bridge. Thirteen months and five days after heavy, prolonged rainfall caused a partial collapse of the 18th century, listed structure over the River Wharfe, we were able to hand back this vital link to the town's residents on Friday 3 February.

From a standing start, this Council's highways engineers, together with our contractors, Balfour Beatty, succeeded in carrying out a major piece of civil engineering in little more than half the time such a task would normally take. Many challenges were faced, including not least to ensure compliance with the rigorous requirements for a listed structure. Matching stone was found and quarried. A design to widen the bridge by means of a cantilever were drawn up, a planning application for the work was submitted to, and approved by, Selby DC in record time.

I take this opportunity to thank all officers in our BES team, and particularly our bridge expert, John Smith, for their remarkable efforts. I congratulate the workforce of our contractors for their unfailing dedication to get the work done, often in very bad weather conditions.

Above all, I pay tribute to the people of Tadcaster for their patience, understanding and support throughout the many months of difficulties after 29 December 2015. Their steadfastness has been rewarded with a perfectly restored bridge, wider and better than before.

Winter Update

I am pleased to say that nothing so dramatic has happened (so far) this winter. Although we have had to grit regularly when conditions merited, we have experienced no prolonged road closures or bridge damage due to the weather.

High winds did bring tidal surges along the east coast on Friday 13 January. A small number of residential and commercial properties were flooded but the impact overall was minimal thanks to multi-agency planning, which was very effective. Our local highway teams played a key role by providing sandbagging and emergency traffic management.

Winter service is within budget and operations have been delivered in line with policy.

A59 Kex Gill

At this time last year, the A59 was closed at Kex Gill for seven weeks. There have been no problems this year following last year's extensive work to stabilise the steep slope above this trans-Pennine route. Nevertheless, we are monitoring the situation there very carefully and on 23 January began to drill boreholes in the slope and through the carriageway to install highly sensitive meters to provide enhanced data. This work is being conducted under temporary traffic lights.

The Kex Gill Steering Group has met twice to consider options to divert the route away from this difficult and unreliable location.

Funding updates – some good news

Government has recently announced a number of funding settlements for 2017/18. This is the picture so far:

£26.6m confirmed as capital allocation for highway maintenance.

£2.4m as our share of the Government's Pothole Action Fund.

£5.1m provisionally given to us from the National Productivity Investment Fund.

The NPIF was first identified in the Autumn Statement and is intended to be used to ease congestion, unlock economic growth and support job creation opportunities through delivery of new housing. This funding will be confirmed next month once our officers have identified which schemes meet the fund's conditions.

There is also new funding for highways authorities to make their most dangerous roads safer. We will submit bids for three such sections of road before the end of April.

The Incentive Element of our maintenance allocation, which is based on how well we manage our highway assets, is expected to be announced soon.

Finally, and as reported recently in the media, we have made a successful bid for almost £1m from the Government's Access Fund. This funding will allow us to promote cycling and walking in Harrogate, Knaresborough, Scarborough and Skipton. This was a very competitive bidding process and I am pleased that our hard work in drawing up the bid paid off.

Access to the Countryside

I am delighted to report that North Yorkshire came out as top authority in the recent National Highways and Transportation Network's survey to measure public satisfaction with public rights of way, a remarkable achievement given our size and rurality.

Broadband and Mobile Telephony

The expansion of high-quality broadband (>24Mbps) throughout the county continues. Superfast North Yorkshire is the County's wholly-owned organisation, which is leading the programme to bring this increasingly important utility to households and businesses in those areas, which would not otherwise receive the service from commercial providers.

SFNY will complete Phase 2 of this project in June, by which time 165,000 premises will have been connected up, taking overall provision in North Yorkshire to 90%. We expect to award the contract for Phase 3 in the next few weeks. This is worth up to £30m and when completed will take coverage up to 95%.

The programme represents excellent value for taxpayers' money, with an average connection cost of £217 per property so far, the lowest achieved by any rural authority in the country.

DON MACKENZIE