

**NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL****13 NOVEMBER 2019****COUNTY COUNCILLOR CARL LES**Rural Commission

Rural sustainability is an issue that has been very prominent over recent years. The issue has been particularly highlighted in and around the two national parks in North Yorkshire in terms of lack of younger families, high and unaffordable house prices, with knock on affects for the provision of services, schools, etc.

We have all been very concerned about the issue and looking at ways to respond. Following a number of partnership discussions I have established a Commission, independent of the Council, to look into the sustainability of our most rural communities.

Eight commissioners have been asked to consider the issues. These are:

- Very Reverend John Dobson (Chair) – Dean of Ripon
- Chris Clark – owns and manages a farm in the Yorkshire Dales and a Member of the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority
- Dr Debbie Trebilco – board member of Community Energy England and trustee of the North York Moors National Park Trust
- Heather Hancock – chair of the Agricultural forum and former chief executive of the Yorkshire Dales National Park
- Jean MacQuarrie – Editor-in-Chief for JPIMedia - Yorkshire's 18 weekly titles in North and West Yorkshire
- Martin Booth – experienced community worker and instrumental in developing community ownership and housing in Hudswell
- Professor Sally Shortall – Professor of Rural Economy, Newcastle University
- Sir William Worsley – chair of the National Forest Company and Hovingham Estate

Our aim is to get the insight of a group of well-informed and influential people, leading to a collective action plan and also some hard-hitting recommendations to ourselves, our partners, other local agencies, our own MPs and through to Government. The Commission will also help improve the evidence base and arguments to enable us to successfully make the case for increased government support to maximise the sustainability of the most rural communities in North Yorkshire. The Commission is the first of its sort in the country and is intended to be a productive intervention, not a talking shop.

The Commission is supported by a reference group, which I chair, comprising the leaders of all local authorities in the county, the two national parks and the Local Enterprise Partnership. This has agreed the terms of reference with the commission and will provide a sounding board for the Commission's developing thinking.

## Climate change

At our last meeting, Council committed to produce its own carbon reduction plan with an aspiration to achieve net carbon neutrality by 2030.

To support this aspiration work is progressing on four work streams:

- Understanding the Council's carbon footprint and establishing a robust way of reporting this in a way that enables priorities for action to be determined and progress to be monitored
- Scoping and developing a carbon reduction plan with options that are properly costed and deliverable
- Developing and piloting a new climate change impact assessment tool that enables decision makers to better understand the impact of the decisions that they are being asked to make
- Establishing robust governance so that this is an integral part of our Council plan and performance reporting, not an add-on

We are already making positive strides. A good example is our achievement in already converting more than 35,000 street lights, 80% of the total, to LED. This has generated savings of £800,000 this financial year alone and reduced our carbon footprint by more than 2,400 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>. However the aspiration to achieve net carbon is ambitious. This will require very difficult decisions to be made in coming years, particularly given the financial pressures we face and the growing demands on our services.

The LGA has published "A councillor's workbook on acting on climate change" (available at [www.local.gov.uk/councillor-workbook-acting-climate-change](http://www.local.gov.uk/councillor-workbook-acting-climate-change)), which I encourage all Members to read. You may also wish to consider what actions you can take to encourage and support other organisations towards net carbon neutrality, for example through the contacts you have with them and your use of the Locality Budget scheme.

As stated action is being developed across numerous fronts – Management Board, an Executive task group led by Greg White, a Scrutiny Working Group led by Stan Lumley.

As agreed I will report headline progress at each Council Meeting.

## Brexit preparedness

In partnership with other local authorities and partners, the County Council undertook significant work to ensure that, as far as possible, its services and the lives of local people would not be adversely impacted by a no-deal Brexit on 31 October 2019. This work has been paused, but will remain in place in case it is needed in future.

As the uncertainty continues, I want to reassure all EU citizens living and working in North Yorkshire that they are an important and welcomed part of our community and will continue to be so post-Brexit. We are continuing to encourage to support them to apply to the EU Settlement Scheme so that they can continue living and working

in the UK after 30 June 2021. Further information is available at [www.gov.uk/eusettledstatus](http://www.gov.uk/eusettledstatus). The County Council's Registration Service has a service which enables anyone who doesn't have access to a compatible phone or tablet to scan and verify their documents as part of their application. This is available by appointment at the Harrogate, Northallerton and Scarborough registration offices.

### Flooding

"Unprecedented", "biblical", these were two of the adjectives used to describe the "once in a thousand years" downfall of rain that happened at the end of July. Although hugely impactful, fortunately it was confined to a relatively small area of 2 dales or the devastation would have been much worse.

I have nothing but admiration for the way the communities reacted to their situation. Working with other agencies and volunteer groups, I want to record once again our appreciation of the work done by our teams of staff, both immediately and in the early days of the deluge.

Later on, our highways teams and bridge engineers did amazing work in getting roads reopened and bridges replaced, the best contribution we could make to getting communities and businesses reconnected, not back to normal, but open for business. We are working closely with the LEP to provide further support.

Much of this activity was at our financial risk, and sometimes taking on tasks that were not ours, but it was important to act as quickly as possible.

I would wish to recognise the efforts the local MP, Rishi Sunak, made to ensure the rescue work went on at pace, and to secure adequate funding to recompense us for that risk.

### UCI

Our staff played a key role in the organisation and management of the routes for this major cycling event, the equivalent of hosting the football World Cup, and they are to be congratulated on the level of expertise they have developed and deploy at such major occasions. Unfortunately the weather also adversely affected the UCI cycle activity, especially disrupting the final day, and leaving an ugly, but temporary sight on the Stray. Based in North Yorkshire and running throughout the County, this once in a lifetime event showcased to the world what North Yorkshire and the host venue Harrogate have to offer to the local, national and international visitor. Unfortunately, not every business benefited from the event during the week, although some did very well out of it, but the true benefit will be seen in future years as visitors come to beautiful North Yorkshire and majestic Harrogate. Also it was hugely popular with the thousands of folk who lined the routes, attended the starts and finishes, and as ever with cycle races in the County, "made their own event of the event"

CARL LES