

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

22 JULY 2020

STATEMENT OF THE OPEN TO BUSINESS PORTFOLIO HOLDER COUNTY COUNCILLOR ANDREW LEE (INCLUDING GROWTH, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, PLANNING, WASTE MANAGEMENT, TRADING STANDARDS AND BUSINESS RELATIONS)

Trading Standards

Farming, Food & Health

Covid-19 Recovery Phase – Support to Businesses

The Farming, Food & Health team have continued to provide support to North Yorkshire businesses throughout the Covid-19 crisis by providing regulatory business advice.

As part of this support, officers are also working with the Local Enterprise Partnership to deliver a series of webinars to help North Yorkshire businesses maintain and develop their operations during these difficult times. The first webinar that was delivered discussed digital solutions for restaurants and cafés who wish to provide ‘takeaway’ food with Trading Standards staff providing information on allergens and how to ensure safe operations are adopted. This webinar was well received by the participating businesses.

Further webinar events that are planned will cover a range of topics as part of the support offer to North Yorkshire businesses.

Planning Services

Work toward the adoption of our Minerals and Waste Joint Plan with the City of York Council and the North York Moors National Park Authority continues albeit in somewhat more limited form over recent months due to COVID-19. Upon the work being finalised on the production of an updated Schedule of Main Modifications and the completion of accompanying statutory assessments, a public consultation will take place shortly thereafter with the anticipation of adoption before the end of this year.

Insofar as our processing of planning applications, the performance of the County Council, as Minerals and Waste Planning Authority, has remained buoyant during these unprecedented times of COVID-19 and has seen the latest published percentages consistently and comfortably above 87.5% for the last 4 quarters; well above the national threshold of 60% (below which authorities can potentially be placed in special measures).

Growth and Heritage Services

Staff have been working with local business during the pandemic and providing on-going research and intelligence on the impact of Covid-19 on the local economy and national trends. They have also updated Covid-19 related business and economic support and advice on the NYCC website and set up North Yorkshire Buy Local website for residents of North Yorkshire to be able to access goods and services locally during Covid-19 restrictions. Staff are now representing NYCC on the development of a coordinated regional Strategic Economic Recovery plan working with the LEP and other Local Authorities.

Economic Development

The Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) has been focused on the economic and business response to the Covid-19 crisis working in partnership across all Local Authorities.

The activity has been focused around four priorities:

1. Helping businesses get support quickly and easily

2. Making as much available online as possible
3. Gathering intelligence and feeding into government
4. Developing an Economic Recovery Plan to bridge the gap between the impact of Covid-19 and the Local Industrial Strategy ambitions developed pre Covid.

In addition the LEP submitted a bid to the £900m national accelerated infrastructure funding detailed by the Prime Minister on 30 June.

Waste Management

Members will be aware that all Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs) closed as part of the national lockdown in March, with sites reopening on a phased return from 6 May. All sites are now open again with social distancing measures in place and a traffic management system is being used to manage queues, where necessary. The mobile HWRC services resumed on 18 June.

Allerton waste Recovery Park has continued to operate as normal throughout the lockdown except that the visitor centre has been temporarily unavailable. We have agreed with the operator that this was a reasonable response and have granted relief from performance obligations relating to the visitor centre since its closure on 16^h March. We are now working with Amey to secure the reopening of the visitor centre with appropriate social distancing measures in place, with additional online material being produced to help fill the gap.

Countryside Access

During the early stages of the Coronavirus lockdown the Council received a high number of requests from landowners and farmers for the County Council to close public rights of way because of the risk of transmitting the disease. Conversely there were high numbers of complaints from members of the public about landowners illegally closing public rights of way by installing barriers or erecting signage to discourage and prevent use.

Government guidance throughout has made it clear that public rights of way should remain open, as a way to help encourage exercise and maintain physical and mental wellbeing. Advice is that the risk of the coronavirus being passed on to others from people using public rights of way and other paths and trails is considered to be very low as long as people follow the Government's instructions to maintain sensible social distancing. We advised customers and landowners of the government guidance and the service has logged all reported issues of closures and obstructions. As we move into the recovery phase, our staff and countryside volunteers have restarted site visits and are investigating reports of obstructed paths, taking action to remove signage or obstructions if the landowner has not done so already.

COUNTY COUNCILLOR ANDREW LEE