

North Yorkshire Council

Thirsk and Malton Area Constituency Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on Friday, 14 June, 2024 commencing at 10.00 am.

Councillor Nigel Knapton in the Chair plus Councillors Joy Andrews, Lindsay Burr MBE, Sam Cross, Caroline Goodrick, George Jabbour, Steve Mason, Janet Sanderson, Dan Sladden and Malcolm Taylor.

In attendance: Councillor Carl Les OBE

Officers present: Rachael Balmer, Shaun Berry, Julie Gillett and Nicki Lishman

Apologies: Councillors Alyson Baker, Gareth Dadd and Keane Duncan

Copies of all documents considered are in the Minute Book

1 Appointment of Chair for 2024/25

Resolved

That Councillor Nigel Knapton be appointed Chair of the Area Constituency Committee until the first meeting of the Committee following the Council's Annual General Meeting in 2025.

2 Welcome by the Chair - introductions and updates

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and confirmed there were no updates to provide.

3 Minutes of the meeting held on 22 March 2024

Resolved

That the minutes of the previous meeting of the Thirsk and Malton Area Constituency Committee held on 23 March 2024, having been printed and circulated, be confirmed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

4 Appointment of Vice Chair 2024/25

Resolved

That Councillor Caroline Goodrick be appointed Vice Chair of the Area Constituency Committee until the first meeting of the committee following the Council's Annual General Meeting in 2025.

5 Apologies and declarations of interest

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Baker, Dadd and Duncan.

Councillor Burr declared a personal, non-pecuniary interest in item 7 as a member of Malton Town Council and Norton-on-Derwent Town Council.

Councillors Goodrick and Jabbour declared a personal, non-pecuniary interest in item 8 as they were both members of the Howardian Hills National Landscape Joint Advisory Committee.

6 Public questions or statements

There was one question from a member of the public.

Question from Dinah Keal

When North Yorkshire Council was launched in Spring 2023, the Leader was quoted as saying that the new council 'would put local communities and people at the heart of everything it does'.

Why then has it become virtually impossible for members of the public in those communities to communicate with officers of NYC? As a town councillor and resident I have not only been on the receiving end of a system that is not fit for purpose and seems designed to actively avoid communicating with the public and have received complaints from local residents who find the new switchboard system either impossible to negotiate or deeply frustrating.

- for example - I have been contacted by a 75 year old who had attempted to enquire about a Blue Badge, but had given up when she got to the 'describe in three words' request, as she became flustered and couldn't find the words to reply. In what way is this system user-friendly - it just isn't.

- when calling myself, I was passed to two incorrect district 'hubs' before I finally got through to the correct office where the officer I needed to speak to is based, before being told by the receptionist that I couldn't speak to them and should email or 'submit my query via the portal'. And I quote 'it is more than my job is worth to put you through to a person'.

- even town council clerks struggle to contact the officers that they need to speak to with specific community issues. Everything it seems - even the simplest query that could be answered in two minutes on the phone - now has to be reported through a faceless portal.

So can I ask - is North Yorkshire intent on diminishing democracy even further than it already has done through the creation of the unitary authority, by making it virtually impossible for residents to communicate with officers of the council or even speak to the correct department to deal with their query?

Or will you commit to completely overhauling and improving your switchboard/customer enquiries department so that it enables residents to communicate with their council in a straightforward, simple and effective manner?

Response from Julie Gillett, Head of Customer Experience and Excellence

When North Yorkshire Council was launched in Spring 2023, the Leader was quoted as saying that the new council 'would put local communities and people at the heart of everything it does'.

North Yorkshire Council is committed to placing the customer at the heart of everything we do and improving our customer's experience. We are sorry to hear that some of our customer experiences have not been positive, but we are committed to improving this, so we are grateful for the feedback.

The new telephone system provides one number for customer and then routes the calls to the relevant service area. As we brought 8 councils together, we need to route calls to the appropriate team who are mostly still operating on a geographical basis as a result of different inherited systems from eight different councils. The majority of the time the system works well but occasionally we do need to transfer calls to ensure the customer speaks to an adviser with access to the necessary system. If the few words used by the customer to describe what they are looking for is not recognised, then the call will transfer to an advisor who will help them.

We recognise that we are still in the early stages of our customer experience improvement journey, and our approach will evolve further for us to achieve our ambition for customer excellence. It should also be recognised that the scale of the new council has meant that we have been able to bring resilience and some improvements to this area already where some legacy councils had struggled to deliver the right level of customer service. We intend to build upon that with our plan to ensure that the customer experience is more positive more often. This will be supported by use of different customer channels, systems, reviews of processes, better use of data and equipping staff to handle a broader range of enquiries. It will ensure the council's one front door is set-up to continuously improve as we put customers at the centre every step of the way.

It is also important to say that Council services have been going through re-structures and new teams have been brought together. Now the re-structures have largely been completed council services will continue to forge better links at the local level in communities and through parish and town councils going forward.

Mrs Keal then asked the following supplementary question:

Could North Yorkshire Council

- a. remove the "explain what you want in 3 words" from the answering system? And
- b. provide structure charts on the NYC website, so town and parish clerks can easily find out who they need to speak for responses to queries?

Julie Gillett, Head of Customer Experience and Excellence, thanked Mrs Keal for her feedback and suggestions.

7 Malton and Norton-on-Derwent Neighbourhood Plan Decision Statement and Referendum

Considered - report of the Corporate Director Community Development.

The Planning Policy and Place Manager gave a brief introduction and confirmed that Members were being asked to consider and note the draft Decision Statement for the Malton and Norton-on-Derwent Neighbourhood Plan.

Malton and Norton on Derwent Neighbourhood Plan had reached an advanced stage where the Council decides whether it passed the Basic Conditions test or can do so with modifications, and whether it can proceed to Referendum.

The recommendation was that the Decision Statement to agree to modifications (recommended by the Examiner in Appendix 1) of the Malton and Norton Neighbourhood Plan and for that modified plan to proceed to referendum be noted.

The officer confirmed that, subject to a positive referendum outcome, the Neighbourhood Plan was made by Council, it then forms part of the development plan. Under planning legislation, the development plan has primacy in decision making. Applications would be considered in accordance with it unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Plans usually have a timeline of 15 to 20 years but there would be an expectation that plans are reviewed on a cycle of about five years and neighbourhood plans are no different. There would be an expectation that a neighbourhood plan would be subject to review to ensure that it is compatible with any potential emerging plan for North Yorkshire.

When a new Development Plan for North Yorkshire is adopted, it sets out, which plans or policies are effectively superseded by its operation.

In the preparation of the plan for North Yorkshire, regard would be given to the strategic direction approach and site-specific designations that are within neighbourhood plans. However, those strategic principles and considerations may be revisited as part of the preparation of the North Yorkshire Local Plan.

Councillor Burr emphasised the commitment of the two Town Councils to develop the Plan. They have engaged with all members of the community and hope that it will give some steer moving forward, with particular regard to local green space and the Visually Important Undeveloped Area of High Malton.

The Chair offered the Committee's thanks and congratulations to all involved with the production of the Plan.

Resolved

That the Decision Statement to agree to modifications of the Malton and Norton Neighbourhood Plan and for that modified plan to proceed to referendum be noted.

8 Update on the work of the Howardian Hills National Landscape

The Head of Sustainability and Environment for NYC gave a brief introduction, explaining the relationship between NYC and the Howardian Hills National Landscape (HHNL). As the host authority, in addition to providing HR, legal and financial services, NYC sought to work collaboratively with the National Landscape.

The Manager of the Howardian Hills National Landscape then presented an overview of the background, legislation and its primary purpose. The presentation included:

- An explanation of the latest legislation that governs relevant authorities and how they should deliver the new duty "to seek to further the purpose(s) of designation of the protected landscape."
- The location of the HHNL, the possible links with the Yorkshire Wolds National Landscape and the geography of the HHNL and its links with council Wards.
- An overview of the activity delivered during 2023/24 and the challenges and opportunities in the future.

A request was made for the Council to consider appointing a further one or two Councillors to the Joint Advisory Committee.

Councillors discussed the information, with the key points as follows:

- The importance of the HHNL and the challenges and opportunities it faces.
- The possible links with the Yorkshire Wolds National Landscape, should it be established.
- The views and opinions on the proposal of those living and working in the Wolds area.
- The benefits of working together and the economic benefits, should the Wolds be

- designated.
- The links with Dark Skies programme in the National Park and the Dark Sky Villages of the HHNL.

The Chair offered the Committee's thanks to the officers for the presentation and update.

Councillor Cross joined the meeting at 10.47am.

9 Work Programme

Members considered a report by the Assistant Chief Executive (Legal and Democratic Services) which contained the Committee's current work programme for the remainder of the municipal year (2024/25).

Members were reminded that an online meeting to discuss the work programme had been arranged for 16 July.

Resolved

That the work programme for the remainder of 2024/25 be noted.

10 Let's Talk Food survey feedback - for information only

Report circulated for information only.

Members were advised to contact the report author with any questions or comments.

11 Outcomes of project scoping - for information only

Report circulated for information only.

The Chair confirmed that, as Division Members, neither he nor Councillor Donohue-Moncrieff had any concerns regarding the recommendations of the report.

12 Other business which the Chairman agrees should be considered as a matter of urgency because of special circumstances.

There were no items of urgent business.

The meeting concluded at 10.59 am.