

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

22 February 2023

STATEMENT OF CLLR CARL LES

Our hearts must go out to the people of Turkey and Syria following the earthquakes that have affected large parts of their countries. Whatever difficulties we face in this country and at this time, their situation caused by a natural disaster, is so much the worse, and greatly exacerbated by continuing conflict in that region. And we must continue to empathise with the people of Ukraine, at home or living as refugees, as the first anniversary of Putin's illegal aggression is passed. Again our difficulties are less severe.

“There`s a lot going on” – a common phrase in recent months

LGR, new Council, new Constitution, Council Plan, Budget, Council Tax, Devolution, Mayoral Combined Authority – all these items which I have reported on and we have discussed regularly, are coming together in one two day Council meeting, together with my colleagues` Executive reports which illustrate the work of “Business as Usual” that goes on looking after children, adults, maintaining roads, disposing of waste, protecting people and being open to business. Of course, these responsibilities will be added to at the next Council meeting.

Local Government Reorganisation.

No longer weeks away, now measured in days to transition. I want to recognise the enormous efforts put in by our staff across the two tiers, and Members, in getting us to the point where all should be “safe and legal”, and also there should be no discernible difference in delivery to the customer, client or resident. No change is without risk, and this is the most major change to local government in this county since 1974, but we have done all we can to minimise this risk, and mitigation measures will be in place to correct errors as soon as possible.

Levelling Up

It was very disappointing that our Levelling Up bid, and those of the Districts and Boroughs were not successful in Round 2, with the exception of the bid put forward by Richmondshire District Council and strongly supported by us for major improvements to “Camp Centre”. It`s only right that a sense of place and improvements to the public realm and services is delivered at the heart of the largest Army base in the country, not only for the military families to who we owe so much, but also local residents will benefit as well. We will learn from feedback how the other Levelling Up Bids can be improved, and resubmit them for Round 3.

Shared Prosperity Fund & Rural England Prosperity Fund

Following approval of the Council`s UK Shared Prosperity Fund Investment Plan a funding agreement has been signed off by the Secretary of State for Levelling Up Housing and Communities confirming the allocation of £16.9m for North Yorkshire until the end of March 2025. In addition a further £5.4m has been initially allocated as part of the Rural England

Prosperity Fund which will become available in April subject to approval by the Government. The funding will be used to support five key areas of economic and community development in North Yorkshire. These are:

- Tackling Rurality and Inequality
- Building Pride in our Places
- Boosting Productivity
- Decarbonising our communities and businesses
- Enabling an active labour market

Capital and revenue funding will be made available for a wide range of projects and activities ranging from business support to community development, developing local facilities, climate action projects and supporting skills and access to employment.

The Shared Prosperity Fund is managed by a Local Partnership Group consisting of stakeholders and representatives from across the County representing faith communities, education providers, business associations, voluntary sector organisations and many others. Organisations interested in applying for funding or seeking advice were encouraged to register their interest in the programme by emailing ukspf@northyorks.gov.uk and completing a short registration form.

The fund will be formally launched on February 20th with the publication of a North Yorkshire UKSPF Prospectus which will be available on the Council's website at www.northyorks.gov.uk/uk-shared-prosperity-fund.

Budget and Council Tax

Although this is one of the subjects I mentioned earlier as a part of the overall agenda, I cannot let an opportunity pass to comment in more detail. Every year we face a challenging situation to identify what the organisation needs to deliver its services, comparing that with the ability of our residents to pay. Many of those who find it most difficult are the residents who require our services the most. We have measures in place to help those most in need. This year is without doubt the most challenging any of us have faced, where the very factors creating the cost of living crisis are factors that also impact so severely on our budget-setting. Once again I want to thank management, and especially the finance team, for giving us all the information we need to reach a decision. Fortunately, our prudence in previous years has provided us with strong reserves, and the opportunities provided by LGR will serve us well in future.

Thornborough Henges

Finally, those who live in my division in particular will already know of the efforts that Tarmac plc put in to being a good neighbour whilst extracting the essentials for growth, and the restitution and restoration works they do once a quarry is exhausted. I think we should recognise their act in gifting the land and Thornborough Henges to English Heritage. Although unlikely, this protects the land with certainty against any future development, but also opens it up to a proper visitor experience, where we can go to learn what was the likely reason these prehistoric earthworks were created, by whom, and when.

COUNTY COUNCILLOR CARL LES