

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNCIL

26 FEBRUARY 2025

STATEMENT OF EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORTATION

Weather

We've battled a period of extreme and challenging weather, with North Yorkshire hit by four named storms since the last meeting, plus significant snowfall.

In December, Storm Darragh brought heavy rainfall and strong winds. Around 50 properties were flooded in and around Kirkbymoorside, while hundreds of homes were left without power and 160 fallen trees blocked roads. We responded quickly, evacuating people to safety, deploying pumps and sandbags, and establishing an emergency support centre. The response to this devastating event showed the very best of this council, our partners and the community. We continue to work on delivering a £1.65m flood resilience scheme to protect at-risk properties in the areas impacted and other, nearby communities in the Derwent catchment. We hope to begin installations by May.

The first week in January saw a fresh challenge, with prolonged and extreme winter weather including significant snow, ice, extreme drifts and freezing temperatures as low as -10°C. These conditions were the toughest we have seen in North Yorkshire since the Beast from the East seven years ago. We must thank everyone involved in the effort to keep the county moving in the face of these conditions.

This was also the first major winter event since the new council was established. It is right that we use this opportunity to review our service and I have written to all councillors inviting suggestions about ways we can enhance our arrangements. An honest appraisal of what works well, and what can work better, will help ensure we can offer the strongest possible response to whatever winter brings.

Street Lighting Upgrade

Work to upgrade 4,500 former district and borough council street lights with LED bulbs has commenced. In many cases, these lights use obsolete technology that are prone to fault, tricky to repair and costly to run. We will also upgrade columns and brackets that in some locations are many decades old and in a poor state of repair. The lights will then be operated on the same part-night basis as the 50,000 lights formerly operated by the County Council. Using more efficient LED technology and part-night lighting will generate energy savings of more than 1 million kilowatt hours and save around £300,000 in annual energy costs based on current prices.

A59 Kex Gill

The importance of our major A59 realignment project was underlined by yet another closure of the landslip-prone stretch at Kex Gill from New Year's Day. This was the 15th such closure of the road since 2000. Despite snow frustrating our efforts, we were able to repair the problem and reopen the road within three weeks. This involved removing 2,000 tonnes of debris and installing 50m of new drainage channels at a cost of £150,000.

Opening the new, £68m bypass will ensure further closures are avoided. We continue work on this major project at pace. The new earthworks season commenced this month, and subject to no unforeseen issues arising, we expect to be able open the road as planned in Spring 2026. We hope the existing road does not create further problems before it is

decommissioned, however we will continue to respond as required to keep this key east-west route open to the public.

Transforming Cities Fund – Harrogate, Selby and Skipton

We have reached a landmark moment with our Transforming Cities Fund projects as we rapidly approach construction. We expect to have spades in the ground in March for Skipton and in June for Selby. I know this will be very welcome after so many years of work and effort from everyone involved.

While we are progressing in these two locations, a fresh legal action relating to the Harrogate project has been mounted by a group called Get Away. Legal counsel is currently engaged to defend against this latest challenge. It is right we defended this robustly and ensure the council's democratic decision can be delivered.

Lane Rental Scheme

We know roadworks, however vital they might be, cause no end of frustration. Not only do they cause disruption to our daily lives, they can also have a huge economic impact for our businesses. That's why we are acting to take the toughest possible approach with the introduction of the first lane rental scheme in the North of England.

Building on our existing permit scheme, we will introduce a £2,500 daily charge for peak-time works on the busiest and most sensitive routes. This will incentivise third parties to work at different times of day, to work to schedule and to cooperate with each other.

We are working to submit our application to the Department for Transport by the April 1 deadline. Following what we hope and expect will be a successful submission, our lane rental scheme should be in operation between October and December.

Moving Traffic Offences

We have successfully assumed civil enforcement powers for certain moving traffic offences, following parliamentary approval late last year. The primary purpose of this enforcement is to reduce congestion and improve road safety.

For the very first time, the council can now issue penalty notices for offences including incorrectly driving into a bus lane, stopping in a yellow box junction, making banned turns and going the wrong way in a one-way street.

The first site for this to be implemented within North Yorkshire is at the A19/B1258/Gowthorpe yellow box junction in Selby. We expect this to commence in May. Cameras will be used to capture offences, with fines set at £70 and reduced to £35 if paid within 14 days.

The expectation is that, in time, moving traffic enforcement will be extended to other known hotspot areas in the county. In each case, there will be consultation before enforcement is introduced and its operation will be closely monitored. All funding raised through fines will be ringfenced to finance highways and transport projects in the county.

COUNCILLOR KEANE DUNCAN