

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

05 MAY 2021

STATEMENT OF THE LEADER CLLR CARL LES

HRH The Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh

The nation was privileged to be allowed to share in what was a private family funeral. As the Dean of Windsor said in his remarks “Our lives have been enriched through the challenges that he has set us, the encouragement that he has given us, his kindness, humour and humanity”.

He was a frequent visitor to North Yorkshire, as part of visits made by the Queen, and also part of his 22,000 solo engagements, and many communities in our County, of place and of interest, will have many memories of how they related to him, not least the thousands of young people who participated in the “D of E Scheme” and the great benefits they acquired because of that participation.

Rest In Peace, Rise In Glory

Covid

As we emerge from the latest lockdown, and benefit from the hugely successful mass vaccination programme, there appears to be a brighter future ahead. We need to reflect on how well our officers have responded, and the strong partnership arrangements that exist in North Yorkshire. It would be invidious to try to single out individual organisations for praise, as all have worked for the common good, but I'm pleased that the Chairman has indicated a willingness to visit voluntary organisations to recognise their roles.

Climate Change

The Executive will be considering a draft carbon reduction plan for the Council in July. This will be framed in the context of our 2030 aspiration, with an annual update on progress and more detailed actions for the next year.

We are expecting the council's carbon footprint to have reduced during last financial year because of the impact of the Covid pandemic, including closed buildings and reduced travel. It is essential that we do not allow everything to return to exactly as it was before. For example, whilst face to face meetings are essential in some circumstances, video conferencing works very well for many meetings and is significantly more efficient in carbon and time.

The Council's energy team were recently successful in attracting £1.9m from the government's Public Sector Decarbonisation Fund to make some of our schools and offices more energy efficient through improvements to buildings including double glazing. Making properties more energy efficient will be a key strand of our carbon reduction plan.

As a co-chair of the Yorkshire and Humber Leaders Board I was pleased to play a part in launching the Yorkshire & Humber Climate Commission on 17 March. The Commission is an independent body that will help raise our region's collective ambition in tackling climate

change. The Commission's focus will be on reducing carbon emissions as quickly as possible, and ensuring people in Yorkshire are prepared to cope with the impacts of climate change, such as flooding, heatwaves and sea level rise. The Commission will encourage even greater investment in low carbon, climate resilient developments that create benefits for everyone, including a just transition for workers. It will also give Yorkshire and the Humber a louder, clearer and unified voice with which to call for the changes and support that we need to see at the national level so that we can achieve net-zero as swiftly as possible. For more information about the Commission please see <https://yorksandhumberclimate.org.uk/>.

LEP

I would like to take this opportunity to welcome Helen Simpson to the Chair of our LEP, one of the best performing LEP's in the country. At the same time I would like to thank David Kerfoot for all the good work and leadership he provided both in his tenure as Chair, but also a longer time as Deputy to Barry Dodd. David was passionate in his support for rural businesses, and also SME's and micro-businesses, which make up such a large part of the North Yorkshire economy.

Virtual meetings

We have been in direct communication with the Minister and Secretary of State about virtual meetings, and also through our connections with LGA and especially the County Council Network. We have supported the legal opinion being sought from the High Court by Herts CC and Lawyers in Local Govt, and I'm encouraged by a reply I received from the SoS that he would join with this request, rather than oppose it, and if it was positive he would move quickly to provide flexibility. Flexibility is the key point we require, as both virtual and face-to-face meetings have advantages.

The High Court hearing is on 21st April, but we are not clear when any judgement will be made. In the meantime we responded to the LGA's request for details of how we had held meetings, their value and their challenges, and we will respond to the Minister's call for evidence.

LGR

The consultation has now closed, and we await the SoS's decision, sometime in July we are told. Whatever the outcome, local government will need to work together for the benefit of all our residents wherever they live in the County, and that will be our commitment. In particular we need to collaborate on the Levelling Up and Community Renewal initiatives, working with our MP's as sponsors of such bids.

COUNTY COUNCILLOR CARL LES