

Leader's statement, February 18 2021

As if the Covid-19 pandemic and the prospect of reorganisation were not enough to deal with, our district was confronted with a new problem last month: flooding. This council rose yet again to the challenge however, going above and beyond, as we always do, to help those affected.

Amidst these major challenges, I am proud of how we have continued to deliver day-to-day services while also bringing forward a range of key and transformational projects to benefit of our residents. The past few months have shown the very best of what our council can do, and I know from the comments I have received it has been very much appreciated by the community.

Flooding

Last month, Malton, Norton and Old Malton faced their biggest flooding challenge since the defences were installed. Despite tense moments, the cross-agency effort on the ground meant the worst-case scenario was averted. The majority - but sadly not all properties in the towns were protected. We had 29 pumps deployed on the ground at the height of the situation, with teams working round the clock. I salute their heroic efforts.

Flooding was not contained to just this area, however. Fryton, Slingsby, Low Marishes, Buttercrambe, Pickering and others were also affected, with a number of properties flooded or cut off by road closures. We were able to support residents here too.

Thank you to everyone involved in the effort, from Ryedale District Council, the Environment Agency, Yorkshire Water, North Yorkshire Fire & Rescue and others. The task now for this council is to use its influence to bring partners together and push for further protection. We must identify relevant measures, and ensure they are delivered. While it is right for us to contribute, we cannot do it alone, nor should we. Our officers have started preliminary work with a view to reporting to members in due course.

Covid-19

Ryedale citizens and businesses continue, on the whole, to be exemplary in following the national lockdown. I thank them wholeheartedly for this. Testing sites at Thornton Dale and Malton are being used regularly. Meanwhile, GP surgeries in Malton and Pickering are playing their part in the amazing nationwide vaccination effort. We are supporting this, with our car parks commandeered to assist with the local programme.

We are working to get the latest business grants out to those who so desperately need them. So far, we have sent out over £30m in total, including £8m for the six schemes we currently have open. There is support too for citizens who are worried about paying their rent or mortgage, and for the lowest paid who are self-isolating. We continue to work with our partners, community organisations and amazing volunteers to support our most vulnerable.

In addition to the above, we now have a dedicated Covid Marshall patrolling Ryedale daily to help give advice and educate businesses about the current government guidance and restrictions. The Marshall works across all departments of the council and reports back any issues for the Environmental Health Department to follow up. His work is likely to only increase as we reopen sectors of our economy in coming months.

North Yorkshire Police

Malton's Neighbourhood Policing Team and front counter services moved into Ryedale House on February 1. Our priority has been to ensure police officers remain stationed locally in Malton, for the benefit of the town and the wider district. I'm

delighted to confirm that's what we've been able to achieve after years of uncertainty. Going forward, the move should help our district be an even safer place, with our communities team able to work in even closer cooperation with police officers on issues such as speeding and antisocial behaviour.

Investing in Ryedale

We continue to make significant investment in our district. Already we have approved £450k to improve infrastructure in Malton and Norton and around £3.5m, rising to £5.2m with Homes England grant funding, to deliver the most ambitious housing programme since the transfer of our council homes. We have also agreed, with eight other authorities, to commence discussions with the Government about a devolution deal for York and North Yorkshire worth more than £2bn.

Tonight we discuss a new car parking strategy for the district, a funding contribution to the Milton Rooms and significant investment in Thornton Road Industrial Estate in Pickering - one of the biggest economic investment projects this council has even been involved with, stimulating growth and creating jobs at a time they are needed most. This progress represents an immense amount of background work and significant cross-party agreement, which should not be downplayed.

Hungate Centre

Efforts to save the Hungate Centre for community use continue. At the time of writing, I am due to meet with RVS management directly to stress the strength of feeling amongst councillors and the public we represent. It is my hope that a solution can be found in line with the council's wishes. I will update councillors in due course.

Climate change

Work to deliver our Climate Change Action Plan is gathering momentum. We have supported an application for BEIS funding for a Geothermal Heat Project in collaboration with Third Energy Ltd and the LEP. We are also supporting the Circular Malton and Norton project team in investigating the feasibility of an Anaerobic Digester/ Biogas development project. Progress with the Malton to Pickering Cycle Route continues, as does the development of a Low Carbon Staff Travel Plan.

We are also putting in 10 additional electronic vehicle charging points across five of our car parks: Cleveland Way in Helmsley, Town Farm in Kirkbymoorside, Vivis Lane and Eastgate in Pickering and Wentworth Street in Malton. The streetlight replacement scheme continues, with 262 of 277 conventional lights replaced with LEDs so far. Excellent progress, but with more to do.

Local government reorganisation

At the time of writing, it is expected that government will soon consult on proposals for local government reorganisation. On the current timeline, a final decision by the Secretary of State on which option to implement - North Yorkshire and York, or East and West - is expected this summer. Whatever the future may hold for local Government in Ryedale, it is vital that we continue working to best meet the needs of our residents, ensuring the next few months go down as amongst the most productive in our 47-year history.