

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNCILLOR'S REPORT APRIL 2025.

A66 UPGRADE AND SCOTCH CORNER

We are now being told by the Government that the decision on whether the upgrade of the A66 will proceed will be made at the end of June. Apparently this decision will be made as part of a strategic review, but National Highways have repeatedly said that it is the largest road project in the north with a budget of £1.4 billion. I cannot in all honesty say that I am wildly optimistic about the prospects of it proceeding, but we can only live in hope.

And of course because of the doubt of this much needed upgrade, Scotch Corner roundabout and its much needed upgrade hangs in the balance. Tied in with this is the Designer Outlet which requires the roundabout upgrade to be completed prior to its opening, still sees no progress. I was assured by the developer very recently that work will recommence in May following a financial restructuring. I hope this will be the case! I am frequently asked what NYC will do with the steel if all else fails and the answer is I don't know. But I hope it doesn't come to this.

PLANNING AND 'CERTIFICATE OF LAWFULNESS'.

There have been at least 2 applications that I know of in my division for a Certificate of Lawfulness for domestic properties which the owner wishes to open as a childrens' home. One is at Whashton Green and the other at Aldbrough. There may be others in the pipeline. Why these issues have surfaced now, I don't know. The applicant is I understand a firm from Penrith.

These applications have caused great concern among local residents and this has lead to considerable criticism of the Richmond Planning Office. My understanding, after consultation with not only the Richmond Planning Office and other avenues, is as follows:

A 'certificate of lawfulness' is a formal document issued by a local planning authority confirming that a proposed or existing use or development is lawful in planning terms. This provides assurance that it meets legal requirements and won't be subject to enforcement action. Unlike planning permission applications, there is no formal consultation process for a certificate of lawfulness. This means that neighbours cannot object to the application. However, they may still raise concerns if they believe the development is not lawful, which could lead to further investigation.

So in the two cases mentioned above, if they were private dwellings being occupied as domestic accommodation, and that continues to be the case, then there is nothing neighbours can complain about to the planners. The reason for the consultation by the planning office was so that neighbours could give any valid reason why the certificate of

lawfulness should not be granted, for example if the applicant was running a shop from their front room without planning permission.

If the property is used in future as a home for children and anyone feels that rules are being broken by the owner or occupants, then the matter may be reported to the enforcement team, in our case at Richmond, who will investigate.

I can appreciate that the many who objected to the Whashton certificate of lawfulness application may feel frustrated by the above, but this is the law of the land as things stand.

In terms of planning in general, I'm afraid despite the backlog of cases in Richmond Planning Office decreasing by 22% since October, there appears to be little if any improvement in the service we are receiving from them. Validation of new applications is now taking 5 days and a customer service improvement plan is being put in place. Windows 11 can access the old district systems so this should mean offices outside Richmond can now be used to help out with their backlog of work.

Yet I made no apology when I reported to a Senior Member of NYC Planning that the position in Mercury House is every bit as bad as it has been over the last 5 years and I am seeing a gradual increase in the number of complaints constituents are bringing to my attention asking me to put pressure on to the planners so that progress can be made towards determination of their case.

I am receiving a large amount of complaints about the conservation team who are involved alongside Richmond planning staff when for example listed buildings are concerned. I am currently doing further investigations in respect of this department and will report my findings in a future report. I will also investigate as to whether the standards which are being applied to Richmondshire applications for listed buildings are being applied across the county. These standards are leading to what appears to be a large number of refusals for what on the surface appears to be petty reasons.

SECOND HOMES COUNCIL TAX.

The doubling of council tax on second homes in North Yorkshire has now been introduced with the new fiscal year. Many if not most councils have gone down this route as a way of discouraging second home ownership in rural villages and hamlets especially in the North Yorkshire Moors and Dales where property prices are now such that the younger generation find it virtually impossible to get a foot on the property ladder.

This may seem unfair to some, especially where a person has very recently inherited a property. No doubt the debate will go on with Airbnbs being part of it too.

The additional revenue to NYC from the above is estimated to be £42 million over the next 4 years and this is to be ringfenced and spent on 500 new affordable homes across the county.

BOUNDARY COMMISSION

The draft of the report from the Boundary Commission differs quite considerably from that put forward by the Council. The proposal for my division of North Richmondshire is to split the existing division in 2 using the A1 as the dividing line. So villages from Manfield to Newsham will be in North Richmondshire and villages east of the A1 but including Skeeby will be in a new division to be called Brompton and Scorton. This will take in Barton, Stapleton, Middleton Tyas, Moulton, North Cowton, Dalton-on-Tees and Croft, as well as Scorton and Brompton-on-Swale.,

We are now in a consultation period which ends on 9th June. Please feel free to write in to give your views. The final recommendation of the Boundary Commission will be published on 2nd September. Only Parliament can make any variations to their recommendation.

HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT.

I have severe reservations about this policy which has attracted much criticism in my division. This I fully understand especially when you have situations where families with a child at say Richmond School, find that they can only get funded transport for a younger child to a school in Co. Durham.

We are having an EGM to debate the issue on 21st May. When we had the vote to move to the new policy last July, there was a large majority, reluctantly in many cases I have to say, in favour of the new proposal where we would only fund transport to the nearest school as the crow flies (which is the DfE's minimum requirement), rather than to the catchment school as was the case. But most of us voted that way on the belief that this would give significant cash savings.

I think the vote in May will be much closer. I am currently doing work to establish much more regarding the new policy and will hopefully be in a position to give you more detail than I can today. However the waters are being muddied by the position where Richmond School is full. Part of this will no doubt be due to the fact that they have been and still are 'poaching' pupils from Bedale, Catterick and Northallerton which are all outside their catchment area.

In summary, I am not happy at all with the position we are in and won't support it in any vote in favour of the new policy as things stand. There are a number of reasons for this on which I will advise you when I have the final details, but principally because we were

told that there would be substantial financial savings to be made by adopting the new policy. Any evidence to date of this is extremely vague to say the least.

FINANCES.

I occasionally receive complaints that the service that taxpayers receive from NYC isn't as good as it was from RDC. If you take Planning out of the equation because it is every bit as big a mess as it was under RDC, it maybe that there are odd occasions when individuals have a grievance which would have been sorted out more efficiently during RDC days. For example, I had a constituent who couldn't get any response from any department regarding closed churchyards. Gary Hudson would have dealt with this in old days.

But when I tell you that the savings to date on a recurring basis through forming the new Unitary council were £40 million last year and are now projected to increase to £60 million per annum next year, then surely we can agree that Local Government Reorganisation in North Yorkshire has been a huge success? Without it we would have been going out of business.

As I have said many times before, the new Government will not help us at all. They see us as a leafy shire county who have been very good at putting efficiency savings in (£230 million over the 13 years to 2023), and will only target any monies spent on local government on what they see as deprived inner city areas run by Labour councils. The Government contribution is currently £410 per head to North Yorkshire. The AVERAGE council in England receives £571 per head of population per annum.

When a special one off grant was announced in the budget last October of £500 million to local authorities to be spent specifically on pot hole repairs, we got £16 million ie. 3.2%, despite having more miles of roads than any other county.

Finally, the inclusion of various sales of buildings and other figures such as the now £60 million per annum savings through the Unitary, we as things stand, now have usable reserves to cover the deficit for 4 years. Not a good position to be in but we are in a much better position than most councils.

If you would like to be on my circulation list for these reports which I usually issue every other month, please email me on cllr.angus.thompson@northyorks.gov.uk, and I will add you to my list.

Best wishes,

Angus Thompson.

12th April 2025.

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