

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

8 NOVEMBER 2017

STATEMENT OF THE ACCESS PORTFOLIO HOLDER COUNTY COUNCILLOR
DON MACKENZIE (INCLUDING HIGHWAYS, ROAD AND RAIL TRANSPORT AND
BROADBAND, MOBILE TELEPHONY)**Highways and Transportation**

The **Highways Capital Programme** for the current year is forecast to deliver over £32m worth of work consisting of more than 480 schemes. As a result of increased spending in recent years, the condition of our highways, especially of the lesser-used rural and residential estate roads, has improved. The latest performance report shows that the proportion of the latter (category 4 and 5) roads needing repair has reduced from 25% to 17%. Our principal and heavily used roads remain in good condition with only a very small number (4% or less) currently in need of repair.

As I reported in July, we made two bids to the Government's **National Productivity Investment Fund** in June. One of those bids - for transport improvements in the west of Harrogate worth £3.2m – was successful. With local contributions, this sum rises to £4.6m and includes a package of measures including junction upgrades, an off-road cycle path, a roundabout and electric vehicle charging points.

A **Permit Scheme** which will require utility companies to buy a permit to carry out works on our roads will be introduced next February subject to approval by the Executive at its meeting next week. This scheme will give incentives to utilities to complete their works as quickly as possible, to coordinate their schedules with other companies, and to minimise the disruption caused to the travelling public.

In a bid to drive improvements in road reinstatements carried out by utility companies, the County Council has begun a **street works coring service** to test the quality and depth of materials used. It is expected that the new, more rigorous inspection regime will drive up standards and reduce imperfections in the road surface.

The decision was taken last month by the BES Director in consultation with BES Executive Members to increase the price of **parking permits**. The price of permits has remained unchanged for 10 years and the cost of administering the service exceeds income by £173,000 a year. This has meant that for many years requests for new residential parking schemes, or alterations to existing ones, have had to be refused, unless there was third-party funding. Officers have been asked to provide a supplementary report setting out recommendations for a new pricing structure which is consistent throughout the county.

The third and final stage of the resurfacing of the **Selby Bypass** was completed on 15 October. This road was in poor condition when the County Council took responsibility for it in 2009. Residents and businesses campaigned for improvements over a number of years, and they now have a bypass in excellent condition to support the town's economic aspirations.

Some members have questioned our current policy concerning **Vehicle Activated Signs**, expressing the view that some parish councils have the funds to buy their own, but are prevented from installing them on the highway. A report on the County Council's VAS protocol is on the agenda for the TEE Scrutiny Committee's meeting taking place on 31 October. *I will be in a position to update Council on this matter.*

Cawood Bridge re-opened on Saturday 2 September, on time and on budget. The £1m refurbishment involved installing steel plates to raise the weight limit to 10t, and re-painting of the whole structure. Our highways officers remained in close contact with local residents both before and during the project, and this cooperation meant that the works were completed with minimum disruption. The improvements to the bridge bring great benefits to the local and wider community.

Bus services

At the end of August two companies providing local bus and home to school transport services ceased trading. The first, **Utopia Coaches** in the Selby area, called in the liquidator at midnight on 23 August. This company operated school and local bus services under contract with the County Council, as well as a wide commercial network. The second, **Shaun's Minibuses**, which ceased trading on 31 August on the death of the owner, provided similar services in the Ripon area.

I would like to pay tribute to the outstanding work of our Integrated Passenger Transport team who were able in just a few days to make new arrangements for all pupils starting school shortly afterwards. Subsidised bus services were immediately re-tendered and new contracts awarded.

As far as the commercial routes were concerned: whilst the Ripon town service was picked up straightaway by another bus operator, great difficulty was experienced in the case of two routes in the Selby area, which provided the only public transport for several villages around Cawood and Sherburn. No operator came forward to pick up these routes and so the decision was taken to provide a subsidy to secure replacement services, which came into effect on 30 October.

Broadband and mobile telephony

An announcement will be made very soon about the award of the contract for Phase 3 of the roll-out of high speed broadband by Superfast North Yorkshire. This contract is worth up to £33m and is expected to connect about half of all those properties in North Yorkshire currently without access to superfast (>24Mbps) broadband.

We are a leading authority in the provision of high quality broadband in a rural county, and we look forward to the visit of the **Minister of State for Digital** to County Hall later this week.

A fully integrated **Digital Infrastructure** is essential for the county to support our residents and to boost the economy. Good mobile communication is a key element of this. That is why we are cooperating with network providers and planning authorities to improve mobile 4G coverage across the whole county.

We have recently appointed a **Manager for Mobile Connectivity** to take the programme forward. The challenges are considerable: sparsity of population, access to remote areas, finding acceptable sites for masts, getting power to them, and obtaining planning permission. The new manager is focused on finding solutions to these challenges.

DON MACKENZIE