

APRIL 2026

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNCIL.

This month sees the 3rd anniversary of the coming in being of the Unitary Council, know of course as North Yorkshire Council. I think three years down the line, we can say that it has been on the whole, a great success. There will always be residents who say that we had a better service under the old RDC days, but we always need to be mindful of the fact that it was done principally to save on costs.

The Unitary is now showing savings of very nearly £70 million per annum. So where would we be if we hadn't gone down this route? The answer is almost certainly bankrupt. There was in the run up to the new Council coming into being, a plan brought forwards for a 'two unitaries' system in North Yorkshire. One would have encompassed the district councils of Hambleton, Harrogate, Craven and Richmondshire which would have been based in Northallerton, and a second unitary taking in Scarborough, Ryedale, Selby and the City of York which would have been based in York.

There were two factors in my mind which made me vote for the single unitary. Firstly and most importantly, there would not have been anything like the financial savings which we were aiming for and have achieved through one council. Whilst other counties, Surrey for example, have been split into three unitary councils, have been driven by the sheer population size. We have in North Yorkshire the largest geographical area in England, but a population of some 700,000 which is considered at the top end of the scale for one council.

The other, but less important factor in my mind, was the fact that the City of York was fiercely resisting the proposal. As it happens, the single unitary has worked out well and interestingly, has been help up as a shining example of what can be achieved by the government. They are forcing other counties like Surrey, who still operate a two tier system of district and county councils, to bring forward proposals to merge councils into a unitary. So it looks as though we in North Yorkshire would have been forced down this route had we not opted to do so four years ago.

HIGHWAYS.

At the meeting of the Combined Authority, that is NYC, City of York and the Mayor, on 27th March there was an exchange of views as the Mayor stated that NYC will in 26/27 receive £63.8m for highways maintenance, up from £57.8m in the current year. The City of York will receive £7.1m in the same period, up from £4.4m in the current year. So York will have an increase of 61% whilst we will have an increase of 10%. But NYC says it will

actually receive £20m less over the next 4 years from changes planned by the Mayor than it would have received had the funding come directly from the DfT.

It was said from the NYC representatives that, 'With the harsh and particularly wet winter, if we had the full allocation of the DfT funding, it would have allowed us to improve the condition of the highways network. But to be confronted with a loss of more than £20m, even before inflation is factored in over the next 4 years, is going to have a very detrimental effect on the condition of our highways'.

The Mayor responded by saying that he is proposing a £17.5m investment to build and improve cycle routes, pavements and crossings. There will also be an extra £30m to improve conditions around schools and funding schemes which protect everyone who uses our roads.

But the bottom line is that NYC will be £20m worse off than we would otherwise be over the next 4 years in terms of funding for our highways. The leader of the council Carl Les stated that, 'A letter before action is to be sent to the Mayor. All electors should understand that we are fighting every corner'.

A66 AND THE DESIGNER OUTLET.

The DfT has now announced that the funding is now to be made available for the A66 upgrade and I understand the timetable will be released by the end of April.

Scotch Corner Designer Village has announced that it is proposing to raise £25.5m by the sale of shares in the business. Scotch Corner Designer Village Holdings plc has announced it intends to join a small-cap stock exchange. AQUSE is a smaller alternative to the London stock Exchange, so that the company will sell units of ownership in the business, mainly to members of the public and some larger investors, including pension funds and asset managers. The land and business for the project will be contributed to the listed company in return for shares worth £16.5m.

So if the 'float' is a success we can look forward not only to the Designer Outlet opening at long last, the new electricity sub station at Scotch Corner which in theory should dramatically reduce the number of power cuts that villages at the end of the line terminating in Manfield have to currently endure, and a redevelopment of the Dalesway Lodge site which has become such an eyesore.

Timescales for the opening may even be revealed! We shall see.

PLANNING.

The headlines recently said, 'North Yorkshire Council has one of the country's worst records on unreasonable planning decisions'. Since 2019, inspectors ruled that the authority had made unreasonable decisions on 38 occasions, the second highest number in the country after Cornwall. The 'unreasonable' ruling is taken when the

inspectors overturn a decision made by the council and awards costs to the appellant because the authority fails to follow planning policy, imposes unreasonable conditions, or it wastes time or money.

A good number of these 38 appeals will of course relate back to the District Councils prior to April 2022. A good example of such a decision which was overturned on appeal was what is now named Copperfield Park at Middleton Tyas. This was pre 2019 but the then RDC Planning Committee refused permission, largely because of the opposition to the development within the village and the from the PC, but this was overturned by the Inspector and costs awarded against RDC.

Another one which was post 2019 was the Ashes proposed development in Barton. So this will be one of the 38 cases.

In defence of NYC Planning, officers have stated that, 'As the country's largest county by geographical area, we handle more applications than most authorities. In 24/25, we made decisions on about 4,700 applications compared with the national average of 1,365 for English unitary authorities'.

In my January report I said that I was hopeful that the Richmond Planning Office had turned a corner in terms of staffing. Sadly, I think I was being a little optimistic here in that with the former Hambleton and Richmond Planning Offices effectively combined, vacancies for qualified planning officers do not appear to be any lower than six months ago. The one real step forwards has been in IT which is more or less on a level and workable playing field across the county. This means that staff from say Harrogate can pick up Richmond cases, if needs be.

HOPE MOOR WIND FARM.

The proposal to put 20 two hundred meter high wind turbines on the beautiful moor between Newsham, Arkengarthdale and the Stang across from Barningham has stunned residents, not just in the immediate area but right across the county. When you consider that it will be possible to see these monsters from Hartlepool, Skipton and the Lake District, you can perhaps envisage the scale of what is proposed. Community input into Scoping is vital not only for the Secretary of State's decision but also in any subsequent plans for monitoring and mitigation of various impacts.

I urge you to listen to the following for more information.

<https://eur02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fmyers.co%2Freceptorvideo&data=05%7C02%7Cllr.angus.thompson%40northyorks.gov.uk%7C299a6a15e707401337e308de8456eefb%7Cad3d9c73983044a1b487e1055441c70e%7C0%7C0%7C639093706093973509%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJFbXB0eU1hcGkiOnRydWUsIlYiOilwLjAuMDAwMCIslAIiOjJXaW4zMilslkFOljoITWFpbCslldUIjoyfQ%3D%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=SGnxX%2F8Rd9NgA07b80Av6T3JNRNLjAcG16ec hWfXwXI%3D&reserved=0>

If you wish to receive my reports which I send out usually every second month, then please forward your email address to:

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Best wishes,

Angus Thompson.

NYC Councillor for North Richmondshire.

2nd April 2026.

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