**WOLDS WEIGHTON NEWS**

**from CLLR MIKE STATHERS**

**DEPUTY LEADER OF THE EAST RIDING OF YORKSHIRE COUNCIL**

**AND ONE OF THE THREE ELECTED MEMBERS REPRESENTING THE WOLDS WEIGHTON WARD**

**INTRODUCTION**

Four years ago, I was instrumental in the launch of the Western Parishes Liaison Group, a forum where Parish Council chairs and clerks from many of the 28 Wolds Weighton Parishes and later the six Pocklington Provincial parishes came together to discuss issues affecting their communities and to ask for help and intervention from the Ward councillors.

Clearly, this Group is currently unable to meet, certainly not in the form of attended meetings, so I felt it was important to bring you up to date on just a few of the key issues affecting our towns and villages.

**MY ROLE AS ONE OF YOUR WARD COUNCILLORS**

I was first elected to the East Riding of Yorkshire Council in 2015 and spent several years learning how best to represent our residents at County Hall, serving on various planning committees, the ERYC Pensions Committee and the Humberside Police and Crime Panel.

In May 2019, I was given a role on Cabinet and handed one of the largest portfolios, Planning and Enhancing Communities.

In July, this year, I was elected Deputy Leader of the Council, working with all Cabinet members but focusing my efforts on Covid 19 Recovery, our housing strategy, affordable homes and communications. While this is a great honour and generates a significant workload, I am still a Ward councillor first and foremost.

**COVID 19 PANDEMIC**

The biggest challenge facing all of us is facing up to and dealing with the coronavirus pandemic. This is piling the pressure on every one of us, on our lifestyles, our employment, our shopping and, most of all our health.

It will also significantly impact on the financial health of ERYC. In the next few weeks, councillors will be entering into the budget setting process where we fix our financial programmes for the next year, making sure we can continue to deliver the 600-plus services your Council provides.

The full financial impact of the pandemic will not be known for some time but our officers will be working hard to balance the books even though we could well face substantial loss of income from our leisure services and as a result of Council Tax defaults and reductions in business rate payments as Covid takes its financial toll on families and businesses.

ERYC is one of the highest performing local authorities in the country and a financially strong organisation and I am confident that we will remain strong and well balanced financially in the coming years.

Along with the Leader, Cllr Richard Burton, I receive almost daily updates on the pandemic and how it is affecting our residents, but one thing we can all do is keep a close watch on our communities, especially the elderly and vulnerable in our villages.

As Ward and Parish councillors, we should all be doing this - asking our posties to let us know if they have any concerns about individuals, recruiting delivery men and women to act as look-outs, talking to our refuse collection teams - all in the hope they will be the collective eyes and ears of our communities, looking out for our residents, especially those who live in the more remote villages, farms and lanes of Wolds Weighton.

**FREE SCHOOL MEALS**

The question of whether or not we should provide free school meals for some of our school children during holidays has become a hot topic, a vexed issue due to the Government’s unpopular stance. We know there are many needy families in the East Riding and no one wants to see any child go without food.

That’s why myself and the Leader met with our Chief Executive on Monday morning (Oct 26) to tell her that if the Government won’t help, we will. Within four hours, the Leader and myself had secured just over £100,000 of funding from reserves to enable us to offer vouchers to families in need, vouchers that have to be applied for but can quickly result in £15 per child being paid directly into the parents’ bank account.

**DEVOLUTION**

This summer, Government tasked ERYC and Hull City Council with producing a foundation document that could, if eventually accepted, lead to the formation of a Combined Mayoral Authority (CMA). Both ERYC and HCC would continue to exist as unitary authorities, delivering the services they deliver today, with the same identities, the same structure and the same number of councillors.

However, sitting above the current structure would be a Cabinet consisting of three senior elected members from each authority led by an elected Mayor. That elite unit would be largely responsible for what we call the ‘big ticket” projects, such as major infrastructure schemes, strategic employment opportunities, business support and inward investment.

Should the CMA be accepted and established, it would receive a £25m per annum ‘gain share’ fund for 30 years. This sounds a lot but in reality it isn’t. We, along with Hull City, have asked in our submission for funding amounting to £1.6bn to be spent on a huge range of projects. One of the key benefits of a CMA is that decisions on large-scale expenditure, historically and currently made mostly at Whitehall, would be made here.

As elected members who are in daily dialogue with our residents, we know that this will not be readily welcomed by many in the East Riding, but we have been forced into a corner, largely because our local authority neighbours to the north are being pushed into full local government reorganisation, the two south bank unitary authorities have chosen to join with a Greater Lincolnshire while West and South Yorkshire have already decided to go their own way with elected Mayors.

The joint ERYC/HCC submission was presented to Government in early September and as I write we have not received its response. When we do, the Leader of ERYC will unveil detailed plans for a comprehensive consultation programme with our residents so you will have your chance to air your views.

**THE WHITE PAPER - PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE**

Many Town and Parish Councils have grave concerns over the very radical changes this White Paper is proposing. So do I.

I spoke at Full Council recently, basically to urge ERYC to send a strong message back to Government that we don’t like much of their proposal and that the planning boffins in London should think again.

Very briefly, the White Paper proposed the biggest change in our planning system since the 1940s and I feel it could reduce our community involvement in the planning decision-making process.

Here in East Yorkshire, our planning performance is officially recognised as being among the best in the country, so why change it? We receive 6,500 applications a year, 90 per cent of which are successfully dealt with under officer delegations and with 95 per cent being determined on time.

It’s aim is to streamline the planning system and calls for greater use of digital technology, more brownfield development, new homes to be built quicker, replace the current developer contribution system with an infrastructure levy and easing of permitted development rights.

Many planning authorities, including ERYC, have expressed their concerns at the proposals, believing they could represent too much change too soon.

I’m all in favour of progress but I refer you back to my earlier comment that I am a Ward councillor first and foremost, elected to speak up for the residents of Wolds Weighton and even though this proposal has come from our Conservative Government and even though I am a Conservative councillor, the views of our residents remain top priority so my message to Boris is ***TAKE IT BACK AND THINK AGAIN!***

So there we are……just a snapshot of some of the huge challenges we face in the East Riding. In addition, there are childrens’ services to be maintained, pressures on adult social care, potholes to be repaired, bus services under threat, grass verges to be cut, roads to be repaired, village drains cleared …. the list is endless, but with the help of our friends in the Town and Parish Councils the work goes on.

Thank you for reading and I hope you found some if not all of the above of interest. Please feel free to contact me at any time or speak with my Wolds Weighton Ward colleagues, Cllr Leo Hammond and Cllr David Rudd.

I know it’s early but let me wish everyone a very Happy Christmas. Stay safe, stay well, most of all look after each other.

**MIKE STATHERS**

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**NOTE**

As Deputy Leader, I also represent the Council on various regional and national bodies, including:

East Riding Local Development Framework

Flood Protection and Resilience Board

Housing Tenant Forum

The County Councils Network

The Local Government Association

Transport for the North Scrutiny Committee

York, North Yorkshire and East Riding Housing Board

East Riding Rural Partnership

Humber and Wolds Rural Action

Pocklington School Governor