

County Councillor Report Sept/Oct 22

North Yorkshire's biggest conversation, 'Let's Talk', is coming

We're kick-starting North Yorkshire's biggest countywide conversation, 'Let's Talk', this autumn to understand how the public are feeling, what their priorities for their local areas are, and to get their feedback on important consultations to help inform decision-making for the new North Yorkshire Council.

Working with the Stronger Communities and Communities Teams, plus volunteers from across all eight councils, we will be holding these important conversations in person, ensuring we capture a wide range of views, and supporting those who may not be able to complete the survey online. We aim to have at least 1,250 face-to-face conversations over the next four months in local places where people go, socialise and meet - like libraries and street markets, and we will also be talking to partners and community groups.

'Let's Talk Local' survey goes live on 26 September. Sign up at <https://letstalkny.commonplace.is/> to be notified when the surveys go live.

Second home owners to face council tax premium on their properties

The owners of second homes are set to have to pay a premium on their properties in North Yorkshire amid ambitious plans to tackle the affordable housing crisis which is blighting communities across the county.

North Yorkshire County Council is due to see a 100 per cent premium introduced for council tax bills on second homes within the next two years, which would effectively double council tax bills for second home owners, and the proposals will now be considered at a full council meeting.

If agreed by the full council during the meeting in November, the new scheme will mean that North Yorkshire is one of the first areas in the country to progress adopting the Government's new measures, which are ultimately aimed at bringing second homes back into use for local communities.

It is also expected that a decision to introduce the premium will provide a multi-million pound boost to finance key council priorities, including a central aim to use the funding to help introduce more housing in areas particularly affected by the affordability crisis.

North Yorkshire has the highest number of second homes in the region, and concerns have been voiced that the trend is undermining the availability of housing for local communities as well as inflating property prices.

The independent North Yorkshire Rural Commission, which was established by the county council in the autumn of 2019 to look into a host of issues affecting countryside communities, highlighted the affordable housing crisis as among the greatest challenges to resolve.

Analysis has shown that the introduction of a 100 per cent premium on council tax bills for second homes in North Yorkshire could generate in excess of £14 million a year in additional revenue.

For example Scarborough district has the potential to bring in almost half of that figure due to the large number of second homes in coastal towns such as Whitby, Scarborough and Filey.

While Richmondshire could generate about £1.8 million through the second homes premium, while the Craven, Harrogate and Ryedale districts could each provide about £1.5 million in extra revenue. Hambleton could provide £1 million and the Selby district a further £260,000.

The premium is being considered under an over-arching policy for council tax premiums and discounts which is being introduced when a new local authority spanning the whole of North Yorkshire is launched on April 1 next year.

The proposed scheme would mean for example, second home owners having to prove that their properties were let for short periods up to a total of 70 days during the previous 12 months. This move is aimed at ensuring that properties are only allowed to transfer from council tax to business rates when they are genuinely being used for business purposes.

Another concern was raised that couples who own second homes may claim that they are living separately and are single occupants of each respective property. However, officers at the new North Yorkshire Council will be able to check the circumstances giving rise to any discount or exemption claimed, including single person discounts. These circumstances can be verified against the information supplied to the council to claim the reduction, and financial penalties can be imposed if false information is provided.

The county council's executive has also backed proposals to maintain a zero per cent discount on second homes that is already applied by North Yorkshire's district and borough authorities.

The plans would introduce a zero per cent discount for properties that are unoccupied or undergoing major repairs or structural alterations. The proposals

would also see the continuation of a sliding scale of council tax premiums from April next year on properties that have been left empty or unfurnished for between two and 10 years.

However, the 100 per cent council tax premiums on second homes would not be introduced until April 1, 2024, if the Government's new proposals do become enshrined in law.

The Government published its Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill in May, and the proposed legislation includes more options for council tax premiums to be introduced on empty properties and second homes nationally. If the bill receives Royal Assent, the proposed changes would come into effect from April 1, 2024. However, if the county council wishes to adopt changes outlined in the Bill, it is required to confirm its decision by a deadline of March 31 next year.

A lack of affordable housing across North Yorkshire has been a long-running issue, accentuated in many of the county's rural and coastal locations that are among the most desirable places to live in the country. House prices in the Yorkshire Dales, for instance, are about a third higher than the county's average. The average cost of a property in the Dales is nearly £400,000, while the weekly wage in North Yorkshire is just over £530.

There is a high demand for second homes, increasing the strain on an already limited housing stock. According to the National Housing Federation, there are 8,199 second homes in North Yorkshire - the highest number in the Yorkshire and Humber region.

Cut back overgrown trees and hedges on your property

Residents are being reminded to cut back any hedges or trees on their land that are causing a hazard to the public.

In recent weeks North Yorkshire County Council's highways teams have seen an increase in reports of pavements being obstructed and road signs obscured by overgrown trees and bushes.

The local authority is responsible for making sure trees and hedges don't obstruct the highway or damage property.

Landowners and occupiers have similar responsibilities for trees and hedges on their property. They must make sure these do not obscure road signs, reduce visibility for road users or prevent people using the road or pavement safely.

They are also responsible for removing dead or decaying trees and other growth, removing branches that hinder high-sided vehicles or block light from a street light, and making sure roads and pavements are clear of debris from cutting work.

For more information please visit www.northyorks.gov.uk/grass-cutting-verge-hedge-and-tree-maintenance

Devolution deal unveiled

Under terms of the proposed deal, the mayor will be supported by the transfer of key powers and investment from Whitehall. Key features include:

Control of a £540 million investment fund in total over 30 years to drive growth and take forward local priorities over the longer term, giving the mayor and local constituent councils more flexibility to decide how best to spend money on key local priorities.

New powers to improve and better integrate local transport, including the ability to introduce bus franchising, and an integrated transport settlement starting in 2024/25.

Powers to better improve local skills to ensure these meet the needs of the local economy. This will include devolution of Adult Education functions and the core Adult Education Budget and contribute to the Local Skills Improvement Plan.

Over £13 million for the building of new homes on brownfield land across 2023/24 and 2024/25, subject to sufficient eligible projects for funding being identified.

£7 million investment to enable York and North Yorkshire to drive green economic growth towards their ambitions to be a carbon negative region. This investment is subject to agreement of submitted business case

Powers to drive the regeneration of the area and to build more affordable, more beautiful homes, including compulsory purchase powers and the ability to establish Mayoral Development Corporations.

The mayor will take on role and functions of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner.

Integration of the York & North Yorkshire Local Enterprise Partnership (Y&NY LEP) into York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority. This will ensure there continues to be a strong and independent local business voice which informs local decision making.

Councils representing the City of York and North Yorkshire will remain, working to deliver vital services to residents with the combined authority having the responsibility for an over-arching vision.

A submission to pursue a devolution deal for York and North Yorkshire was submitted to the Government in 2020, and formal negotiations began at the start of this year.

Follow the link below for full details of the proposed Devolution deal

[York and North Yorkshire devolution deal - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/york-and-north-yorkshire-devolution-deal)