

North Yorkshire Council Election 5 May 2022

NY Climate Coalition survey of candidate views on key environmental issues

Candidate name	Party	Division
Mark Harrison	Liberal Democrats	Romanby

Thanks for taking part in this survey. We hope you will see this as an opportunity to share your thoughts with voters on important climate and environmental issues. While we would ideally like candidates to answer the survey in full, we appreciate that some of the points are quite technical. Candidates come from many different backgrounds and may be drawn to local government because of a passion for other aspects of service delivery and community interest. Please feel free to focus on the questions you feel are most relevant to you. You can always add more information later if you wish.

1. The newly elected members of North Yorkshire Council (NYC) will be responsible for overseeing the county's net zero strategy. Would you support the provision of carbon literacy training (e.g. through the [Carbon Literacy Project](#)) as part of the induction programme for new councillors?

Yes

2. Transport, agriculture and domestic energy are the biggest sources of greenhouse gas emissions in North Yorkshire. In your view, how should the new NY Council tackle these most effectively?

Establish Citizen's Assemblies for each of the three sources to obtain the perspectives of a wide range of people. Invite experts to present ideas on the scale of changes required, methods, timescales, costs, benefits, implications (As used recently in the Republic of Ireland to discuss abortion constructively) Establish an overarching group to report on the progress of the assemblies and present the options to NYC. NYC to determine a plan with specific, measurable, attainable targets and then implement it. Progress against plan to be routinely reviewed by NYC (or sub-committee) and any corrective actions to stay on track to be endorsed. NYC to publish progress and learning.

3. Many politicians support net zero commitments, but some argue that "green" measures to protect the environment and climate are too expensive, will cost jobs and need to be delayed. Where do you stand on this?

The meaning of "Net zero" is clear and simple but making a commitment to a simple statement is the easy bit. The extent and pace of actions required to address climate change and environmental degradation are vast and radical. Some types of employment and ways of living will change. Many people have legitimate concerns e.g. how can they reduce CO₂ emissions from heating old homes which they cannot afford to insulate better? Others don't wish to acknowledge that change is required. Powerful vested interests have downplayed climate science or tried to discredit it. Their legacy is significant and still published and broadcast. The hard bit is creating plans which achieve good enough results fast enough and which are supported and sustained by most of society. This has to be done.

4. As we seek more energy independence nationally, what role do you see in our region for onshore wind, solar farms and fracking?

I support the development of onshore wind and solar farms but recognise that local sensitivities are key. Sometimes these sensitivities may be influenced by favourable local tariffs. (I understand that in France where the majority of its electricity has been generated from nuclear energy for decades, that locals were supplied with electricity at reduced rates.) I believe that wind turbines look much better than a vast number of buildings and roads but recognise that others have strong opinions. Similarly solar farms are no more objectionable to me than vast fields of monoculture, but others feel differently. Our landscape has been shaped radically by human activity, virtually none of it is natural but changes require careful consideration and consultation.

I am very doubtful that fracking can or would be carried out well enough for it to be justified. Hazards inherent to fracking include leakage of methane to atmosphere (a strong greenhouse gas and a fire and explosion hazard if concentrated) and leakage of methane and fracking chemicals into aquifers. The water supply for the Pickering vale area is from aquifers. The rocks with potential for fracking lie beneath these aquifers. Drilling down through the aquifers is inherently hazardous.

Any leakage of the chemicals used in fracking or from the dirty gas extracted could have a significantly adverse impact on the quality of drinking water. Such leaks and contamination have occurred during fracking in the USA.

Stringent conditions would have to apply, such as a safety case backed up by independent experts and an insurance policy funded in full up front by the fracking organisation which would pay for any liabilities for decades afterwards. Such conditions might be too severe for commercial exploitation to be viable and would require a lot of NYC time and effort.

It seems best that the limited NYC time and resource available should be spent on other matters like poverty alleviation and insulation of new and existing buildings.

5. How could the future NYC use its powers under the planning system to promote sustainable development? Should there be a presumption against high-carbon development proposals in NYC's planning policies?

I don't have an overarching view, but a starting point would be an immediate change in the insulation standards and heating systems required for new builds. It is a disgrace that modern houses are built with far less insulation than required to achieve something close to Passivhaus standard.

6. There are plans (in the [NY Local Enterprise Partnership strategy](#)) to double the current area of woodland in the region. Would you actively support this target?

Yes, in principle though it would depend on the diversity of trees, rights of public access, payments, and incentives. (This may be in the strategy above, apologies for not reading it yet.)

7. Will you sign the UK Divest Pledge: "If elected, I pledge to support the council divesting its pension fund out of fossil fuels and redirecting those amounts into sustainable investments and the local economy over an appropriate time-scale. I promise to do everything in my power to make sure this happens within the first year of my term in office."

Yes

8. Would you support net zero measures as a spending priority for the new council?

Yes, in principle.

9. Most districts/boroughs in NY and around 75% across the UK have declared a climate emergency. In your view, should the new NYC adopt a similar motion to underpin its decarbonisation and planning policies?

Yes

10. Is there anything else you'd like to add on your environmental or climate views?

For example, what would your future priorities be in your division and more widely in North Yorkshire? Do you have any comments on more technical matters such as hydrogen as a fuel, Drax, grid capacity, energy-efficiency, retrofitting, peatland conservation, plastic pollution, waste, circular economy, nature recovery or the government's new energy security strategy?

This is a vast range of important subjects. There are many people and organisations who / which are better informed than me. The sadly late David McKay's book "Sustainable energy without the hot air" is a great point of reference for assessing what is required and the choices which must be made.

Reducing the demand for energy by ensuring good insulation standards in new buildings and retrofitting is crucial and one of the most cost-effective measures. (Retrofitting is complex but some enterprising networks are developing and sharing good practice.)

Grid capacity will continue to need to increase as more buildings are heated with heat pumps and more cars powered electrically.