

North Yorkshire Council Election 5 May 2022

NY Climate Coalition survey of candidate views on key environmental issues

Candidate name	Party	Division
Paul Haslam	Conservative	Bilton and Nidd Gorge

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?

Please note I am currently a councillor seeking re election and so my answers are rooted in my actions in the current NY county council

I took this training June 2020. It is an excellent grounding in understanding carbon footprints and how things might be mitigated.

I have already suggested at NYCC that all councillors and key officers undertake this training, I paid for it myself. I have asked providers to write to the council in the last year. Although, its not been provided for all councillors yet, I understand a "bespoke to nycc" version has been undertaken key officers. I would want it taught in some form as part of the new council.

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?

Transport:

This is all about behavioural change and encouraging modal shift

Modal shift might be a

- new way of working
- Getting people to move to less polluting forms of transport.
- To use public transport as opposed to their own vehicle
- To participating in active travel
- Maintenance of the Highway including street lights where massive savings in both carbon and cash have been made.

To do these things we need to create an infrastructure that gives people reason to change

- Safer highways for all including dedicated linked cycleways
- EV chargers
- Better priced, convenient public transport
- Broadband
- And so on...

The other key issue is the technological improvements – not something the council does but needs to be aware of.

Agriculture:

I think the key to changing agriculture is to focus on better nutrition. Creating new markets for our farmers to serve. It is known that the western diet is not healthy and causes illness such as diabetes, cancers and more recently has been associated with cognitive diseases such as Alzheimer's disease. Encouraging a healthy, more plant based diet (I am not advocating exclusively plant based diet) for all, we will see a number of different outcomes. First and foremost, new markets for our farmers as we encourage and make it easier for them to use the land differently reducing the reliance on intensive farming, which we know damages the environment, soil quality, wildlife and insects such as bees etc though use of insecticide, herbicides and nitrogen based fertilisers. Not only that, people will feel better, there will be a reduced workload on the NHS in future as we treat the cause of illness rather than the symptom, less medicine required. All in all, we all win. Agriculture reduces its carbon footprint and we have healthier people who are not placing demands on the NHS (which has a huge Carbon Footprint) The NHS is looking to move to the prevention of illness rather than treating the symptoms so this should be a great win all round.

As a council we must advocate better nutrition and lead by example wherever we provide meals.

Domestic Energy:

Again, this falls into behavioural change and enabling reduction of dependence on fossil fuels through technology. For example.

- Technology will be the move to increased use of electricity or hydrogen to heat our homes and hot water.
- The council should provide or enable the provision of best practice and guidance to residents.
- Best Practice planning for new houses
- Trusted Guidance on retrofitting energy saving measures.

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?

I think the way the country and world fought Covid 19 proves that there will always be fierce debate over the best course of action. However, in my opinion, no obstacle is insurmountable. We need to be guided by the scientists and experts. I consider myself a perpetual student; curious, continually learning and being prepared to learn.

Fighting climate change is a journey but with a clear destination to net zero carbon. We must accept that there will be bumps in the road such as the current energy crisis exacerbated by the war in the Ukraine. We must ensure everybody is included and protected on this journey with affordable living costs. No one should be left behind. However, climate change is not going away, and we must continue to be active and vigilant on our impact on the environment, in particular our carbon footprint. Humanity just needs to continue to be ingenuous and find better solutions to rapidly decarbonise and get to net zero and beyond.

We must always look at the impact of the various schemes to make sure that we are choosing the schemes that will give the best results and this needs to include what is termed social return on investment.

We must not forget the UNs Sustainable Development Goals

<https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

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

The simple answer is that all must be considered based on my previous answer, however they must be part of the journey to net zero.

Solar farms - I would favour these being on brown field sites or perhaps landfill sites and not on good agricultural land – food security is as important as energy security. I think some more imaginative solutions might be to cover roofs of houses, warehousing and other buildings with focus on more local microgrids. I am not an expert and would always seek advice.

Onshore wind – if we have suitable sites then it should be an option. North Yorkshire Coast is blessed with many off shore options to fulfil our energy demand. It should also generate Green hydrogen overnight when domestic energy usage is low, which could provide the energy for domestic homes – replacing gas, cars, buses and trucks.

Fracking - a proven technology for maximising the extraction of oil and gas from deep sea wells at the end of their life but not on densely populated land like the UK. There is a moratorium on fracking in the UK. If this were lifted the health and safety regulation is very stringent.

I see no role for on shore fracking in the UK.

North Yorkshire has some potential hydro options where flooding (due to climate change) mitigation projects are needed. Doing the work at the same time could save money and help fund the projects. North Yorkshire’s coastline might offer some wave energy generation opportunities.

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 would encourage all planning policy to be at the least carbon emitting possible and looking at it through the lens of climate change. It's not simple though. Many factors need to be taken account of; building houses to highest quality, building the houses such that CO2 levels and waste is reduced and reused or recycled, ensuring the new residents have access to convenient low carbon ways of using the house, of getting about and living.

We must use planning policy to its full extent but ensure that the regulation backs up the council's desire to achieve net zero, which will involve feedback to central government to keep pace with what is needed and being requested by the public.

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 – The north of England does not have enough trees about the 8% coverage. I also support the restoration of peat bogs which are better at sequesters of CO2 than trees. As councillors we are briefed on and input into the LEP proposals including the commitment to be carbon negative and their commitment to the circular economy.

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."

I agree with the principle however...

This is a difficult question because you are dealing with other people's money and pensions either now or to come. The Pension Fund is obliged to maximising its long term value, in order to ensure that it has the funds to meet obligations to current and future beneficiaries.

Having said that I have raised this question a number of times over the past three years to make sure NYCC are limiting and reducing their holding of fossil fuel shares. To me fossil fuel investments are a risk to pension investments. It seems likely that fossil fuels will become a reducing market and therefore a reducing profit opportunity, over the next decade or so, which will inevitably lead to them being less attractive investments. Many of the firms traditionally associated with fossil fuel investments are already pivoting towards sustainable energy.

NYCC has expert pension investment advisors who are best placed to decide how and when to taper down the fund's exposure to fossil fuel based assets.

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

Of course, but please note we have certain legal obligations and services which must be honoured first!

However, there is no reason why a net zero emissions approach embedded in every task. In fact, NYCC are moving towards that. It is a learning curve though and takes time to adopt.

I hope we would build on the vision of the current council which I contributed to...

"We want North Yorkshire to be a thriving county which adapts to a changing world and remains a special place for everyone to live, work and visit. Our ambitions are:

- leading for North Yorkshire
- every child and young person has the best possible start in life
- every adult has a longer, healthier and independent life
- North Yorkshire is a place with a strong economy and a commitment to sustainable growth
- innovative and forward thinking council

As part of delivering our vision and ambitions, we are seeking to work in a more sustainable way and reduce our costs. This includes:

- reducing our CO2e emissions, energy and water consumption
- minimising waste - reduce, re-use and recycle
- rationalising our property and managing our land sustainably
- procuring in a way which balances economic, social and environmental factors, and seeks to increase social value
- ceasing unnecessary travel and reducing the impact and cost of necessary travel
- supporting and encouraging our staff, schools and residents to take similar actions

We support the government's aim for the UK to be net carbon neutral by 2050 and the York and North Yorkshire Local Enterprise Partnership's ambition to be the UK's first carbon negative region – carbon neutral by 2034 and carbon negative by 2040. These ambitions were endorsed by the leaders of the councils of York and North Yorkshire through the submission of devolution asks in December 2020 aimed at achieving a carbon negative region.

In terms of our own carbon footprint, we have an aspiration to achieve net carbon neutrality by 2030 or as close to that date as is possible. In this plan we set out our progress to date and our plans for the next three years.

From April 2022 this plan will be integrated into our Council Plan and reviewed annually. Progress will be regularly monitored as part of our corporate performance management framework including quarterly performance reports to our Management Board and Executive.

We are also part of a wider leadership team, including district councils and the Local Enterprise Partnership, working to encourage and support our residents, businesses and communities to be part of the county and country achieving net carbon neutrality. A comprehensive joint work programme is still to be developed by the partners, although some initial elements are highlighted in this plan.

Whilst the actions identified in the plan focus on ourselves, we and other local authorities will not be able to tackle every aspect of carbon reduction nor achieve net carbon neutrality without government support and action through legislation and fiscal measures. Significant changes in national infrastructure will also be required, for example increases in generation, distribution and/or storage of electricity.”

<https://www.northyorks.gov.uk/beyond-carbon>

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?

I think declaring a climate emergency is probably a little late. I think we all know. I might consider it, if we believe it contributes to managing behavioural change and I will defer to experts on this. But, beactions are louder than words. NYCC has committed to:

“Reducing the causes and impacts of climate change, now and for future generations – we recognise that delivering council services creates carbon emissions and are committed to reducing these with an aspiration to achieve net carbon neutrality by 2030, or as near to that date as possible.”

additionally see page 16.

https://www.northyorks.gov.uk/sites/default/files/fileroot/About%20the%20council/Strategies%2C%20plans%20and%20policies/Council%20plan/85945%20-%20Council%20Plan%202022-2023_int_Accessible.pdf

We need to build on what we have and make it better and perhaps bolder.

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 power station, grid capacity, energy-efficiency, retrofitting, peatland conservation, plastic pollution, waste, circular economy, nature recovery or the government’s new energy security strategy?

Climate change will only be defeated (mitigated) if we all work together. It will need massive behavioural change (about 60%) as well as technology change. It needs to be a partnership between people, council, and other agencies. Each has its part to play.

Sixty percent of the fight to reduce carbon dioxide in the atmosphere will be behavioural change. It will take lots of actions by many people to get results. It is important that the Council, council officers and councillors lead by example and influence change by setting up services and infrastructure that makes change easy and a joy to do. (for example the councils Power Down Pete in school)

An example of this might be instead of asking yourself in the morning “How will I get my car to work today?” but “How will I get to work today?”

Enabling people to reduce their footprints might include

- better broadband to make working from home an option
- low price, more convenient and accessible public transport
- easier recycling and environmental disposal of waste
- safer active transport and so on...

At council I actively review all policies through the lens of climate change and their environmental potential impact. Council Officers now expect the environmental challenge they will get with any policy they propose.

I chair Scrutiny of Transport of the North (TfN). I represent NYCC on this bod. This committee ensured that that TfN has a strong comprehensive decarbonisation policy that it has shared across the councils of the North of England. I have attended many conferences on climate change on behalf of the council to access the latest thinking and options available which I have shared with officers and other councillors.

I have insulated my house to highest specification with solar panels and batteries for the generation and storage of renewable energy. Appliances are the most efficient I could afford at the time, with all lighting being LED. The heating is air source, and we have some water harvesting. I share a hybrid car with my wife that mainly runs on the batteries charged by our own generated solar power – the Yorkshireman in me saving as much as I can. From my own experience I understand these technologies, their costs and benefits such that I can guide others and policy, although I would always listen to the expert for particular guidance.

My focus is to my residents and how I can find ways for them to reduce their carbon footprints, reduce their energy bills, and keep other costs down. For example, if you drink bottled water you could switch to a filter jug system which in my experience has reduced the number of plastic bottles, I use in a year by 1000 and saved me over £1000.

Through this page, and I thank you for this opportunity, may I ask that people start to form their own Carbon Net Zero plan