

# Part Two: Key Principles

## Key Principles

These principles explain in more detail the council’s vision for York’s public realm and set out important considerations for everyone involved with the city’s streets and spaces. Above all, they should be the first point of reference in this manual. They should also be read in conjunction with other key guidance, particularly the Government’s *Manual for Streets 1* and the Government endorsed *Manual for Streets 2*.<sup>1</sup>

“The public realm can offer spaces for enjoyment, entertainment and social interaction and quieter areas for those who value solitude and contemplation. Public space is open and free to use. It provides an essential opportunity for all parts of society, to meet, mingle and connect.”

*City of Bath Public Realm Strategy 2008*

“We are all pedestrians, and our streets are the one public space we all use, everyday. At Living Streets, we think that they are worth fighting for. With our supporters, we work to create streets that really put people first. When we have streets we want to walk in, lives are transformed - we are healthier, happier and more sociable.”

*Living Streets 2010*

“Enhancing street environments through a high quality public realm incorporating local materials and historic street features, removal of clutter and pedestrian barriers, use of shared space where appropriate and enhanced street lighting can help to stimulate local economic activity, reduce street crime and encourage a sense of local community; this in turn encourages more local, shorter distance travel on foot or by cycle. This will be particularly important in conservation areas, national parks, World Heritage sites and other environmentally sensitive areas.”

*Manual for Streets 2 Chartered Institution of Highways & Transportation 2010*



Space for meeting, greeting and socialising



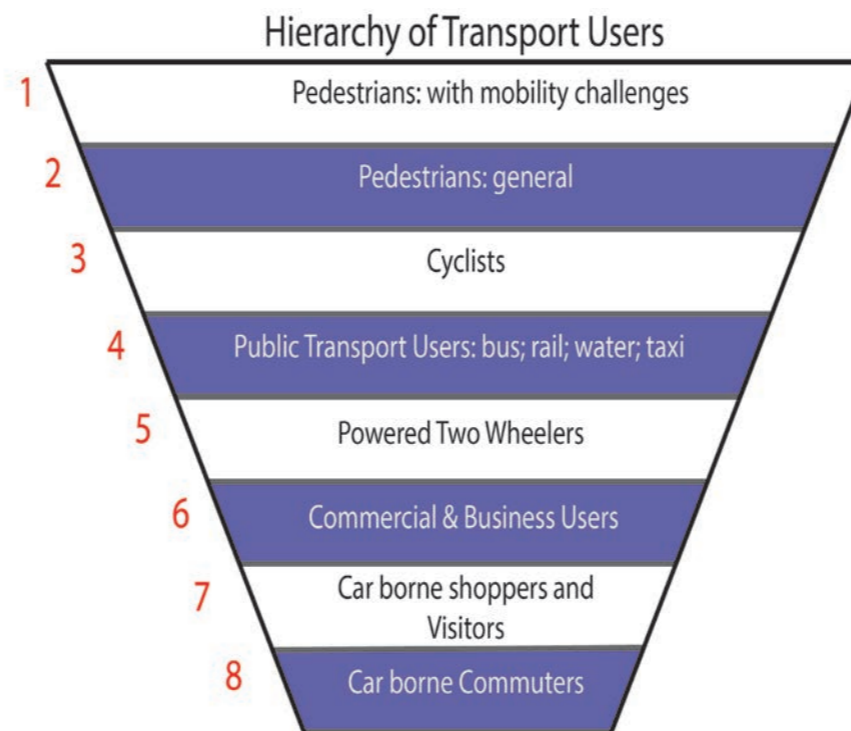
Time for reflection in North Street Gardens

<sup>1</sup> A list of key guidance documents can be found after the bibliography.

## Principle 1: A city for people

Since the late 1980s<sup>1</sup>, the council has a policy on a hierarchy of transport users that gives pedestrians and cyclists a clear priority over motorised traffic in the city's streets and spaces with the highest priority given to pedestrians with mobility issues. In reality, outside the footstreets, management and design is generally based around accommodating pedestrians and cyclists in a traffic dominated environment. A really successful urban environment is one where people are placed at the centre of its design and use and specialist practitioners<sup>2</sup> should instead be asking how traffic can be accommodated within a pedestrian and cyclist dominated environment.

There are examples from the 1980s and 1990s such as Bishophill, Leeman Road, The Groves, Scarcroft and Terry Avenue where through traffic in residential areas has been successfully controlled resulting in positive change to street character. Streets and spaces are as much about places to meet, rest, and explore, as they are about moving from one location to another and design needs to reflect these different uses.



*Taken from the City of York Local Transport Plan 3, 2010*

### Key message

Always put pedestrians first and always consider the most vulnerable pedestrians before all others. Vulnerable can be someone in a wheelchair, a toddler in a push chair, blind and partially sighted, young children and older people. What works for an older person with mobility issues will work for all.

<sup>1</sup> The City of York 1987/88 Traffic & Parking Study  
<sup>2</sup> Highway engineers, planners and designers



## Principle 2: Access & mobility

If York is to realise its ambition to become a world-class city it must ensure that it becomes a fully accessible city with few barriers to communities of interest as defined in the Equality Act 2010<sup>1</sup>. All design, whether large-scale reconfiguration of junctions to control the movement of traffic, or the siting and design of seats, should be conceived and implemented in the context of the social model of disability<sup>2</sup>. It is important to provide positive experiences for everyone whether that is the redesign of existing spaces or the creation of new ones. Most importantly, the repair and on-going management of streets and spaces should always be fully informed through appropriate equality impact assessments and communities of interest should be fully engaged at the planning stage and throughout the life of a project.

1 Protected characteristics are: Age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief (including lack of belief), sex, and sexual orientation.

2 The social model recognises that there are institutional and environmental barriers limiting opportunities for people with disabilities. For further information see *Creating an Inclusive Built Environment, Preferred Options Accessibility Supplementary Planning Document: Worcester City Council, 2011*



*Exhibition Road, London, a fully accessible environment?*

### Key message

Consultation with organisations representing communities of interest as defined in the 2010 Disability Act, should normally be undertaken as part of a project's early scoping exercise ensuring that issues and opportunities are quickly addressed.

## Principle 3: Design

The design of public spaces and streets should always be informed by research and knowledge<sup>1</sup> which in turn should always consider the physical (structures, materials and layout) as well as the experiential (how people perceive and interact with each other and the space itself). Good design is also inclusive design<sup>2</sup>. A public space is about: surfaces; buildings; signs; lighting; views; ambience; noise; accessibility. Design needs to understand these relationships and develop solutions that enhance experience in a three-dimensional way. The vertical and horizontal relationship between buildings, pavements and roads is a crucial one for example. It is important to ensure that new surfacing, signs and other paraphernalia associated with public spaces, whether permanent or temporary does not detract or create an eyesore and that aesthetics is an essential ingredient. Whilst aesthetics can be subjective, communication and consultation will be key to appropriate decision making.

Effective public spaces are also uncluttered spaces. In refreshing existing or designing new, it is important to keep things simple. Less is sometimes more and simple high quality designs on a small area should always be preferred over larger, lower quality schemes. It is not always appropriate to install fancy lighting, designed benches and complex surfacing. An uncluttered and uncomplicated environment is more accessible, more flexible and more easily understood. All improvements and new designs whether they consist of new surfaces, new street furniture or lighting should always be designed with maintenance, longevity, and carbon reduction in mind.



*A fine example of the decorative use of blanc-de-bierge setts in Spurriergate*

### Key message

Always keep things simple - ensuring that each street and space has a consistent pallet of materials and street furniture and that every intervention has a clear purpose and need.

Always be aware of how a street and space is used before introducing new design and new activity and be particularly aware of accessibility issues and opportunities. This is particularly true of shared spaces.

<sup>1</sup> There are various sources of excellent guidance, particularly from the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) - several are listed at the back of this document.

<sup>2</sup> See *the principles of inclusive design*: CABE, 2006 which sets out five key principles of inclusive design.



## Principle 4: Distinctiveness

Not all streets and spaces have the same identity and it is important to make sure that locally distinctive character is built into the design of new public spaces and enhanced in existing streets and spaces<sup>1</sup>. Homogeneity should be avoided through the use of different pallets of materials for different situations and variation in street furniture. However, this should not be overdone. Distinctive character need not be historically determined but may reference contemporary functions and make use of contemporary design. Distinctiveness will include: the form and scale of particular streets and space; mass, height and character of buildings; surviving original surfaces and materials including roofs and building materials; and existing street furniture (may have a negative as well as positive impact on character). Understanding character is fundamental<sup>2</sup> and all works affecting streets and spaces should reference available evidence including conservation area appraisals<sup>3</sup> or historic environment character assessments.



*A particularly well preserved section of historic stable paviours on a side lane in Southbank*

### Key message

Historic character assessments, conservation area appraisals, village design statements, neighbourhood plans, conservation management plans and statements of significance are a valuable evidence base for decisions affecting the layout and use of streets and spaces.

<sup>1</sup> English Heritage have published widely on this subject, notably their excellent *Streets for All* series which offers convincing arguments for the retention and enhancement of historic features and surfaces.

<sup>2</sup> The City of York Council is undertaking a comprehensive assessment of historic character of the main urban areas which includes a series of detailed statements of significance which will be an invaluable evidence base.

<sup>3</sup> The most important and comprehensive is the *Historic Core Conservation Area Appraisal* adopted in 2012.

## Principle 5: Wayfinding & legibility

Although York is generally a relatively small and compact city, it is also a complex place to move around and understand. Part of York's charm is 'getting lost' but many people also need to understand where things are, where they are in relation to the city's major landmarks and what it all means. Wayfinding is not just about signposting places of interest (heritage assets) and places of need (toilets; council offices; police; hospital), it is also about explaining accessible routes for different users: where the most wheelchair friendly routes are; where alternate routes for cyclists are; where picnic areas are; where the best places for parents and young children are. Independent wheelchair users will have different needs from someone with learning difficulties; A blind or partially sighted person will also have specific needs. It is also very easy for someone with dementia to get confused in our streets and spaces. Visitors from other countries may have language difficulties that need to be recognized and parents and carers of young children will need to know where toilets and baby changing facilities are.

Enhancing people's experiences of York, whether resident or visitor is also about explaining York better. Museums and other attractions do an excellent job but the streets, public spaces and their relationship with York's inherited urban landscape are sometimes difficult to understand.

A combination of street based signposting, information boards and contemporary digital technologies using WiFi and other media should inform a new wayfinding strategy for the city fit for the 21st century. Wayfinding should also reflect changing needs including the needs of people suffering from dementia.



*Two responses to wayfinding. A cast iron finger post in York (top) and a contemporary monolith on Howard Street, Sheffield (bottom).*



*The finger post has poor legibility because of typeface and colour although the principle is a good one.*

*The monolith retains significantly more information that could be confusing for some people.*

### Key message

The design of new public spaces and refreshment of existing streets and spaces should always consider how people orientate themselves and how they can find their way around and through. Particular attention should be given to seeking opportunities to improve the experience for vulnerable groups including people suffering with dementia.



## Principle 6: Light & dark

Lighting is a key element in the design of public spaces in terms of: safety; aesthetics; way-finding; and sheer delight. It also enhances experience in different ways as the seasons change and as day turns into night. During daylight hours it is the lighting structures that either enhance or detract a view and great care should be taken in determining lantern and column design. In general lanterns should not be obvious and should blend into the environment. Street light location is important for perceptions of safety and a careful balance between this and respecting key buildings and settings needs to be achieved. The illumination itself should have the ability to respond to specific circumstances and specific needs without compromising safety but at the same time achieving significant decrease in light spill (i.e. enhancing dark skies).

Lighting design will need to consider how a place will look at night and how views will be enhanced. Architectural lighting should be used carefully and sensitively and particular attention should be given to identifying situations where it will be more appropriate to keep a place dark.

LED lighting should replace existing lighting as it is more energy efficient than both metal halide and high/low pressure sodium, as well as providing better quality light. Existing and emerging technologies can be used to adapt heritage lighting for LED use<sup>1</sup>.



An image of the Shambles as it might look with new architectural lighting installed (York Light Plan 2006)

### Key message

Street lighting should be kept to the minimum necessary for safety and respecting key buildings and settings and should use the latest sustainable technology - normally LED so that the city can make a positive contribution to dark skies and energy consumption as well as cutting greenhouse gas emissions.

<sup>1</sup> Central Bedfordshire Council are replacing traditional street lights with LEDs to achieve significant wattage reduction, as well as reducing the maintenance burden of the highways team; 381 LED lanterns were installed across two pilot areas – one urban and the other semi-urban, using less than 50% of the installed energy load. Source: *Carbon Trust*



## Principle 7: Management

The greatest challenge facing any English city setting out to create sustainable and beautiful public spaces is managing wear and tear caused by traffic on carriageways and overrun on pavements, constant digging up of roads and streets for utility repair and replacement, and reconciling the sometimes conflicting requirements and aspirations of the various uses that public space can be put to.

Management of process – ensuring that practitioners whether they are carrying out basic highway repairs or implementing complex road schemes are fully informed of all the key issues and opportunities reflected in this document and associated national guidance and regulation. There should also be significantly improved coordination of activity.

Implementation of highway schemes – ensuring that key practitioners including individual contractors and sub-contractors are appropriately skilled and experienced in delivering the quality outcomes outlined in this document. The importance of good craftsmanship in the laying of paving, cobbles and setts should be a given.

Management of functions – the compactness and intimacy of York's spaces can be quickly overwhelmed by activity such as pavement cafés; festival stalls and booths; fairs; street performers; disabled parking; and, fast food outlets. It is important to ensure that the temporary and permanent use of space through installations, street furniture, activity, ambience (including noise) and trading is planned and implemented with clear reference to the issues and opportunities detailed in this document.



*An awful utility company reinstatement of a historic cobbled surface at King's Staith*

### Key message

Any planned activity in a street or space, whether it is a minor carriageway repair, a festival or the siting of a street trading pitch should at all times consider access and mobility issues, impact on heritage assets and their settings, quality outcomes, need and sustainability.