



# Our City Centre Vision



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# Introduction

The Our City Centre project establishes a 10 year strategic vision for the centre of York, which will be shared and owned by the council, partners, stakeholders and local communities.

The vision has been shaped through a wide series of engagement exercises, designed to reach as broad an audience as possible, and sets out a series of objectives, priorities and aspirations for the centre, which will allow York city centre to adapt, grow and thrive.

The Vision was originally approved in November 2021, however since then, the City has adopted three significant 10-year strategies which are the Climate Change Strategy, Health and Wellbeing Strategy, and Economic Strategy, and the Council has adopted a new Council Plan.

To align to the city strategies and Council Plan priorities, the vision for the city centre was re-launched in October 2023 as the “Our City Centre Vision”. This updated the 8 themes to have a stronger focus on accessibility, residents, affordability, equalities, climate resilience and carbon reduction.

The vision is bold and to achieve the full ambition of the vision will require strong commitment of both the council and partners and through the securing of external resources and private investment. However, having a clear vision will leave the city best placed to secure any funding that becomes available.

The vision will be owned by our stakeholders and communities, and a delivery plan will be produced in partnership with those stakeholders setting out how the vision will be realised.



## Core vision statement:

A city centre everybody wants to be a part of

This 10 year vision for the city centre comes at a time of significant flux, where changing consumer behaviours, regulatory change for accessibility and business activity and climate change are combining to bring about unprecedented change for the city centre. As these trends are at a national and global scale, the focus of the council and our partners has to be on how we respond, contribute and adapt at a local level. These changes also bring opportunities as well as challenges, but the key to maintaining the long term success is to create a thriving, flexible city centre that benefits from the positives and minimises the negative impacts. This is particularly important for York, where the city centre is a huge driver of our economy, and where vibrancy will be a determining factor in retaining and attracting not just visitors and businesses, but residents also, as quality of place rather than job location becomes more of a deciding factor in where people choose to live.

The determining factor in creating vibrancy and the ability of our city centres and high streets to adapt to these global changes is people. People create the noise, soul and life of a city, and crucially the captive audience for businesses to thrive. In order to support our local economy we must continue to support the vision of a city centre people want to visit, stay and enjoy at all times of the day and year.

**People, or footfall, is the key to a successful place.**

When footfall and vibrancy drop, towns and cities can enter a vicious circle where people are less likely to use them, fewer services and shops can be supported, vacancies rise and employment falls. Conversely, a vibrant and popular place will attract people and support shops and services for our residents. Clearly places can become too popular, but by influencing how and when the city centre is used, and adapting key spaces, we can manage this better and optimise the benefits for all, particularly our residents.

Our core premise is that **a vibrant city centre, which a wide range of people want to spend time in across the day and night, will create the right conditions for responsive businesses to grow and adapt, for city living to develop, and for cultural and social activity to flourish.** York is an amazing place that people want to visit, and tourism is a key component of our economy. But first and foremost our city centre exists to serve the needs of our residents. By focusing our vision on ensuring the city centre is in the best place it can be for our residents and communities that live here, the visitors that support the economy and sustain our shops, markets, restaurant and jobs will follow.

The Our City Centre Vision will create the environment for all of this to happen through eight key themes:

## Our City Centre:

A vibrant, environmentally sustainable city centre, where a wide range of people want to spend time, live and work. A place where business thrives, sustainable communities grow, and a varied cultural and social life flourishes.

**1. A family friendly and affordable city centre**

**2. An attractive, active and healthy city centre**

**3. A sustainable city fit for the future**

**4. Making tourism work for York**

**5. Embracing our riversides**

**6. A safer city centre which is welcoming and accessible to all**

**7. Thriving businesses and productive buildings**

**8. Celebrating heritage and making modern history**

## I. A family friendly and affordable city centre

Families of all types are a key component of a vibrant and well-balanced city centre, bringing footfall, activity, social interaction and spend. Feedback tells us that whilst the city is a popular destination for visiting families, it is less well used by local residents, with issues cited around:

- affordability
- ease of access
- suitable facilities
- appropriate attractions
- threatening or unwelcoming atmosphere at certain times

Our proposed response incorporates more to attract local families into the centre, as well as improving the basic facilities in town. This will also benefit visitors to the centre.

## We will explore and encourage

- A. Exciting new play spaces in the city centre
- B. Using open space for cultural and family activities
- C. Venues and spaces that are used by people of all ages
- D. Improving toilet provision and facilities
- E. Improving information on city events for residents
- F. More covered and indoor spaces to spend time in all weather
- G. New experience-based attractions in the centre
- H. Supporting family-friendly activity in the early evening



## 2. An attractive, active and healthy city centre

Our ambition is to manage the city better at its busiest times, whilst encouraging residents and visitors to also visit in quieter periods through providing a family-friendly and welcoming environment with plenty to do.

A focus on making the city centre attractive with a broad and inclusive offer including increasing green spaces and promoting opportunities to support the health and wellbeing of the city's residents and visitors.

The squares and streets in York city centre frame an astonishing wealth of heritage and activity but are in need of improvement in many places with poor physical appearance, accessibility and usability flagged in engagement.

### We will explore and encourage

- A. Investment in public space, squares and our shopping areas
- B. Spreading the location of events better throughout the city's spaces
- C. Focusing the city's events programme across a wide range of offers that have broad and inclusive appeal
- D. Improving digital & physical signposting of events
- E. Making it simpler, cheaper and less disruptive to put on events in the city, and support more community led events
- F. Opportunities to support and improve our thriving permanent and temporary markets
- G. Active travel options for getting into and around the centre of York
- H. A healthy food and drink culture in the city
- I. Outdoor eating and café culture in the city centre



### 3. A sustainable city fit for the future

In 2019, the City of York Council declared a climate emergency, set an ambition for York to be net zero carbon and established an independent Climate Commission for the city. Reducing our carbon emissions and adapting to a changing climate are crucial to ensure that York is a city fit for the future.

The York Climate Change Strategy was approved in 2022 setting out a Net Zero Carbon Pathway for York to 2030.

### We will explore and encourage

- A. The implementation of the Climate Change Strategy in the city centre and surrounding area
- B. Adapt the city centre for extreme weather events
- C. Increasing green space and planting to increase biodiversity and support carbon sequestration when investing in the city centre public spaces and squares
- D. Maximising the use of city centre roof spaces to increase biodiversity
- E. Sustainable transport and deliveries to improve air quality and congestion in the city centre and surrounding area



## 4. Making tourism work for York

Tourism is a core part of the York's economy, supporting many businesses and jobs, particularly for those who are more deprived, and those who rely on the flexibility of part time employment.

Without visitors to the city we would also struggle to sustain the wide variety of shops and facilities which we benefit from. Tourism does create impacts too though - the sector tends to be less well paid, and there is a sentiment in feedback that more facilities and amenities are directed to visitors than to residents.

We want to:

- rebalance our relationship with tourism
- bring greater benefits from tourism
- reduce some of the negative impacts of tourism, caused by a minority who don't respect our city

## We will explore and encourage

- A. Adopting and implementing the York Tourism Strategy
- B. A mechanism for visitors to make voluntary financial contributions which offset their impact and support our communities
- C. Improving the quality of jobs in the tourism sector
- D. Providing targeted priority measures for residents



## 5. Embracing our riversides

The River Ouse and the River Foss are a defining characteristic of York's city centre, being a determining factor in the founding of the city; they have had a formative influence on the urban form throughout its development. The function of York's rivers has changed over time, from commerce and servicing, to currently being principally amenity and recreation related use.

Climate change is affecting how our rivers are managed and how they interact with the city.

The constrained city centre turns its back on, and presents a poor environment to the rivers in many places – a huge lost opportunity to celebrate and enjoy these spaces.

Our ambition is to redefine York's rivers to create high quality spaces and routes which contribute fully to the city's unique sense of place, whilst also ensuring river safety and protecting ecology.

### We will explore and encourage

- A. Celebrating the historic, cultural and environmental benefits of our two rivers, providing riverside spaces and links for local communities
- B. The creation of new accessible riverside walkways at Coney Street and Castle Gateway, and progress a new Ouse footbridge
- C. Improving river corridors as sustainable travel routes to and through the centre
- D. Living well with water to manage flooding impacts & ensure river safety



## 6. A safer city centre which is welcoming and accessible to all

As sustainable city living continues to be supported and to grow, we must ensure that these residents have the resources and facilities to live happy successful lives.

We must also 'invest in place' to ensure that the city centre is a safe, welcoming, and accessible space for all - to ensure its continued vibrancy.

### We will explore and encourage

- A. A city centre where residents can live in diverse and affordable communities
- B. Improving services, open spaces and facilities for residents
- C. Creating a welcoming and accepting city centre for all
- D. Improving the safety of the city centre for all users
- E. Improving accessibility for disabled people through a wide range of measures
- F. Embedding dementia and autism friendly standards into public spaces
- G. Creating an age friendly city
- H. Managing and minimising issues caused by the important night time economy, including through the securing of purple flag status



## 7. Thriving businesses and productive buildings

The nature of commerce in the high street is changing fundamentally and rapidly, and it takes significant investment in time and resource (and exposure to risk) for landowners and businesses to adapt their assets in response to this change.

We want to create a city centre where:

- vibrant mixed-use buildings can co-exist
- innovation and growth can happen
- the goods and services on offer can respond dynamically to consumer demand

We want to do this in a way which uses the city's existing buildings to best advantage. To achieve all of this, we need to ensure that our processes are sufficiently flexible, facilitative and responsive, whilst maintaining appropriate controls where necessary.

### We will explore and encourage

- A. City centre businesses to thrive and adapt through a supportive regulatory environment and creating a city centre people want to visit
- B. Businesses to improve operational sustainability
- C. Our independent businesses
- D. Temporary uses in empty buildings and spaces
- E. Re-use of the under-used upper floors of buildings
- F. Tours and experiences to explore historic buildings



## 8. Celebrating heritage and making modern history

The historic nature of York is a key factor in why it is cherished by so many, and a major driver of the city economy - through its role in our identity as a place to live and do business, to the visitors it attracts.

Adapting the historic environment to change comes with more complexity, cost and risk than usual, and as the city centre enters a period of significant upheaval, we must ensure that our processes are responsive, and the right balance is struck, between preserving what is most important and allowing new life to be breathed into the city.

### We will explore and encourage

- A. The role of planning in allowing buildings to adapt for modern uses, recognising the significant changes facing city centres
- B. The re-use and re-purposing of historic buildings and spaces to avoid them becoming redundant or under-used
- C. Better integration of the wide range of channels that allow the public to engage with the historic city around them



# Image Credits



803 (Chinese New Year) - Image by Anthony Chappel-Ross via Visit York



810 (Roman Legion march) - Image by Visit York



758 (St Nicholas Fair) - Image by Gareth Buddo via Visit York



766 (Walmgate Bar) - Image by Charlotte Graham via Visit York



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557 (View of St Helen's Square) - Image by Visit York

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