

York World Heritage Steering Group

Statement of Outstanding Universal Value Draft 2022_03

Brief Synthesis

York is the pre-eminent historic urban centre in northern England. For many centuries, it was the second city of England, at times a centre of government. It developed around a strategic tidal river crossing and has been at the centre of a network of national and European communications and trading links since its establishment. The city is the outstanding example of urban development in western/north-western Europe originating with Roman occupation. York has exceptional evidence of its Roman origins and of all successive phases up to the modern day.

Roman York, Eboracum, was established c.71 CE. In the 7th – 9th centuries CE, the Anglo-Saxon city, Eoforwic, became a centre of power, belief, trade and learning. In the 9th and 10th centuries CE, Jorvik, was the centre of an extensive Viking kingdom. Urban occupation developed through the Norman conquest and the medieval period and development continued post-Reformation to the present day.

This sequence of historical urban development, although common in western/north-western Europe, is marked in York by exceptional survival of evidence for all these periods. The town plan, buildings, archaeological deposits and objects, and documents and archives that evidence this include: remains of the Roman fortress and colonia; early development of the Minster and merchant's wic from the 7th century CE onwards; Viking Age occupation and trade evidenced by new streets, house plots, new forms of urban housing and exceptional organic artefacts; the surviving Norman castles and near-complete circuit of medieval defensive walls and gates and St Mary's Abbey show the transformation of the city after the conquest in 1066. The wealth and development of the medieval town is evidenced for example by the Minster and historic urban churches and their ornamentation, particularly with exceptional stained glass, and the many exceptional timber-framed buildings including three surviving Guildhalls. Post-medieval, post-Reformation development is well evidenced for instance, by The King's Manor, seat of the King's Council in the North, and in 18th century Georgian domestic, civic, and administrative architecture, the 19th century scientific institutions, and the impact of the railways. Since the mid-20th century, historic buildings have been conserved and repurposed alongside often sympathetic contemporary architecture. The sequence of surviving evidence sheds an unparalleled light on urban development in western/north-western Europe.

Criterion (i)

Criterion i) represent a masterpiece of human creative genius;

The Minster and historic urban churches of York (eg All Saints North Street, St Denys, St Michael le Belfry, All Saints Pavement), hold a rare and exceptionally rich and diverse collection of stained glass produced by master craftsmen and artists of the highest quality, ranging in date from the 12th to the 21st centuries. Glass derived from archaeological excavation at York Minster takes this corpus of extant material back to at least the 11th century. There is therefore an unbroken record of creativity, industry, benefaction and scholarship associated with this medium in historic urban York, stretching back over a least a millennium.

This collection reflects a wide diversity of social, historical, devotional, iconographical and patronage contexts of high creative genius. Individual windows can be associated with outstanding artists and significant donors. In the Great East Window of the Minster (1405-8), we can boast a work by one of the greatest artist/designer/makers of the Middle Ages, John Thornton. It is the largest expanse of medieval glass in the UK and one of the largest and most complex narrative windows ever made. This medieval inheritance has left an indelible mark on the cultural identity of the city. Through the work of Henry Gyles and William Peckitt, York was at the centre of stained glass production in the 17th century. York continues to be a major centre of glass-painting, and today the city is an international centre for stained glass art, conservation, and research.

Criterion (ii)

Criterion (ii) exhibit an important interchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town-planning or landscape design;

The City of York displays external influences and values assimilated in its urban form and development over many centuries. The colonisation by Rome is seen in the remains of the Roman legionary fortress and colonia, including defences (Multangular Tower) and some of the principal streets of the town. From the Anglo-Scandinavian period, there is evidence of streets and buildings which reflect morphologies seen in contemporary Scandinavian towns. The Normans introduced innovations in military (York's castles, city walls and gates), ecclesiastical (Minster, St Mary's Abbey St Leonard's Hospital) and domestic architecture. York has significant surviving guildhalls (Merchant Adventurers Hall, Merchant Taylors Hall) that preserve their medieval appearance and layout.

The impact of the protestant reformation and the dissolution of the monasteries brought adaptation of ecclesiastical buildings, such as the conversion of St Mary's Abbey into King's Manor, home of the Council in the North, and the redistribution and redevelopment of ecclesiastical property across the city. The development of polite society in the 18th century resulted in the introduction of new types of civic buildings (The Assembly Rooms) and dwellings (The Mansion House, Fairfax House) in new architectural styles based on classical principles. The contemporary interest in science is evidenced in specific building types relating to mental health (eg Bootham Hospital) and scientific inquiry (eg the Yorkshire Museum). The assimilation and exploitation of new modes of transport is evidenced by the introduction of railway infrastructure in the city and the associated workers housing both within and beyond the city walls. The human scale of York and its town plan are a result and expression of the assimilation of these values and developments over almost 2000 years.

Criterion (iii)

Criterion (iii) bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared;

York is an outstanding example of urbanisation in north-western and northern Europe initiated by the Romans and developed through successive influences to the present day. It is a pre-eminent example of such a city because it possesses exceptional physical evidence of this urban development. The combination of survival above ground and exceptional archaeology below ground combined with exceptional civic, corporate and ecclesiastical archives gives an unparalleled physical record of this sequence.

York began as a Roman military site. It then developed into the most important Roman town (a *colonia*) in northern Britain, and capital of the Province of Britannia Inferior. This urban role persisted through the Anglo-Saxon period and the city became one of the great ecclesiastical and secular power centres, seat of the northern Archbishopric from 735CE, in England and medieval Europe. This urbanisation is closely related to regional, national and international trade and exchange networks maintained by the city (eg Anglo-Saxon trading wic, artefacts indicating the scale and extent of Viking trade, Merchant Adventurer participation in the Hanseatic League). The city continued to fulfill an important regional and national role in the 16th to 20th centuries. In the 21st century York has become the pre-eminent historic city in the United Kingdom exhibiting attributes from all these periods, making it an exceptional example of this form of urban development in Europe.

Criterion (iv)

Criterion (iv) be an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history;

As an outstanding example of urbanism in north-western Europe, York provides an unbroken sequence of secular and ecclesiastical buildings, illustrating the development of urban life from the Roman conquest, through kingdom formation in the 6th to 9th centuries, the arrival of Scandinavian settlers, the Norman conquest of England, in the medieval period, and the Reformation to the development of modern urbanism.

There is evidence of developments in social, economic, religious, and political history both in buildings and in the planning of the town, reflecting successive cultural change and evolving lifestyles.

This ensemble includes: remains of the Roman fortress and colonia; elements of the early medieval town; urban Viking structures (conserved and displayed in the Jorvik Viking Centre); elements of two Norman castles; very well-preserved city walls and gates; York Minster, an outstanding example of medieval ecclesiastical architecture, and other urban churches, including their rare and exceptionally rich stained glass; guildhalls; the earliest medieval timber-framed row-houses and an exceptional assemblage of unusually large, diverse and well-preserved pre-modern timber-framed buildings including three surviving guild halls. There are transitional houses demonstrating the evolution of medieval units into later brick-built terrace houses provided with staircases and fireplaces of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries built for the emerging urban middle- and working-class population. Post-Reformation religious developments are visible in numerous non-conformist chapels and a very early Catholic convent. The Quaker-led influence on education, mental health, industry and housing and social policy (Seebohm Rowntree's nationally influential study in 1901 on Poverty in York) is evident in the structures of the city. Twentieth century developments are exemplified by Aldwark, an outstanding example of early conservation-led urban regeneration aimed at encouraging people to live in the city.

Criterion (vi)

Criterion (vi) be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance. (The Committee considers that this criterion should preferably be used in conjunction with other criteria);

In 306CE, Constantine was acclaimed Emperor in York. This event probably took place in the basilica or the Principia at the centre of the legionary fortress. Remains of the basilica are displayed in-situ underneath York Minster. Constantine, proclaimed Emperor in York, would go on to adopt Christianity as the official religion of the Empire.

Alcuin, c735 – 804 CE was a student and teacher in York in a library and a school of European renown, then the best in the Latin world. When Charlemagne needed a learned advisor, he headhunted Alcuin. While in Charlemagne's service, Alcuin became known as the most learned, he influenced the emperor's policies to favour expanding education, conversion by persuasion rather than force, and respect for justice and truth. As a poet, he has left an eyewitness description of 8th century York.

In all of his writings we can detect his formation at York and his success in transmitting the knowledge and ideals formed in his native city to the Latin west.

Theatre and performance are of universal significance. The most spectacular of all medieval drama was the religious drama performed in towns known as the 'mystery plays'. York possesses a complete cycle of 48 Mystery Plays. The plays were performed on the Feast of Corpus Christi, the actors members of the York Guilds. The "stage" was formed by carts pulled along a well- recorded processional route through the city stopping at significant "stations" to perform the play. Performed in the 14th and 15th centuries the Mystery Plays, were banned in the 16th century but were revived in the 20th century and are once again a key, living attribute of the historic city.

Statement of Integrity

York possesses a high degree of integrity with the layering and coherence of the planning, design, construction and assimilation of the individual components and attributes undiminished and well-preserved.

The individual components and attributes that form the World Heritage Site are exceptionally well-preserved. All the components and attributes that define the OUV of York are within the proposed boundary although some of attributes extend beyond the chosen boundary.

The essential and complex relationships between the components remain intact (eg the relationships between the multi-period defences, street plan and individual component structures). The intimate interrelationship, for instance, of the large-scale Minster and small-scale domestic and civic structures remains a striking feature of the present-day urban landscape.

The wider setting needs to be protected. No buffer zone has been defined, but the 'essential setting' of the World Heritage Site and 'significant views' are defined in the existing documentation that will form the basis of the World Heritage Site Management Plan.

Potential threats could come from unsympathetic development, from adverse impacts arising from climate change, and from issues relating to management of visitors to the city.

Statement of Authenticity

The authenticity of the components and attributes that form the proposed World Heritage Site has been maintained despite poor interventions and neglect in the 19th and first half of the 20th century.

The landmark publication by Lord Esher in 1968, the pioneering conservation and stabilisation of York Minster led by Sir Bernard Feilden, and the establishment of the Institute of Advanced Architectural Studies at the University of York all established conservation at the heart of practice and management of the city. Conservation of the components and attributes within York has been undertaken following the philosophy of conserve as found, and in general minimal intervention or intrusive modification has occurred. The plans, form, materials, and component features of the many individual components are all largely unaltered. For instance, York City Walls still exhibit the full range of architectural forms associated with such features that have disappeared elsewhere: barbicans, portcullises, fortified gates, towers, and curtain walls. They also provide almost complete enclosure of the historic city. The physical authenticity of urban structures is complemented by the unrivalled preservation of organic sub-surface archaeological deposit. The authenticity of these structures is also supported by very well-preserved corpus of civic, ecclesiastical and corporate archives from the 12th century onwards.

The overall setting of the historic city is largely intact – the linear suburbs extending beyond the historic gates, the network of historic Strays that, with the rivers, provide the green setting of the city – and the city retains the components and attributes that underpin OUV of this exceptional example of European urbanism.

Requirements for protection and management

The UK Government protects World Heritage properties by the statutory protection of individual sites and buildings and by spatial planning and guidance.

Many of the components of the proposed World Heritage Site are protected by statutory scheduling as monuments of national importance or by designation as Listed Buildings. The entire World Heritage Site lies within Conservation Areas that cover the immediate setting of the proposed WHS. The WHS also sits within the central Area of Archaeological Importance, one of only five such designations on the UK. The individual components are maintained by their owners according to current conservation principles. The site is protected by an emerging Local Plan and an emerging York Minster Precinct Neighbourhood Plan.

These measures combine to ensure York is subject to rigorous controls over development that could potentially impact upon the WHS or its setting. Flooding has been and will continue to be an issue for the city. Continued close liaison with the Environment Agency will help maintain and develop the flood defences of the city.

Tourism and visitor management is managed through VisitYork and the Council is actively engaged in work to implement policies for promotion, access, interpretation and visitor management.

The York World Heritage Steering Group will continue to advise the Council on World Heritage issues.

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