



Make It York

Visit | Culture | Markets | Events

Strategic Plan
2026-2035



Introduction



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Managing Director



We live in fascinating times for the tourism sector. We have felt the influence of so many changes over the last five years, from the start of the Covid pandemic to the cost-of-living crisis, and beyond the UK borders with key elections, ever-shifting international relations, and the ever-climbing cost of travel.

Yet against this background, York is holding strong. We were one of the fastest cities to bounce back after the pandemic, footfall is back up and exceeding 2019 levels and spend is up. The way people plan their travel – particularly families – is constantly changing and evolving. Make It York is working hard, collating data and analysing the latest trends, and sharing those with organisations in the tourism sector so that we can remain ahead of our competition.

Our goal is to have York recognised as the best city in the UK, for residents and tourists alike, and to be seen for the pioneering approach – highlighting and empowering the creative and commercial energies in the city – that makes this happen. The York welcome is unlike any other – we have a fantastic reputation for being warm and friendly. We are known as a city of history and culture, but we're using new techniques and technologies to bring the world's spotlight on our status as a UNESCO Creative City of Media Arts. We celebrate our heritage whilst investing in the contemporary.

Make It York is committed to making this

happen. We are working in partnership with key organisations to facilitate this. We have joined forces with Visit North Yorkshire, the new destination marketing organisation for the county, as part of a new Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP), which gives us access to VisitEngland and VisitBritain campaigns. We have worked in partnership with the York Tourism Advisory Board to create the Tourism Strategy which has been adopted by City of York Council. With York BID, attractions and the hospitality sector, we spot any gaps in the market and fill them with engaging content.

Against this background, we have worked hard to ensure Make It York is financially stable and robust to be able to deliver on our goals. The way we are structured and funded is unlike any other Destination Management Organisation (DMO) in the country – independent of the local authority yet entirely owned by City of York Council. This brings unique challenges – particularly in terms of funding – but also gives us a dynamism that others lack. Our city centre Visitor Information Centre (VIC) is a perfect example: many cities have lost an in-person VIC, but for us, people come first in the city and this face-to-face interaction provides a great service to visitors and local alike, whilst giving us a very direct interface with those we are here to support.

York is a wonderful place to live, work and visit. We are proud of our role in supporting and promoting this.

Our Vision



Make It York will strive to deliver an exciting and thriving city for all!

We will develop our city centre where our residents are proud to live.

Make It York will contribute by:

- Creating incredible events that our communities love.
- Developing our dynamic and engaging cultural and arts scene.
- Ensuring our city centre is attractive and befitting of our city's heritage.
- Ensure that residents influence the direction of travel for tourism.

We will develop and showcase our unique experiences and spaces, creating a dynamic place where more businesses will prosper and grow.

Make It York will contribute by:

- Supporting local businesses with advice and information.
- Building strategic partnerships locally, nationally and globally.
- Attracting and retaining the right investment and talent for the city.
- Showcase excellence in our sector.





York Christmas Market

We will continue to enhance our visitor offering and marketing, resulting in more people wanting to visit and explore.

Make It York will contribute by:

- Making York famous as a first-class destination for leisure, business and study.
- Creating unrivalled experiences for visitors across the city.
- Supporting local businesses who help make this happen.
- Create a global visitor experience for all.

We will use data, evidence and smart technology to help businesses make the right decisions, as well as to attract residents, visitors and new investors.

We will draw on the expertise of a talented team of Make It York team, with local, national and international experience, and an influential Board of Directors including local councillors, business leaders and city stakeholders.

We will work strategically to identify and support areas that are important to the city's future; the needs of York are always changing and that's why we are always improving our services to meet the city's evolving demands.

Our priorities

- Maintaining York as the most attractive city for residents and tourists in the UK.
- Supporting a vibrant and dynamic city centre for businesses to thrive.
- Maintaining a city based on social value and sustainability by pioneering and leading on regenerative tourism.
- Maintaining a strong and effective organisation.

Maintaining York as the most attractive city for tourists in the UK.

York has it all: 2000 years of fascinating history visible through our monuments, architecture and even street names; chosen a place from which to lead the way, from Roman emperors and Viking kings to Victorian engineers and chocolatiers. With many other destinations – many significantly larger – keen to steal our crown as the most appealing tourist destination outside of London, we must work hard to shout about the world-class assets to be found inside and outside our city walls.

Make It York will:

- Promote York as a must-see business and leisure destination to regional, national and international audiences, partnering with Visit North Yorkshire to secure representation by VisitEngland and VisitBritain.
- Implement and support other partners, including the York Tourism Advisory Board and City of York Council, with the delivery of York's new Tourism Strategy, with a commitment to sustainability and growth.
- Highlight the uniqueness of the city, from the warmest welcome we extend to visitors, to the remarkable art, culture, history and gastronomy; from unique goods created and sold by independent businesses, to our nationally and internationally significant museums and collections.
- Target national and international markets that will deliver the best return on investment for the city, with higher spend and longer stays.
- Ensure that York is a destination that always delivers on its promises. Every visitor should leave York wanting to return.



Shambles Market

Supporting a vibrant and dynamic city centre for businesses to thrive.

At a time when footfall is reducing in towns and city centres across the country, the numbers in York continue to rise. Make It York plays a key role in activating city central spaces to add colour and vibrancy; exploring new opportunities that draw new audiences.

Make It York will:

- Create an environment in which businesses seek to invest in the city centre, filling empty properties with both big names and independent traders to extend York's reputation for quality shopping, hospitality and entertainment.
- Support Shambles Market to thrive by appealing to residents; encouraging regular visits for daily staples; creating a space for friends and families to share a snack; capturing wandering visitors to browse for an array of goods.
- Blend regular festivals already established as must-visit experiences with new events and activities to appeal to an even wider audience of locals and visitors.
- Encourage free events and activities to drive city-centre visits and engagement for residents and tourists.
- Explore new ways of using city centre spaces to generate income and improve accessibility.
- Be brave. Not every event will appeal to every audience, so we will balance the needs of all those who engage with the city centre on either regular or one-off visits.
- Develop events, trails and activities that highlight the works of local artists and create engagement and connections between art, sculpture and places within the city.
- Support and highlight the works, skills and achievements that underpin the UNESCO Creative City of Media Arts status, promoting them through our online and offline communications channels.
- Engage artists and cultural practitioners to deliver initiatives that engage with marginalised communities across the city.



Big Wheel on St Sampson's Square

Maintaining a city based on social value and sustainability by pioneering and leading on regenerative tourism.

Make It York is committed to delivering social value and sustainability in all that we do. Being a beacon of best practice and putting people and the environment at the heart of what we do.

Make It York will:

- Gain knowledge in best practice for regenerative tourism, using both tourism partners such as VisitBritain and VisitEngland but also industry experts in other fields showcasing adaptation.
- Support the city's climate ambitions, where possible, engaging with businesses and our visitors.
- Promote and collaborate with communities to enhance community led tourism offers for our visitors.
- Continue to understand and implement accessibility needs of all individuals ensuring and inclusive environment for all.
- Work with our residents to showcase the value of tourism and events for York. Engage with their needs and ensure residents are ambassadors for both the city, tourism and all of what Make It York delivers.



Filming for our summer marketing campaign



Visitor Information Centre,
Parliament Street

Maintaining a strong and effective organisation.

Since its inception, the way in which Make It York operates has evolved and changed, from the sources of funding to the commercial remits for the organisation. A very tight focus on financial management over the last three years has created a firm foundation for sustainable growth, development and reinvestment to support the delivery of our vision.

Make It York will:

- Continue to evolve our operational strategy so it can adapt to changing market conditions, maintaining Make It York as a sustainable, self-financing company.
- Maintain our commitment to retain Good Business Charter status, which monitors ten criteria required, from diversity and inclusion to fair wages, hours and contracts.
- Evaluate all our events through impact assessments to ensure that they contribute to the local economy in a positive way.
- Build and grow our membership of Visit York, engage more members and deliver more impactful and inclusive campaigns.
- Support businesses to celebrate the success of the tourism, hospitality and culture sector through our annual Visit York Tourism Awards, with York's success stories then feeding into VisitEngland's Awards for Excellence.
- Support the growth of networks within the city, encouraging and facilitating organisations to work with each other to build audiences and develop enhanced offers.

By 2030.

Make It York will continue to succeed in the coming years, with the priorities set and our vision for the future.

We will showcase our delivery of the above with these key achievements:

- The value of tourism will be £5 billion to the city.
- Make It York will develop 3 key signature world class events.
- Shambles Market will continue to be recognised as the UK best outdoor market.
- York will be ranked as the most sustainable English city in the UK.
- York will be the most visited UK city outside of London and a top 10 European destination.
- Residents will champion us as a tourist destination.



Our Board



Sarah Loftus
Managing Director
of Make It York



Stuart Paver
Chair of Pavers



Councillor Claire Douglas
Leader of City
of York Council



Richard France
Managing Director of
Oakgate Group PLC



David Flesher
Commercial
Director, LNER



Mark Fordyce
Managing Director,
York Data Services



Joan Concannon
Director of External
Relations,
University of York



**Councillor Paula
Widdowson**
Deputy Leader of the
Liberal Democrat
Group



Board Advisor
Lyndsey Turner Swift
He of England Action
Plan, VisitEngland