

York Museums Trust
Scrutiny Committee Report
07 March 2023

York Museums Trust vision and mission

In 2019 we revisited our vision and mission involving all staff and consulting with stakeholders. We gained Trustee approval and officially launched the new vision in February 2020.

Our vision

To work together with audiences and communities to inspire, to share and to care for cultural heritage.

Our mission

York Museums Trust shares collections, gardens, buildings, art and stories for learning, enjoyment and wellbeing. Rooted in York and Yorkshire, we look outwards nationally and globally. As a charity, our income enables the Trust to care for heritage and to benefit all.

YMT Progress

Our priorities for much of the period since we last reported to the Committee have been surviving the closures of our sites and admitting only limited numbers of visitors when allowed to open because of the Covid restrictions.

Our current priorities for 2022/23 are:

- Deliver innovative public programming which supports an audience-focused, inclusive, visitor-first approach;
- Progress the Castle Transformation Project
- Progress collections development and management, including collections centre
- Increase our resilience by expanding enterprises and fundraising activities, investing in our people, and caring for our environment

In addition to these priorities, we also have a shorter term high **YMT priority** focused on our recovery given 2022/23 is a transition year as it's the first year of being open fully post Covid and the uncertainty that this has brought in forecasting visitor behaviours and numbers:

- Survive the Covid-19 crisis and work together with audiences and communities to recover and rebuild.

We have determined outcomes and targets for the 2022/23 business plan and report on our progress on these together with our performance to our Board of Trustees who are charged with our Governance on a quarterly basis.

We are pleased we were successful in retaining our Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) Status for the period April 2023 to March 2026. However, the level of the grant remains at £1.253m which has remained unchanged since 2019. With inflation Arts Council themselves have stated that they expect us to deliver 15% less than we have been able to do previously.

When we last reported we were preparing with CYC's support a major capital bid for £10m of funding from National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) for the Castle Transformation project. As a reminder this was for the first £23m phase of a £70m scheme. Having fully completed our RIBA 1 designs and plans we were unsuccessful in our 2019 application.

We survived the Covid period through the combination of emergency grants from ACE and DCMS of nearly £1.7m, the use of the CJRS furlough scheme of £0.6m. However, we still had to make redundancies of nearly 30% of our workforce in late 2020. Since then, we have been rebuilding the workforce as visitor numbers have returned and we have been able to extend our opening hours. The other element of our funding that has been crucial to our survival is the Letter of Credit from CYC for £1.95m that we have had from the Council since 2020. This letter currently expires in March 2024. Our stakeholders and funders have seen this as a visible sign of support from the Council which has been crucial to us continuing to receive other sources of grants, funding and support throughout the period.

Performance

Throughout the period after the first Covid lockdown we were able to keep the **Museum Gardens** open the public and gradually extend the hours of opening. This has been appreciated by the people of York and

visitors and we are seeing footfall return to the 1 million plus visitors each year we had pre covid.

York Castle Museum is now open seven days a week and we are achieving healthy visitor numbers of more than 80% of our pre Covid levels. This is our most popular family and visitor attraction and we have ensured there are always family activities included in the admission in the holiday periods. In the last twelve months our *Tiger who came to tea* exhibition proved very popular and Christmas on Kirkgate was very well attended. We have been using the Community rooms to engage with different communities to exhibit their works and heritage including *York's Jewish Story : 1170 onwards* with York Liberal Jewish Community and *HerStory York: 100 Women Changemakers*.

At the **Yorkshire Museum** we have been able to open through the winter period in 2022 for the first time since Covid and have seen a much more gradual return of our audience. We were able to open again after closure in April 2022 with the *Ryedale bronzes* which were acquired by YMT and added to York's collections.

We took the decision in 2020 to reopen in the summer with free admissions to our permanent collections at **York Art Gallery** and to see what we could achieve through visitor donations. We now only charge for our temporary exhibitions some of which are from our own collection but also include high profile touring exhibitions. Currently *Marvellous and Mischievous: Literature's Young Rebels* from the British Library is proving popular with families. Previous exhibitions since we reopened have included *Grayson Perry: the pre-therapy years*, *Beyond Bloomsbury: Life, Love and Legacy*, *Body Vessel Clay: Black women, ceramics and contemporary art*, and *Sin* from the National Gallery. Despite increasing visitor numbers by over 50% we have not seen income from secondary spend or donations increasing, and this decision is currently costing us £200k per annum in lost income.

Whilst we have had to increase admissions prices because of inflation we continue to offer discounts to York residents. All of York's children continue to benefit from free admission. All of our sites participate in York's residents' weekend annually.

Given the numbers of visitors we are expecting in 2022/23 we will be able to demonstrate that our attractions generate £19m of economic value added in the City in the current financial year.

Visitor numbers

	2019/20 actual	2020/21 actual	2021/22 actual	2022/23 forecast
York Castle Museum	240,913	8,238	108,807	213,602
Yorkshire Museum	105,503	Nil	26,859	73,297
York Art Gallery	73,031	12,478	85,947	110,660
Total	419,447	20,716	221,613	397,559

Finances

We remain loss making given our reliance on visitor income and trading through our Enterprise subsidiary for 70% of our funding. In 2022/23 we have managed in year to reduce an expected budget loss of nearly £800k to around £300k through continued scrutiny of every cost and tight control on recruitment. Given the unexpected inflationary pressures and the uncertainty caused by the cost-of-living crisis we are really pleased with this outturn. However, this is not a sustainable financial position given the pressures are not going away and we will be left with only two months cover for our operational costs in reserves at the year end. This is below our reserves policy of three months.

We are currently preparing the 2023/24 budget which will at best project losses of around £0.5m which will further diminish our reserves position. We receive a £300k annual grant from CYC each year which was reduced from £600k in 2015/16 and from £1.1m in 2014/15. The reduction in 2015 was a result of introducing charging at the Art Gallery.

We do not carry any capital funding and the state of the buildings in our care remain of concern and we are unable to make any much-needed improvements or changes without such funding.

Kathryn Blacker and Paul Lambert

York Museums Trust

23 February 2023