



CITY OF  
**YORK**  
COUNCIL

# Our City Centre Vision



# Main Changes

## Strategic Position

Adoption of the 10-year strategies:

- Council Plan 2023-2027
- Climate Change Strategy 2022-2032
- Economic Strategy 2022-2032
- Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2022-2032
- Tourism Strategy: A Vision for Tourism in York 2032

## Current issues to respond to

- Cost of living crisis
- Climate crisis
- Councils financial position
- Accessibility of the city centre



Working together to improve and make a difference

Vision “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.”

**1. Family friendly  
and affordable  
city centre**

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

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

**4. Making  
tourism work for  
York**

**5. Embracing our  
riversides**

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

**7. Thriving  
businesses and  
productive  
buildings**

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

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.

## **1. Family friendly and affordable city centre**

### **Explore and Encourage:**

- A. Exciting new play spaces in the city centre
- B. Using open space for cultural & 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

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.

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

### 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 & 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

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.

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

**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

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

#### 4. Making tourism work for York

##### **Explore and Encourage:**

- A. Adopting and implementing of 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

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.

## 5. Embracing our riversides

### 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



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.

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

**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 nighttime economy, including through the securing of purple flag status

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.

## 7. Thriving businesses and productive buildings

### Explore and Encourage:

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

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.

## 8. Celebrating heritage and making modern history

### 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