

Re-imagining York's Guildhall complex: Connecting River and City

Open Competition Submission: November 2012

CONTEXT

This prominent and historic riverfront area has resisted the incentives of redevelopment for longer than normally imaginable. The existing buildings tend to sit perpendicular to the river, with four access points (including Common Hall Lane) from Lendal and St Helen's Square. These lead down to (what were once, working) yards on the riverside. York Boat still operate, though much of their working space could be relocated and optimized for public benefit.

REGENERATION PROPOSALS

These plans create a publicly accessible network of footpaths that connect the town and river, and run parallel between Lendal and the Ouse. Although located close by, the pubs and businesses that front onto Lendal do not have access or views to the river; rather, snickelways often terminate in enclosed private yards or gardens. These proposals will show the benefits of sharing space, access and flexible property boundaries in the interests of a joint enterprise.

We have deliberately chosen not to extend a public footpath or pontoons along the river. The existing Guildhall buildings that rise out of the river are rare examples of a close relationship with water that should not be compromised.

A new pedestrian route parallel with the river is proposed to run from St Martin's Church to Lendal Bridge. The main public spaces along this route can be identified as: City Screen Yard – Guildhall Yard – Lendal Cellars – New Lendal Basin. Along the route there are various pinch-points: these narrow connections open out to surprising and sometimes generous public spaces.

At City Screen Yard a new building is proposed over the old slipway on the footprint of the Guildhall annex. Although of some significance this annex is to be removed as it severely compromises the public accessibility of the area.

The route continues through Guildhall Yard and runs through to New Lendal Basin. It is recommended that the division between Lendal Cellars and the rear of the Council Chambers is removed.

Unique Registration Number: Y50

Three new buildings form a major new public space that addresses the river: New Lendal Basin. Access to these buildings at upper level from Lendal gives the opportunity for a raised loggia to bridge over the footpath from the Guildhall and overlook the riverfront. Below, a broad plinth steps down to the river, offering informal public seating and the opportunity for riverside spectacle. Magnesian limestone is used for paving and cladding.

The recent weather has emphasized the vulnerability to flooding of buildings and businesses beside the river. The ground levels of the new buildings all sit over maximum flood levels, so can be accessed and continue to operate despite high water levels.

The riverside route then continues under Lendal Bridge and along the north-east bank of the Ouse.

USES

The brief recognizes that this location will attract high quality business uses. It has the potential to provide a dense and thriving working community within a quick walk of the mainline railway station.

While the historic council chamber is to be retained in use by the City of York Council (CYC), it is envisaged that some ancillary office space will still be required by the CYC. This may all be within the retained Council Chambers building, but the replacement annex has a flexible layout that can accommodate different mixes of tenancy.

There is often an associated requirement for new residential associated with new work environments. A small amount of residential accommodation is included in these proposals.

NEW BUILD AND LICENSED AREAS (GROSS)

City Screen Yard	
Office (B1):	1,000m ²
New Lendal Basin	
Office (B1):	1,200m ² (does not include retained areas of the Council Chambers annex)
Restaurant (A3):	550m ²
External (A3):	200m ² (approx.)
Residential (C3a)	620m ²