

COVID_19 Economic Recovery

Transport and Place Strategy



June 2020

Executive Summary

In response to the impacts of COVID_19 City of York Council are developing an Economic Recovery Plan. As part of this plan a one year Transport and Place Strategy has been produced to underpin the city's economic recovery, respond to reduced capacity and confidence in the public transport network, and secure the active transport benefits that have been realised during the initial lockdown. This strategy compliments and is in addition to implementation of the government's Safer Public Places guidance, which was issued in May 2020, and follows five key strands:

- Create ***a people focused city centre***
- ***Prioritise active transport***
- Promote ***a complimentary park > walk > visit strategy*** using council car parks outside the people focused city centre
- ***Maintain confidence in public transport***
- ***Support the city's secondary centres***

Most of the interventions set out in the strategy will remain in place for the full year – or until such point as a vaccine or treatment for COVID_19 is in place - whereas others will only be applied as and when required by the current government COVID_19 alert level or guidance. This provides a simple and clear framework for stepping up or down the strategic response. Should the government announce a change in alert level or guidance then the appropriate measures can be immediately actioned and communicated to the public.

It is important to note that all elements of the strategy are designed to be flexible and pragmatic. Should guidance change; anticipated trends not emerge; measures prove ineffective; or funding not be available, then the strategy will be refined. Public and stakeholder feedback will be sought throughout as part of a supporting communication and engagement plan.

Key principles

The city's Economic Recovery - Transport and Place Strategy is designed to underpin and support the economic recovery, whilst locking in as many of the active transport benefits that have been realised during COVID_19 as possible.

The Economic Recovery Plan for the city is aligned with the Council Recovery Plan, and the following key principles:

- healthiness
- wellbeing
- sustainability
- innovation
- inclusivity
- safety

The city's economy, particularly in the city centre, is very dependent on tourism which creates and sustains significant numbers of jobs in the hospitality, food and beverage, retail, leisure and cultural sectors. Initial estimates suggest that there could be 15,000 job losses in York as a result of COVID_19, largely across these sectors. Creating places and an environment in which visitors can safely return to the city centre in the short term will be crucial in laying the foundations for the long term economic recovery.

Post-lockdown measures

The ongoing response to COVID_19 will over time involve a combination of active mitigations to ensure the infection reproduction rate remains below 1. These include:

- Continued social distancing
- Avoiding crowded places
- A sector by sector approach to returning to work
- Phased reopening of schools
- Active discouragement of the use of public transport when the risk is high, and the promotion of walking and cycling
- Downloading of a track and trace app to identify contact tracing and self-isolation following exposure to infection
- Increased levels of personal hygiene and surface cleaning
- Requirements to wear face coverings on public transport and in enclosed spaces
- Continuing to work from home wherever possible
- Shielded people and those in high risk groups to remain in self-isolation
- Full or partial future lockdowns should the virus reproduction exceed a rate of 1

A combination of the above is likely to remain in place until such time as a vaccine is (hopefully) discovered, tested, and in mass production; or combinations of anti-viral drugs that are proven to effectively treat the virus are discovered. The current best estimates are that a vaccination will hopefully be available sometime in 2021. In short, for at least the next 12 months there are likely to be varying degrees of the above measures in place, causing significant disruption to society and the economy.

Behavioural change and the public response

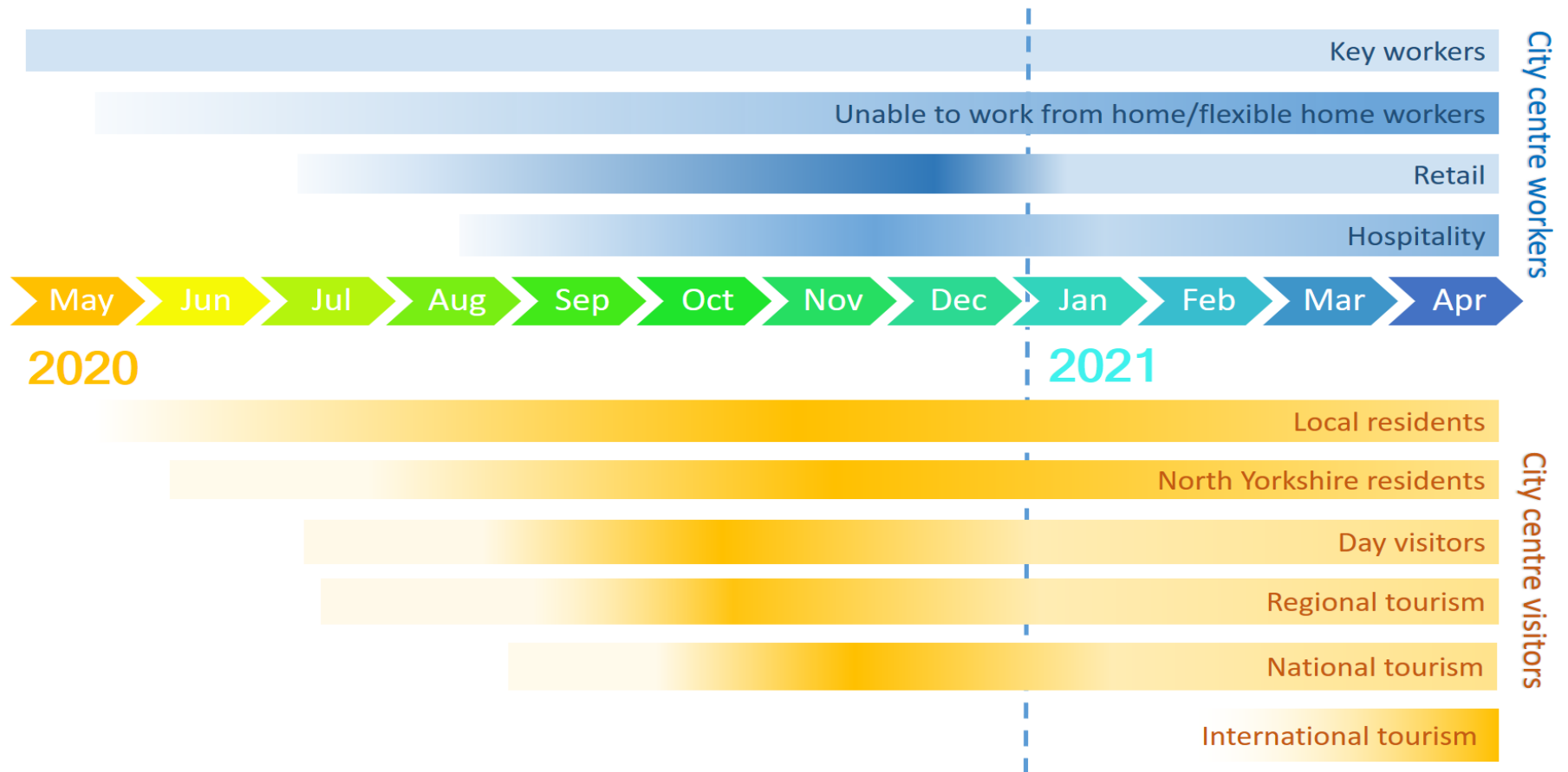
Predicting anything that will happen as a consequence of COVID_19 is challenging. In the long term this may result in a fundamentally different 'new normal', where complete behavioural change occurs and people simply adapt to a new way of working, living, and interacting, causing permanent changes to the structure of our society and economy. Alternatively we may quickly revert back to the underpinning principles of human behaviour and the way life was pre-COVID_19, with more nuanced societal and economic changes and a speeding up and ratchetting forward of existing trends.

In the short term, as the current lockdown is initially lifted it may feel daunting to people at first. First instincts may be to visit friends and family; travelling by car to quiet, rural areas where it is easy to social distance; and avoiding crowded places. The assumption is that people will look to spend time and money locally until confidence grows and some forms of national domestic tourism returns. International travel is expected to be severely restricted and affected for the foreseeable future.

The following page sets out very high level theoretical assumptions on when different groups who use and visit the city centre would likely return over the coming year if COVID_19 restrictions were lifted in incremental stages and there was a continual and gradual fall in infection reproduction rates.

The darker shaded areas represent anticipated spikes in visitors or employment, particularly relating to seasonal changes such as employment.

Estimated timeline of people returning to the city centre by group assuming a gradual release of government restrictions



However, as noted earlier in this document the measures to tackle COVID_19 in advance of a vaccine are highly unlikely to follow a fixed trajectory, with a flexible application of future measures to respond to spikes in infection.

Government alert levels

In response to the infection risks posed by COVID_19 the government’s latest strategy is to follow an alert level based model to flex restrictions to respond to potential spikes in infection rates. These are set out below:

COVID Alert Levels		
Level	Description	Action
5	As level 4 and there is a material risk of healthcare services being overwhelmed	Social distancing measures increase from today’s level
4	A COVID-19 epidemic is in general circulation; transmission is high or rising exponentially	Current social distancing measures and restrictions
3	A COVID-19 epidemic is in general circulation	Gradual relaxing of restrictions and social distancing measures
2	COVID-19 is present in the UK, but the number of cases and transmission is low	No or minimal social distancing measures; enhanced testing, tracing, monitoring and screening
1	COVID-19 is not known to be present in the UK	Routine international monitoring

During the initial emergency lockdown the alert level was 5, with a reduction to level 4 in mid-May and tentative suggestions of a further relaxation to level 3 in July, dependent on infection reproduction rates. This provides a much more useful framework through which to assess the impact on those using and visiting the city centre and secondary centres, and allows a strategic transport and place approach to be tailored to each of the different alert levels that can be quickly implemented as and when the government changes the level. It should however be noted that there remains nuances within each alert level which may require a flexible local application of strategic responses.

COVID_19 impact on transport

The period of lockdown resulted in significant improvements in air quality, largely as a consequence of the reduction in travel resulting in far lower levels of vehicle usage. The initial guidance to exercise outside the home once a day, and reduced numbers of vehicles on the roads, also resulted in an increase in active forms of travel such as walking and cycling. This trend is entirely in line with the council's existing long term transport strategy to promote active travel, and there is an opportunity to harness the cultural shift to these modes of transport.

However, social distancing to reduce the spread of infection will in the short to medium term have a major impact on public transport. The guidance of maintaining a 2 metres distance from other people is expected to reduce the capacity of the public transport network by as much as 90%. There is also likely to be a reluctance to use public transport as the close proximity to others means it will be perceived to be the highest risk form of transport in terms of infection.

This initial reluctance is anticipated to dissipate over time, and in a post-vaccine world public transport will remain the strategic priority. There may be less demand in the long term should large scale homeworking become the norm, particularly on inter-city travel, although this would be reflected across all forms of transport. Much of the travel to York will depend on our ability to secure a sustainable long term economic recovery for the city centre.

To underpin this recovery the emergency economic response pre-vaccine will be vital and is the immediate focus of the council's COVID_19 Economic Recovery Plan. This plan will require significant short term transport measures that are set out in the following Economic Recovery - Transport and Place Strategy, which will also lay the foundations for a future sustainable transport system.

COVID_19 Economic Recovery - Transport and Place Strategy

Driving York's economic recovery and creating a sustainable transport legacy

The COVID_19 Economic Recovery - Transport and Place Strategy will deliver bold interventions to accelerate the city's move towards active and sustainable transport, yet also has the short term pragmatism to accept that the economic recovery relies on people, who will only visit the city centre if they can travel with confidence and in a way which they feel safe. This strategy compliments and is in addition to implementing the government's Safer Public Places guidance, which was issued in May 2020. Some elements of the strategy will require interventions throughout the 12 month period whilst others will be implemented or stood down depending on the alert level at the time.

To achieve the aims set out above the strategy will focus on five key strands:

- Create ***a people focused city centre***
- ***Prioritise active transport***
- Promote ***a complimentary park > walk > visit strategy*** using council car parks outside the people focused city centre
- ***Maintain confidence in public transport***
- ***Support the city's secondary centres***

This strategy is a time limited, one year response to the impact of COVID_19. It does not replace the requirement for a new Local Transport Plan (LTP). The measures set out in this strategy will instead begin to serve as a test case for the LTP, and allow analysis of the impacts, and public feedback on the interventions, to help develop the long term strategies.

COVID_19 Economic Recovery - Transport and Place Strategy

COVID_19 Economic Recovery Plan

COVID_19 One Year Transport and Place Strategy

People focused city centre

- A safe city centre environment to social distance with confidence
- Attract visitors back to the city centre to drive economic recovery
- Create flexible public spaces for commercial use by local businesses
- Harness improved air quality and increased use of active transport
- Continue long term sustainable transport strategies

Prioritise active transport

- Ensure current increases in active travel continue
- Provide improved sustainable transport options as alternatives to reduced public transport capacity
- Ensure that travel by car does not become the short term solution for commuters and a long term dependency
- Ensure those that are able to work from home continue to do so
- Develop school drop off strategies

Park > Walk > Visit

- Ensure the city centre is attractive to residents in the immediate future
- Ensure the city centre is a destination of choice for visitors post-lockdown
- Accept visitors may need to be incentivised to return
- Accept visitors will see and use cars as the primary form of transport
- Promote car parking opportunities *outside the people focused city centre*

Maintain confidence in public transport

- Ensure that the bus and rail network continues to operate for those that need it
- Bus stops and the railway station are safe environments
- Capacity is increased at key times of day and times of the year
- As the risk or perceived risk of infection reduces people return to using public transport instead of cars

Support the city's secondary centres

- Safe environments in which people can social distance with confidence
- Increased footstreet areas for people focused secondary shopping centres
- Create flexible public spaces for commercial use by local businesses
- Increased cycle parking to encourage active travel

A people focused city centre

The COVID_19 emergency and resulting government restrictions and guidance for social distance in public places has already required the council to implement measures to create additional space within the city centre for pedestrians and business, and the repurposing of roads to allow people to safely walk and cycle.

A people focused city centre will redefine and expand the pedestrianised footstreets in line with Department for Transport guidance (Safer Public Places) to accommodate social distancing; create new cycle routes through the city centre to harness the modal shift to active transport; and explore options to increase the capacity for cyclists and pedestrians in crossing the river. An additional benefit will be the improvements in air quality from the consequent reduction in city centre traffic.

This strand of the strategy also has a key role in the economic recovery of the city centre as it will help to drive footfall when government guidance allows. Residents and visitors will only return to the city if they have confidence that they can safely social distance and that it is an attractive outdoor environment to spend time, given that other footfall drivers such as pubs and restaurants will not be open during higher alert levels. It will also make large public spaces and footstreets available to repurpose for local businesses to adapt their operating models to social distancing.

Actions – People focused city centre

- Implement the government's Safer Public Places guidance in conjunction with other stakeholders and partners
- Create a priority city centre cycle route that avoids the inner-ring road and narrow pedestrian areas
- Create multiple large scale cycle parking points within the city centre through new or repurposed office/station cycle parking
- Extension of the footstreets and creation of increased public spaces that can be used by local businesses to adapt their operating models
- Create flexible areas of public space for leisure, culture and local businesses, including the potential use of Castle Car Park if viable options are identified
- All displaced blue badge parking to be replaced and concentrated in accessible points and linked to shop mobility and shuttle services
- Accelerate feasibility work to explore city delivery hub models for all businesses
- Apply indicative keep left and one way walking routes in space constrained streets and around the Bar Walls

Prioritise active transport

During the initial COVID_19 lockdown there was a significant rise in people walking and cycling as part of their permitted daily exercise. The reduction in vehicular traffic also meant that the roads were less busy and safer, again encouraging people to travel by bicycle.

In an attempt to harness the growing trend to active transport during lockdown; to add capacity to the sustainable transport network whilst bus and train travel is restricted; and to ensure that commuter car dependency does not emerge; the strategy proposes to invest and make bold interventions to create new networks of park and cycle hubs, priority cycle routes, cycle hire and cycle parking to prioritise active travel as the preferred form of commuter transport.

During the lockdown key workers were provided with free car parking in council car parks. This has now ended for all, except those designated as critical workers by the government (NHS and care workers). For other key workers free city car parking will only be reintroduced when the government alert level is raised to 5.

This is to avoid encouraging new car dependency in those key workers that previously did not drive to work. In the long term it would also take car parking capacity away from the visitors to the city centre that generate the demand to protect and create employment. Without footfall there will be far fewer jobs for people to commute to.

Actions - Prioritising active transport

- Invest in all Park and Ride to also become Park and Cycle hubs
- Consider options to create two Park and Cycle super-sites with expanded cycle offers, with potential solutions including:
 - Cycle hangers for privately owned bikes
 - Cycle hire schemes if viable
 - Clear cycle priority routes to new city centre cycle parks that involve limited on road cycling
- Phase out subsidised city centre parking for key workers (except for critical workers) when government alert levels are below 5 **and** we are not in an emergency response phase, and offer alternative active transport incentives
- Develop school drop-off strategies that responds to the decreased bus capacity

A complimentary park > walk > visit strategy

Whilst ensuring the commitment and continuation of long term sustainable transport strategies, the Transport and Place Strategy needs to reflect the major economic challenges facing the city. The structure of York's economy means that a failure to encourage residents and visitors back to the city centre once it is safe will cause huge short and potentially long term damage. Although the long term transport strategy remains completely committed to sustainable transport there is an acceptance that in the short term – and for those where active travel is not an option - cars will be the preferred method of travel due to the loss of capacity and confidence in public transport.

As the purpose of the Transport and Place Strategy is to underpin the economic recovery a complimentary **park > walk > visit** strategy will be adopted, with the promotion and incentivisation of car parking for residents and visitors in council car parks outside the people focused centre. This pragmatic response reflects that people will seek to drive to places; that they will have options as to where they visit; and that we need to be an attractive destination that people can visit with confidence and ease. This approach will drive footfall, build city centre business confidence, mitigate some of the worst immediate economic impacts, and lay a solid foundation for the economic recovery.

However, the incentives would only be applied to targeted car parks, and specifically exclude Castle, Esplanade and Piccadilly car parks so as to align with the **people focused city centre** strand of the strategy. Castle Car Park may be closed under this strategy to create additional public space for businesses and events, and Esplanade and Piccadilly Car Park would not be incentivised so as not to encourage additional cars within the city centre. The initiative would also be time limited, being phased out as and when it is appropriate to return to full priced car parking and the promotion of public transport.

Actions - A complimentary park > walk > visit strategy

- The use of car parking incentives in council car parks outside the people focused city centre - when the use of public transport is being discouraged - to attract residents and visitors to the city centre
- Escalate the implementation of pay on exit and roll out across all council car parks
- Promotional campaign to encourage people to shop local and use open air food markets and retailers in the city centre
- Promotional safely visit York campaign when government guidance allows
- An exit strategy to ensure we return to public transport once confidence and capacity has returned

Maintain confidence in public transport

Social distancing will have a significant impact on public transport. The need to maintain safe distances will vastly reduce capacity on buses and trains, both of which play key roles in York's transport hierarchy. The communal nature of public transport and requirements to wear face coverings from the 15 June, will also mean it is likely to remain the least attractive mode of transport behind walking, cycling, and cars as people try to minimise their social contact.

However, during this period public transport will still be the only viable form of transport for many people, and it is also vital that a modal shift away from bus and rail and a new wave of car dependency does not take root during the COVID_19 response phase. Consequently it is important that significant thought and effort is given to the safety of bus and rail users and maintaining confidence in public transport.

Through strategic interventions we will ensure that the bus and rail network continues to operate for those that need it, that bus stops and the railway station are safe environments, that capacity is increased at key times of day and times of the year, and as the risk or perceived risk of infection reduces people return to using public transport with confidence instead of cars.

Actions – Maintain confidence in public transport

- Support any rail campaigns relating to social distancing
- Lead an information campaign about how to social distance when using and waiting for buses
- Through the York Quality Bus Partnership encourage bus operators to make changes to ticketing, schedules and vehicles to help deliver social distancing
- Explore options to protect and enhance bus priority routes so that buses can be kept out of any additional congestion caused by increased car use
- Continuing with previous projects to develop the public transport network (e.g. York Station frontage, Castle Gateway, York All Electric Bus Town)

Support the city's secondary centres

Although the city centre is the key driver of the economy, York's secondary centres also play important roles in the city's social and economic vibrancy. Large secondary high streets and centres such as Acomb and Haxby and out of town shopping centres at Vanguard, Monks Cross, Clifton Moor and the Designer Outlet will all need to apply the government guidance on Safer Public Places. Where the public spaces are the responsibility of third parties we will work with them to ensure that they understand and implement the appropriate measures. In secondary centres we will take the direct lead.

Secondary centres are well placed to benefit from the relaxing of restrictions as people are expected to look to shop local where they can easily travel safely by foot or bicycle. To facilitate this there will need to be increased cycle parking provision within easy access of shops and services, in addition to the measures to maintain confidence in public transport. It is not envisaged that subsidised or free car parking will be required as these areas are generally well served by low cost or free parking areas.

There are also opportunities to work with our local communities to create extended footstreet areas and public spaces where local businesses can adapt their operating models in response to social distancing and help them to become resilient and be part of the economic recovery.

Actions – Support the city’s secondary centres

- Implement the government’s Safer Public Places guidance in secondary centres in conjunction with other stakeholders and partners
- Explore options for extended footstreet areas and creating people focused environments
- Create increased public spaces that can be used by local businesses to adapt their operating models
- Increase secondary centres’ cycle parking
- Refine the current interventions at Bishopthorpe Road based on public feedback
- Ensure third parties implement the Safer Public Places guidance at out of town shopping centres

Implementation of the strategy

Many of the actions and interventions set out in this strategy will run for the duration of the one year period and potentially beyond – although all measures will need to be flexible and pragmatic and remain under review based on government guidance, local responses, and ongoing assessments of the outcomes of the interventions.

The implementation of the strategy will have two key strands – those elements which are intended to be in place throughout the COVID_19 response, and those that will be introduced or ended depending on the government alert level at any given time. This will provide a very clear and easy to use framework. Should the government announce a change in alert level then the appropriate measures can be implemented and communicated to the public. Any changes to restrictions within each alert level will be assessed and responded to in consultation with elected Members.

A number of the measures in the strategy required urgent implementation to ensure the city was ready for the reopening of non-essential retail on the 15 June. The following section sets out the measures that were in place for that date, and which different measures will be introduced or removed based on the government alert levels.

Priority measures that were implemented for the reopening of non-essential retail on the 15 June 2020

- A first phase extension of the city centre footstreets, with staffed barriers to assist the public (see Annex I)
- Identification of a second phase of city centre footstreet extensions (see Annex I)
- Implementation of a Circulation Management Plan for pedestrians
- Increased disabled parking provided at Monk Bar car park, with individual taxis providing personalised shuttle services in to the heart of the centre for those that need it
- Identification of constrained streets where queuing will be challenging, with a wraparound support service for businesses
- Guidance and support packs issued to businesses on how to reopen safely
- Public toilets reopened, with additional temporary toilets procured
- Launch of the Let's Be York campaign to provide information and support for all residents, visitors and businesses
- Bespoke city wide signage created, implemented and shared with all stakeholders and businesses to ensure a consistent, friendly and high quality standard

Implementation of the strategy based on government alert levels

The following table sets out when each element of the strategy will be in place under the government alert levels.

Action	Alert level				
	1	2	3	4	5
People focused city centre					
Implement the government's Safer Public Places guidance			✓	✓	✓
Create priority city centre cycle route	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Large scale city centre cycle parking points	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Extension of footstreets for use by local businesses		✓	✓	✓	✓
Create flexible areas of public space on Castle Car Park		✓	✓	✓	✓
Displaced blue badge parking concentrated in accessible point(s)		✓	✓	✓	✓
Accelerate feasibility work for city delivery hub models	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Keep left and one way walking routes in space constrained streets		✓	✓	✓	
One way walking route around the Bar Walls		✓	✓		
Prioritising active transport					
Invest in all P&R to also become Park & Cycle hubs	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Create two Park & Cycle super-sites		✓	✓	✓	
Free city centre parking for key workers					✓
Develop school drop-off strategies		✓	✓	✓	

Action	Alert level				
	1	2	3	4	5
A complimentary park > walk > visit strategy					
Incentivise visitor parking in car parks outside inner-ring road			✓		
Escalate implementation of Pay-On-Exit	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Promotional campaign to shop local in city centre markets			✓	✓	✓
Promotional campaign to safely visit York	✓	✓	✓		
Develop exit strategy to return to public transport	✓	✓			
Maintain confidence in public transport					
Support rail campaigns relating to social distancing			✓	✓	
Support bus operators deliver social distancing measures			✓	✓	
Lead campaign on social distancing on buses			✓	✓	
Protect and enhance priority bus routes		✓	✓	✓	✓
Continue with capital projects to enhance public transport	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Support the city's secondary centres					
Implement the government's Safer Public Places guidance			✓	✓	✓
Explore extending footstreets and people focused environments			✓	✓	✓
Create public spaces for use by local businesses		✓	✓	✓	✓
Increase secondary centres' cycle parking		✓	✓	✓	✓
Ensure out-of-town shopping applies Safer Public Places guidance			✓	✓	

Annex I – footstreets extended on 15 June and proposed future footstreet and highway interventions

