



# My City Centre Draft Vision

# Introduction

The My City Centre project establishes a 10 year strategic vision for the centre of York, which will be shared and owned by the council, partners, stakeholders and local communities. The vision has been shaped through a wide series of engagement exercises, designed to reach as broad an audience as possible, and sets out a series of objectives, priorities and aspirations for the centre, which will allow York city centre to adapt, grow and thrive.

The vision is bold and ambitious, with tangible outcomes in the short term and longer term aspirations for the future. To achieve the full ambition of the vision will require strong commitment of both the council and partners and through the securing of external resources and private investment. However, having a clear vision will leave the city best placed to secure any funding that becomes available.

Once approved and adopted the vision will be owned by our stakeholders and communities, and a delivery plan will be produced in partnership with those stakeholders setting out how the vision will be realised.



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## Core vision statement:

A city centre everybody wants to be a part of

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This 10 year vision for the city centre comes at a time of significant flux, where the impacts of the communications revolution, changing consumer behaviours, the Covid pandemic and climate change are combining to bring about unprecedented change. As these trends are at a national and global scale, the focus of the council and our partners has to be on how we respond, contribute and adapt at a local level. These changes also bring opportunities as well as challenges, but the key to maintaining the long term success is to create a thriving, flexible city centre that benefits from the positives and minimises the negative impacts. This is particularly important for York, where the city centre is a huge driver of our economy, and where vibrancy will be a determining factor in retaining and attracting not just visitors and businesses, but residents also, as quality of place rather than job location becomes more of a deciding factor in where people choose to live.

The determining factor in creating vibrancy and the ability of our city centres and high streets to adapt to these global changes is people. People create the noise, soul and life of a city, and crucially the captive audience for businesses to thrive. In order to support our local economy we must continue to support the vision of a city centre people want to visit, stay and enjoy at all times of the day and year. **People, or footfall, is the key to a successful place.** When footfall and vibrancy drop, towns and cities can enter a vicious circle where people are less likely to use them, fewer services and shops can be supported, vacancies rise and employment falls. Conversely, a vibrant and popular place will attract people and support shops and services for our residents. Clearly places can become too popular, but by influencing how and when the city centre is used, and adapting key spaces, we can manage this better and optimise the benefits for all, particularly our residents.

Our core premise is that 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.** York is an amazing place that people want to visit, and tourism is a key component of our economy. But first and foremost our city centre exists to serve the needs of our residents. By focusing our vision on ensuring the city centre is in the best place it can be for our residents and communities that live here, the visitors that support the economy and sustain our shops, markets, restaurant and jobs will follow.

The My City Centre Vision will create the environment for all of this to happen through eight key themes:

# My City Centre:

A vibrant, environmentally sustainable city centre, where a wide range of people want to spend time, live and work. A place where business thrives, sustainable communities grow, and a varied cultural and social life flourishes.

## 1. Family friendly city centre

- » A. Create exciting new play spaces in the city centre
- » B. Use open space for cultural & family activities
- » C. Encourage venues and spaces that are used by people of all ages
- » D. Improve toilet provision and facilities
- » E. Improve information on city events for residents
- » F. Provide more covered and indoor spaces to spend time in all weather
- » G. Support new experience based attractions in the centre

## 2. Events, experiences & sustainable investment in public spaces

- » A. Invest in public space, squares and our shopping areas
- » B. Greening the city centre
- » C. Spread the location of events better throughout the city's spaces
- » D. Focus the city's events programme across a wide range of offers that have broad & inclusive appeal
- » E. Improve digital & physical signposting of events
- » F. Make it simpler, cheaper and less disruptive to put on events in the city, and support more community led events
- » G. Explore opportunities to support and improve our thriving permanent and temporary markets with Make it York

## 3. An attractive city offer at all times

- » A. Support businesses and family-friendly activity in the early evening
- » B. Create a family friendly environment in the early evening, particularly midweek
- » C. Support outdoor eating and café culture in the city centre
- » D. Manage and minimise any issues caused by the important night time economy, including through the securing of purple flag status

## 4. Making tourism work for York

- » A. Develop a strategy with Make it York which ensures that the essential tourism sector is sustainable, and targets those visitors who respect our city
- » B. Allow visitors to make voluntary financial contributions which offset their impact and support our communities through a 'York Gift' scheme
- » C. Improve the quality of jobs in the tourism sector
- » D. Provide targeted priority measures for residents over visitors

# My City Centre:

A vibrant, environmentally sustainable city centre, where a wide range of people want to spend time, live and work. A place where business thrives, sustainable communities grow, and a varied cultural and social life flourishes.

## 5. Embracing our riversides

- » A. Better celebrate the historic, cultural and environmental benefits of our two rivers, and provide riverside spaces and links for local communities
- » B. Lobby and bid for government funding to enable the creation of new riverside walkways at Coney Street and Castle Gateway, and progress a new Ouse footbridge
- » C. Improve river corridors as sustainable travel routes to and through the centre
- » D. Promote living well with water to manage flooding impacts & ensure river safety

## 6. A safe city centre community, which is welcoming to all

- » A. Create a city centre where residents can live in successful confident communities
- » B. Improve services, open spaces and facilities for residents
- » C. Improve the safety of the city centre for all users
- » D. Improve accessibility through a wide range of measures including more dropped kerbs, improved surfaces and seating and better facilities for disabled people
- » E. Embed dementia and autism friendly standards into public spaces
- » F. Achieve World Health Organisation charter status for age friendly city business
- » G. Create a welcoming and accepting city centre for all

## 7. Thriving businesses and no empty buildings

- » A. Ensure city centre businesses are able to thrive & adapt through a supportive regulatory environment & creating a city centre people want to visit
- » B. Support businesses to improve operational sustainability
- » C. Support our independent businesses
- » D. Facilitate temporary uses in empty buildings & spaces through business rates and business support where possible, and by lobbying government for a flexible & reformed rates system
- » E. Encourage re-use of the under-used upper floors of buildings through planning support and business rates approach
- » F. Support tours and experiences to explore historic empty buildings

## 8. Celebrating heritage and making modern history

- » A. Recognise the huge changes facing city centres, and the role of planning in allowing buildings to adapt for modern uses
- » B. Support the re-use and re-purposing of historic buildings and spaces to avoid them becoming redundant or under-used
- » C. Provide more planning flexibility for the types of uses that most benefit residents and the city
- » D. Provide more early support for planning applications.
- » E. Explore an interactive 'living heritage' app to allow the public to engage live with the historic

## I. Family friendly city centre

### Core Principles:

Families are a key part 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, some local residents use it less than they would like to. The reasons for this range from affordability, a lack of suitable facilities and attractions, and an unwelcoming atmosphere at certain times. Our proposed response set out below delivers more to attract people of all ages, including local families into the centre, as well as improving facilities. This will in turn also benefit visitors to the centre. Managing and improving behaviours at busy times is also addressed in themes 3, 4 and 6.

### A. Create exciting new play spaces in the city centre

**IA: Play and Active Leisure:** The city centre contains no children's play spaces, with Rowntree Park, Navigation Road, Haxby Road and Lower Priory St being the nearest facilities. There are opportunities to work with partners to integrate dynamic innovative play spaces within the city's existing open space and public realm. This doesn't have to mean traditional playgrounds. Spaces could be designed to use existing buildings, and play off the city's unique heritage character. Smaller play-spaces spread across the centre could spread benefits and impacts. Key development and regeneration sites could be designed with integrated play, and planning contributions could help to fund them elsewhere. Appropriate active leisure uses such as outdoor table tennis and small courts could also be incorporated. Spaces would be designed to minimise potential misuse in the evening, and designed and located to avoid impact on residential areas.



## B. Use open space for cultural & family activities

**IB: Cultural and Family Activity in Open Spaces:** Bringing open spaces to life through cultural activity already happens in events such as Jorvik, and the Railway Museum's plans for York Central will set an exciting benchmark which could be replicated elsewhere to make best use of space, and improve learning outcomes. The city fabric is a fantastic backdrop to draw more people into events, enrich with activity and celebrate diversity (whilst also preserving space for quiet contemplation in the city). We will work with cultural partners to deliver more of this activity (particularly at quiet times – see 3B) and make sure that spaces have the infrastructure to allow it to happen. We can explore the use of city spaces to showcase outdoor art, and draw on the city's UNESCO creative arts status.

## C. Encourage venues and spaces that are used by people of all ages

**IC: Venues and Spaces for all Ages:** Innovative multi-purpose community spaces have a broad inter-generational appeal due to the range of services they offer, community interest, and diversity. Venues such as Spark:York have successfully brought this approach to the city centre and we will encourage more of these types of spaces in the centre, and ensure they are accessible to all.

## D. Improve toilet provision and facilities

**ID: Improve Toilets and Facilities:** Toilets are essential facilities, and a lack of appropriate provision (including fully accessible toilets and those with changing facilities) can prevent some from using the centre. We will undertake a review of provision across all sectors to ensure there are clearly signed fit-for-purpose, publicly available facilities in the city centre at all appropriate times. We will work with public and private partners, as well as reviewing our own assets in the city centre area, and seek funding such as through the current 'Changing Places' programme. Provision of other family friendly facilities such as more accessible parking, rest spaces, changing and breastfeeding facilities, and buggy parking can also be explored further.

## E. Improve information on city events for residents

**IE: Improve Event Information:** Whilst there are many providers of information on events and activities for families in the centre, local families feel that this information be improved to a wider audience. We will explore ways to work with existing and new partners to improve the availability of information and promote events, both online and physically, and will signpost to these resources from our own websites and online media presence. This can include both advance and 'on the day' information, and be provided in multiple formats, also including information around accessibility for those with disabilities. We can design the approach to better target residents, and those who live in a wider area but use the city (such as commuters etc.)

## F. Provide more covered and indoor spaces to spend time in all weather

**IF: Covered & Indoor Spaces:** The open spaces and parks of the city are well used through the summer months, but there are limited spaces for families to get out of winter weather when using the centre. Facilities such as Sheffield's Winter Gardens, covered markets, food courts and arcades prove popular elsewhere, and could increase footfall and activity. We will explore ways to make this type of provision (including in connection with **IA**) in a way which is sensitive to York's historic context.

## G. Support new experience based attractions in the centre

**IG: Experience Based Attractions:** Experience-based attractions appeal across the generations and have more recently found their place amongst the high street. Escape rooms, axe-throwing, mini-golf and more are now a regular feature of the city centre. We will support and encourage more of these uses, particularly where they provide facilities that are attractive for residents as well as visitors. Attractions which focus on the city's historic assets, cultural activity, creative arts (including UNESCO status) or promote diversity as part of their offer will be particularly encouraged.

## 2. Events, experiences & sustainable investment in public spaces

### Core Principles:

The city's squares and streets frame an astonishing wealth of heritage and activity, but poor quality pavements and spaces are in need of improvement in many places. Events are and will continue to be a key part of York's character and identity, an attractor of visits to the centre, and driver of economic activity. However they can also be disruptive at times due to their location and are perceived to target visitors and niche interests, with a need to target residents and create a broader appeal. Parts of Shambles Market have enjoyed a resurgence over the pandemic, with the 'shop local' movement, and trialling of dining and events in the evening. We need to explore how markets can continue to improve and evolve with Make it York.

### A. Invest in Public Space squares and our secondary shopping areas

**2A: Invest in Public Space:** Investing in well-designed new and improved spaces to create world class public realm would enhance footfall and spend (encouraging private investment), create flexible spaces better able to accommodate a range of activities, and improve the setting of our unique heritage. Amenity, environmental resilience and accessibility (see **6C**) should be at the fore in designing spaces. Spaces can also be designed to complement the changing high street uses, and incorporate more permanent open air seating.

### B. Greening the city

**2B: Greening the City:** The city centre has few green open spaces, but those it has are cherished and well used. Green space offers opportunities for quiet contemplation, community activity, leisure and active travel, as well as having environmental importance in promoting biodiversity, better managing water, solar shading and carbon sequestration. We will incorporate green spaces wherever appropriate as part of the investment in public spaces set out at 2A, and will explore supporting the provision of a network of publically accessible green rooves as part of development proposals within the city.

## C. Spread the location of events better throughout the city's spaces

**2C: Spreading Events throughout the City:** Most large events are currently concentrated in Parliament St, which can cause disruption to businesses, residents and visitors. Spreading events through the city, and having trail-based approaches can reduce impacts, whilst spreading the benefits of more managed footfall to more businesses. Some existing city buildings are not in use for large portions of time and could play a role, and exciting new spaces are proposed at the Castle and Eye of York, York Central, and new and improved spaces in the Minster Neighbourhood Plan. Ensuring the infrastructure to facilitate events is designed in to these spaces will mean it is easier and cheaper for them to take place at all times of the year.

## D. Focus the events programme across a wide range of offers that have broad and inclusive appeal

**2D: Refocus the Events Programme:** Whilst events have always been intended to appeal to both visitors and residents, there is a broad perception in feedback that they are often aimed at tourists. The pandemic has also brought about the loss of several popular events from the city's programme. Working with partners, we will seek to develop a more inclusive events programme, with a broader appeal (alongside specific interests), and a focus on events which capture the imagination of local residents and celebrate diversity. Medium sized live music venues within the city centre will be very strongly supported.

## E. Improve the digital and physical signposting of events

**2E: Signposting Events:** Feedback from local residents points to poor information on events in the City, so we will explore improving both physical advertising and online information (see IE also).



## F. Make it simpler, cheaper and less disruptive to put on events in the city, and support more community led events

**2F: Simplifying Event Operation & Community-Led Events:** As York's spaces have not necessarily been designed specifically for events, these can take longer to set up, be more resource intensive to manage, and costly to operate. This results in more disruption, restricts operators, and reduces choice affordability and diversity of events. Newly designed spaces can be properly configured for events, and appropriate infrastructure (loading, services etc.) provided. Existing spaces can be improved in terms of layout and fixed services to allow events to take place. Provision of permanent structures such as canopies in a sensitive and appropriate manner will also be explored.

Providing spaces in this way could allow more grass-roots community-led events which would provide more for local residents and encourage social interaction, sustainability and cultural experiences. Partners could promote these opportunities to the community, manage an overall programme of these events, and provide logistical and other support to these groups.

## G. Explore opportunities to support and improve our thriving permanent and temporary markets with Make it York

**2G: Support & Improve Our Markets:** Shambles market is popular with both residents and visitors and operates 7 days a week. The pandemic served to highlight the importance of the market for residents buying groceries, and temporarily extending operating hours to the evening for food drink and events also proved popular. However Covid also served to highlight the congested space, and traders having to take stock in and out daily can be disruptive. Working with Make it York and traders, we can explore opportunities to further improve the market, with the objectives of increasing popularity, vibrancy, hours of operation and flexibility of the space, as well as making markets simpler and more efficient to operate. An affordable offer for residents should form part of the markets ongoing appeal, and enhance its role as a small business incubator.



### 3. An attractive city offer at all times

#### Core Principles:

Working patterns have changed dramatically through the pandemic and have yet to settle, the absence of city workers has been keenly felt by businesses in the centre throughout this period, and many have adapted operating models in response - some permanently. The city has also traditionally been very busy at the weekend, with the behaviour of some visitors identified by some as stopping them using the centre at these times. Our ambition is to manage the city better at these busy 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. Supporting businesses and family-friendly activity in the early evening activity

**3A: Support the Early Evening Economy:** With more remote working, spend from workers at lunchtimes and post work will reduce, and with the high street experience changing, more leisure based uses are being identified in the city. We are keen to support both leisure and retail, alongside cultural attractions, to grow their offer in the early evening to provide a family-friendly and attractive offer for residents and visitors.

#### B. Create a family friendly environment in the early evening, particularly midweek

**3B: Vibrant Midweek Early Evening:** This has traditionally been a quieter time in the City, and presents an opportunity to grow the centre's offer with a range of activities, attractions and a café culture as part of a mixed retail and leisure offer. Projects which help deliver theme 1 Family Friendly objectives would be particularly supported. Incentives for local residents (see action 4D) could be targeted to this time to optimise impact.

### C. Support outdoor eating and café culture in the city centre

**3C: Outdoor Eating & Drinking:** The expansion of pavement cafés have been an essential part of the sector's response to lockdown. We will develop a permanent approach to outdoor eating & Café culture which can create a vibrant atmosphere whilst managing accessibility and amenity impacts, and maintaining a high quality city centre environment.



### D. Manage and minimise issues created by the important night time economy, including through the securing of purple flag status

**3D: Night Time Economy Impacts:** Many people fed back that the city can be unwelcoming at times in the evening and weekends as groups enjoy our bars and pubs. In the compact city centre, these behaviours prevent some from visiting. We will strengthen the work of multi-agency safety partnerships to better manage behaviours on the ground, and implement recommendations flowing from the current Purple Flag application. We will explore ways to improve city spaces and connections to reduce impacts, and (aligned with action **4A**) focus our tourism messaging on considerate and positive behaviours when visiting our city.

## 4. Making tourism work for York

### Core Principles:

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 residents 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, to bring greater benefits and reduce some of the negative impacts caused by a minority who don't respect our city.

### A. Develop a strategy with Make it York which ensures that the essential tourism sector is sustainable, and targets those visitors who respect our city

**4A: Sustainable Tourism Strategy:** Working with Make it York we would develop a tourism strategy with associated marketing and promotion plan which seeks to maintain and grow pre-pandemic volumes of tourism but improves the benefits and reduces any negative impacts. This could be by attracting visitors who would stay longer, have more cultural emphasis to their trips, enjoy the wider region, and promote the city as a family destination.

### B. Allow visitors to make voluntary financial contributions which offset their impact and support our communities through a 'York Gift' scheme

**4B: York Gift Scheme:** Irrespective of the sustainable tourism strategy at 4A, trips to the city will still have impacts on the fabric, environment and amenity of the City for residents. We will explore a sensitive package of voluntary measures to allow visitors to contribute financially to their impacts. This could range from simple tap and pay at spaces and attractions, or voluntary contributions in bars and restaurants). Funds could be used to deliver measures set out in this vision, to maintain the city, to provide facilities for residents, or to support employees in the tourism sector.

## C. Improve the quality of jobs in the tourism sector

**4C: Improve Tourism Employment:** Working with operators in the sector we could seek to directly support those who work in tourism, through a coordinated set of actions to improve pay, supporting the key components of the good business charter, or coordinated skills and employability training for those working in tourism.

## D. Provide targeted priority measures for residents over visitors

**4D: Resident priority:** We will explore ways to make accessing the city centre's facilities amenities and businesses more affordable and/or accessible for residents of the city or local area in comparison to visitors from further afield. This could be through measures such as reduced transport costs, resident business loyalty schemes (including reinvention of the York Card), or priority access to services and facilities.



## 5. Embracing our riversides

### Core Principles:

The Ouse and Foss are a defining characteristic of the city centre, being a determining factor in the founding of the city, and have had a formative influence on the urban form throughout its development. The city's use of the rivers has changed over time from trade and commerce and industry to modern day leisure, and climate change is affecting how the rivers are managed and interact with the city. The city centre turns its back on the rivers and presents a huge lost opportunity to celebrate and enjoy these spaces. Our ambition is to redefine the 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.

### A. Better celebrate the historic, cultural and environmental benefits of our two rivers, and provide riverside spaces and links for local communities

**5A: Celebrate Our Rivers:** We can actively pursue, and require private developments to establish, a better relationship with the rivers, and establish new and improved amenity spaces & access, better views & building settings, green spaces, safer environments and more opportunities for recreation & leisure.

### B. Lobby and bid for government funding to enable the creation of new riverside walkways at Coney Street and Castle Gateway, and progress a new Ouse footbridge

**5B: Create New Connections:** We will deliver a new riverside park and pedestrian cycle bridge over the Foss as part of the Castle Gateway scheme, and support the walkway project between City Screen and Ouse Bridge as part of the proposed Riverside Quarter development on Coney Street. We will also continue to explore plans for a pedestrian bridge over the Ouse at North Street Gardens and City Screen. All of these projects would be delivered with world class new and improved open space and facilities, and would provide sustainable transport improvements.

## C. Improve the river corridors as sustainable travel routes to and through the centre

**5C: River Corridors for Sustainable Travel:** We can look beyond the city centre to improve the river corridors and encourage walking, cycling and other active transport, for example those being made as part of the York Central scheme. Safe, attractive and direct routes will connect to and through the city centre.

## D. Promote living well with water to manage flooding impacts & ensure river safety

**5D: Living well with water:** We will continue to work with partners, including the Environment Agency, police and Canal and Rivers Trust to embed the infrastructures and behaviours which can best manage flooding and river safety. We can explore improving the environmental condition of the rivers, including through working with community and voluntary organisations.



## 6. A safe city centre community, which is welcoming to all

### Core Principles:

The city centre is home to around 8,000 people. As sustainable city living continues to be supported and 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 centre is a safe, welcoming and accessible space, to ensure its continued vibrancy.



### A. Create a city centre where residents can live in successful and confident communities

**6A: Successful, Confident City Centre Communities:** New sustainable city living opportunities will be supported and encouraged, and housing will be directly developed by the council and partners. Affordable housing requirements will help to ensure diversity and vibrancy of city communities, and a mixture of housing to meet the needs of all generations will be promoted – from families to young professionals and older people. We will also explore opportunities to provide new community facilities and services in the centre as mixed-uses become more viable.

### B. Improve services, open spaces and facilities for residents

**6B: Services, Open Spaces & Facilities:** These are essential components of any successful community, but challenging to provide in the centre where space is constrained and at a premium. We can invest in place (see 2A) to make existing spaces fit for purpose, attractive, and more flexible and multi-functional. We are creating exciting new city spaces in the Castle Gateway, York Central and regeneration schemes such as the Riverside Quarter (see 5B), which can also provide high quality new public open spaces like the proposed riverside walkway. A range of services were highlighted in engagement as being beneficial to local and visiting communities, with free to use activities (such as museums and libraries), health services and food shops receiving broadest support. We can support proposals for these uses, and explore business rates incentives to encourage new provision (see more detail at 7B & C).

## C. Improve the safety of the city centre for all users

**6C: Improving City Centre Safety:** A city centre that is safe for all users, and perceived as such, will encourage more people to visit, and improve the user experience. Engagement highlighted the safety concerns of some, particularly in the evening and for women. Working with partners and city centre users, we will support development of the Women's Night Safety Charter planned with Safer York, undertake an audit of city centre spaces to identify improvements, embed better standards of design in new and improved spaces, and look to facilitate a city wide network of 'safe spaces' for young people to rely on.

## D. Improve accessibility through a wide range of measures including more dropped kerbs, improved surfaces and seating, and better facilities for disabled people

**6D: City Centre Accessibility:** The quality of surface treatments across the city is highlighted in engagement as an issue for many, particularly those with mobility issues. Parliament Street, Pavement, Colliergate and Goodramgate were identified particularly in feedback as having poor surfaces. As part of investing in public space (2A) we can improve surfaces in the city, provide dropped kerbs (and raised crossings/ level surfaces) where required and appropriate, and deliver new facilities such as seating and refuges. These measures would enhance the city's physical appearance and accessibility. These and other improvements are set out in the Strategic Review of City Centre Access. Interventions here (and in 6E & 6F) would be co-designed through engagement with the specific communities of interest, and online mapping of city spaces to make information available on specific aspects is to be explored.

## E. Embed dementia & Autism friendly standards into spaces

**6E: Dementia & Autism Friendly City:** As a complex historic city, York can be challenging to navigate for the neuro-diverse and those with dementia and autism. Measures related to wayfinding, space legibility and distinctiveness can all help make friendlier spaces, and safe spaces as referenced at 6C can help. Building on the work of the York Dementia Action Alliance, we can undertake an audit of the city centre to recommend improvements, and embed dementia and autism friendly standards into all new and improved public spaces.

## F. Achieve World Health organisation charter status for age friendly city business

**6F: Age Friendly City:** The council is already working towards 'Age Friendly' status, using the World Health Organisation's 'Age Friendly Statements' to check how we are currently performing. Actions set out elsewhere in the vision (6C, 1C & 1D in particular) would help to make the centre a more Age Friendly place, and the Strategic Review of City Centre Access considers the needs of specific age related communities of interest. We can also ensure that all investment in space (2A) is designed to age friendly standards and best practices.

## G. Create a welcoming and accepting city centre for all

**6G: Welcoming & Accepting City:** We want York to be a place which is welcoming and accepting to all, and we will benefit from this by being more vibrant, culturally rich and diverse. We can help achieve this objective through our marketing and branding approaches (4A), and by reflecting these values in our physical city centre improvements wherever possible (for example street art at 3D).

## 7. Thriving businesses and no empty buildings

### Core Principles:

The nature of 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-uses can co-exist, innovation and growth can happen, and 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 we create an environment that is flexible, facilitative and responsive, whilst maintaining control over what is important to the city and its communities.

### A. Ensure city centre businesses are able to thrive & adapt through a supportive regulatory environment & creating a city centre people want to visit

**7A: Thriving Businesses:** The starting point for this vision is an acceptance that it cannot influence national change, but rather must create the environment for local business to thrive and adapt through supporting footfall (themes 1 to 6), and streamlining the process that let business and buildings adapt (2E, 3C, themes 7 & 8). Business support will be provided alongside this through the Council's economic development team to more directly support growth & adaptation, with an emphasis on sustainable and green jobs, and local industries.



## **B. Support businesses to improve their operational environmental sustainability**

**7B: Improve the Environmental Sustainability of Businesses:** Working with partners such as York BID and the business community, we can explore ways for businesses in the city centre to improve the environmental sustainability of their business operations, targeting high impact changes and those which most benefit from collective action. We can support and facilitate any changes identified through securing funding for and delivering overarching infrastructure proposals, disseminating best practice, marketing and communicating the approaches to a broader audience, exploring collective purchasing to reduce cost, exploring funding options, and brokering approaches with landlords where they are remote or disengaged.

## **C. Support our independent businesses**

**7C: Supporting the Independent Sector:** York's independent businesses are highly valued by residents and a key part of the city's draw for visitors, establishing a unique character and offer to the centre, and differentiating it from other towns and cities. The UNESCO creative city designation is a key part of this, and the city has a thriving creatives sector who have specific space requirements themselves. The indie sectors contribute significantly to the local economy, with returns also more likely to be reinvested locally, and the business community passionate about the city and its future. Working with key partners such as Indie York, we will explore the best ways to further support this sector, and we will encourage development proposals which provide the types of floor space most suited to this sector.

## **D. Facilitate temporary uses in empty buildings & spaces through business rates and business support where possible, and by lobbying government for a flexible & reformed rates system**

**7D: Temporary Uses:** Temporary meanwhile or 'pop-up' use of buildings and spaces helps to drive vibrancy and economic activity, whilst making more efficient and attractive use of otherwise empty space. Business rates costs and organisational capacity can restrict businesses from operating temporary uses, so we will explore providing tailored business support to this activity, and establishing a fund to offer business rates relief to these operations (business rates following the outcome of the Government review in autumn).

## E. Encourage re-use of the under-used upper floors of buildings through planning support and business rates approach

**7E: Upper floors:** Floors above commercial units are significantly underused, dominated by storage for retail units and empty space. Introducing different and mixed uses to the centre will allow more of this space to be actively used, but conversions of these buildings are complex. We will explore offering a planning clinic to provide advice (where planning was a requirement – see **8C** for more detail), and explore business rates reliefs for occupation (subject to autumn review).

## F. Support tours and experiences to explore historic empty buildings

**7F: Tours & Experiences:** Bringing people into empty spaces through tours and experiences could both enrich cultural and experience based activity and make better use of space. There may also be opportunities in this respect with occupied buildings. We will promote this opportunity to landowners, and include tour providers in the offer of business support at **7D**.



## 8. Celebrating heritage and making modern history

### Core Principles:

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 change, 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.



### A. Recognise the huge changes facing city centres, and the role of planning in allowing buildings to adapt for modern uses

**8A: Planning & Change:** Accelerated by communications technology, the scale, nature and in particular the pace of change currently underway in our city's and highstreets is unprecedented. Our spaces and buildings must respond to this to ensure that they remain in active and sustainable use, and in an ever more competitive world, those least responsive cities will be left behind. These issues should be acknowledged by planning as a Material Consideration to be weighed in the balance in the determination of relevant planning applications within the centre.

### B. Support the re-use and re-purposing of historic buildings and spaces to avoid them becoming redundant or under-used

**8B: Re-use of Historic Buildings:** Historic buildings are costlier and more complex to maintain and adapt (though there can be an important 'heritage dividend' which sees additional value applied to well used and presented historic spaces). To allow investment to take place, commercially productive uses must be found for their spaces. The government has allowed greater flexibility around change of use through 'Permitted Development rights'. Whilst issues with an overly broad approach on this has been identified locally, the re-use and re-purposing of historic buildings and spaces is recognised as a positive to avoid them becoming redundant or under-used. We will also prepare Supplementary Planning Guidance to give greater clarity to landowners on the use of heritage buildings, and in particular sustainable and green technologies in historic buildings.

## C. Provide more planning flexibility for the type of uses that will most benefit residents and the city

**8C: Planning Flexibility for Beneficial Uses:** Where planning permission is still needed to change the use of a historic building, and less than substantial harm is proposed, we will explore a policy which permits greater flexibility for schemes or uses which include those uses that are most beneficial to our communities, for example affordable housing. We will explore further in our delivery plan the establishment of a hierarchy of most beneficial uses to support decision making and influence scheme development, within the parameters set already by the Local Plan.

## D. Provide more early support for planning applications

**8D: Pre-Application Support:** Guidance and advice at a formative 'pre-application' stage of working up plans for buildings can save abortive costs and time. Smaller conversions are generally more complex and time consuming with a higher cost per square metre than larger ones – landowners for smaller schemes also generally have fewer resources at their disposal than those for larger schemes. We can explore establishing a planning clinic to help shape small-scale historic building conversion projects in the city centre (prior to planning applications being produced. This could help to streamline and facilitate the process of change in the historic environment.

## E. Explore an interactive 'living heritage' app to allow the public to engage live with the historic city around them

**8E: Living Heritage App:** Working with partner organisations and the local digital media economy we could explore the development of an application for the public to engage with the historic city around them in real time on their mobile devices as they navigate the centre. This could allow greater interpretation and engagement with the historic city, driving increased footfall (and contributing to cultural tourism objectives at **4A**, and family friendliness at theme 1), and enriching the visitor and public experience. It could be an additional platform to share the vast array of information held by stakeholders and community organisations, and could include a commons platform for individuals to add their own stories and experiences. Users could filter the information for key phrases or characteristics to generate their own walking tours of the City. The app could also provide links to other local information services.