

# *future* **FRONT STREET**

THE FUTURE OF ACOMB FRONT STREET



CITY OF  
**YORK**  
COUNCIL



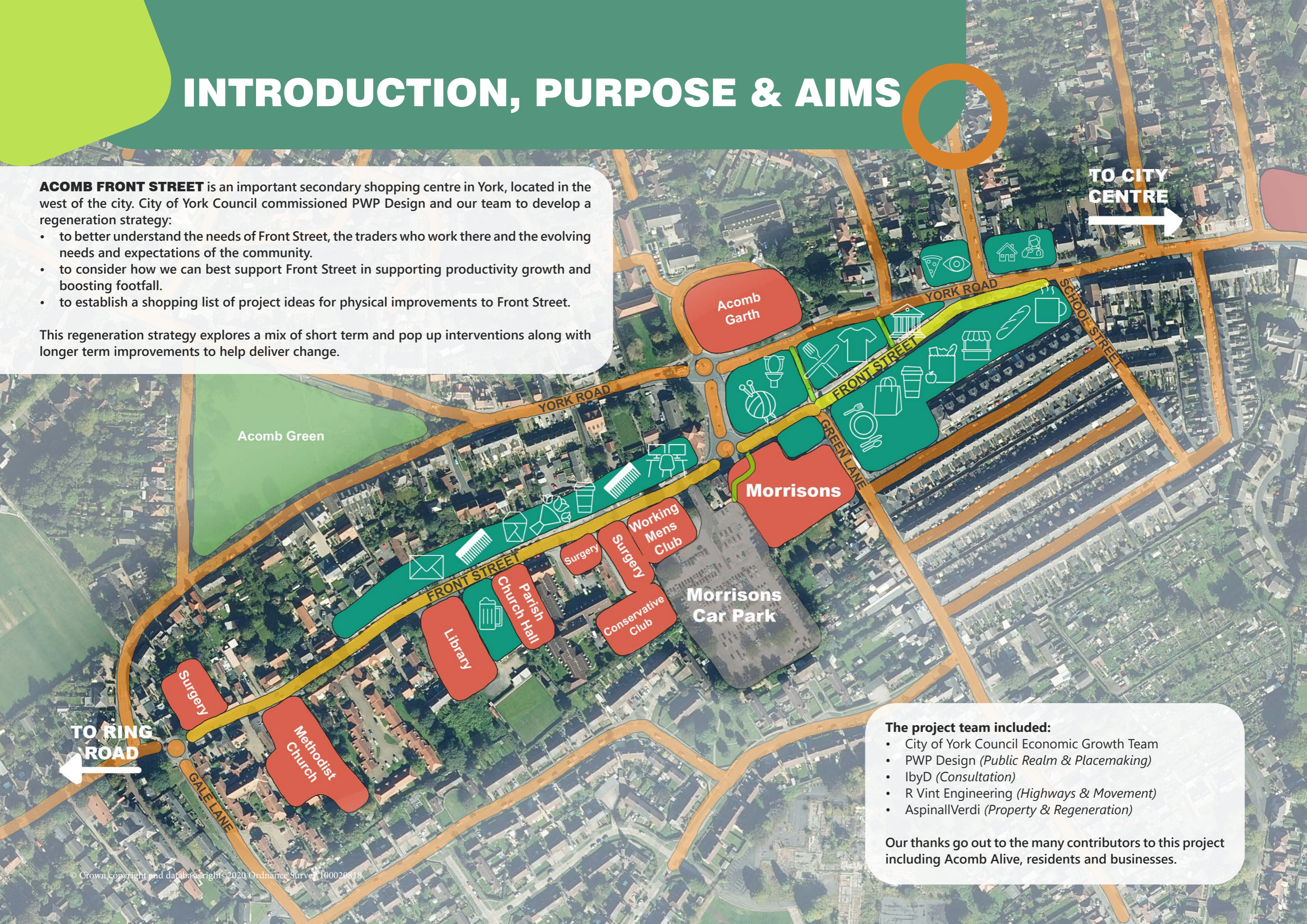
JUNE 2021  
REV 01

# INTRODUCTION, PURPOSE & AIMS

**ACOMB FRONT STREET** is an important secondary shopping centre in York, located in the west of the city. City of York Council commissioned PWP Design and our team to develop a regeneration strategy:

- to better understand the needs of Front Street, the traders who work there and the evolving needs and expectations of the community.
- to consider how we can best support Front Street in supporting productivity growth and boosting footfall.
- to establish a shopping list of project ideas for physical improvements to Front Street.

This regeneration strategy explores a mix of short term and pop up interventions along with longer term improvements to help deliver change.



## The project team included:

- City of York Council Economic Growth Team
- PWP Design (*Public Realm & Placemaking*)
- IbyD (*Consultation*)
- R Vint Engineering (*Highways & Movement*)
- AspinallVerdi (*Property & Regeneration*)

Our thanks go out to the many contributors to this project including Acomb Alive, residents and businesses.

# FRONT STREET TODAY

The largest of all the Wards in York, Acomb is situated to the west of the City Centre and has grown from a former farming village into a large suburb with over 22,000 residents. Dating back to the Domesday Book, Acomb grew to accommodate increasing numbers of workers in various manufacturing industries and is now a thriving community with several schools and sports clubs. Acomb is designated a secondary shopping area in the Local Plan and activity is centred around Front Street, which comprises a mixture of local independents, national retailers, bank branches, professional services, local services community buildings, churches and a supermarket.

Front Street features two distinctive main areas:

- A** A semi pedestrianised precinct located off York Road.
- B** A traditional high street between Green Lane and Gale Lane (which is located within Acomb Conservation Area).

A roundabout, Morrisons supermarket and its car park sit between the two areas.



High streets are struggling to contend with a number of national challenges including the increasing pressures of online shopping, out of town retail parks and decreasing footfall. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a huge impact on our communities and businesses and the pace of change for our high streets has accelerated. There is an urgent need to re-imagine and adapt high streets to create places that will thrive.

COVID-19 has changed the way we perceive and use high streets and this is set to continue. Our high streets have shown innovation and fast action to react to the changing restrictions. People have adapted to stay local, work local and shop local, supporting local businesses, their community and environment. Within this context there may be opportunity to deliver the change of direction and reinvention that high streets have needed for many years, creating safe, welcoming, flexible, community focused destinations.

# WHAT YOU TOLD US ABOUT FRONT STREET

See appendix for full report.

## CONSULTATION

The Acomb Front Street consultation was intended to engage both residents and the business community, in order to obtain their views about any potential changes to the area. A mixed-method survey of residents and businesses was used, which was available online and in paper-based formats. Uptake and engagement in the process was high providing a significant body of information to help guide and shape this regeneration strategy.

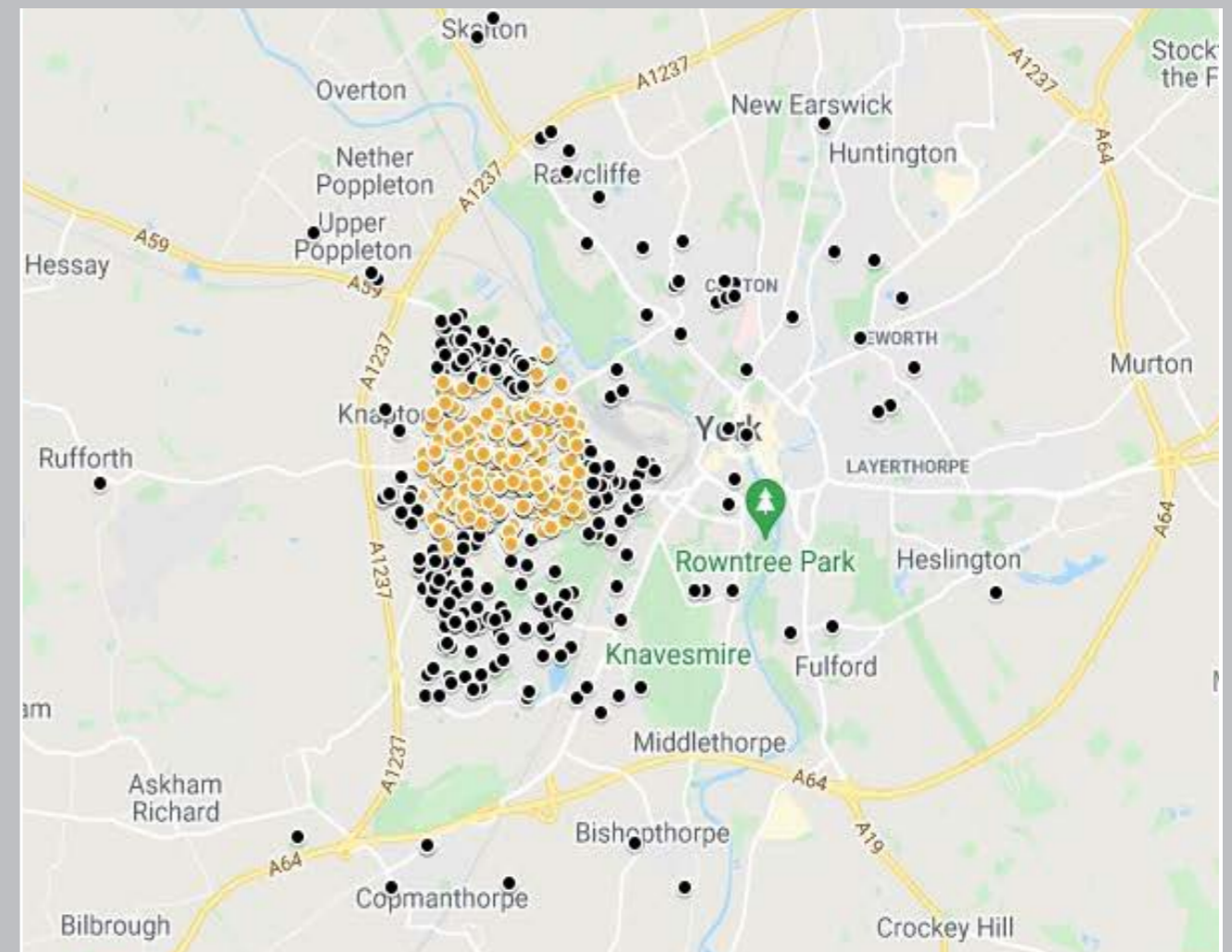
## RESIDENTS & SHOPPERS SURVEY METHODOLOGY

- An approximate 'catchment area' around Front Street was defined for fieldwork, and paper questionnaires were distributed in this area by a small team of lbyD fieldwork staff. Staff called on residents in their own homes, explained the purpose of the research, sought residents' agreement to complete the questionnaire and then called back at an agreed time to collect it. Precautionary measures, in line with industry guidance, were used to protect respondents from COVID-19 infection.
- Fieldwork staff received an enthusiastic response, with residents' keen to share their views. Due to the good response and very low refusal rate, most fieldwork was conducted in the area closest to Front Street, with some in the other areas.
- The survey was also available to complete online as a self-completion questionnaire. This online survey was promoted by City of York Council on its website and social media platforms.
- For the residents' and shoppers survey, a final sample of 1,261 questionnaires was achieved, with 515 paper questionnaires completed and 747 questionnaires completed online. 891 respondents lived within the defined catchment area and 371 used Front Street but lived outside of the 'catchment area'.

## BUSINESS SURVEY METHODOLOGY

- 86 business on, or adjoining, Front Street were identified for the research and were visited by a team of lbyD fieldwork staff. Where the business was open, team members introduced themselves, described the purpose of the research and sought agreement to complete the questionnaire. Fieldwork staff then arranged to call back to collect the paper questionnaire at an agreed time, or provided a freepost so the questionnaire could be returned by post. Businesses were also given the option to complete an online version of the survey.

- If the business was closed, the team members posted the questionnaire through the door, together with an accompanying pack containing a letter to explain the purpose of the research and asking the business to take part, and a freepost envelope to return the completed questionnaire in. The letter also contained the link to the online version of the survey.
- Precautionary measures were again used to protect respondents from COVID-19.
- The online version of the survey was also promoted by City of York Council on its website and social media platforms. Acomb Alive also helped promote the survey to local businesses.
- For the business survey, a final sample of 32 questionnaires was achieved.



Orange = residents , black = shoppers

## SURVEY RESULTS

### Use of Front Street and changes as a result of COVID-19

- Front Street was most frequently used for shopping, with 90% of respondents to the residents and shoppers survey using the street at least monthly for shopping in the year before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. A quarter or more used Front Street at least monthly to buy take-aways, go to cafes and go to the library.
- 84% of respondents had changed the way they shopped since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, with 57% shopping more online, 54% shopping more locally and 12% going somewhere different to shop. A third were using Front Street more since the start of the pandemic, while 32% were using Front Street less.

### What people think of Front Street now

- 43% of residents and shoppers would speak positively about Front Street, 34% would speak neutrally and 23% would speak critically.
- The Greengrocers, the variety of shops and that it is close by and convenient were the 3 highest ranked things that residents and shoppers thought were best about Front Street. The community, the variety of shops, that it is close by and convenient and parking were the highest ranked things that businesses thought were best about Front Street.
- Charity shops, bookmakers and the unattractive or rundown appearance were the highest ranked things that residents and shoppers thought were worst about Front Street. The unattractive or rundown appearance, anti-social behaviour and uneven pavement were the highest ranked things that businesses thought were worst about Front Street.
- The level of street lighting, the availability of street furniture and the range of shops in the gated precinct area of Front Street were rated as very or fairly good by 40% or more of residents and shoppers and by 40% or more of businesses.
- The condition of the buildings, attractiveness of the area overall and appearance of the signs on business and shops in the non-gated area of Front Street were rated as very or fairly good by 40% or more of residents and shoppers and by 50% or more of businesses.

### What needs to change?

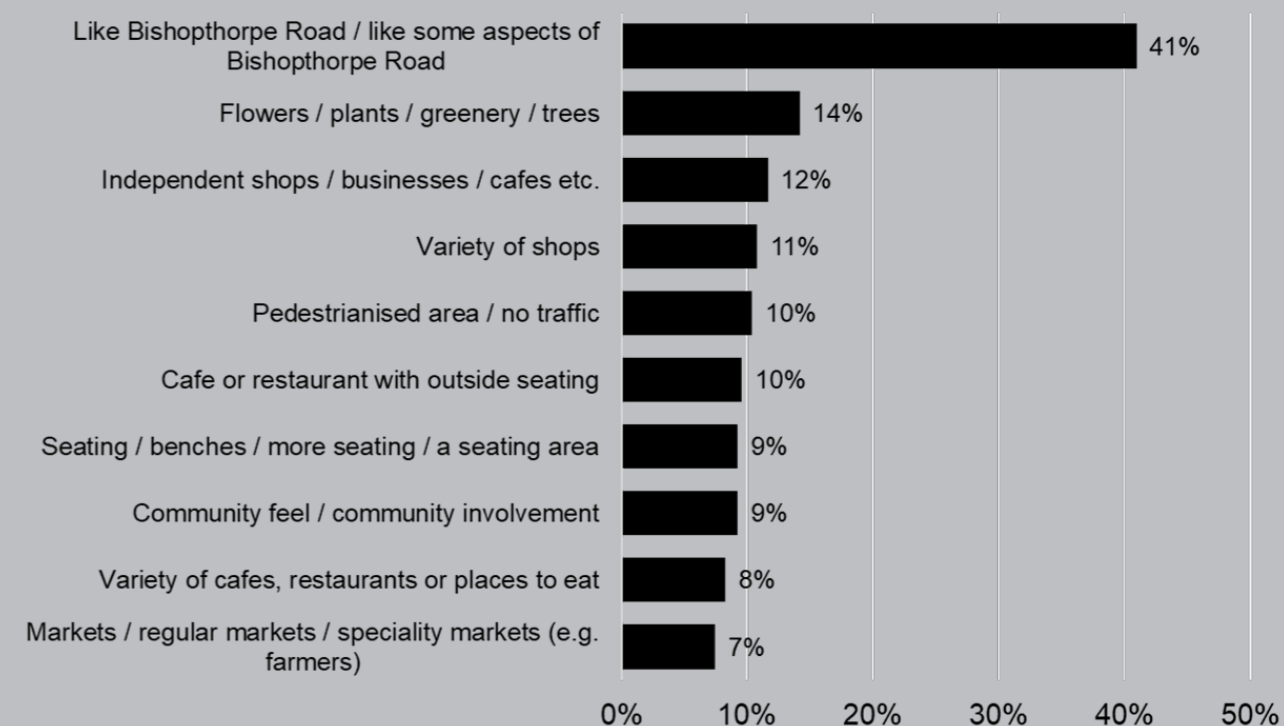
- 59% of residents and shoppers and 45% of businesses thought parking restrictions on Front Street are fine as they are. Businesses were more likely to think parking should be allowed at all times, with 8% of residents and shoppers and 23% of businesses thinking that parking restrictions should be completely lifted.
- 73% of business thought that there would be no impact on their business if the gates were always shut and 61% thought that there would be no impact if the gates were always open. Of the businesses that were located in gated precinct area, 78% would like to be able to 'spill out' their business onto the paved area in front of the shops.
- More choice or variety of shops, more activities, more choice of food or drink during the day and more plants, trees or flower boxes were the top things that would make residents and shoppers visit Front Street more often. These were also the top things that businesses thought would make residents and shoppers visit Front Street more often.

- Cafés, restaurants and independent shops were the highest ranked aspects that residents and shoppers thought were missing from Front Street.
- A better variety of shops and businesses, a better variety of places to eat and more independent businesses were the top ranked aspects that businesses thought would most to improve footfall on Front Street.

### Future vision of Front Street

- When asked about their vision of Front Street for the future, 41% of residents and shoppers would like Front Street to be like Bishopthorpe Road, or like some aspect of Bishopthorpe Road. More greenery, independent shops and businesses and a variety of shops were mentioned by over 10%.
- When asked about their vision of Front Street for the future, 30% of businesses would like Front Street to be more attractive. Safety or a reduction in anti-social behaviour, seating and greenery were also mentioned by one-quarter of businesses. Businesses were less likely to want Front Street to be like Bishopthorpe Road than residents and shoppers.
- 9% of residents and shoppers were interested in opening a business on Front Street, however many expressed that they were unlikely to do so, due to not having the money or experience, or that opening a business would be dependent on other factors (for example funding, affordable rents, affordable business rates or regeneration of the area). The most common type of business respondents would like to open was a café or coffee shop, with 22% interested in opening this type of business.

Your vision of Front Street in the future? Top 10 (Residents & Shoppers - Coded)



## SURVEY RESULTS (Cont.)

### Travel to Front Street

- The majority of residents and shoppers (85%) normally travel to Front Street by walking. 70% of businesses thought that their customers normally travel to Front Street by car (either as driver or passenger), while only 38% of residents and shoppers said they normally travel by car.
- Of the 11% of respondents who do not normally walk or cycle to Front Street, 31% stated that it is not possible for them to walk or cycle more on their visits to Front Street, 21% would need a change in their personal circumstances to be able to walk or cycle more and 17% stated that nothing would make them walk or cycle more.
- Although 37% of businesses thought that it would not be possible for their customers to walk or cycle more on their visits to Front Street, 26% thought that more cycle racks and storage would enable their customers to cycle more and 16% thought more or better cycle lanes would help. One-in-five (21%) thought a general improvement to Front Street (not related to walking or cycling) would enable their customers to walk or cycle more, with some businesses thinking that if people had more of a reason to come and spend time on Front Street they would walk or cycle more.

*Refer to Appendix 1 for the full details of the survey responses.*

## SOCIAL MEDIA

Any Council-procured project, including the Future of Acomb Front Street, must adhere to a series of high level principles, including using a variety of engagement tools to gain an understanding of a diverse range of people's needs and ideas, cultivating open debate about complex issues, and building networks to retain community involvement and influence in decision-making, design and delivery. This runs in parallel with the Council's Big Conversation approach, which actively seeks resident input, opinion and feedback on some of York's biggest challenges to build into our core strategies.

The Front Street project reached an unusually high number of people through extensive survey work, and social media has been another valuable tool for this initiative in generating energy and excitement about the local area.

We set up a website page dedicated to shaping the future of Acomb Front Street - [www.york.gov.uk/AcombFrontStreet](http://www.york.gov.uk/AcombFrontStreet) - and encouraged people to have their say through Facebook and Twitter, as well as providing an email address for more detailed feedback. This sparked various different discussions and ideas from people, groups and organisations, which we have subsequently been able to feed into some of the options you will find in this report.

## ACOMB ALIVE

Acomb Alive!, the Traders' Association for Acomb, have long championed the potential of Acomb Front Street as a magnet for the community and a 'go to' place for shoppers and visitors. They have already played their part in energising the area by establishing the local market and setting up Christmas lights displays, and they know much more is possible given the physical space, appetite for change and local pride in the area. Their members are keen to see this regeneration vision evolve and have wholly supported the process undertaken which has had unprecedented input from locals, businesses and visitors, to breathe new life into Front Street.

## CONSULTATION HEADLINES

A total of 1,261 residents/shoppers and 32 businesses completed the survey – giving a robust sample and good confidence in the results. 4 out of 10 residents/shoppers would speak positively about Front Street – with the greengrocers, the variety of shops and convenience ranked highly. Businesses ranked the community, variety of shops and parking highly.

Both residents/shoppers and businesses agreed that more choice or variety of shops, more activities, more choice of food or drink during the day and more plants, trees or flower boxes would make residents and shoppers visit Front Street more often. When asked about their vision of Front Street for the future, 41% of residents and shoppers would like Front Street to be like Bishopthorpe Road, or like some aspect of Bishopthorpe Road. However, businesses were less likely to want Front Street to be like Bishopthorpe Road that residents and shoppers.

Although the majority of residents and shoppers (85%) normally travel to Front Street by walking, 70% of businesses thought that their customers normally travel to Front Street by car (either as driver or passenger) – in fact only 38% of residents and shoppers said they normally travel by car.

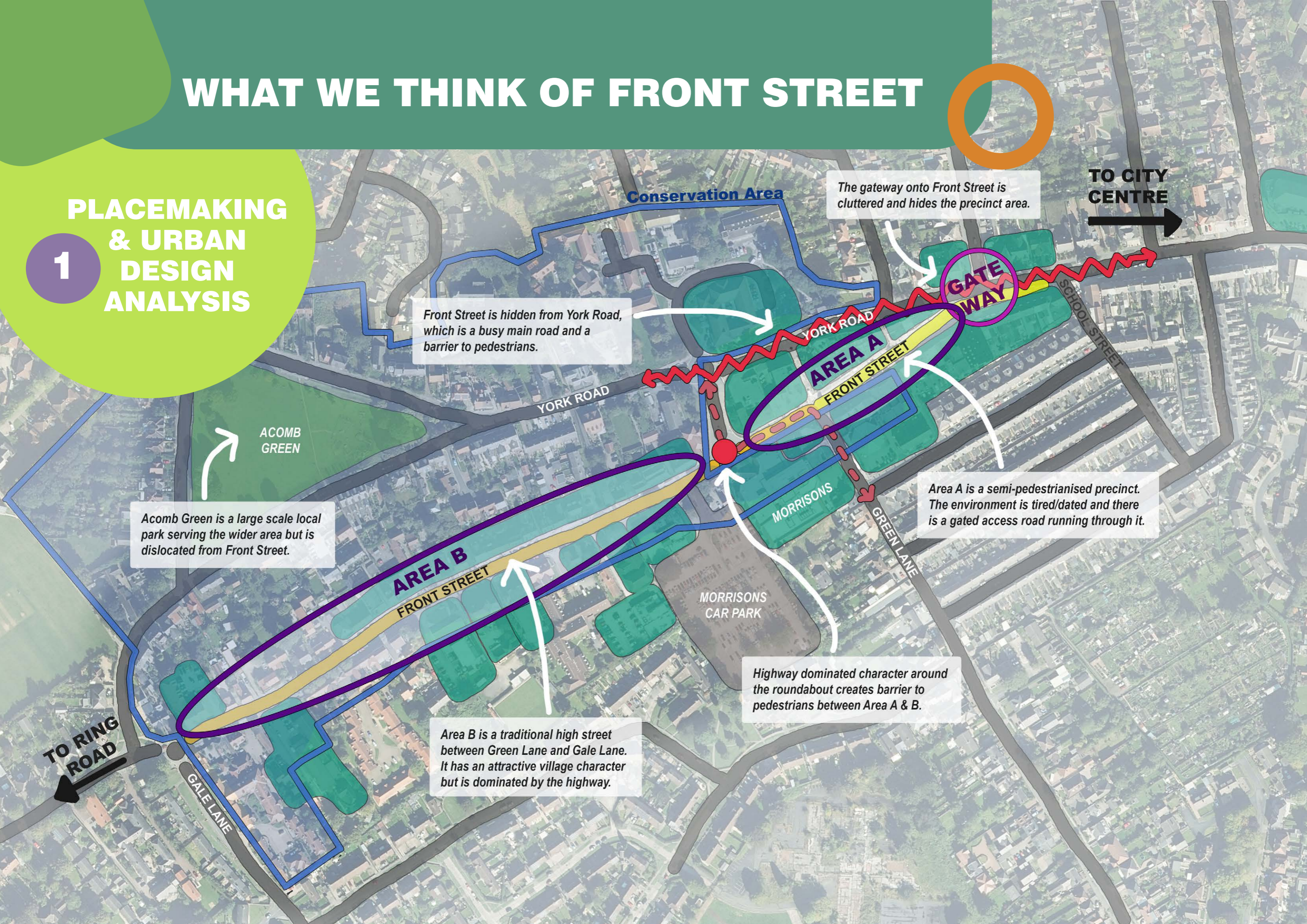
In relation to parking, there was a divergence of view between residents/shoppers and businesses. 59% of residents and shoppers and 45% of businesses thought parking restrictions on Front Street are fine as they are. Businesses were more likely to think parking should be allowed at all times, with 8% of residents and shoppers and 23% of businesses thinking that parking restrictions should be completely lifted. However, 73% of business thought that there would be no impact on their business if the gates were always shut and 61% thought that there would be no impact if the gates were always open.

These survey results along with the social media conversation and stakeholder discussions have helped our understanding of the big issues and the varying perceptions. The emerging project ideas are guided by the consultation process.

# WHAT WE THINK OF FRONT STREET

## PLACEMAKING & URBAN DESIGN ANALYSIS

1



Conservation Area

The gateway onto Front Street is cluttered and hides the precinct area.

TO CITY CENTRE

Front Street is hidden from York Road, which is a busy main road and a barrier to pedestrians.

ACOMB GREEN

Acomb Green is a large scale local park serving the wider area but is dislocated from Front Street.

AREA B  
FRONT STREET

Area A is a semi-pedestrianised precinct. The environment is tired/dated and there is a gated access road running through it.

MORRISONS  
CAR PARK

Highway dominated character around the roundabout creates barrier to pedestrians between Area A & B.

Area B is a traditional high street between Green Lane and Gale Lane. It has an attractive village character but is dominated by the highway.

TO RING ROAD

GALE LANE

AREA A  
FRONT STREET

GATEWAY

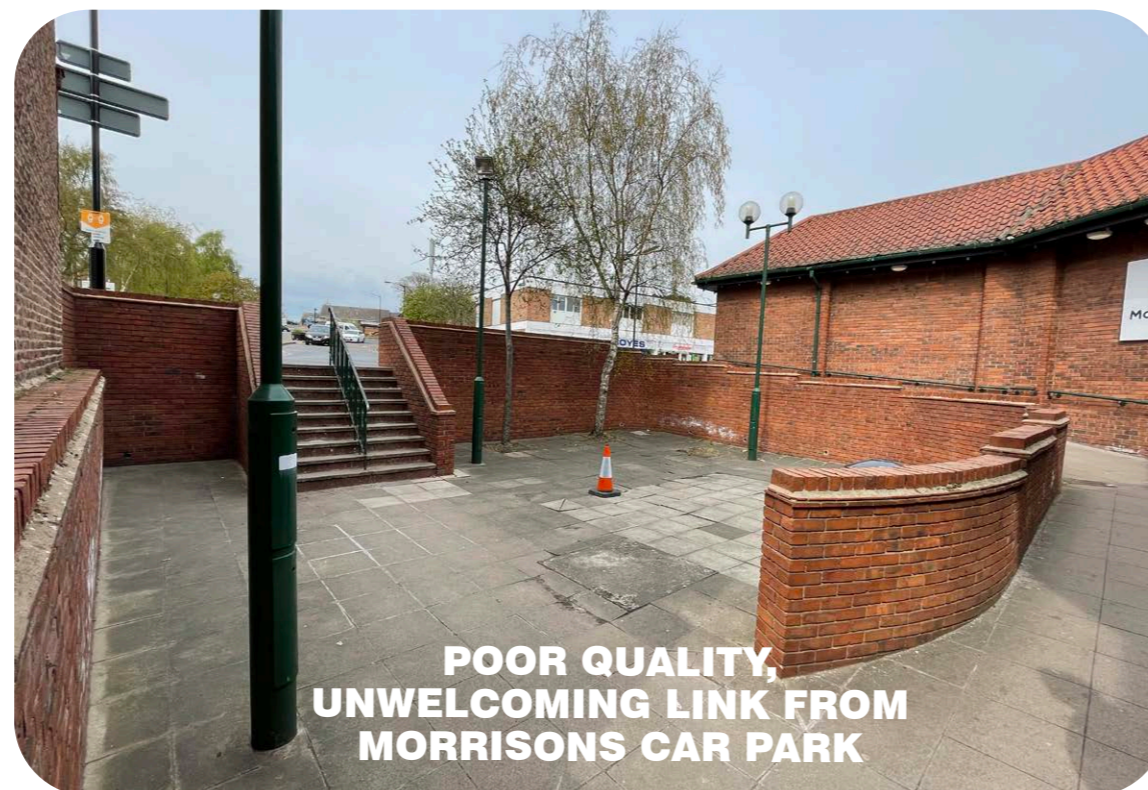
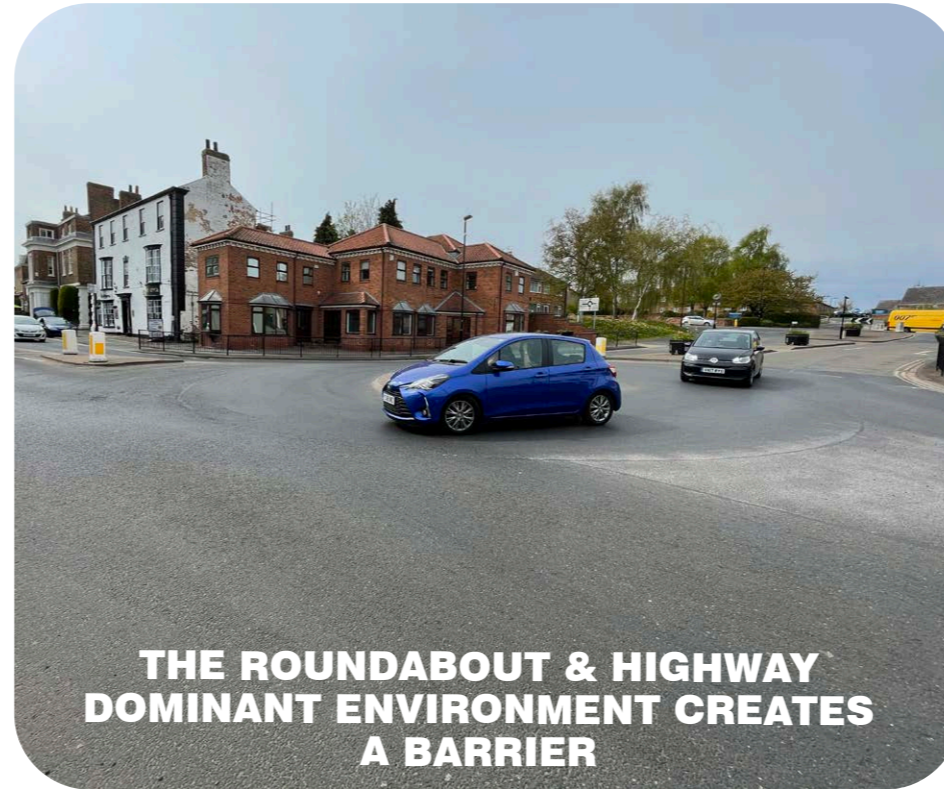
YORK ROAD

GREEN LANE

SCHOOL STREET

# 1

## PLACEMAKING & URBAN DESIGN ANALYSIS





# 2

## TRANSPORT ANALYSIS

### GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

The main junction at York Road and Carr Lane presents a natural traffic calming measure, but as a result means that the junction dominates the arrival experience into Front Street. The traffic noise and application of breaks means sound pollution and potentially poor air quality at what should be the gateway to Front Street. The precinct area is gated with a one way access road closed to traffic between 10.30am – 4pm, creating a semi pedestrianised character to space.

The roads around the site are typically single lane single carriageway. While this helps encourage vehicles to travel at slower speeds, the highway dominant character of the roads and in places wide carriageway widths have the opposite effect, creating a challenging environment for pedestrians. The short link road that connects York Road to Front Street (via the roundabout), to the western side of the precinct area opens out to two lanes. This means vehicles travelling at slower speeds are potentially allowed to accelerate between the two roundabouts. This is poor use of the space and appears unnecessary when the roads approaching this area are single lane and more controlled. This contributes to the barrier effect created by this area of the site.



The precinct area of Front Street is hard and lacking greenery and features that would encourage people to dwell and enjoy. The section of Front Street that extends beyond Morrisons has a village high street feel, greenery starts to emerge and the space feels less harsh.



### PARKING

Outside of the main Morrisons car park, on-street parking is provided throughout the Front Street area.

- On-street parking on York Road in advance of the Front Street area is well used and presents an opportunity to act as a traffic calming measure to slow vehicles passing.
- On-street parking within the gated precinct area of Front Street appears to be popular during evenings to permit access to fast food outlets and convenience stores. This means vehicles dominate the space outside the pedestrianised periods and limit the use of the space for community and family use outside of the 10.30am – 4pm periods.
- On-street parking along Front Street between the roundabout and Gale Lane, appears well used supporting local businesses and presents an opportunity to act as a traffic calming measures to slow vehicles passing. The poor quality pedestrian links from Morrisons car park may deter use of Acomb Front Street's main car park when visiting this area.

Disabled parking bays adjacent to Halifax appear well used but questionable how many are blue badge holders. The position of these bays means the gateway onto Front Street is dominated by highway interventions, signage and barriers. Manoeuvring in and out of these bays when the pedestrian period is enforced creates a potentially dangerous arrangement as access is in close proximity to the York Road/Carr Lane junction. There is a real need for disabled parking in the area but a location that permits safe access to Front Street, while enabling a quality gateway space.



Free parking at Morrisons provides a convenient option for motorists but also means that most arriving at Front Street do so via Morrisons. While having a relatively large main car park is a positive feature for Front Street, it also may mean that potential customers for the wider area may be drawn into Morrisons and not venture beyond. This likelihood is intensified when consideration is given to the poor quality environment that is present along the pedestrian cut through by Morrisons. Its poor quality public realm, high wall and blank facades, with highway beyond, do nothing to create a connection that encourages pedestrians to venture further onto Front Street. The alternative route being the busy highway dominated entrance into the car park, which could be made considerably more accessible attractive and safer for pedestrians.



The informal parking that takes place in the lay-by area off York Road is poorly laid out and not an efficient use of the space. This space should be planned better to enable deliveries to this area at set times and is a potential option for more formal short stay parking together with blue badge parking (to free up the space at Halifax).

It is noted through this process that Front Street currently does not have a car share scheme location or car charging points. An opportunity to include these within Front Street should be considered.

## CYCLING

York is fast becoming a cycle city and being the busiest retail centre outside of the city centre, there are no dedicated cycle lanes to and from Front Street. This should be seriously considered as part of wider ongoing work. Convincing residents to cycle and walk in lieu of driving can only occur if there is encouragement and a real alternative that is safe and more attractive than driving. Cycle lanes and better cycle parking (at the edges of the space) should be investigated further to reduce the reliance on car use.

## PEDESTRIANS

Most pedestrians appear to arrive by either walking or private car. Few appear to arrive by public transport. Pavements are generally wide but the gated access road and associated bollards and signage that dissects the precinct area, the physical barriers around Morrisons area and the busy highway dominant roads helps make Front Street feel like a space designed for vehicles. These type of issues are reflected throughout Front Street, with all the visual clues pointing to vehicular priority and detracting from the visitor experience. Fixing these issues can change perceptions and encourage cafe culture and the use of the space by families.

Barriers are also present along the western end of the precinct, nearing the signalised crossing point and Boyes. Highway railings fence off space, give the perception of a barrier and do not encourage ease of pedestrian movement through the space. The signalised crossing is also a feature that suggests vehicles have priority and pedestrians are simply permitted to cross. The main entrance of Morrisons is a highway junction which creates a conflict between vehicles and pedestrians. Consideration should be given in the future to removing these type of barriers and introducing a raised road table to enhance the link between the precinct area, Morrisons and beyond.

The arrival experience for pedestrians entering Front Street from the main north east gateway is very poor. The informal crossing points dotted along York Road and alley links into the precinct are equally poor quality for pedestrians and discourage access. The interface with York Road could be much improved and turned into a positive edge and frontage to Front Street.



# 3

## ECONOMIC ANALYSIS

### RETAIL ECONOMIC OVERVIEW

The impact of COVID-19 has had a dramatic effect upon high streets, with a reduction in footfall and indeed closures of business. The hospitality sector has perhaps been the worst affected. The High Streets Task Force/Springboard categorises centres into 4 different types and Front Street could be described as being 'multifunctional' as it provides a wide range of functions and services to a catchment which is relatively local. The presence of an essential retailer such as Morrisons in particular together with some others will have helped to generate footfall and activity.

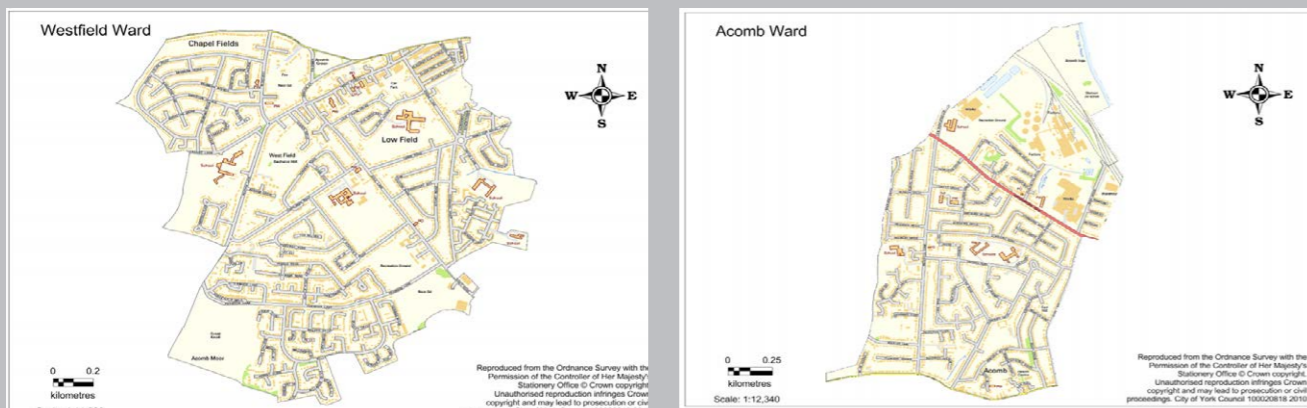
As lockdown eases it will be increasingly possible to see whether some of the smaller businesses will recover and indeed whether there will be opportunities from operators seeking accommodation for new businesses benefiting from the 'rediscovery' of local centres and facilities.

Given the range of retailing activities we would anticipate that the impact of online retailing on Front Street will be somewhat limited (but not non-existent) as the mix of shops and services will appeal to 'in-person' visits. The challenge remains however that trends such as the need for improvements in experience will still be needed in order to compete in an competitive environment.

### SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND DEMOGRAPHIC OVERVIEW

Front Street is situated close to the northern boundary of the Westfield Ward which abuts the Acomb Ward to the north. Figure 1.1 below shows both ward boundaries. This section considers both wards given that Front Street is located in close proximity to the Acomb Ward.

Figure 1.1 - Westfield Ward & Acomb Ward



Source: York City Council

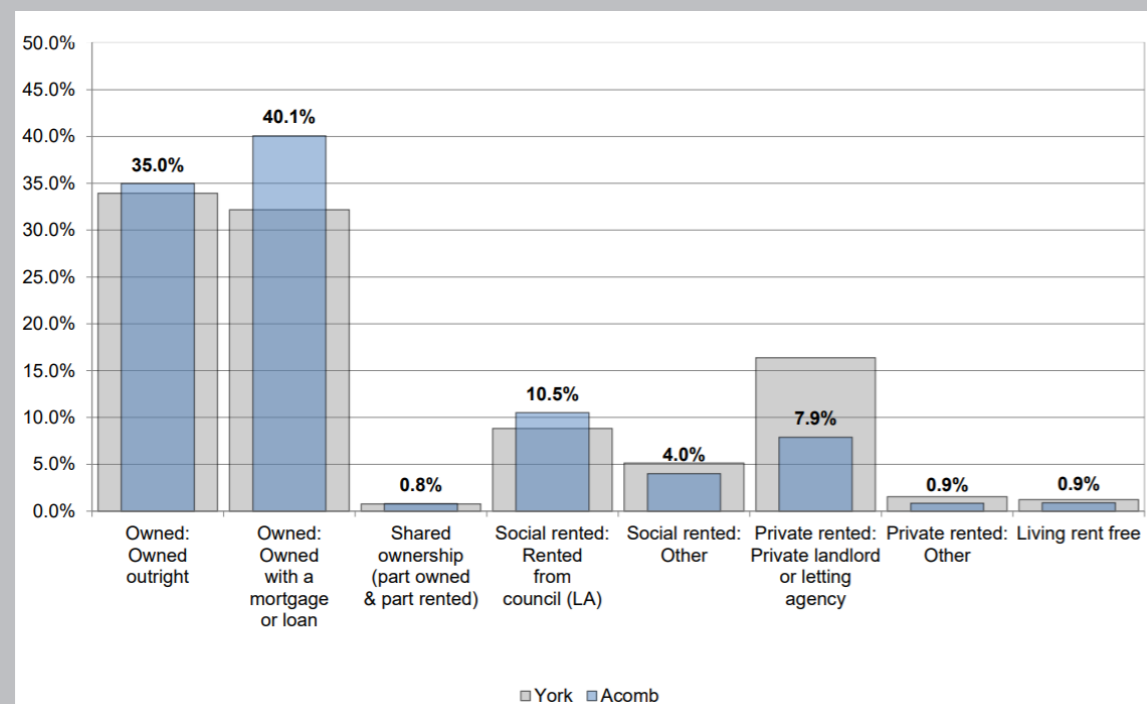
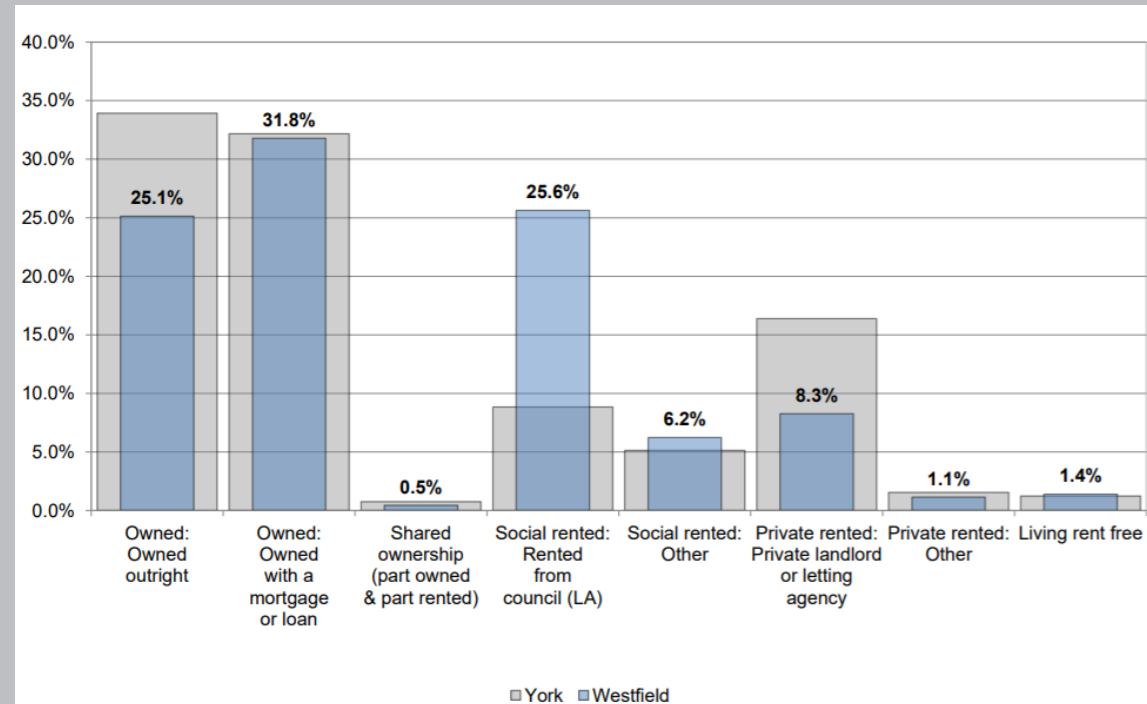
	Westfield Ward	Acomb Ward
Residents	14,109	9,208
Average Net Weekly Household Income (2017/18)	£651.92	£676.15
Home ownership		
Own outright/mortgage	57%	75%
Private Renters	9%	9%
Social Tenants	32%	15%
Percentage children in low income families	21.6%	12.4%
Percentage of households in Fuel Poverty	8.6%	8.6%
Percentage claiming out of work benefits	6.2%	3.7%

The table above indicates that the Westfield Ward profile reflects a community which suffers from greater levels of deprivation than the Acomb Ward to the north. Front Street will clearly serve both communities, segments of which may have slightly differing needs. The vibrancy and vitality of Front Street will rely on both of these catchments for a thriving local centre and indeed local employment opportunities and services are of importance.

## HOUSING TENURES

It is useful to look at the housing tenures when considering the socio-economics of a place. Figure 1.2. below shows that home ownership (ether outright or with a mortgage) is the predominant tenure type in both wards. In Westfield, home ownership with a mortgage is more regular compared with any other tenure type and accounts for 32% which is the same as the wider City of York area. In Acomb, again home ownership with a mortgage is more regular compared with any other tenure type accounting for 40%. Affordable housing (shared ownership and social rent) make up over 30% in Westfield compared with 15% in Acomb ward.

Figure 1.2 - Housing Tenures in Westfield and Acomb Ward

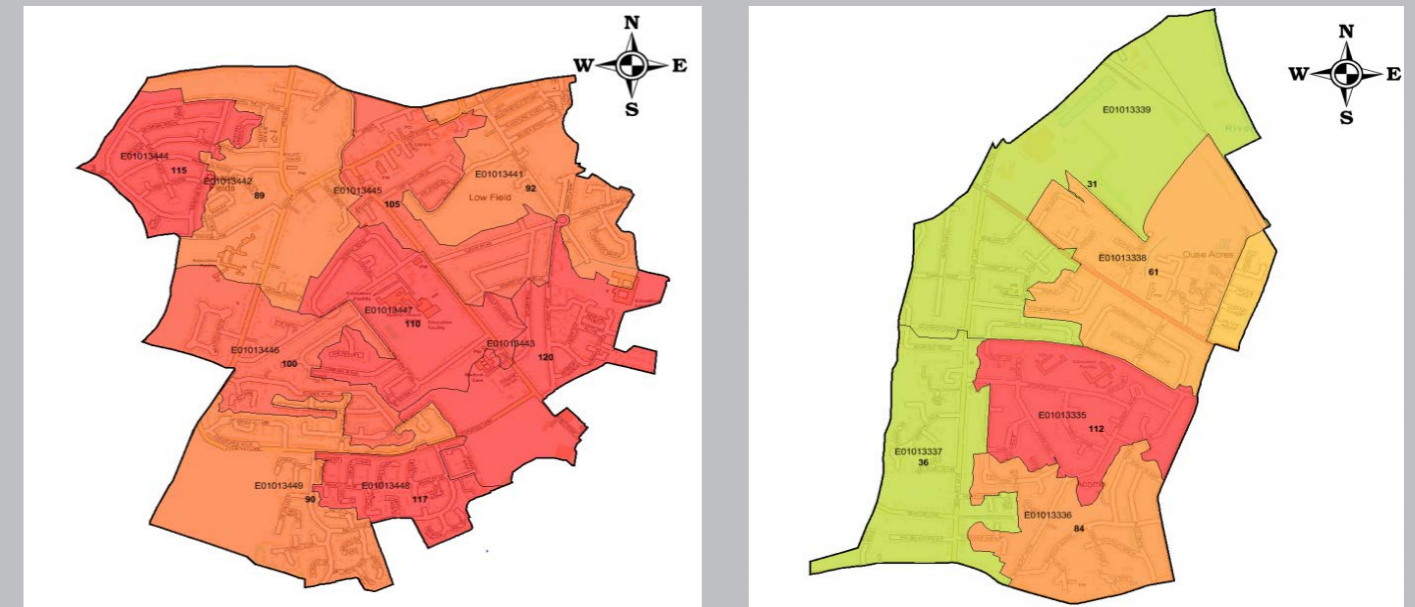


Source: York City Council

## INDEX OF MULTIPLE DEPRIVATION

The IMB is a widely used dataset which classifies the relative deprivation of wards in the United Kingdom. Components of deprivation include; Income, Employment, Education, Health, Crime, Barriers to housing and services and the living environment.

Figure 1.3 - IMD for Westfield and Acomb Wards 2019



Source: York City Council

Figure 1.3 above shows the IMD for both the Westfield and Acomb ward. It can be seen that in the Westfield ward the area to the south east has the highest score for deprivation (120), whilst Front Street is situated in an area with a slightly lower score of 105. In general the Westfield ward is highly deprived which suggests a low quality of life across the different components of deprivation. In comparison, the Acomb ward is generally less deprived, apart from the area around Carr infant and junior school which has an IMD index of 112. Overall, it appear that residents in the Acomb ward have a higher quality of life compared with the Westfield ward when comparing the components of deprivation.

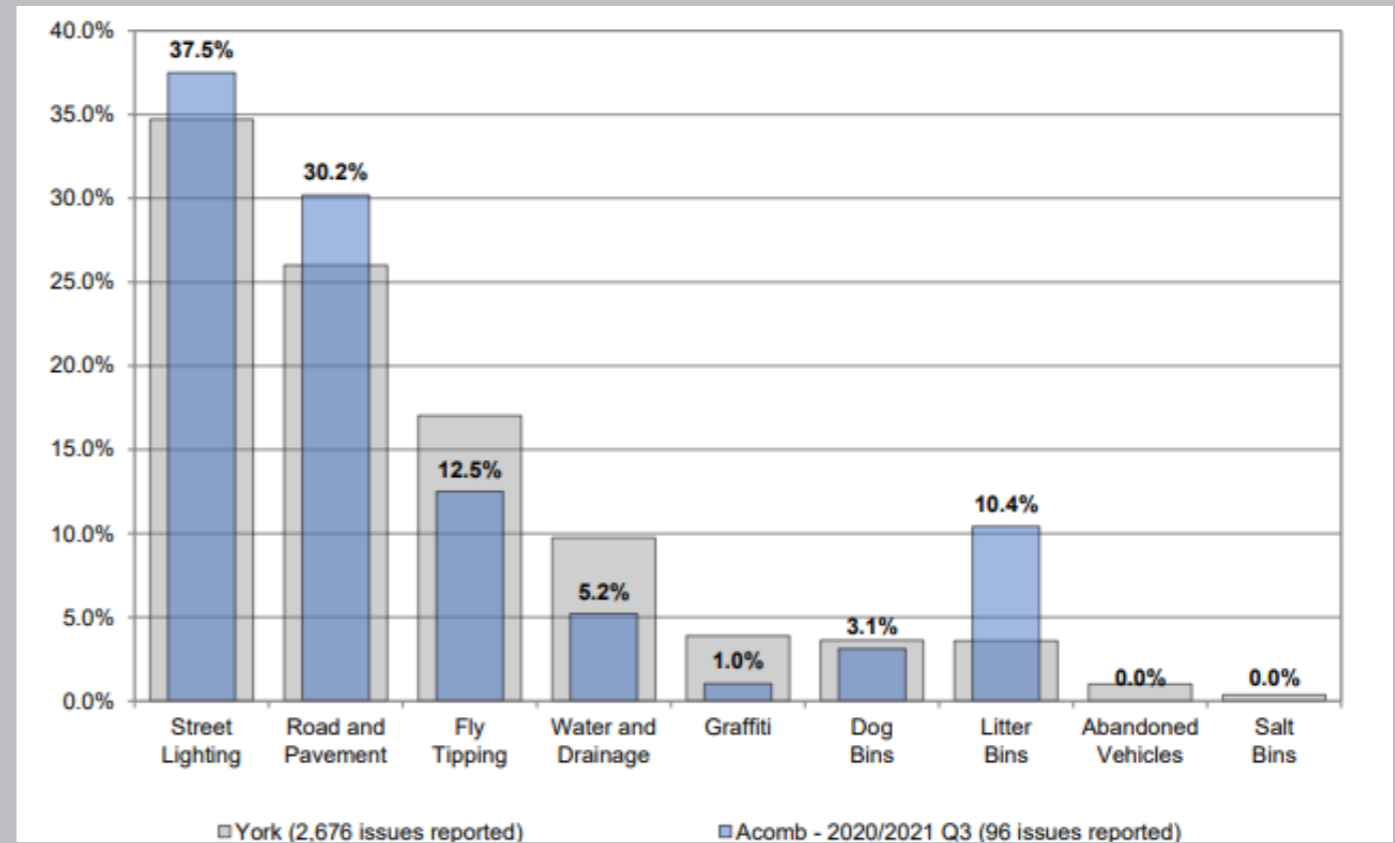
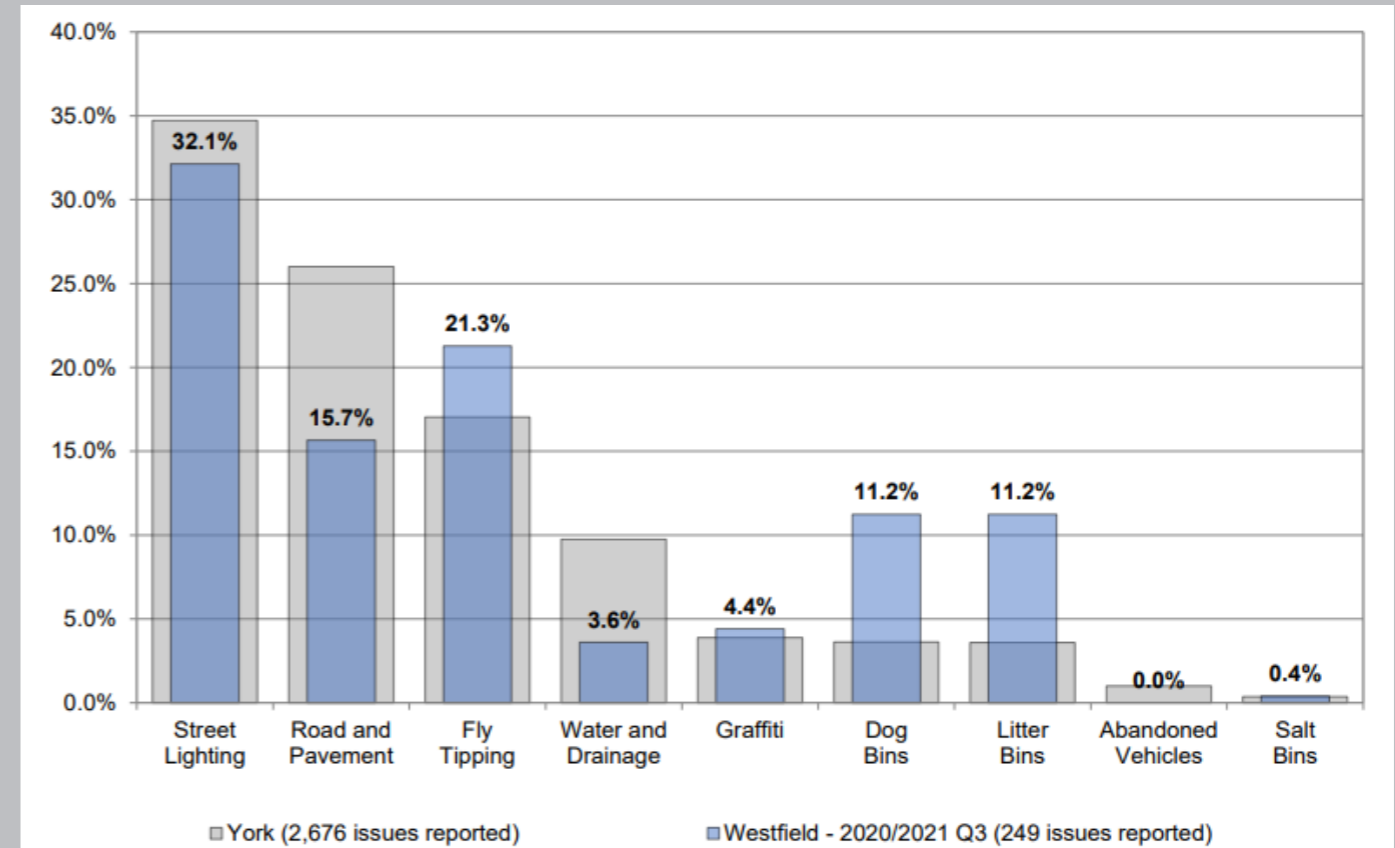
## PUBLIC REALM

Public realm is defined as the space around, between and within buildings that are publicly accessible, including streets, squares, parks and open spaces. York City Council have collected and analysed the number of issues reported in relation to public realm across every ward. The latest data available is for Q3 2020/2021, Figure 1.4 below shows this data for the Westfield and Acomb wards.

In the Westfield ward, 249 issues were reported compared to 96 in the Acomb ward in Q3 (2020 / 21). In both wards, street lighting, road and pavements and fly tipping recorded the highest numbers of issues. This data can be directly related the IMD given that one of the components relates to the living environment. It is therefore not surprising that there were more issues reported in the Westfield ward in relation to the public realm given that this ward has a higher deprivation index compared with the Acomb ward.

This data provides a useful indication of the improvements which should be made, particular in the Front Street study area.

Figure 1.4 - Public Realm issued reported - Westfield and Acomb wards

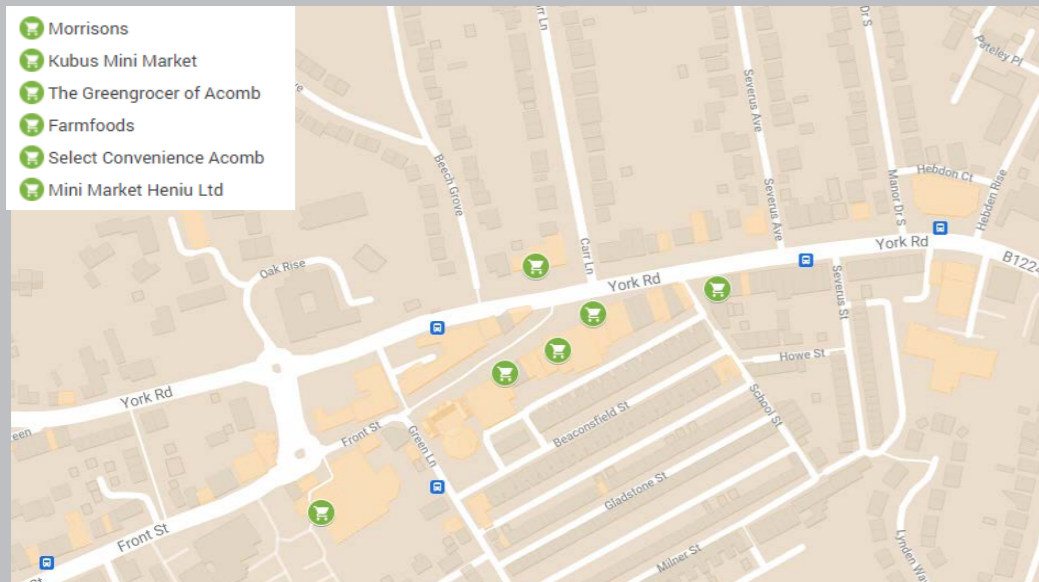


Source: York City Council

## RETAIL AND LEISURE PROVISION

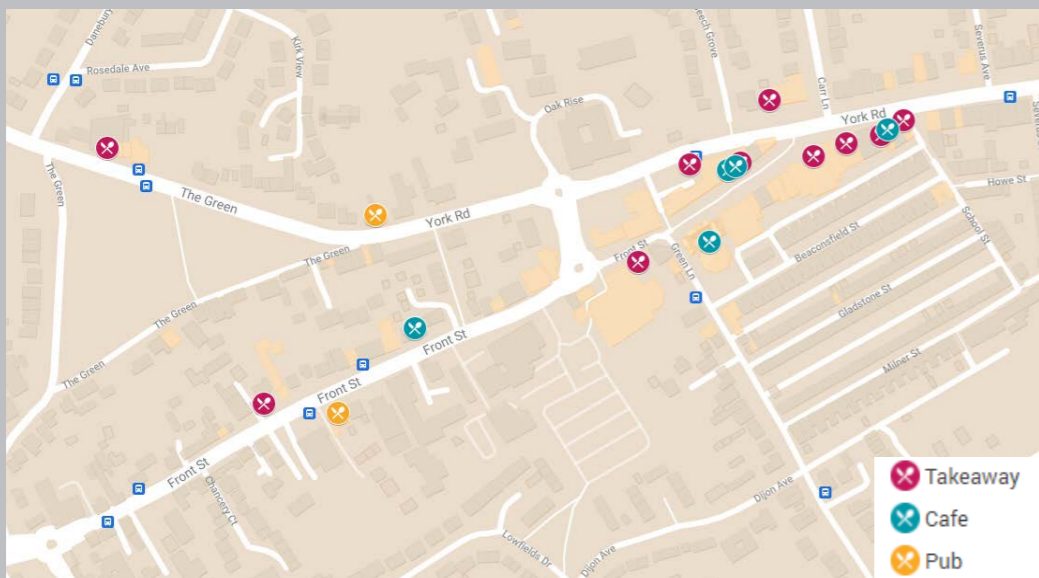
This section provides a high-level review of the supply of convenience, 'food & drink' and comparison retail along Front Street, Acomb and the immediate area.

Figure 1.5 shows the current convenience retailing along Front Street and the immediate area, the largest retailer being Morrisons located at the south western end of Front Street.



Source: Google My Maps, May 2021

Figure 1.6 demonstrates the supply of existing food and drink retail along Front Street and the immediate area. There are 11 takeaways, 5 cafés and 2 pubs with a high concentration along Front Street. It should be noted that there is no restaurant and the 'evening offer' is limited.



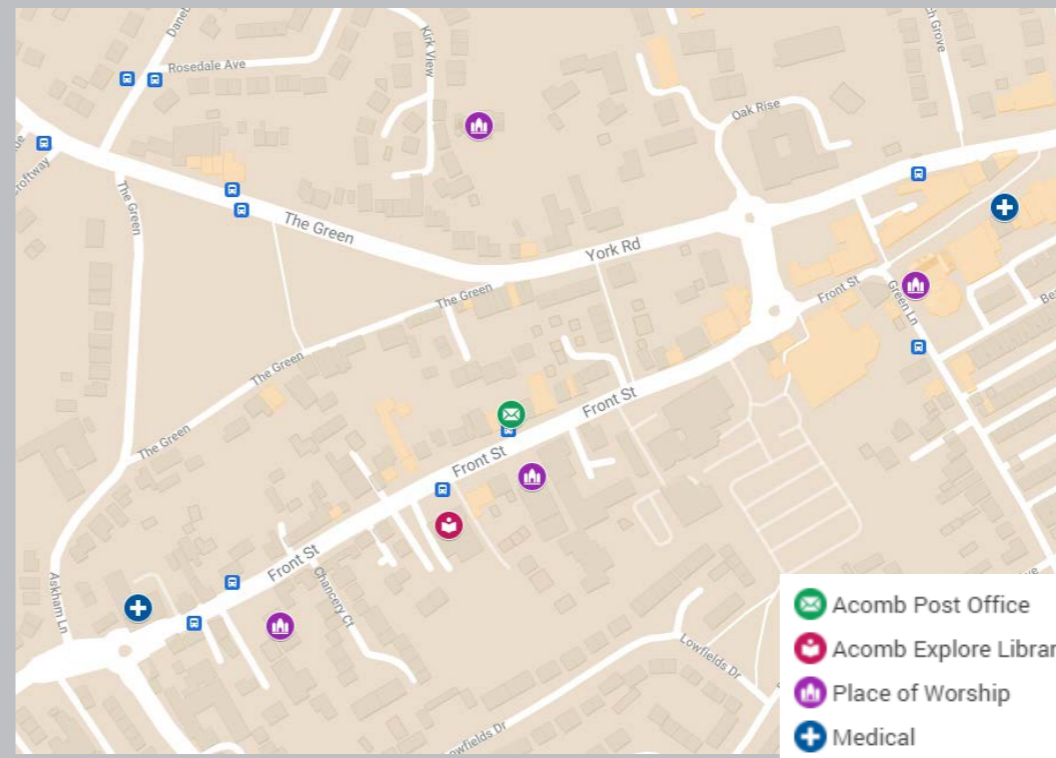
Source: Google My Maps, May 2021

Figure 1.7 shows that these uses are distributed along Front Street and that there is a varied offer. It must be noted that the west of Front Street is interspersed with residential use and therefore presents a very different character and experience.



Source: Google My Maps, May 2021

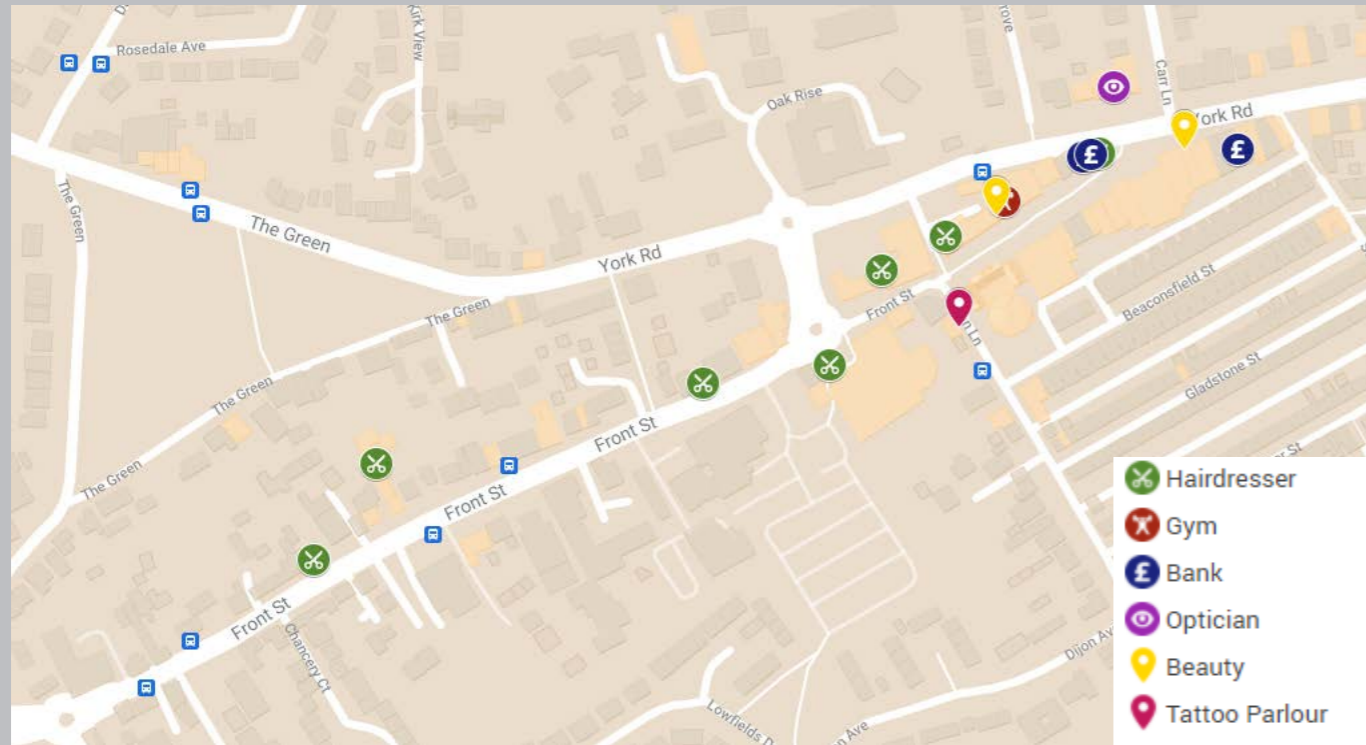
Figure 1.8 considers the provision of public services such as places of worship, post office, public library and medical facilities. It can be seen that each is represented either on Front Street or within close proximity.



Source: Google My Maps, May 2021

Figure 1.9 below shows the provision of personal services such as banks, opticians and hairdressers along Front Street and the immediate area. It can be seen there is an abundance of hairdressers, 7 in total, all within close proximity of each other. Other provisions include:

- Gym - Ouch Potato
- Two banks, Halifax and a Building Society
- Eyecare Opticians
- Beauty - York nail and spa and lash candy
- Tattoo Parlour - Black Tides Tattoo



Source: Google My Maps, May 2021

## CONCLUSIONS

Front Street benefits from two distinct catchments which have differing socio-economic profiles. Our analysis shows that Front Street and its immediate area benefits from a variety of comparison, convenience, food and drink retailing along with personal and public services.

The area is also well connected to York City Centre, which is located circa 3 miles to the east along the B1224 which makes it an ideal location for commuters to live and for those residents looking to shop at national retailers.

Whilst the COVID-19 period online sales have increased significantly, Front Street has benefited from the presence of operations deemed essential and indeed the ability to walk to access these facilities does benefit the local catchment. With the combination of independent operators and accessibility the level of vacancies in Front Street is low.

We would consider that investment in improving accessibility to the residents within the two wards is important to the success of the centre and indeed the experience and relevance of the centre to serve this catchment.

# 4

## SWOT ANALYSIS

### STRENGTHS

- Morrisons provides an anchor store and free car parking for visitors.
- Busy, well used local centre with a wide range of retail, services and community uses.
- New businesses occupying spaces brings energy.
- Future York Central development will improve connections and possible demand for Front Street (so too will Lowfield Lane development).
- Wide pavements in areas.
- Links and frontage to York Road.
- Significant residential population within easy walking distance.
- Acomb Alive traders association is active and has delivered many initiatives including the popular Christmas Lights and Farmers Market.

### WEAKNESSES

- Limited/poor quality seating opportunities.
- No play facilities (outside of main parks).
- Landscape feels like a road passing through a square.
- Quality and use of wide pavements.
- Limited food and beverage offer (lacks high quality evening economy).
- Front Street is disjointed and doesn't read as a single place or destination. The precinct has its own character in contrast to the high street running from Morrisons up to Gale Lane.
- The public realm and environment is tired and outdated in the precinct and the connection with Morrisons.
- Gateways, pedestrian connections and wayfinding are poor in general. The area around Boyes and the roundabout are dominated by vehicular infrastructure creating a barrier between the two halves of Front Street.
- There is an absence of a gateway or announcement of the space to those passing on York Road – meaning potential additional customers are being missed.

### OPPORTUNITIES

- Potentially serves a large area of York and within walking distance as an alternative to the city centre.
- There is plenty of outdoor space that could be brought into better use to support businesses and to create an attraction for visitors.
- To create a public space that is at the heart of the community and better serves the residents and greater number of people may work from home in the future.
- Create a gateway on York Road to announce Front Street as an interesting space and valuable piece of public realm.
- Better connect the public realm to those businesses on York Road to Front Street – and calm traffic at the same time.
- Improve the public realm by reducing street clutter and barriers.
- Reduce vehicle dominance (or the perception of) through altering vehicle access and introducing better delivery strategies off York Road.
- Improve connection to Morrisons by altering the space that connects the two and possibly enable Morrisons to have activity on Front Street.
- Better utilise the highway on York Road to provide parking and release space at the front of the Bank.
- Bring back into use the WC's to provide a needed facility in Front Street.
- Possible café culture and branding on York Road to draw attention to the area from passing trade.
- Introduce play space and create a centre that focuses on the residents and creates a heart to the community that does not rely on people spending money.
- Tie in with various upcoming initiatives at Acomb Explore Library.
- The precinct offers the opportunity for spilling out/back of pavement trading.
- Potential to attract local office based workers and businesses.
- Encourage more civic and community investment.
- Support local start ups and new ways of working (such as co-working space).

### THREATS

- The national trends of the declining high street which have been accelerated by COVID-19.
- Lack of fast action to support local businesses, attract more visitors and create a clear brand for Front Street.
- Potential for a gradual decline in the quality of shops/offer.
- Focus on vehicles as opposed to pedestrians.
- Front Street struggles to capture potential visitors due to poor quality arrival spaces, pedestrian environment and lack of social/seating spaces.
- Permitted Development rights could lead to loss of commercial space/vibrancy.



# 5

## KEY THEMES

### A FRIENDLY, COMMUNITY FOCUSED, LOCAL CENTRE

- There is significant warmth, loyalty and pride for Front Street, along with concern over decline. On the back of this there is an opportunity to think big and bold to capture the imagination of existing and potential visitors.
- Front Street already features many community buildings, facilities and independent businesses. The future of the high street is create activity, a wide variety of reasons to visit and a place for the community to come together. Front Street needs to shout louder about what already has as a place for all ages to visit and build on this asset by adding new layers of activity, inclusivity and access. The quality of the environment needs to transform to reflect this being a friendly place.

### TIRED ENVIRONMENT BUT BENEFITS FROM PLENTY OF SPACE

- The precinct area and the link to Morrisons is poor quality architecturally and in its environment/public realm. This is in contrast to the village character of Front Street that extends to Gale Lane. Two distinctive places and destinations is a positive feature if the quality and connectivity is lifted for mutual benefit.
- The precinct has plenty of space and is a blank canvas to be bold in design terms, creating a new distinctive attraction that sets it apart from other York destinations and local high streets. There is also space to 'go green' for the benefit of the environment and health and wellbeing.

### A DISCONNECTED PLACE WITH BARRIERS TO PEDESTRIANS

- York Road is a busy main road running alongside Front Street, with a vehicular dominant character. It forms a barrier to pedestrians accessing Front Street and separates businesses that run along York Road from being seen as part of Front Street.
- The main gateway off York Road hides Front Street from passing pedestrians and traffic. This is a cluttered space, dominated by the blue badge parking area and gated vehicular access point. This needs to become a welcome matt to encourage people to visit.
- The area around Boyes, Morrisons and the roundabout is the main barrier to unifying Front Street as a single place. A move away from vehicular dominance in this space over time is necessary to bring Front Street together.
- The precinct is currently severed by the gated access road that is open to traffic out of core hours and also provides service access to businesses. This in turn adds clutter and highway infrastructure such as rows of bollards, signage and barriers into an environment that is largely pedestrianised. The removal of through traffic would transform the environment and perceptions of this space.

### A LARGE NUMBER OF SHOPS AND RANGE OF USES

- Front Street benefits from a wide range of shops, local services and community buildings. There is a sense of decline in the general offer, but there are signs of new high quality offer emerging such artisan bakers and greengrocers and an appetite to increase this offer to encourage cafe culture and an evening economy.
- Shops and businesses are scattered along Front Street and the wider area. Therefore the full offer is not apparent or easily accessible to visitors.

# THE FUTURE OF ACOMB FRONT STREET



## VISION

We believe Acomb Front Street should shout louder and prouder about its many positives as destination for local residents and the wider community in York.

It is a friendly place with reasons to visit for all ages. It offers two distinctive character areas alongside convenient parking and an anchor supermarket. However its accessibility, public realm and visitor experience is poor, which deters footfall and stops Front Street reaching its full potential. There is an urgency to act now within the context of national trends, the post COVID-19 recovery and the clear message for change given by local residents and businesses through this study.

### The project ideas therefore aim to:

- Improve the visitor experience.
- Fix physical barriers.
- Create a stronger brand.
- Support local businesses and community groups.
- Introduce a bold community linear park as a major new attraction to Acomb Front Street.

The project team developed a shopping list of project ideas for physical improvements to Acomb Front Street. These emerged through the process, based on consultation with residents and businesses, input from stakeholders including Acomb Alive and our analysis of Acomb Front Street.

**The following pages describe the project ideas and sets out design principles and next steps towards delivery.**

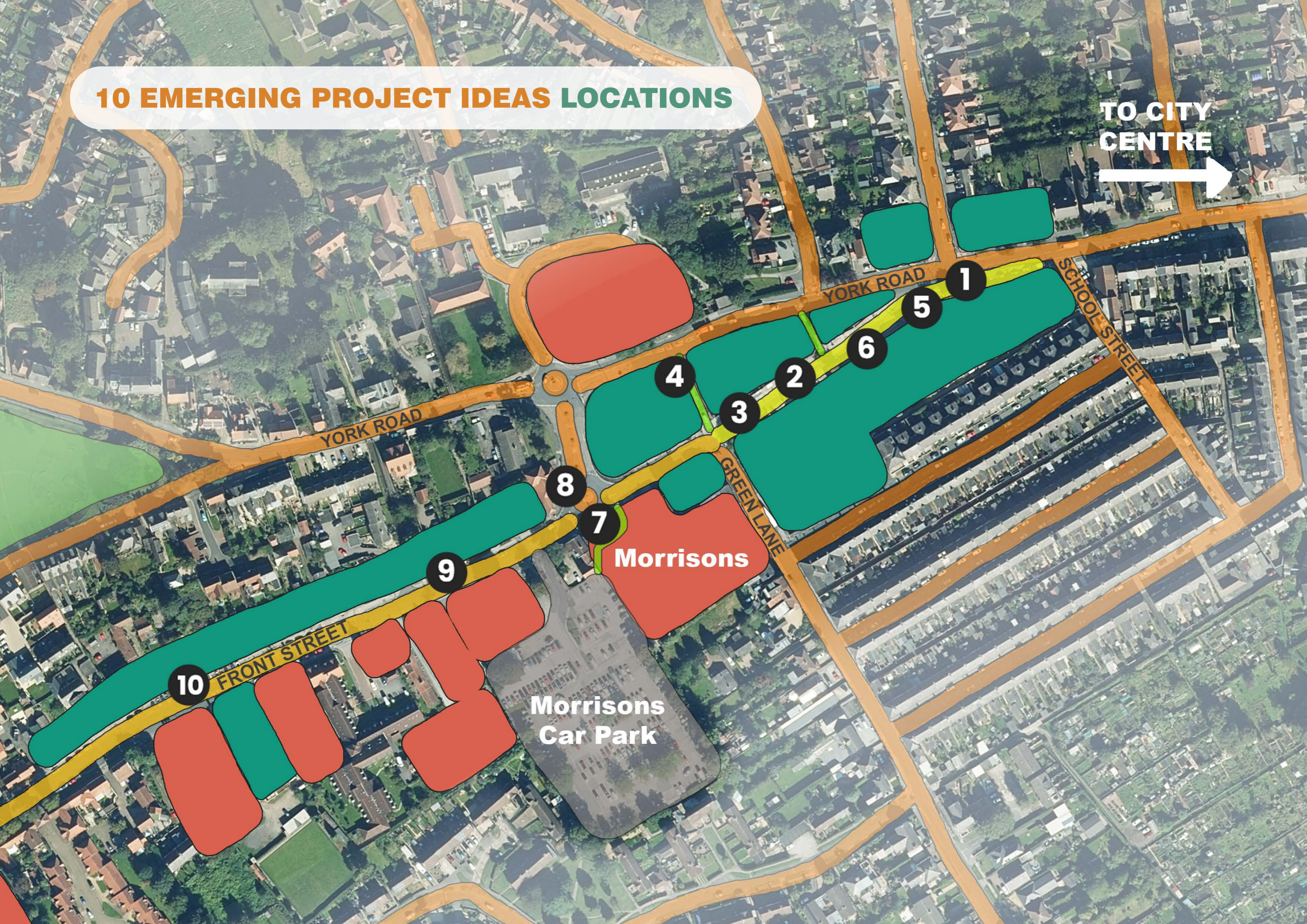


## 10 EMERGING PROJECT IDEAS

- 1 Creation of a gateway space and bold branding that addresses York Road.
- 2 Replace the road through the precinct with a community linear park.
- 3 Decluttering and enhancement of the precinct public realm.
- 4 Brand and transform the character of pedestrian connections and links through Front Street.
- 5 Relocation of blue badge parking and service access for businesses to unlock more space for pedestrians.
- 6 Enable businesses to takeover outdoor space to create a vibrant edge to streets.
- 7 Transform the Morrisons ramp space into a landscape feature and pop up kiosk.
- 8 Break down the pedestrian barriers between areas A & B, joining the whole of Front Street together.
- 9 Create a network of village character pocket parks along Front Street between the roundabout and Gale Lane.
- 10 Reclaim space from cars along Front Street between the roundabout and Gale Lane

# 10 EMERGING PROJECT IDEAS LOCATIONS

TO CITY CENTRE



YORK ROAD

YORK ROAD

SCHOOL STREET

GREEN LANE

FRONT STREET

Morrisons

Morrisons Car Park

10

9

7

8

4

3

2

6

5

1

# 1

## CREATION OF A GATEWAY SPACE AND BOLD BRANDING THAT ADDRESSES YORK ROAD

The precinct area of Front Street opens out onto York Road. The current gateway is cluttered, dominated by the blue badge parking, the gate and associated highway signage. This project aims to create a welcoming entrance into the pedestrian focused precinct and a strong outward facing brand to promote Front Street to visitors.

### DESIGN PRINCIPLES

- Define a gateway space that jumps across both sides of York Road, creating a sense of driving through, rather than driving past. A new public square / arrival and meeting place.
- Provides an opportunity to visually and physically connect to the businesses and increase footfall to all areas.
- Create a decluttered, open, pedestrian focused entrance to Front Street with distinctive branding that promotes businesses, community activities and attractions.
- Consider the potential relocation of blue badge parking and the trial closure of the gated road to reclaim space for pedestrians and remove conflict with vehicles from the gateway.



### NEXT STEPS

- Define the parameters for the gateway space design brief, including detailed consultation in relation to the potential relocation of blue badge parking and the trial closure of the gated road.
- Commission a concept design for the gateway space to create a defined scheme and budget for funding purposes.
- Commission a branding study for the gateway and the wider Front Street area.

# 2

## REPLACE THE ROAD THROUGH THE PRECINCT WITH A COMMUNITY LINEAR PARK

The gated access road that runs through the precinct area has been a talking point through the project. Whilst it serves a number of functional purposes it does also detract from the space for pedestrians and restricts the potential uses. This project aims to unlock this potential by transforming the carriageway into a vibrant community linear park.

### DESIGN PRINCIPLES

- The community linear park should be bold, bright and green, creating a family friendly destination, a venue for community groups/activity, a window into local businesses and a place to sit and meet a friend.
- Consider the potential trial closure of the gated access road to reclaim space for pedestrians and remove conflict with vehicles along the precinct area of Front Street.
- Ensure this trial is carried out in tandem with a positive transformation of the existing carriageway, through a short term pop up project/phase 1 linear park.
- Longer term the community linear park could be rolled out along the whole length of the precinct, with the opportunity for the design of the park to evolve and be guided by local businesses and the community.

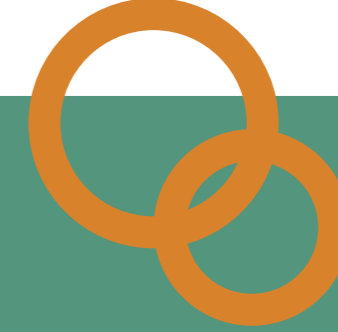
### NEXT STEPS

- Commission a pop up design for phase 1 of the community linear park and deliver in the short term.
- Put in place a trial closure of the road to enable delivery of phase 1.
- Following installation of phase 1 develop a series of events and activities to promote the benefits of the project.
- Commission an overarching design for future phases alongside ongoing consultation and engagement.



# 2

## REPLACE THE ROAD THROUGH THE PRECINCT WITH A COMMUNITY LINEAR PARK



# 3

## DECLUTTERING AND ENHANCEMENT OF THE PRECINCT PUBLIC REALM

The precinct area's public realm is tired and outdated, but benefits from space. It is cluttered with signage, furniture and highway infrastructure. This project aims to give the area a spring clean, reduce clutter and introduce more attractive seating, signage and features into the space.

### DESIGN PRINCIPLES

- Alongside or following the creation of the community linear park (refer to Project 2) the remaining public realm should be decluttered of any unnecessary bollards, signage, highway railings and poor quality/dated furniture.
- This provides an opportunity to add some new seating, planters and wayfinding signage onto the existing paving.
- The various temporary and pop up interventions could guide the conversation and test ideas ahead of a longer term more comprehensive regeneration of the precinct, including new paving etc.
- Improve cycle access and promote cycle parking.
- All improvements should consider and accommodate existing events and activity such as the popular farmers markets and the Christmas Lights. The proposals for this and Project 2, need to allow flexibility to use the space for a variety of purposes.



### NEXT STEPS

- Carry out an audit of existing signage, features, furniture and highway infrastructure in the precinct area. This should identify any items that could be removed and any items that must stay (or be replaced).
- Commission a pop up furniture design for the precinct area and deliver a first phase of decluttering and enhancement in the short term.

# 4

## BRAND AND TRANSFORM THE CHARACTER OF PEDESTRIAN CONNECTIONS AND LINKS THROUGH FRONT STREET

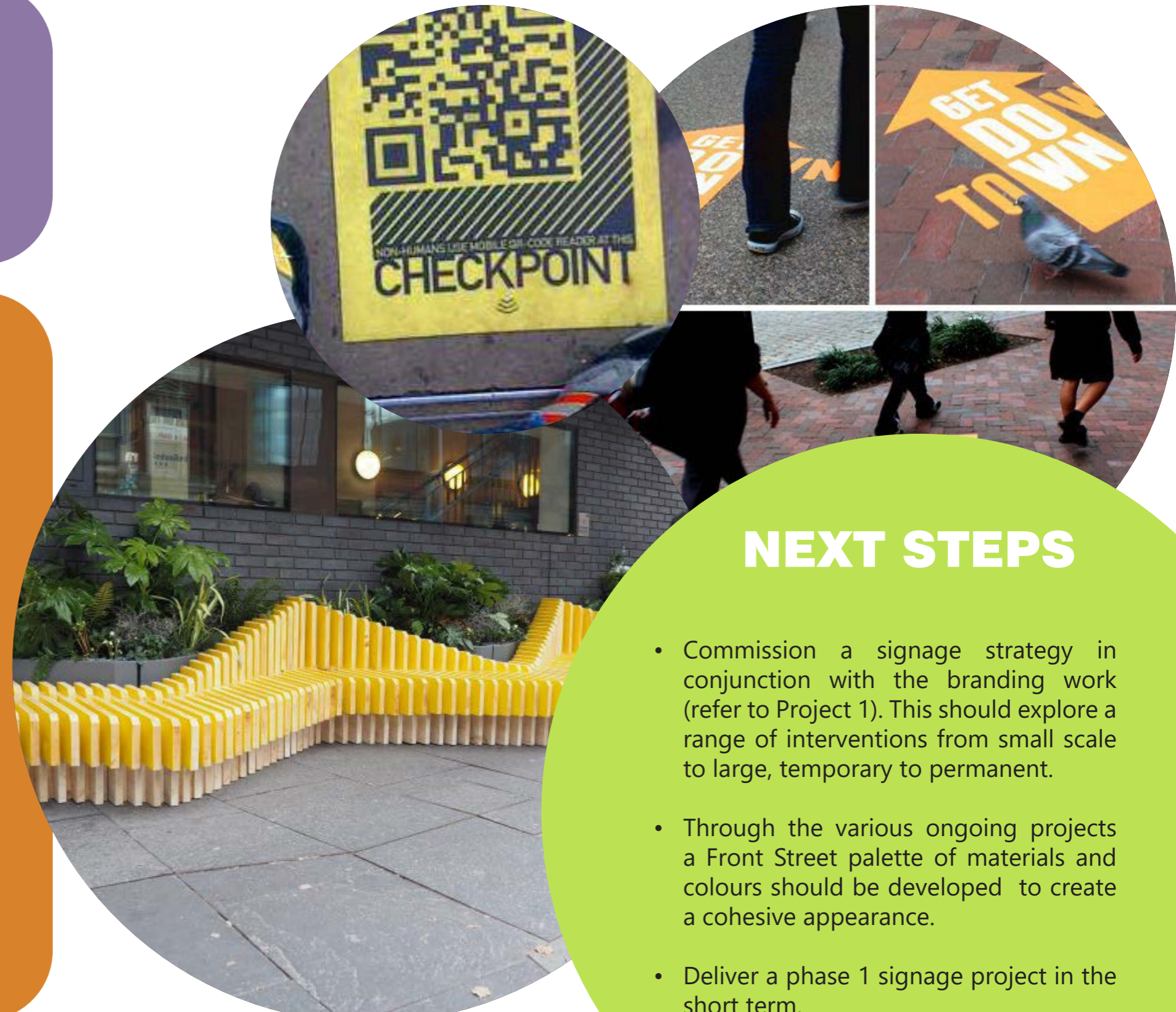
There is a lack of brand identity and wayfinding for Front Street. Existing signage is functional/utilitarian and focused on highway information. Existing pedestrian routes are poor and gateways are poor quality. This project aims to roll out the branding across the whole area and to enhance and highlight pedestrian/cycle access.

### DESIGN PRINCIPLES

- In combination with Project 1, develop a brand for Front Street. This should aim to bring together all areas of Front Street into one unified place and destination.
- A range of new signage and branding can be introduced to knit the areas together, promote Front Street as a whole and help people navigate to local services and attractions.
- Pedestrian and cycle routes to Front Street can be improved through focused environmental improvements, signage and branding. Signage can range from temporary paving stencils through to formal signs/totems. This is illustrated by the series of cut throughs from York Road onto the precinct that relate to informal pedestrian crossing points, which can be transformed through pop up project to be welcoming and bright, along with slowing traffic.
- Information for drivers can be improved to highlight parking and improve the pedestrian links onto Front Street from Morrisons car park.

### NEXT STEPS

- Commission a signage strategy in conjunction with the branding work (refer to Project 1). This should explore a range of interventions from small scale to large, temporary to permanent.
- Through the various ongoing projects a Front Street palette of materials and colours should be developed to create a cohesive appearance.
- Deliver a phase 1 signage project in the short term.





# 5

## RELOCATION OF BLUE BADGE PARKING AND SERVICE ACCESS FOR BUSINESSES TO UNLOCK MORE SPACE FOR PEDESTRIANS

Various proposed projects would benefit from changes to existing blue badge parking and service access arrangements for businesses. This project aims to ensure that practical considerations like these are looked at holistically as a standalone exercise, to help inform proposals to improve the pedestrian experience.

### DESIGN PRINCIPLES

- Within the precinct area reclaim the gateway space and the gated access road for pedestrians (and cycle parking). This will require a number of options to be explored for relocating existing blue badge parking and service access arrangements in detailed consultation with the community and businesses.
- Encourage servicing from a focused area to avoid the need for vehicles to travel through the gateway space and precinct area.
- Options include exploring new locations in close proximity (for example reorganising the highway along York Road). Alternatively provision could potentially be retained within a sensitively designed drop off area at one end of the precinct.
- Also consider focused opportunities to reclaim space for pedestrians in the wider Front Street area for example pop up parklets/cafe seating/bike parking in service bays and



### NEXT STEPS

- Carry out a detailed consultation and feasibility study to understand existing service access arrangements and blue badge parking usage. Identify a series of options that could support the delivery of projects in this report.
- Deliver any agreed changes in tandem with environmental improvements to demonstrate the positive change achieved by these interventions.

# 6

## ENABLE BUSINESSES TO TAKEOVER OUTDOOR SPACE TO CREATE A VIBRANT EDGE TO STREETS

Front Street has plenty of outdoor space to work with but this is currently underused. The reopening of businesses following the COVID-19 restrictions has led to creative use outdoor spaces throughout the country. This project aims to build on this momentum, actively encouraging cafe culture and vibrant frontages to shops and businesses.

### DESIGN PRINCIPLES

- Encourage and support businesses to spill out, use and decorate the streetscene. This could be supported by yearly awards for best outdoor space and 'open days' similar to York Open Studios to attract visitors.
- A palette of materials/colours could be developed in consideration of the branding (refer to Project 1) to help reinforce the overall brand, whilst still allowing for creativity and uniqueness from individual businesses.

### NEXT STEPS

- Provide design guidance and a tool kit that explains what is and isn't allowed based on local rules and regulations.
- Explore the feasibility of a grant system (similar to shop front improvement schemes) to part fund an initial wave of Vibrant Edge pilot projects as an exemplar and inspiration for others to follow.



# 7

## TRANSFORM THE MORRISONS RAMP SPACE INTO A LANDSCAPE FEATURE AND POP UP KIOSK

This link to and from Morrisons and Front Street's main car park is heavily used by pedestrians and currently is a poor quality, empty space that provides a negative impression of Front Street. This project aims to reinvent this space into an attractive, interactive gateway.

### DESIGN PRINCIPLES

- It is currently poor quality and hidden due to the nature of the levels and the blank brick walls. A variety of approaches could be taken ranging from a landscape enhancement of it (such as planted terraces), introducing artwork, through to adding a specific function or revenue generator such as a coffee kiosk. Such activity provides purpose and reduces anti-social behaviour.
- Consider removing the street level wall and replacing with something that is visually permeable. It is currently a real barrier and its removal would create the perception of a more fluid area, which would also improve passive surveillance.



### NEXT STEPS

- Commission a concept design for the space to create a defined scheme and budget for funding purposes. This project has the opportunity to collaborate with local community groups, students or artists.
- Consider delivery of some low cost pop up improvements in the short term while funding being gained for the full scheme.
- Potential for a local business to sponsor the space for marketing purposes.

# 8

## BREAK DOWN THE PEDESTRIAN BARRIERS BETWEEN AREAS A & B, JOINING THE WHOLE OF FRONT STREET TOGETHER

This location has been identified as a significant barrier in bringing together the two areas of Front Street, increasing footfall and providing pedestrian priority. This project aims to explore a series of options from short term to longer term, to change perceptions of this space and in the longer term change the environment to a pedestrian dominant one.

### DESIGN PRINCIPLES

- Key to bringing the two areas of Front Street together is a project that looks to change the balance of power in a space which is currently vehicular dominant and discourages pedestrians. Various levels of intervention should be explored and it is likely that a phased approach would be taken.
- Early opportunities are increased wayfinding signage and removal where possible of highway barriers/clutter.
- This could be followed by a change in surfacing to the section between the roundabout and the pedestrian crossing at Green Lane, still allowing vehicular movement through but changing the perception and quality of this link to the precinct.
- Further longer term opportunities could be explored to limit and reduce traffic flow and the carriageway width/lanes around the roundabout.



### NEXT STEPS

- Commission a feasibility study to understand the constraints and opportunities and to set out a series of levels of intervention from simple environmental and pop up proposals through to more fundamental changes to the highway.
- Deliver a phase 1 enhancement project in the short term.

# 8

## BREAK DOWN THE PEDESTRIAN BARRIERS BETWEEN AREAS A & B, JOINING THE WHOLE OF FRONT STREET TOGETHER



# 9

## CREATE A NETWORK OF VILLAGE CHARACTER POCKET PARKS ALONG FRONT STREET BETWEEN THE ROUNDABOUT AND GALE LANE

This area of Front Street has an attractive village character. It is green and has a number of quality buildings and details within the streetscape. It benefits from a mix of businesses, community buildings, local services and residential properties. This project aims to look at short term ways to enhance and highlight these characteristics and improve footfall.

### DESIGN PRINCIPLES

- A range of ideas should be explored including the introduction of a series of pocket parks or enhanced frontages along the street creating a reason to explore further afield and a place to stop and rest.
- Proposals should encourage use, such as additional seating or interactive features to entertain children near bus stops or near community buildings.
- There is opportunity to include habitat creation within these spaces, transforming bare verges into places full of nature.
- Opportunity sites include the areas in front of Acomb W.M. Club, Acomb Explore Library etc. Continued consultation, started by this project, will guide this opportunity.



### NEXT STEPS

- Commission a concept design for pocket parks to create a defined scheme and budget for funding purposes. This project has the opportunity to collaborate with local community groups, residents, businesses, schools or artists.
- Deliver a phase one exemplar pocket park in the short term. Potential to be installed by a local community group.

# 10

## RECLAIM SPACE FROM CARS ALONG FRONT STREET BETWEEN THE ROUNDABOUT AND GALE LANE

While the townscape in this area of Front Street is high quality, the pedestrian experience is dominated by vehicles, with a lack of crossing points and in places the pavements are tight. This project aims to reclaim space and improve the pedestrian experience, while maintaining vehicular use and on street parking to serve businesses.

### DESIGN PRINCIPLES

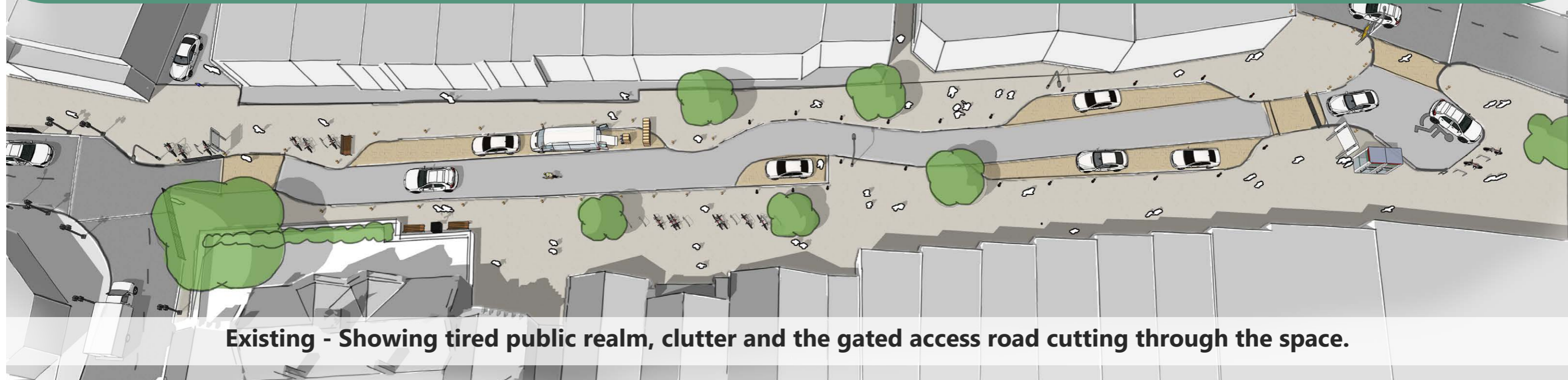
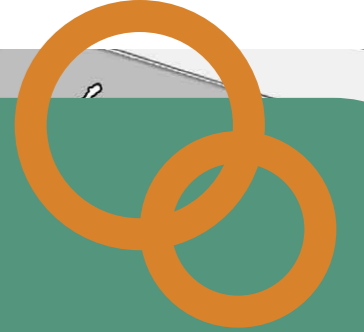
- This stretch of road is busy and bustling, but in places pavements are tight and carriageway widths are wide, also incorporating on street parking, service access and bus stops. Pedestrian crossings are limited and not necessarily responsive to desire lines.
- Various interventions on this street can be explored and tested that begin to capture and reclaim more of the street for pedestrians and for businesses to spill out onto.
- In the short term parklets or temporary use of underused space could be explored.
- Longer term this can lead onto more comprehensive alterations to the highway, retaining this as a trafficked street but creating a more attractive, safer and user friendly environment for visitors.
- Explore options to improve cycle access and parking along the street.
- Along with improving the pedestrian experience consider user friendly car parking opportunities along the length of the street to support various uses.



### NEXT STEPS

- Commission a feasibility study to understand the constraints and opportunities and to set out a series of levels of intervention from simple environmental and pop up proposals through to more fundamental changes to the highway.
- Deliver a phase 1 pop up project in the short term (in conjunction with Project 9).

# THESE DIAGRAMS ILLUSTRATE A PHASED APPROACH TO TRANSFORMING THE PRECINCT, BRINGING TOGETHER VARIOUS PROJECT IDEAS FROM POP UP TO PERMANENT



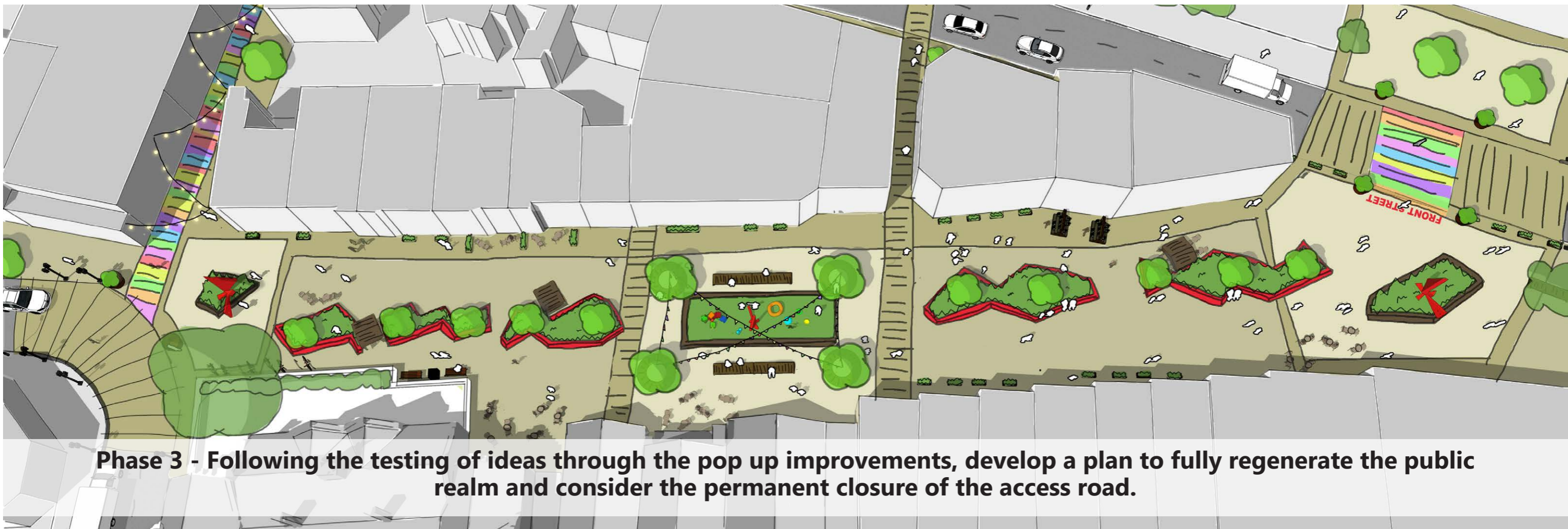
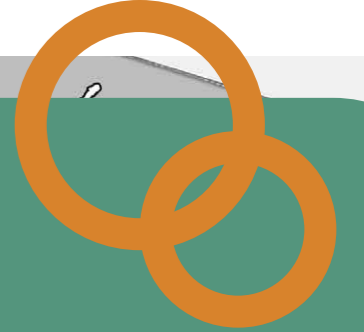
**Existing - Showing tired public realm, clutter and the gated access road cutting through the space.**



**Phase 1 - Introduce a first phase pop up community linear park and a trial closure of the gated access road.**



# THESE DIAGRAMS ILLUSTRATE A PHASED APPROACH TO TRANSFORMING THE PRECINCT, BRINGING TOGETHER VARIOUS PROJECT IDEAS FROM POP UP TO PERMANENT



# SUMMARY & NEXT STEPS



## SUMMARY

This regeneration strategy aims to capture the enthusiasm of residents, businesses, community groups and the project team for the Future of Front Street.

We believe Acomb Front Street should shout louder and prouder about its many positives as destination for local residents and the wider community in York.

This report also provides a start point for reinventing the public realm and making it work much better for the community. A stage for day to day activity and special events throughout the year.

The 10 emerging project ideas aim to improve the visitor experience, fix physical barriers, create a stronger brand, support local businesses and community groups and introduce a bold community linear park.

There is urgent need to act now and build on this momentum, in consideration of national trends, the post COVID-19 recovery and the clear message for change given by local residents and businesses through this study.

## DELIVERY

This regeneration strategy includes next steps and delivery considerations for each of the 10 emerging project ideas.

In addition, the following overarching points should be considered to help deliver change for Front Street:

- Acomb Alive traders group have been a driver for change over the past decade and their role in building consensus and promoting the delivery of projects is critical. Following their engagement and support for this process, the regeneration strategy provides a masterplan to deliver in collaboration with City of York Council.
- Delivery of the projects should be broken down into small parcels and prioritised in line with emerging funding opportunities.
- Change often takes too long. Its essential to deliver something in to short term to create interest and to test ideas. Small scale pilot projects provide an opportunity to achieve actual change and start the conversation on longer term more challenging projects.
- Continue the momentum built by this process, engaging with the community and local businesses.
- Along with exploring emerging national and local funding streams, look creatively at opportunities for local sponsorship of projects.
- Proactive engagement with the North Yorkshire LEP and other key strategic organisations.
- Actively explore opportunities to maintain commercial vibrancy and reduce loss of commercial space through Permitted Development rights.

# *future* **FRONT STREET**

THE FUTURE OF ACOMB FRONT STREET



CITY OF  
**YORK**  
COUNCIL



Aspinall  
Verdi



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DESIGN