

## English Heritage statement on The Clifford's Tower Project

### Background

The new development at Clifford's Tower is explicitly conceived and designed by English Heritage to serve the public, both residents of York and visitors from the UK and abroad. Clifford's Tower is at present visited by around 150,000 people per annum, a substantial figure and one of the largest numbers for the 420 sites in English Heritage's portfolio of historic sites, but at the same time, surveys indicate that many visitors are dissatisfied with their visit and unlikely to return or recommend. It is anticipated that the project will generate an additional 25000 visitors in the first year, stabilising at 20,000 extra visitors annually thereafter. Research tells us that these extra visitors are likely to visit other attractions in York as well, further enhancing the benefits to the York economy.

English Heritage proposes to spend an estimated £5.2m on improving the experience at Clifford's Tower, with this substantial capital outlay designed to pay back in nine years, all revenues generated being put towards the Trust's charitable aims to conserve England's heritage.

The principal benefits to York of the Clifford's Tower project are as follows:

#### **1 Conservation of an important Ancient Monument**

English Heritage has designed a programme of conservation repairs to the historic fabric of Clifford's Tower, to the value of £790,000. These include substantial works to the upper ring-beam and the fabric of the wall-head, which has experienced localised deformation as a result of corrosion of the iron reinforcements, and the roof covering of the chapel, where badly designed drainage has allowed water to penetrate into the walls, and the timbers of the modern roof to decay.

In addition to these works, which rectify the adverse effect of interventions from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the addition of the new protective timber canopy will shield the internal masonry from the direct effect of wind and rain, without causing an abrupt and radical change of environment and its resultant migration of salts.

Together this programme of conservation work will protect Clifford's Tower for now and future generations of York residents.

#### **2 Further opportunities for research and dissemination**

There is significant potential for interesting and important new information to be uncovered during the course of the project, which would be shared with the people of York. With effective dissemination (as part of visitor interpretation during and after works, through various levels of publication, and on the world-wide web), this will increase the sum of public knowledge about Clifford's Tower and the wider site of York Castle. School visits will be encouraged to engage local children in their

heritage, with the new interpretation bringing history to life for a whole new generation.

As part of the feasibility and design phases of the project, a number of archaeological investigations have already taken place inside Clifford's Tower and on the earth mound. Before 2014, the site had undergone extremely limited investigation and almost no reliable information about the mound's physical composition exists in print. Since November 2014, archaeologists have excavated the foundations of the tower, examined the make-up beneath the present York-stone pavement of in the northern part of the interior, have taken soil cores from all levels of the mound down to natural soil, and have investigated the south-east quadrant of the 19th-century millstone grit wall concealed within the re-profiled base of the mound. The proposed project will afford an opportunity for further archaeological investigation, both inside the tower, especially in its southern lobes, and at the base of the mound, where the new visitor centre is designed to be built: these investigations have the potential to illuminate the development of the tower between the 13th century and the present, and the construction and successive enlargements of the mound and its buried ditches, potentially revealing Prehistoric, Roman and earlier medieval deposits.

Considerable amounts of staff time have already been invested in research, both to inform the design-development of the project, and the generation of content for future interpretation. All this research undertaken by English Heritage will help the people of York to understand more about the iconic Tower in their midst.

### **3 Improvement of access to Clifford's Tower**

Improvement of access, in the broadest possible sense, is one of the fundamental drivers of the Clifford's Tower project. Proposed improvements to access may be considered within the following categories:

#### **3.1) Physical access to the tower, around its interior, and to the roof**

The proposed new development at Clifford's Tower will create a more staged route to the threshold of the tower than the uninterrupted flight of steps that currently runs up the mound. Inside Clifford's Tower, the two medieval spiral stairs will be supplemented by a new route to the upper parts of the structure, with horizontal walk-ways suspended below a new timber canopy/viewing platform at wall-walk level. The walk-ways provide access to the presently-inaccessible medieval garderobe chamber inside the north wall of the tower, the door into the south-west spiral stair (beside the chapel) and the two disused bartizan turrets that originally rose from the first floor of the tower to the parapet. All new stairs will be proportioned and detailed to be more easily negotiated by all ambulant visitors. In addition, care will be taken to make the new stairs and walk-ways easily visible to visitors with visual impairment. These access improvements are designed for the benefit to both

tourists and residents. According to the 2011 census, York has a slightly higher elderly population than the national average.

The new viewing platform at wall-walk level offers a considerably broader level space than the present narrow wall-walk, and will allow greater scope for visitors to enjoy the beautiful and commanding vistas at their leisure. It will also be possible for them to sit down on a bench in the northern part of the platform, or in 'amphitheatre' seating in the southern part of the roof structure.

### 3.2) Intellectual access, through improved and enhanced interpretation

The proposed visitor centre and the new protective canopy inside Clifford's Tower will create sheltered spaces (modern inside the visitor centre, both historic and modern inside the tower), and will include the following features:

- A display of the newly exposed 19th-century retaining wall, as the back wall of the new visitor centre, with explanation of when and why the motte was cut back, and eventually re-profiled to restore its 'medieval' form.
- A dedicated space inside the visitor centre, including both fixed graphics and computer animation, in which the development of the castle site and Clifford's Tower and key historical episodes will be set out.
- Virtual access will be provided inside the visitor building for those who cannot climb the stairs to the tower: this will include 360-degree views of the interior of the tower and the panorama from the roof-deck, and the visual and audio materials used for interpretation within the tower, with parallel text for those with auditory impairment.
- The roof of the visitor building allows discussion of the history of the Eye of York/former castle bailey.
- The interior of the tower will be interpreted by a variety of media, including the projection of images onto the stonework of the inner walls, illustrating the main episodes in the building's history, and discreet ambient soundtracks within each ground-floor embrasure, addressing eight historical episodes using contemporary texts. Graphics panels will also describe the tower's historic form and evolution, and specific architectural features such as the first-floor garderobe and the interior of the chapel.
- On the roof deck, it is proposed to inset into the perimeter hand-rail engraved panels with identifying labels and short descriptive text for major landmarks visible from Clifford's Tower, and the direction of places historically associated with the castle.

These spaces, together with the new decks on the roofs of both the visitor centre and Clifford's Tower, offer considerably greater scope for interpretation than the present layout.

#### **4 To make Clifford's Tower a more effective participant in the cultural life of the city of York**

Clifford's Tower is already a significant and highly visible cultural asset of the city, especially through the marketing of photographic images showing the tower atop its daffodil-covered mound: the tower is also used on a more occasional basis for city-wide events such as *son-et-lumière*-style projections, cultural tours and as a backdrop for ceremonies, such as annual observance of Holocaust Memorial Day.

The project will allow for the continuation of these initiatives, and will offer greater potential for events inside the tower itself, through the creation of covered space and through the enlargement of decking at roof level. The tower itself is rated with a maximum safe capacity of 120 people at least. This will create potential for theatrical presentations, the use of the tower for civic hospitality, for example. English Heritage is keen to work with other cultural organisations in the city to this effect.

#### **5 Enhancement of the environment of the immediate area**

Care has been taken in the architectural design of the project to minimise impact on the most sensitive aspects of the immediate environment, which includes the Eye of York, a nationally significant group of Grade I Listed Buildings, and the only formal architectural set piece within the city of York. The area also includes a large car-park, which is extremely well-used, but is widely criticised for its negative contribution to the visual amenity of the Castle area.

The new proposal requires significant but localised improvements to the pavements etc in the immediate vicinity of the visitor building, but consultation with City of York Council has indicated that there is an aspiration for much more wide-ranging and radical improvements, known as the 'Southern Gateway'. These may include the creation of a major new path axis running 'east-west', through the construction of a new pedestrian bridge across the River Foss from Piccadilly, and in the long term, it is hoped that the car park itself may be replaced with a more appropriate programme of public realm.

The proposal takes these potential initiatives into account, and is designed to complement them exactly. It is further hoped that the addition of the new visitor centre at the foot of the mound may serve as a catalyst for other initiatives to be brought forward for the necessary improvement of this area of the city.

#### **6 Substantial addition to the heritage amenity of York and its region**

York welcomes 6.8 million visitors a year who contribute £608m to the city's economy and support 20,300 jobs. (Source: Make It York) The Clifford's Tower

project would further strengthen the tourism offer in York and subsequent benefits to the economy.

Visitor experience expectations are growing, with investment by the Minster, Jorvik, York Art Gallery and the Theatre Royal raising the city's game considerably. Conversely visitor feedback from the Clifford's Tower visitor surveys reveal dissatisfaction due to the lack of interpretation or points of interest in the Tower. The project seeks to address these short-comings and make Clifford's Tower more welcoming to all, visitors and residents alike, further enhancing the York 'brand' to the benefit of the city.

English Heritage recognises that many residents have not visited Clifford's Tower for years. Therefore, in addition to the Residents' First weekend in January, we propose to introduce a further Residents' weekend each autumn. We anticipate the offer would be enjoyed by some 2,000 York residents over the each weekend.

### **English Heritage Trust**

English Heritage Trust is a charitable body, established in April 2015 to conserve, present and manage 420 ancient monuments and historic buildings across England. It retains the name of a previous publicly-funded body, whose grant-giving and regulatory responsibilities are now discharged by a new agency, Historic England. English Heritage was endowed with £80 million from the Government at the time of its creation, but its annual grant allocation will diminish annually and will cease entirely in 2023. English Heritage's conservation and presentation activities are funded from revenues from the operation of our sites and from donations.