

## **Report of the Assistant Director of City & Environmental Services**

### **York City Walls Scrutiny Review- Feasibility Report**

#### **Summary**

1. This report suggests a programme that would enable a detailed scrutiny review of York City Walls in terms of conservation policy, interpretation facilities, ownership / management structure, and staffing. It describes briefly the technical work required; outlines timescales for this work; and sets out the staffing and financial resources that would be required to carry out the review.
2. In this report, York City Walls is used as a convenient term to include both walls and structures built to define and defend the City of York, St Marys Abbey Walls, and the remains of St Leonard's Hospital in Library Lawn area that now form part of the scheduled area of York City Walls.

#### **Background to Review**

3. At full Council on 30 July 2015 a Motion was proposed by Cllr Myers and agreed that, inter alia, requested "officers to report back to the Executive on how to maximise the unique asset of the City Walls in order to broaden their appeal". Shortly thereafter, Cllr Myers submitted a Scrutiny Topic on 'York Walls including St Mary's Abbey Walls and St Leonard's Hospital (see Annex A). Cllr Myers sought the views of the Executive Leader on his scrutiny topic proposal and the Leader agreed the topic was suitable for scrutiny review and confirmed that officers should proceed with supporting the proposed scrutiny review ahead of implementing the agreed Council Motion, with the caveat that if the scrutiny topic did not proceed to review, officers would continue with any outstanding work required as a result of the agreed motion.

#### **Introduction to City Walls**

4. The walls around the historic core of the City of York are perhaps the finest medieval walls in this country. York City Walls are part of the character of York, a defining feature in the cityscape. They are perhaps second only to the Minster in the identity they create for the City and in

the recognition they generate among residents and tourists. They extend for 2.5 miles around the city centre area. The earliest elements date from the Roman period; the majority of the walls were built in the period 1200 to 1500. Some 1 million people walk all or part of the wall walk each year.

5. York City Walls are a critical part of the cultural resource of the City. They are used in community events, as a series of venues for artistic and creative interventions (e.g. York Youth Mystery Plays, Illuminate York), and are the focus for a multitude of guided walks and tours, all to the cultural benefit and enrichment of residents and visitors. York City Walls form a green corridor and are a popular traffic-free pedestrian route for residents and City Centre workers. They are used by joggers and walkers as part of their healthy living programmes. York City Walls and ramparts form critical publicly accessible open spaces surrounding the City Centre.
6. The City Walls are a strong, identifiable image of the City. They encapsulate the City's unique character. This image and character are significant elements in the City's mission to create a prosperous city for all. A dynamic approach to regenerating the economic, educational and cultural value of this unique asset will bring benefits that will contribute to the wider mission of the Council.
7. The City Walls are a scheduled ancient monument, listed Grade I structures, and lie within the Central Historic Core Conservation Area. They thus enjoy the highest levels of statutory protection. The walls are owned by the Council, though parts of St Leonard's Hospital are now under the operational control of York Museums Trust and York Explore.
8. The Council has a statutory duty as owners of the walls to provide access for the general public and a duty to maintain and preserve the monument. In order to ensure that the walls are in a safe condition for the general public and also to ensure the long-term preservation of the walls, the Council has an annual programme of repair and restoration. This programme is based on a comprehensive condition survey of the walls in 1991.
9. Over the past 18 months, York City Walls have been monitored and assessed against the 1991 Condition Survey by an external Conservation Accredited Engineer. Based on this work, Part 1 of a Quinquennial programme of restoration (2016/17 to 2020/21) has been identified. This forms the basis of a Capital Resource Allocation Model (CRAM) Bid for the 2016/17 City of York Capital Programme. This

quinquennial approach places the Council's restoration and maintenance practice within the same framework as that used by Cathedrals, churches and the National Trust.

10. The Council has to date invested through its capital programme £90,000 a year on a rolling programme of repair and restoration on York City Walls. This has been augmented in the past by one-off bids to provide additional funding for larger programmes of work (e.g. Railway Arches, 2004, £425000; Robin Hood Tower, 2010, £22500). At other times, funding has been rolled over from year to year in order to provide sufficient funding for a project (e.g. current work at Walmgate Bar).
11. City of York Council commissioned a Conservation Plan and an Interpretation and Access Plan for York City Walls in 2004. These were received and adopted by City of York Council in autumn 2004. They provide a policy framework for all work (both repair and restoration and interpretation) on York City Walls.
12. City of York Council receives no external grant aid or additional funding for this essential programme of repair and restoration. A pilot programme in 2011/12 to raise income through voluntary donations via collection boxes in the Tourist Information Centre and through mobile phone donations met with limited success.
13. The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) will not grant aid for simple schemes of repair and restoration, however large, desirable or necessary they may be. The HLF is interested in funding schemes which address access, education and interpretation issues as well as repair and restoration.

### **Consultation**

14. This report has been prepared by Planning and Environmental Management who if resources were made available could lead this process.
15. If the Committee were to proceed with the proposed scrutiny review, it would require consultation with community, amenity and statutory bodies (e.g. Friends of York Walls, York Civic Trust, Historic England).

### **Conservation Plan and Interpretation & Access Plan**

16. A Conservation Plan is a document that describes a conservation site, what is happening to it; and what the key issues are in order to look after it. In the case of York City Walls, it helps City of York Council (CYC) to

understand why they are valued and by whom, and it enables CYC to formulate an overall view.

17. The current Plan also sets out a framework of policies that help CYC make decisions about how to look after York City Walls whilst ensuring they continue to be used, enjoyed and made accessible. The information it contains helps design new work; plan conservation and restoration works; improve interpretation and public access; support bids to the HLF, and plan activities to help people engage with York City Walls. The Interpretation Plan builds on the content of the Conservation Plan and set out how interpretation and access to York City Walls can be enhanced.
18. An up-to-date Conservation Plan is a requirement specified by external funding agencies such as the HLF and Historic England, and is one of the benchmarks of good conservation and management practice. It covers a whole conservation site and not just parts that may be included in a bid to the HLF for funding.
19. The current York City Walls Conservation Plan and Interpretation and Access Plan are both critical and have driven conservation and interpretation policy and actions over the last 11 years. However, they both require review and updating. An update of these two documents would include:
  - A review of CYC conservation policy
  - A review of management and ownership options
  - Staffing requirements in both professional and craft areas of expertise
  - How to address future programmes of repair and restoration
  - enhancing interpretation facilities
  - Future funding options
20. It would also include extensive consultation with community, amenity and statutory groups and organisations.

### **Proposals for Scrutiny Review**

21. The process of producing an updated Conservation Plan and Interpretation Plan covers three stages:

Stage 1 - The creation of a brief i.e. the preparation of documents, consultation with stakeholders and potential funding partners, procurement, management of the process, and production of an Action Plan. This will cost approximately £9k.

Stage 2 – The production of an updated Conservation Plan and Interpretation Plan. The cost of the revised and updated Conservation and Interpretation Plans is difficult to estimate, as the precise scope and content has at this time not been defined. Based on recently commissioned Conservation Plans and Interpretation and Access Plans, one might expect an external consultancy to cost up to £40k.

Stage 3 - To identify the recommendations and proposals in the Plans that CYC and other stakeholders want to take forward – each of these will need to go through a design, costing, commissioning and implementation procedure.

### **Resource Implications**

22. At present, there are no resources (either staff or financial) available to take this forward. Stage one is likely to take approx 20 days of CYC staff time. Without a firm commitment and the necessary funding to complete stages 2 & 3, it would be impractical to proceed with this stage given the associated cost.
23. There are two possible routes for Stage 2 above:
  - a) Identifying appropriately qualified consultants; obtaining and assessing quotations; appointing consultants; managing the project; producing a report with an Action Plan and making recommendations to Members or;
    - This way forward has the benefit that it will have a minor impact on the day-to-day work programme already in place and this impact will be spread out over an extended period. However, it will require approval for additional expenditure.
    - If this route is chosen it is likely that the process will take at least 8 months: 2 months to prepare documentation for procurement; 4 months to appoint and for the consultant to carry out the commission; and 2 months to prepare an Action Plan ready for reporting
  - b) Carry out the work in-house to produce the Conservation Plan(with officers time being backfilled by an additional temporary post for the duration of the project)
    - This has the benefit of exploiting the knowledge of City of York staff. However the work programme for the relevant staff within PEM is already fully occupied with Development Management advice,

Design advice, Historic Environment Record management, managing the existing City Walls programme, and monitoring archaeological projects. An additional resource would need to be identified in order to bring in an additional member of staff to cover these work areas while PEM staff produced the revised Conservation Plan, which may prove both time-consuming and expensive. Failing to provide this cover would render this option almost impossible to implement.

- It is probable that this route would take an additional three months to complete the necessary work i.e. late 2016.
  - If this route were taken, a suitable experienced external consultant would still be required to review and produce a revised Interpretation and Access Plan This would cost approximately £15k.
24. There are no resources to meet any of the costs associated with stages 1 & 2 above, regardless of the chosen route. If Scrutiny wishes to take this forward as set out above, Scrutiny will have to identify the necessary resources. If an external consultant was procured, the cost could be up to £50k. The cost associated with carrying out the work in house has not been fully explored but is likely to be of the same magnitude, if not greater.
25. As there are no resources available to take this forward, if Members decide they would like to proceed with the review, the first step would be to seek the necessary funding from the Executive via the Corporate & Scrutiny Management Policy & Scrutiny Committee.

### **Scrutiny Review Options**

26. Option 1 – Proceed with the scrutiny review in order to enable a holistic review of the future potential for improving the visitors experience through improved access, education and interpretation of York City Walls, by :
- a) Seeking appropriate funding to enable stages one and two of the process of updating the Conservation Plan and Interpretation Plan, to take place, including considering the most appropriate route for implementing stage two as detailed in paragraph 23.

- b) Subject to the appropriate funding being made available, participate in the creation and development of a stage one brief as detailed at paragraph 21 above.

27. Option 2 - Note the content of this report and agree not to proceed with the scrutiny review.

### **Recommendation**

28. Having considered the scrutiny topic proposal and the information within this report, as provided by appropriate officers, Members are asked to:
- i. Note and comment on the contents of this report
  - ii. Explore the advantages and disadvantages of updating the Conservation Plan and Interpretation & Access Plan at this point in time, in advance of deciding whether to undertake the review
  - iii. Consider the review options detailed in paragraph 25 and the associated resource implications and agree whether or not to proceed with the review.

Reason: To progress the work of the Committee.

### **Contact Details**

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**Report Approved**



**Date** 9<sup>th</sup> October 2015

**Specialist Implications Officer(s):**

**Wards Affected:**

Guildhall & Micklegate

**Annex:**

**Annex A** – Scrutiny Topic Proposal