

## APPENDIX SEVEN

### Recent Developments and Outstanding Universal Value

**York World Heritage Steering Group - An initial view on the theoretical impact of recent developments that may have affected York as World Heritage Site in line with the Draft Statement of Outstanding Universal Value Draft (Appendix 05).**

**Background:** Following Liverpool's loss of World Heritage Status in June 2021 due to "the irreversible loss of attributes conveying the outstanding universal value of the property" through new development, the York World Heritage Steering Group agreed for York Civic Trust to undertake a superficial view of recent developments within the Central Historic Core Conservation Area (the proposed World Heritage Site) to assess the impact these developments could have had on York's OUV should they have come forward in the future and if York was a designated World Heritage Site.

#### **Outstanding Universal Value (Appendix 05 for further detail)**

The proposed OUV focuses on York as the pre-eminent historic urban centre in northern England and as the outstanding example of urban development in western/north-western Europe originating with Roman occupation. The sequence of historical urban development, although common in western/north-western Europe is marked in York by exceptional survival of all periods of the city's history from 71 C.E. This approach to the OUV of the city allows for sensitive and appropriate development within the Central Historic Core Conservation Area. This development can be diverse and varied working within the 24 character areas of one of the most complex and largest conservation areas within England. The York World Heritage Steering Group has agreed that the OUV for York falls within the following criteria:

- (i) **Represent a masterpiece of human creative genius** – focussing on the stained glass collection of York Minster and the historic urban churches of York
- (ii) **Exhibit an important interchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town-planning or landscape design** – focussing on architectural assets that reflect the contemporaneous significant role of York at that time with particular reference to the human scale of York and its town plan.
- (iii) **Bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or had disappeared** – focussing on the comprehensive survival of exceptional physical evidence above and below ground. The combination of survival above ground and exceptional archaeology below ground combined with exceptional civic, corporate and ecclesiastical archives gives an unparalleled physical record of this sequence.

- (iv) **Be an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history** – focussing on an unbroken sequence of secular and ecclesiastical buildings illustrating the development of urban life.
- (vi) **be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance. (The World Heritage Committee considers that this criterion should preferably be used in conjunction with other criteria.)** - focussing on Constantine the Great, Alcuin and the York cycle of Mystery plays

### **Recent Developments and their theoretical impact on the OUV Criteria selected for York**

- (i) N/A
- (ii) The quality of design architects and developments commissioned to work in York recently do meet the aspirations of criterion (ii). There are examples e.g. Make Architects – Headquarters building for Hiscox representing York’s leading role in the Insurance industry or CSP Architects for City of York Council’s West Offices representing both the continuing civic leadership of City of York Council and retaining the significance of the railways to the city. Other positive developments have been recognised by initiatives such as York Design Awards. Weak developments exhibit neither an important interchange of human values nor developments in architecture, town-planning or landscape design. Recent emphasis on continuously increasing heights of buildings within the central historic core if continued unchecked could impact on the human-scale of York and its town plan. Securing World Heritage Site status would support higher standards of sensitive and ambitious design for the future.
- (iii) The recent upward trend of the financial benefits of property development within the central historic core has seen several large-scale developments that have replaced existing buildings rather than adapting them for reuse. Whilst adding to the sequence of urban development this surge has resulted in the preservation in-situ, recovery and recording of archaeological evidence and occasional physical loss of architectural assets. Publication, dissemination and addition to communal knowledge of ‘the testimony of the cultural tradition or to a civilization’ that these developments could have provided is still awaited for some important sites. The designation of York as a World Heritage Site could encourage developers to take a more proactive

role in adapting their policies to reflect this criterion and look to greater adaptive reuse rather than demolition and replacement.

- (iv) Recent development trends within the Central Historic Core Conservation area in recent years, when looked at as a series or an ensemble, whilst not significantly detracting from the examples cited within the submission for OUV Criterion (iv) for York, do not add anything exceptional. The expansion of the architectural responses to recent stages of human development – higher education open to all and mass cultural tourism in the form of city centre student accommodation blocks and hotels have been underwhelming in not consciously adding anything outstanding to reflect these key movements in York's history. World Heritage Site status if achieved could raise the ambition across the central historic core to create outstanding additional ensembles that illustrate contemporary development of urban life.
- (vi) N/A

**Conclusion:** As the Requirements for Protection and Management (Appendix 6) state the Central Historic Core is already protected by rigorous controls from over development that could potentially impact the World Heritage Site or its setting. This initial survey has shown that these controls are effective in protecting York's physical assets but a lack of sensitive architectural ambition and overall aspiration expected from development within the area has been missing. Designation as a World Heritage Site for York could significantly enhance the Central Historic Core of York. Such an aspiration would require a combined city-wide effort including developers, architects, civic leaders, advocacy groups and residents to raise architectural design and sensitivity standards to complement and add benefit to York as the outstanding example of urban development in western/north-western Europe originating with Roman occupation.