

Report of the Interim Director of City Development

## **Major Projects – Castle Gateway Update**

### **Summary**

1. In November 2023, a review of the Castle Gateway Masterplan and component schemes was undertaken to ensure they aligned with the recently approved Council Plan, and the three key city strategies (Climate Change, Economy, Health, and Wellbeing), and the recently relaunched “Our City Centre” Vision.
2. Following this review, the Executive approved a number of recommendations relating to the individual Castle Gateway schemes.
3. This report summarises the steps that have been taken to progress these schemes in line with the decisions that were made in November 2023, mainly focusing on the Castle and Eye of York.

### **Background**

4. The original masterplan was approved in 2018, with the business case for Phase 1 delivery being approved in January 2020. Since the approval of the Phase 1 delivery strategy, the projects have been impacted by a number of macro-economic factors, including:
  - construction cost inflation driving increases in delivery costs
  - rising interest rates impacting borrowing costs
  - housing market uncertainty
5. There had also been two unsuccessful Levelling Up Funding (“LUF”) bids, which sought to fund the delivery of the public realm around Clifford’s Tower and the Eye of York.

6. Considering these external influences impacting on the delivery strategy for Phase 1, and approval of the 10-year strategies and a new Council Plan (2023-2027) being adopted, a review of the masterplan and schemes was required.
7. Following this review, recommendations were presented to the Executive on each of the projects to ensure they delivered positive outcomes for the city, in accordance with both the original master plan principles, and the then recently approved Council Plan and “Our City Centre” Vision, together with ensuring they deliver ambitions set out in the three key 10-year strategies (Climate Change, Economy, Health, and Wellbeing) that were approved by Council in December 2022.
8. The key recommendations approved by Executive are set out below, with this report then providing an update on progress against each recommendation:

### **Castle and Eye of York**

9. Confirm the re-purposing of the Castle car park to support the delivery of a revised Castle Gateway Masterplan, with retained Blue Badge parking; subject to an updated business case being brought back to Executive for full consideration, and where closure will only occur when a revised Scheme has been approved for delivery.
10. Confirm the re-design of the Castle and Eye of York Scheme, with a specific emphasis on the retention of blue badge parking numbers, flexible green space with children’s play provision and a keen focus on reducing capital and management costs and the submission of revisions to the planning application.

### **St George’s Field Car Park**

11. Confirm the Council will not proceed with the building of a Multi-Storey Car-Park on St George’s Car Park and that officers are to develop proposals which balance - improved parking capacity; pedestrian and cycle connectivity; and coach drop off facilities within a surface level layout. This decision acknowledges that there will be an in-year revenue impact to the Council of up to £1m.

### **Castle Mills**

12. Confirm that further work on developing the Castle Mills site is paused and ask officers to investigate appropriate meanwhile use options in

parallel with exploring longer term opportunities for the future delivery of 100% affordable housing on this Council owned site.

13. Instruct Officers to progress work to secure delivery of the pedestrian/cycle bridge, sustainable travel links, subject to confirmation of funding with West Yorkshire Combined Authority (“WYCA”); updated delivery costings; and all necessary approvals, planning, highways, and bridge agreement.

## **Progress update**

### **Castle and Eye of York**

14. In February 2022, the council submitted a planning application for a new public space at the Castle and Eye of York, the heart of the masterplan. The design was informed by extensive engagement with residents and businesses about what they want to see in the area.
15. Two funding bids which sought to deliver the public realm around Clifford’s Tower and the Eye of York have been unsuccessful, so there is a significant funding gap for the previous project.
16. At the Executive in November 2023 recommendations were approved for the next steps of the Castle Gateway project, to align these with the new Council Plan.
17. In respect of the Castle Car Park and the Eye of York, the council is working with BDP, the landscape architects, to amend the submitted planning application in line with the recommendations approved by Executive, which were to:
  - a. provide a flexible green space which includes children’s play provision
  - b. retain the 30 blue badge parking spaces on Castle Car Park (position and access point to be confirmed)
  - c. focus on reducing capital and management costs
18. The council is seeking planning permission for the whole site with the red line boundary of the planning application staying the same, however there is now a need to phase the delivery due to reduced funding being available to bring forward the scheme. The phasing of the site is yet to be determined, with the business case including financial case under development, with the aim of inviting Executive approval in the spring.

19. Combining the new brief with the existing wealth of engagement feedback, BDP developed revised concept design ideas. The revised brief, along with the high-level optioneering design was tested with Members, key stakeholders and the public between May and September 2024.



Figure 1. BDP concept design to aid engagement.

20. Working with My Future York, the public consultation ran 15 August until the 20 September 2024. The consultation included several methods for people to provide their feedback:
  - a. Four on site tours and one online tour 7/9 Sept – total 70 participants
  - b. Pre-recorded YouTube video – 1,358 views
  - c. Guildhall Ward Committee 12 Sept – 10 attendees
  - d. Blog posts through the project website
  - e. Social media posts

f. Press and media coverage, including YorkMix York Press, YO1 Radio and That's TV.

21. The council also directly engaged with the Castle Gateway Advisory Group (a group of external stakeholders in the city including the Civic Trust, York Museums Trust, York Bid, Make it York, Environment Agency, English Heritage, Historic England, York Crown Court), as well as other key stakeholders including York BID Board, York Liberal Jewish Community and the York Access Forum.

22. The engagement feedback is summarised below, with more detailed perspectives outlined in the My Castle Gateway blog (linked below).

a. Parking and Accessibility

- Majority supported the removal of Castle Car Park, though some were concerned that loss of parking would affect **local businesses**. Need a wider **parking and movement strategy**.
- **Blue Badge Parking** was pretty universally seen as necessary. Some asked whether alternative locations could be found, some felt 30 was too few spaces, some felt 30 was too many.
- Need **parking enforcement** of Blue Badge spaces including Tower Street (near Hilton).
- Some welcomed **screening** of car park, whilst others felt this left car park users vulnerable/ unsafe.
- **Path** across car park could be centred on Clifford's Tower/ symmetrical approach.
- Need accessible **seating, toilets** and links to **mobility schemes**.

b. Movement and connectivity

- Concern that **Castlegate junction** would not feel like a pedestrian route - speed tables don't work well, will traffic lights be needed, will paved surface be robust enough for HGV's/ suitable for users of mobility aids?
- Need a **drop off and pick up** point.

- Will **Castlegate** be pedestrianised? Need to reinsert new proposals back into wider masterplan area.
- **Boardwalk** was welcomed to connect Coppergate path and Raindale Mill. Concern regarding impact on flats opposite. Path around the Coppergate centre is very unpleasant/ experiences anti-social behaviour.
- Scepticism as to whether cyclists will **dismount** on boardwalk (3m is wider than other York shared use paths).
- Need clarity on **cycling routes** – chance to contribute towards city cycling network. Castlegate allows cycling one way. Need a segregated cycling path on Piccadilly over the proposed new Foss Bridge.
- Need convenient **bike parking**, including for adapted bikes and cargo bikes.

#### c. Heritage, uses and telling stories

- General consensus that concept design respects the **setting** of Clifford's Tower and the historic buildings.
- Incorporating **castle** outline/ wall was well received - offers a chance to sit/ play/ enhance understanding.
- The outline to the 19<sup>th</sup> century **prison** had been lost.
- Circular walk around **Clifford's Tower** and the importance of commemoration (saying Mourners' Kaddish and laying stones) was widely welcomed. Tension with misbehaviour on the Motte. Potential conflict between a space for remembrance and a space for protest.
- Desire to **interpret and share** the many layers of histories and stories.
- Some welcome the range of potential spaces in **Eye of York**, but also concern that it was 'doing something for the sake of it'. Might the benches/ planting prevent it being used flexibly as a place to gather? Need to retain kerbs (not a level shared space).

- **Benches** were welcomed, some with backs and of interesting designs. What about **shade, shelter and bins**?

d. Play and getting close to the Foss

- The balance between **play** and **respecting the quiet spaces** was recognised as important, although hard to achieve (including noise disturbing the court).
- Will the play elements be **playful enough**? Could they be more **interactive**? The loss of the fountains from the previous scheme was felt by some.
- Idea of the **swathe** to represent historic role of water was very popular, but is it practical? Will it be hard to keep looking good/ will it look muddy/ attract rubbish/ will there be a dedicated **maintenance** team?
- Enhance **connection** between Clifford's Tower and River Foss, car park shouldn't be a barrier.
- Need **native planting** to both provide biodiversity and cool the city.
- Opportunity to improve **habitat** and re-naturalise the stagnant River Foss.

e. Usage and economy

- How do we bring life to the area at all times of day/year and in all weathers. Great in the daytime when it is nice weather – but **what about when it is raining or at night**?
- A place to sit, meet up in a green space was very much welcomed. Where might food and drink be bought – was there an opportunity for a **café or street food**?
- What the area would be like if it was raining, as there is **no indoor focal point**.
- Some felt the **loss of the events space** function of the previous plan (e.g. skateboarding).
- Should the design include **future proofing** the site with **event infrastructure**?

- A warning of disruptive activity at night was issued by residents who overlook the site (music, cars doing doughnuts, rubbish). Current plans don't provide any **focus for the evening** that might help displace the current activity, so it could be an intimidating space for Blue Badge drivers and people walking through.
- **Lighting** was seen as important – but it was noted that what really makes a place safe is lots of people.
- Creating a vibrant space requires **activity** to bring people in both during the daytime and after dark.

f. Maintenance and funding

- Whilst landscape proposals look good – how will **long term maintenance** be afforded by CYC, especially with complex or ambitious planting – should not rely on volunteers.
- Loss of revenue from the current car park was noted. Could maintenance be enabled through **revenue generation**/ build economic activity into design?
- How much will it **cost**? How will it be **funded**? Is this the right **priority** for the council?
- Stop talking - start **delivering** it!

23. A detailed summary of all the engagement feedback can be found via the My Castle Gateway Blog:

<https://mycastlegateway.org/2024/11/21/revise-d-concept-proposals-for-castle-and-eye-of-york-summer-2024-responses-via-all-engagement-routes/>

24. Following discussions with York Liberal Jewish Community, Dr Louise Hampson also wrote a guest blog presenting new insight into York's mediaeval Jewish communities and life around the time of the 1190 massacre, for us to consider the opportunity to "walk in the footsteps of those who died" more than eight centuries later as part of the new design:

<https://mycastlegateway.org/2024/11/26/in-the-footsteps-of-those-who-died-new-spotlight-on-1190-by-dr-louise-hampson/>



25. All the feedback received through the engagement is being used by BDP to shape a preferred design which will be tested again with key stakeholders throughout January and February, before being submitted to planning to update the existing pending application.
26. The preferred design is also being informed by the cost plan work that is currently being undertaken by Turner and Townsend to ensure that, inline with the Executive recommendation, we are designing a deliverable scheme.
27. The council is currently preparing the evidence base and information required to inform the next decision point with the Executive which we are aiming for April 2025. This Executive report will seek a decision to close Castle car park and approve the budget to proceed with the detailed design and delivery of the scheme, taking a phased approach.

### **St George's Field Car Park**

28. The decision was taken in November 2023 not to proceed with the multi-storey car park on St George's Field car park and instead explore maximising the capacity of the surface level car park by removing coach parking and creating coach drop off. Officers were asked to explore opportunities for improving pedestrian and cycle connectivity within the scheme.
29. This work is ongoing with a final scheme to be implemented prior to Castle car park closing.

### **Castle Mills**

30. Officers were asked to explore longer term opportunities for the delivery of 100% affordable housing on the Castle Mills site. This work is underway with the council in discussions with Registered Providers. Progress will be reported back to the Executive in the spring.
31. At various points in 2024 the vacant Castle Mills site was used as a site compound, firstly for the contractor delivering the Hostile Vehicle measures, and then by the contractor undertaking the station frontage work. We are continuing to explore more active meanwhile uses for the site while the opportunities for 100% affordable housing is explored.
32. The council is also progressing work to secure delivery of the pedestrian/cycle bridge over the Foss between the rear of the Castle Museum and the Castle Mills site. This work is ongoing in terms of

reviewing the cost plan, confirming the funding with West Yorkshire Combined Authority (“WYCA”); and reviewing the deliverability of the scheme without impacting the Castle Mills residential scheme.

## **Council Plan and Key Council Policies**

33. The Castle Gateway scheme contributes to the delivery of the commitments in the Council Plan (2023-27), ‘Our City Centre’ Vision and the Local Plan.
34. The Castle Gateway projects will contribute to the delivery of the four core ‘EACH’ commitments in the Council Plan 2023-27 – One City, for all by:
  - **Equalities and Human Rights** – by re-purposing the Castle car park and redesigning the proposals, blue badge parking will be retained close to the city to aid accessibility, aligning to the emerging Local Transport Strategy’s Policy Focus Area 1 - shaping a city centre that is accessible for all, and in response to the MIMA report published last year.
  - **Affordability** – by investigating opportunities to increase the supply of affordable housing within the city centre in the longer term and creating a free amenity/play space for families and children.
  - **Climate & Environment** - by providing a new green space within the city centre, and enhancing/improving biodiversity, this will aid urban cooling for climate resilience. The public realm improvements will consider climate adaptations features for example passive shading/cooling, rest areas, water refill stations. It will also provide sustainable transport modes.
  - **Health** – by creating a free amenity and play space for families to encourage healthier lifestyles, coupled with improved connectivity and travel opportunities across the site. Improving walking and cycling routes will contribute to active travel and help improve air quality, contributing to the Joint Health and Wellbeing’s Strategy ambition to be a health-generating city.
35. Below are Council Plan actions to illustrate the above:

- Pg 18 3.2 - develop family friendly foot streets to bring playful exploration to the city centre.
- Pg 26 5.2 Work with partners to develop the city centre.
- Pg 30 3.2 Co-design a plan for Our City Centre to make foot streets more welcoming and accessible.
- Pg 30 4.1 Improve streets, cycleways and footpaths for walkers and wheelers.
- Pg 32 2 Create more affordable housing.
- Pg 36 2.2 Make the most of our green and blue infrastructure to improve biodiversity, improve health and wellbeing and support nature recovery.

36. The Castle Gateway projects will also help deliver the 'Our City Centre' Vision, approved by Executive in October 2023, as set out below:

- **Theme 1 – Family friendly and affordable city centre**
  - The new public realm around Clifford's Tower will create valuable new play space in the city centre and create a space that can be used by people of all ages.
- **Theme 2 – An attractive, active and healthy city centre**
  - The creation of the new public realm space delivers investment in public space and squares.
  - Deliver active travel options for getting into and around the centre of York.
- **Theme 3 – A sustainable city fit for the future**
  - New green space will increase biodiversity in the city and improve climate resilience and reduce surface water run-off.
- **Theme 5 – Embracing our riversides**
  - The Castle and Eye of York designs will celebrate the cultural and environmental benefits of the River Foss, providing a new river edge and walkway linking to the new river park behind the museum.

- **Theme 6 – A safe city centre, which is welcoming and accessible to all**
  - Blue badge parking will be retained close to the city to aid accessibility.
  - Future affordable housing provision on Castle Mills are being explored.
  - The new public space at the Castle and Eye of York will provide open space and facilities for residents and will be specifically designed to improve accessibility. This supports the Health and Wellbeing strategy, “Creating an age friendly city for older adults.”
- **Theme 7 – Thriving business and productive buildings**
  - Projects will explore and deliver temporary uses in empty buildings and spaces. Spark York is great example of this, and an extension of its lease forms part of this Report. Meanwhile opportunities on the Castle Mills site will be explored, whilst affordable housing options are considered.
- **Theme 8 – Celebrating heritage and making modern history**
  - The new public realm development in the Castle and Eye of York will enhance the setting of the heritage assets surrounding the spaces by; repurposing the car park, enhancing the Eye of York, and transforming the connectivity to this area.

37. In the emerging Local Plan, which we expect to progress to adoption soon, **Policy SS5 – Castle Gateway** is allocated as an “Area of Opportunity.” It is identified as a major regeneration area of the city centre. The projects in the Castle Gateway masterplan are key to delivering this policy.

38. The projects also contribute to delivery of the three 10-year strategies approved in 2022:

- Economic Strategy (2022-2032).
- Health and Wellbeing Strategy (2022-2032).

- Climate Change Strategy (2022-2032).

## **Implications**

39. This report contains an update on progress so far and as such there are no implications.
40. Implications will be included in the preparation of the next Executive decision point, due in the Spring 2025.

## **Risk Management**

41. The principal risks associated with the Castle Gateway project at this stage are reputational from non-delivery. Re-evaluating the projects in 2023 and Executive approving a revised way forward mitigates this risk of non-delivery, so that the regeneration of this area can progress to a phased completion.
42. There is a risk that having engaged extensively and raised expectations amongst the public, the change of approach will not fully deliver initial expectations.
43. However, the bigger risk is that by not changing the approach, the regeneration of this important southern gateway into the city will stall. The key principles and outcomes remain and are embedded in the overarching proposal, which once delivered will mitigate this risk.

## **Recommendations**

44. Members are asked to note the progress to date following the Executive decisions taken in November 2023, and the detailed Castle and Eye of York business case being presented to Executive Spring 2025.

## Contact Details

### Author:

Katie Peeke-Vout  
Head of Regeneration  
Regeneration  
[katie.peeke-vout@york.gov.uk](mailto:katie.peeke-vout@york.gov.uk)

### Chief Officer Responsible for the report:

Claire Foale  
Interim Director of City Development

Report  
Approved

 Y

Date 09/01/2025

### Wards Affected:

All  X

For further information please contact the author of the report

### Background Papers:

#### Report to the Executive, 'York's Southern Gateway,' October 2015

<https://democracy.york.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=733&MIId=>

#### Report to the Executive, 'York Castle Gateway,' January 2017

<https://democracy.york.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=733&MIId=9309>

#### Report to the Executive, 'The Castle Gateway Masterplan,' April 2018

<https://democracy.york.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=733&MIId=10197&Ver=4>

#### Report to the Executive, 'Castle Gateway phase one delivery strategy,' January 2020

<https://democracy.york.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=733&MIId=11115&Ver=4>

**Report to the Executive, 'Update on Castle Gateway and Business Case Review,' October 2020**

<https://democracy.york.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=733&MIId=12297&Ver=4>

**Report to the Executive 'Castle Gateway Update' June 2022**

<https://democracy.york.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=733&MIId=13287&Ver=4>

**Report to the Executive 'Castle Gateway Update Report and Next Steps'**

<https://democracy.york.gov.uk/mgAi.aspx?ID=66069#mgDocuments>

**MIMA: York City Centre Accessibility Findings and Recommendations Report 13/06/2024**

[https://democracy.york.gov.uk/documents/s177490/Annex%20C%20MIMA%20York%20City%20Centre%20Accessibility\\_%20Findings%20and%20Recommendations%20Report.pdf](https://democracy.york.gov.uk/documents/s177490/Annex%20C%20MIMA%20York%20City%20Centre%20Accessibility_%20Findings%20and%20Recommendations%20Report.pdf)