

Written submission from York Disability Rights Forum to the Council Executive meeting on 3rd March 2026 with regard to Item 10 – City centre events and permanent Anti-Terrorism Traffic Regulation Order

We welcome the Council's commitment to improving city centre access and acknowledge the challenges it faces given our increasingly risk adverse society with regard to fear of terrorist attacks as well as the physical layout of the city centre and financial constraints. Your officer's report reminds us of your administration's commitment to 'access for all' and includes the statement that: *'In an increasingly polarised and divided society, there is a need for the city centre to do all it can to draw people together. In this context, it is vital that the centre is accessible for all, both in terms of how it is configured and served by key infrastructure, and in terms of how key activity, including city centre events is managed.....'* (page 117) (*our bold*). It goes on to say: 'It is our ambition to provide **full independent access for all to the city centre at all times.....'** The report later refers to your 10 Year Plan and Local Transport Strategy, both of which repeat your commitment to a city centre **accessible for all**. However, the options presented today make clear that access will **not** be achievable for **all** disabled residents and visitors any time soon. That should be made *much* clearer. Indeed the report's reference to the development of a jointly owned road map for longer term solutions has no start date and nothing about who its joint owners will be.

Our starting point at YDRF is that we do not consider the approach to blue badge exclusion during the 2025 Christmas Markets – and hence potentially for future such events - to have been proportionate. We don't accept that vehicles transporting BB holders constitute a significant terrorist threat – and certainly not sufficient to override their human rights. Representatives from several disability groups in the city, including ourselves, met with the North Yorkshire Chief Constable last November to express our concern about his request for an ATTRO for the Christmas Markets but without success. For many blue badge holders, the city centre continues to be a 'no go' area for too much of the time.

We very much hope that the measures set out in the report will result in improved access for some disabled people, providing they are implemented. We were pleased to attend the events arranged to discuss possible options but the report's reference to the measures being co-designed is a misnomer. This report is our first chance to see what officers made of our discussions. It is now several years since the then Director of Communities agreed that officers should check wording with YDRF in advance whenever referring to us to in reports, including when apparently representing our views as here. This is so that amendments can be made if necessary. We suspect this has never got properly embedded into practices so it's not a dig at the officers concerned but to the lack of appropriate procedures for claiming co-design.

In similar vein, we were surprised to learn (para 24) that the Access Officer's role in a 'partnership working group' is to represent the views of 'York Access Forum **and disability rights groups'** (*our bold*). While it seems wholly appropriate to involve the Access Officer in this group, YDRF has not been asked if we want our views to be represented in this way or how it would be done. And we note work is ongoing on a Movement and Place Plan: we would welcome early involvement of disability groups.

Finally, we're aware that the council is trialling the use of the HREIAT – which we welcome - and want to offer suggestions for improvement. In this report the tool only includes ratings of 'positive' despite your own guidance pointing out the importance of providing negatives too, where applicable, especially where human rights have to be balanced (p145). (Indeed the lack of reference to the Human Rights Act in the earlier legal section is perplexing (para 33 page 130)). The continuing exclusion of some blue badge holders is an obvious negative. Earlier in the report (p132), there is reference to some disabled people being unable to access city centre banking or financial advice and to the importance of the Purple Pound to the local economy (if disabled people can't access the centre) but even these do not appear as negatives on the HREIAT. We were also surprised to see the omission of any attention to the 'Right to private and family life'

and the 'Right to freedom of expression' in the HREIAT as believe both rights are impacted by the exclusion of some Blue Badge holders.

These are not criticisms for the sake of it but an attempt to point to the importance of engagement, transparency and truly working together. As the report itself demonstrates, disabled people have been giving time and energy to consultations for a very long time but all too often see little or no improvements and so lose trust and hope. We believe there are the nuggets of progress in this report but let's turn them into the beginning of realising your commitment to a truly accessible city.

(Note: social model language says we should be referred to as disabled people – i.e. disabled by societal barriers - not people with disabilities as in parts of this report).