

Executive meeting on Tuesday, 12 May 2026

Written representation in relation to agenda item 6, York Christmas Market Operating Hours and Economic Impact

Dear Executive Members,

I am writing as a long-standing York business operator with significant involvement in the city centre economy, including the Christmas Market period, to express my strong opposition to the proposal to close the York Christmas Market for one day per week in order to permit unrestricted vehicle access into the pedestrianised city centre.

I fully recognise the importance of accessibility and understand the concerns raised regarding Blue Badge access. However, I do not believe that closing one of York's busiest and most economically important trading days is a proportionate or necessary solution.

York is not unique in operating a Christmas market within a pedestrianised historic city centre. Across the UK, there are dozens of major Christmas markets successfully operating in heavily pedestrianised environments with restricted vehicle access during trading hours and manage significant festive footfall while maintaining largely vehicle-free market environments.

Examples of UK towns and cities operating major Christmas markets within pedestrianised or heavily vehicle-restricted city centres include:

- Manchester Christmas Markets
- Birmingham Frankfurt Christmas Market
- Bath Christmas Market
- Lincoln Christmas Market
- Winchester Cathedral Christmas Market
- Edinburgh Christmas Market
- Nottingham Winter Wonderland
- Leeds Christmas Market
- Newcastle Christmas Market

- Cambridge Christmas Market
- Chester Christmas Market
- Durham Christmas Festival
- Exeter Christmas Market
- Salisbury Christmas Market
- Cardiff Christmas Market.

These events operate successfully within pedestrian-priority environments and do not routinely suspend trading for one day each week in order to restore general civilian vehicle access through the market footprint.

While access arrangements vary between cities, the wider national trend is clear: major Christmas markets are increasingly operated within managed pedestrianised zones due to crowd safety, visitor experience and security considerations.

These cities do not suspend their Christmas markets one day per week to reintroduce civilian vehicle access through the market footprint. Instead, they operate within the accepted reality that major festive events in historic city centres require temporary pedestrian priority, security measures and managed access arrangements.

This has increasingly become standard practice nationally for several reasons:

- Public safety and crowd management
- Counter-terror and hostile vehicle mitigation requirements
- The practical realities of operating high-footfall pedestrian events
- The protection of visitor experience and city centre trading.

York's Christmas Market is not simply a retail event. It is one of the city's largest tourism drivers and a major contributor to the wider hospitality, retail and visitor economy. Hotels, cafés, bars, restaurants, attractions, shops and market traders all rely heavily on the consistency and momentum generated during the Christmas period.

Closing the market for one full day every week would create several negative consequences:

- Confusion for visitors and tourists
- Reputational damage nationally and online
- Reduced visitor confidence and footfall
- Significant financial harm to independent businesses and traders
- Reduced staffing hours and seasonal employment opportunities
- Fragmentation of what is intended to be a continuous festive experience.

Importantly, this proposal risks creating the impression that York is unable to successfully operate a Christmas market under the same conditions already managed by many other UK cities.

The central question should therefore be:

Why does York need to close its Christmas Market one day per week when numerous comparable UK cities successfully operate theirs within pedestrianised zones without doing so?

I believe there is a risk that the proposed closure would cause disproportionate economic and reputational harm while failing to reflect established national practice for major Christmas events in historic city centres.

I would respectfully urge the council to instead explore alternative accessibility solutions that do not require the suspension of a major city-wide economic event. There are likely to be more balanced approaches available that support accessibility while preserving the continuity, safety and viability of York's Christmas Market.

York's Christmas Market has become one of the defining parts of the city's festive identity and visitor economy. Weakening it through weekly closures would, in my view, be a mistake with long-term consequences for businesses, tourism and public perception of the city centre.

York should be aspiring to match the successful operation of these nationally recognised markets, rather than weakening its own offer through regular closures.

Yours faithfully,

Emily Nicholls
Senior Manger
Woody's of York