**Executive meeting on Tuesday, 14 April 2026**

**Written representation in relation to agenda item 7, York Christmas Market Operating Hours and Economic Impact**

Dear Executive Members,

I strongly object to the proposal to reduce the York Christmas Market from 7 days to 6 days per week on a trial basis.

As a hotel operator in York city centre, my business is directly dependent on the consistency, reputation, and reliability of the Christmas market. The proposed "rest day" presents a material risk to bookings, visitor confidence, and the wider hospitality economy, which in my view is underestimated and inadequately mitigated in this report.

## 1. Impact on Hotel Bookings and Overnight Economy

The report acknowledges that the Christmas market supports overnight stays yet significantly underplays how fragile booking behaviour is in reality.

- Visitors – particularly coach groups and international tourists – book based on the assumption that the market operates daily.
- A single closure day introduces uncertainty, which is likely to:
- Reduce forward bookings
- Increase cancellations
- Shift demand away from York to competing destinations.

The report assumes displacement of demand (25–75%), but this is not reflective of how tourism operates. Visitors do not simply "switch days"—they often choose a different city entirely if availability or clarity is reduced.

This is especially critical given:

- 44% of visitors stay overnight (para. 29)

- Overnight visitors generate disproportionately higher spend.

A disruption to this segment will have far greater economic consequences than modelled.

**2. Coach Tourism and Group Travel Risk**

The report does not adequately consider coach operators, who are a major contributor to winter trade.

- Coach itineraries are fixed well in advance
- They require certainty of offer on the day of arrival
- A weekly closure creates a commercial disincentive to include York in itineraries.

This risks:

- Loss of large-volume bookings
- Long-term displacement beyond 2026 (not just a “trial” impact).

Once removed from tour programmes, York may be difficult to reinstate in future seasons.

**3. Reputational Risk is Underestimated**

Paragraphs 12 and 41 acknowledge reputational risk but overestimate the effectiveness of communications.

In practice:

- Many visitors do not read detailed pre-travel information
- Day visitors and tourists already enroute will arrive expecting a full market
- A closed market will lead to:
  - Visitor frustration
  - Negative reviews
  - Complaints directed at hotels and local businesses.

Hotel operators will be placed in the position of:

- Managing dissatisfaction
- Issuing refunds or goodwill gestures
- Absorbing reputational damage for a decision outside their control.

This risk is systemic and unavoidable, not something that can be solved through marketing.

## 4. Flawed Economic Assumptions

The economic modelling contains several weaknesses:

- It admits difficulty in isolating market-driven footfall (para. 9, 32)
- It relies on a “blended” estimate between two extremes (para. 31), reducing reliability
- It assumes displacement of demand without strong evidence

Critically:

- The estimated loss of £2.6m–£7.82m is already described as “significant”
- This does not include:
  - Lost accommodation bookings made in advance
  - Secondary spending outside the city centre
  - Long-term behavioural change in visitors.

The true economic impact is therefore likely substantially higher than presented.

## 5. Misalignment with Economic Strategy

The proposal conflicts with the Council’s own stated objectives:

- Supporting a “vibrant and resilient city centre economy”
- Promoting inclusive growth
- Sustaining independent businesses and hospitality.

Reducing the operating days of the city's most economically significant event risks undermining these goals.

### 6. Disproportionate Impact on Hospitality Sector

The report suggests a rest day may benefit some users, but it does not fairly assess the sectoral imbalance of impact:

- Hospitality and accommodation businesses rely on continuous footfall
- A weekly interruption reduces:
- o Occupancy rates
- o Length of stay
- o Food and beverage spend.

Meanwhile, any benefit to accessibility is:

- Limited to one day
- Not guaranteed to generate equivalent economic activity.

### 7. Operational Burden on Businesses

Hotels and front-line businesses will bear the consequences of:

- Explaining closures to confused visitors
- Managing complaints and expectations
- Adjusting staffing and pricing models.

This represents a cost shift from the Council to private businesses, which is not acknowledged in the report.

### 8. Alternative Approach

If accessibility improvements are required, alternative options should be prioritised that do not damage the city's core economic driver, such as:

- Enhanced accessibility measures during operating days
- Improved crowd management and infrastructure
- Targeted quiet hours rather than full closure days.

A full-day closure is a disproportionate intervention.

**9. Conclusion**

The proposed 6-day operation introduces:

- Significant economic risk
- Disproportionate impact on hospitality businesses
- High likelihood of reputational damage
- Uncertain and overstated benefits

The Christmas market is a critical economic asset, and its strength lies in consistency, reliability, and reputation. Introducing a weekly closure undermines all three.

I therefore strongly urge the Executive to:

- Reject the 6-day trial proposal, and
- Retain the current 7-day operation model while exploring alternative accessibility solutions.

Kind regards,

Samantha Ashby
General Manager

The Queens Hotel & Victoria Cloisters