2.0
Overview



2.1 What makes York special?

The answer to this question is both simple and complex.

The simple part is easily expressed: no other urban place in the British Isles combines in one place a Roman fortress and provincial capital, Anglo-Saxon and Viking royal capitals, a medieval city second only to London from which survive the longest walls in the country, a unique collection of civic buildings and merchants' houses and one of the great cathedrals of Europe, and fine Georgian architecture. Combining all this in a compact, walled area creates a townscape of richness and variety unequalled in this country. Other cathedral cities may boast a finer Close – Salisbury – or charming market town qualities – Wells – but none can rival this combination of outstanding attributes.

The more complex answer has been put forward in detail in the *Core Strategy Heritage Topic Paper*, which identifies the following as the defining characteristics of the city: strong urban form, compactness, landmark monuments, architectural character, archaeological complexity and landscape and setting.

This begins underground. The unusual sub-surface conditions of York have ensured that the archaeological evidence for 2,000 years of urban activity survives in a remarkable state of water-logged preservation which can only be matched by a small handful of locations worldwide.

The archaeology of the city is therefore of outstanding international importance.

Above ground, it is the very complexity of the townscape that combines to create the unique character of York's historic core:

- a compact, densely-developed place, laid out on –
- a street plan combining Roman, Viking and medieval elements, with Georgian and Victorian interventions; streets are therefore a visible expression of the invisible arhaeology, and overwhelmingly intimate, comfortable and on a human scale
- contrast and surprises in the twists and turns of streets, alleys, squares and hidden courts and places, opening up sequences of ever-changing views, in which the Minster often plays a part
- a tremendous diversity of architectural styles and phases causing constantly changing variety and juxtaspoitions in the townscape
- but an overriding harmony through materials – plastered timber-frames, brick and Magneisan Limestone – and continuous street frontages and constant roofscapes
- the relationship between the glorious, dominating presence of the Minster and the scale of the rest of the townscape: viewed from the walls and other high points, the great white mass of the Minster sails on a choppy sea of pantile roofs

The character of the conservation area varies considerably from part to part. First time visitors may imagine that all of York is like the Shambles and Stonegate; those who know it well understand how the historic core changes almost from street to street: the Minster Precinct is a very different place with very different qualities to the central shopping district, or Micklegate or the station area, or the 20th century housing at the end of Walmgate.

This then is not a place of uniformity, of cohesive formal planning and the grand urban gesture like Bath or Edinburgh. York's extraordinary diversity is the antithesis of this.

This diversity stems from York's remarkably consistent success over two millennia. What other city outside London has been as powerful and as vibrant through so many successive ages? The inherent strengths of its location and the legacy of George Hudson ensure that today it remains a prosperous and dynamic city because it is superbly connected to the rest of the region and to the country.

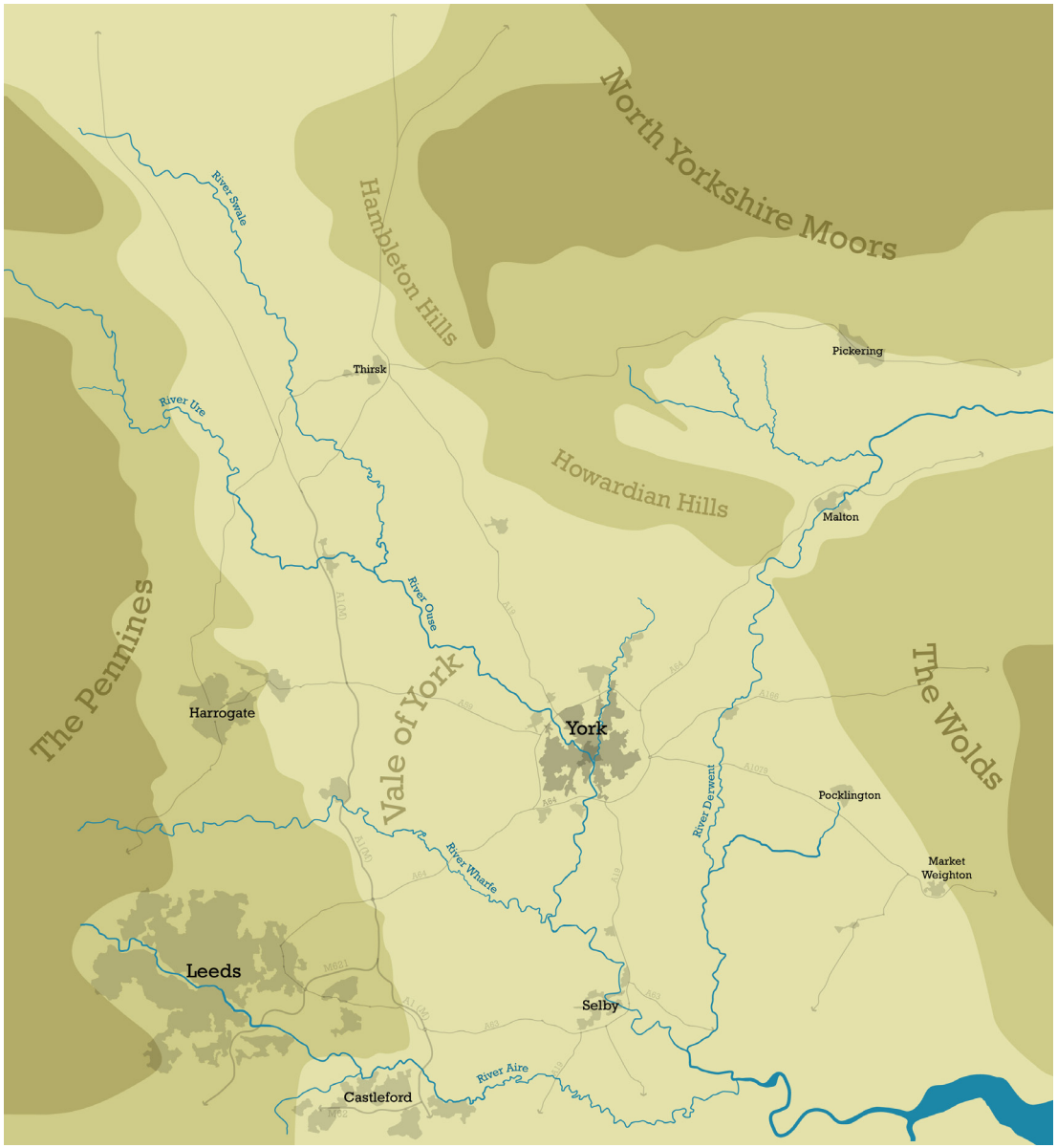
Finally - and this is inextricably linked to these ideas of contrast, variety, richness and position - the centre of York is not a giant open air museum or tourist attraction. It is very much a place which is lived and worked in, and this too is a fundamental element of the special character of this charismatic city.

2.2 Landscape Setting

York sits astride the River Ouse in the centre of the Vale of York, where the Ouse meets its tributary the River Foss.

The Vale is a large low-lying basin stretching over 30 miles from Northallerton in the north to the Humber estuary in the south. This bowl is enclosed on three sides by higher ground: the Pennines rising to the west and the North York Moors to the north, with the Howardian Hills at their foot, sweeping east and south to become the Yorkshire Wolds on the other side of the River Derwent.

This location makes York a natural centre for regional and national communications – roads, rivers and railways – which is why the Romans brought their roads and founded a settlement here in the first place.



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Regional landscape setting

2.3 Geology & Topography

2.3.1 A River City

The Vale of York is an alluvial plain, which means that the geology of York consists of deposits of sediments laid down by glaciers and rivers. The bedrock - sandstones and 'marls' - lies beneath this.

This gives York a subtle topography, though the city is by no means entirely flat. The 'York Moraine' is a gentle, well-drained ridge formed at the edge of the last glacier, which runs through the city from south-west to north-east.

It was this ridge which caused the Romans to settle here: it made it a good place for their roads to the north to cross the Ouse and to locate a fortress, in a landscape that was otherwise marshy and prone to flooding.

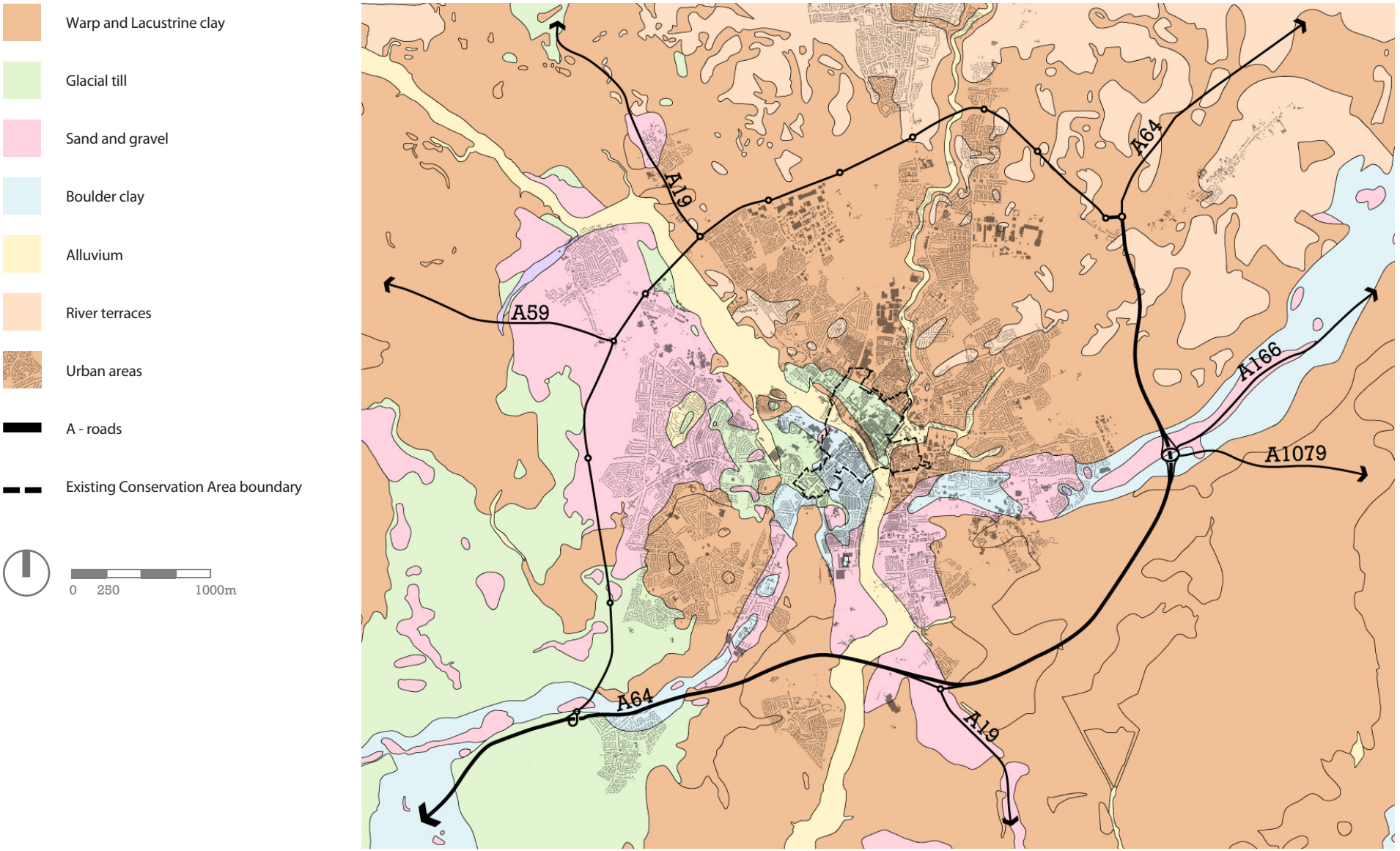
The rivers are therefore the other principal topographical feature. The ability to navigate the Ouse in sea-going vessels was crucial to the growth of the city as it enabled York to develop and to thrive as a major port, until ships grew too large and Hull took over. Even then barge and other river traffic ensured that York was a busy working river port until well into the 20th century.

2.3.2 Flooding

Building a city on the banks of rivers in a low-lying landscape has meant that flooding has been an ever-present risk. However, the risk has been exacerbated in the last 100 years by the loss of the natural sponges, the water meadows (or 'ings') upstream, which once absorbed and reduced the impact of swollen rivers. Because of the construction of flood defences up the rivers, flooding in the city has become more severe and now requires civil engineering to contain and regulate it. Some sections of the conservation area, such as King's Stainth and Tower Gardens, are actually part of what is termed the 'functional flood plane' and flood frequently because they are given no specific protection.

This has significant consequences for management and planning in the conservation area, since it prevents the use of ground floor areas in many locations along the riverbanks for anything other than parking and storage.

Topography is thus one of the elements that creates the distinctive character of York. The form of the underlying landscape is such that the city is not a place defined by the topographical *drama* of its townscape - like Bath, Edinburgh or Newcastle, or closer to home Pennine towns such as Richmond. But it does ensure that the Minster dominates not just the city but the landscape for many miles around, as in a different way do Ely and Lincoln cathedrals. In this way the Minster is not just York's unchallenged visual centrepiece but also Yorkshire's church.



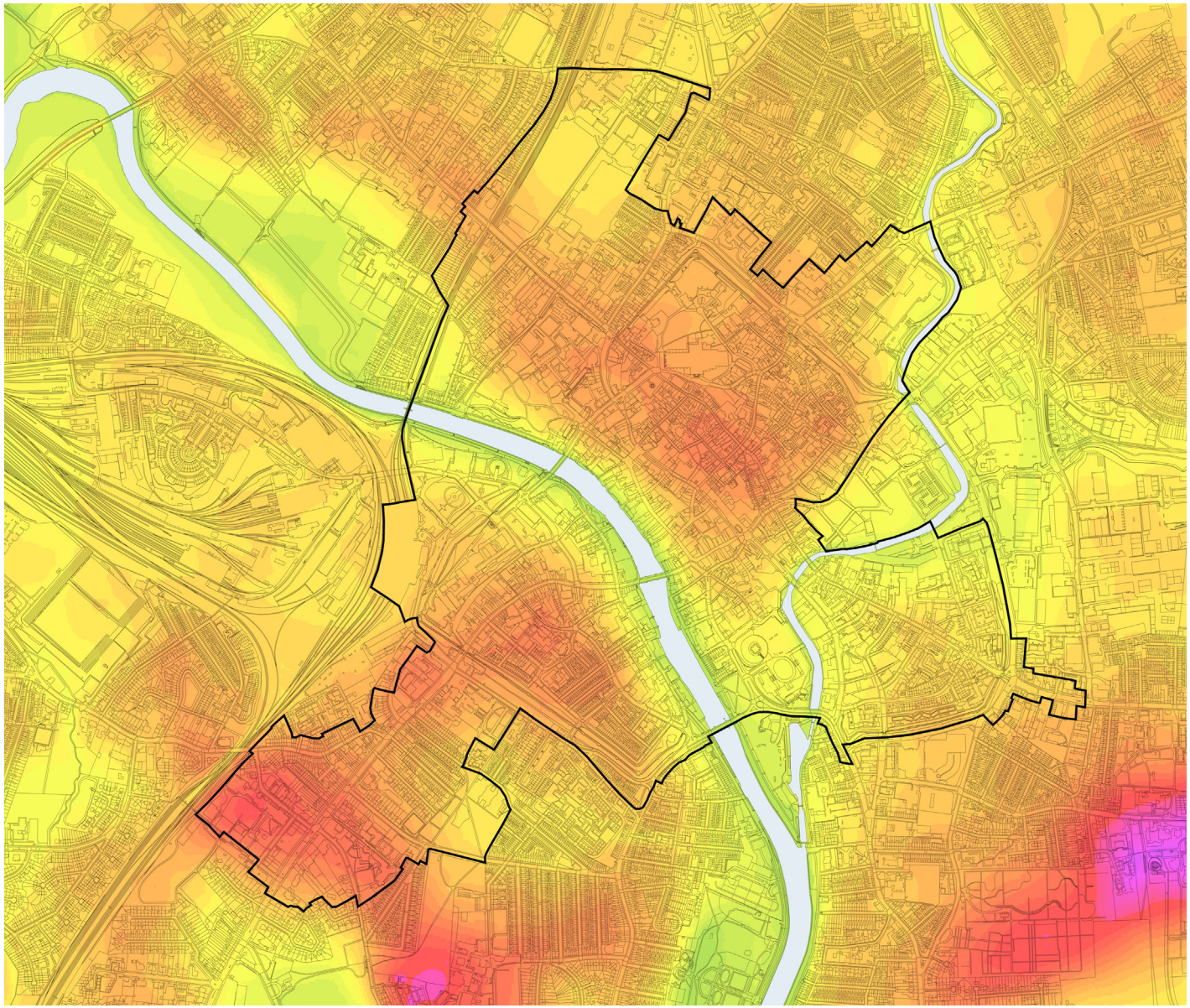
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Geology

Height above sea level

- 0m
- 5m
- 10m
- 15m
- 20m
- 25m
- 30m
- 35m
- Existing Conservation Area boundary

0 100 400m



Topography

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2.4 Eburacum – Roman York

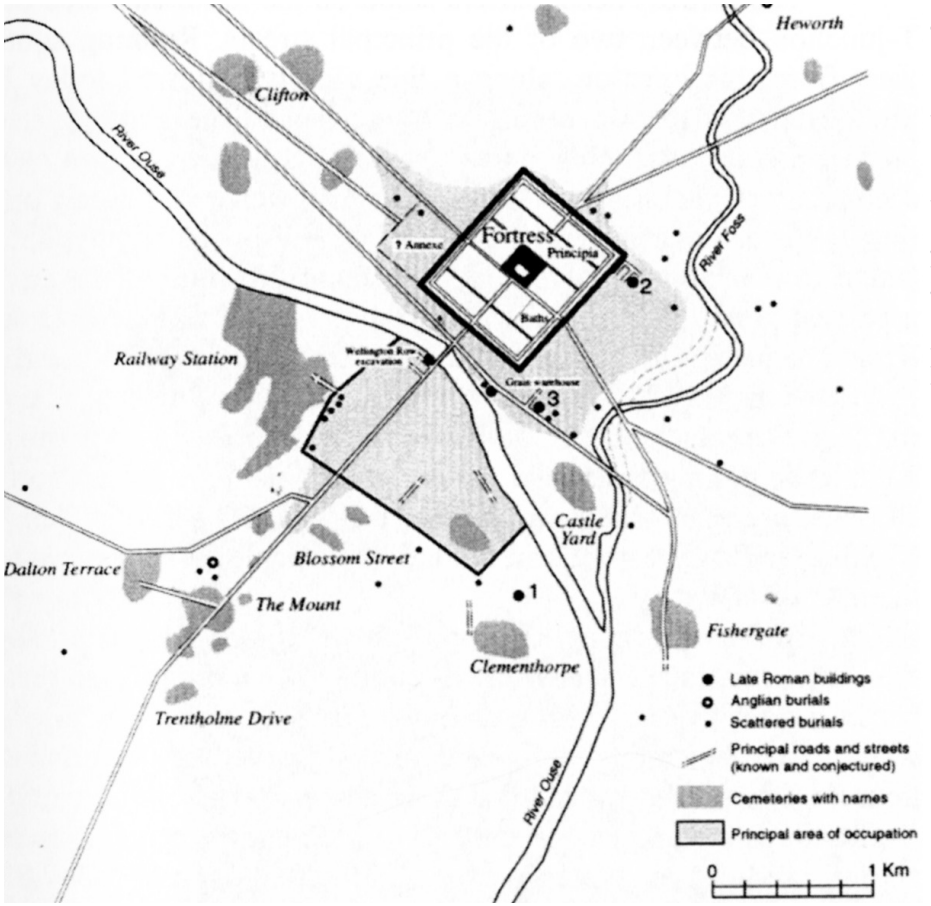
York owes its foundation to the 9th Legion of the Roman Army, which in AD 71 established a fortress on the north-east bank of the River Ouse.

In the 2nd century a civilian settlement grew up around this fortress, spilling over onto the opposite bank of the river. This settlement was granted the title of 'colonia', indicating that it had become one of the most important towns of Roman Britain. It may also have been defended by fortifications laid out along lines similar to the medieval walls later erected west of the Ouse.

As shown here, the fortress was designed on a rigid grid layout standard to the Roman Army. It had walls and four principal gates. Many of its features are still recognisable in the townscape of York today, such as the northern angle of the city walls, and the line of Via Praetoria along Stonegate and the Via Principalis along Petergate. Thus, the Romans continue to exert a powerful influence over the plan and character of York nearly 2000 years later.

Remarkably, more than 50 % of the defensive perimeter either forms or is preserved under the medieval defences. It is best preserved behind the Central Library, where a stretch of wall standing over 4 metres high and the Multangular Tower reveal its construction of Magnesian Limestone blocks. Another long section is visible south-east of Monk Bar.

Other important evidence includes the remains of the 'Principia' – the headquarters building – which is exposed in the undercroft of the Minster, numerous finds uncovered west of the Ouse and a number of cemeteries which were located outside the walls of Eburacum.



Roman York: the civilian settlement lay west of the river

Nuttgens, ed, The history of York: from earliest times to the year 2000, fig. 1

2.5 Eoforwic & Jorvik – Anglian & Viking York

Little is known of York in the 5th and 6th centuries, but the royal settlement of Eoforwic in the Anglian kingdom of Northumbria is recorded from 627, when King Edwin was baptised in a church which may have been located near the present Minster.

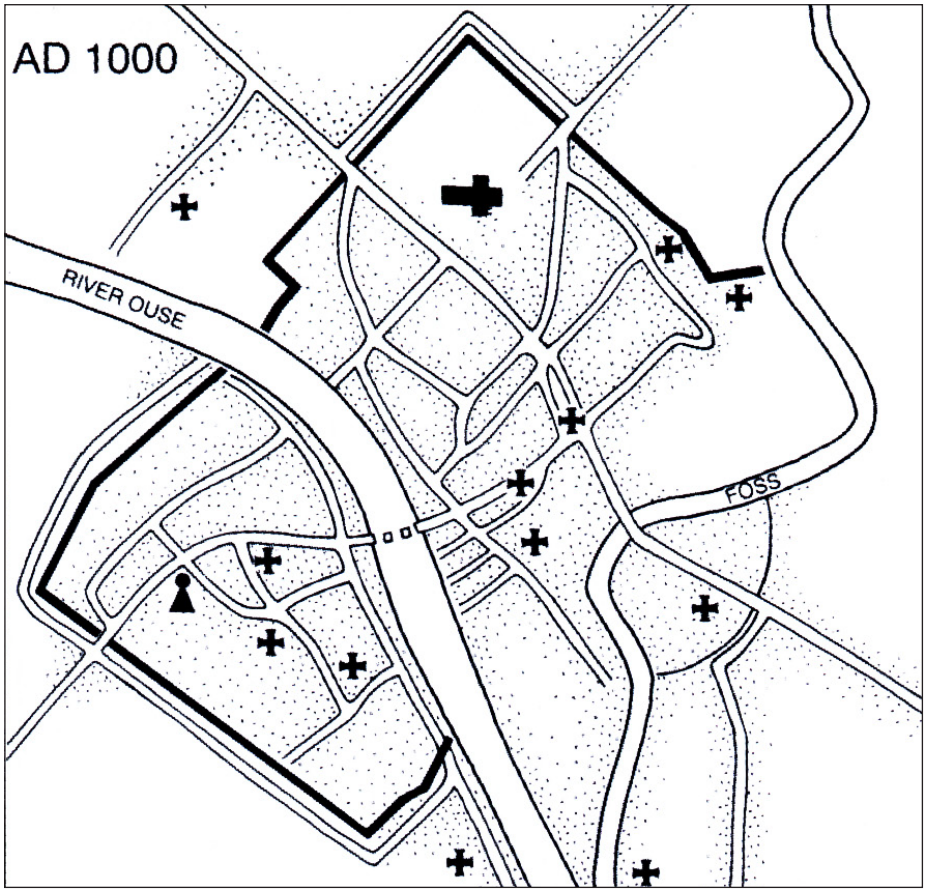
By the 8th century the settlement was an important centre of the Northumbrian kingdom, a renowned cultural powerhouse, and the home of the northern archbishopric of the Christian faith in England.

Nothing survives above ground from this settlement, which broadly occupied the old Roman fortress, but a trading community has been revealed in excavations immediately outside the Conservation Area at Fishergate.

In 866 Anglian rule was abruptly ended: a Viking army entered the city and it became Jorvik - the royal capital and thriving trading port at the centre of a Viking (or 'Anglo-Scandinavian') kingdom for almost a century, until the last ruler, Eric Bloodaxe, fell in 954.

The Vikings created much of the present street pattern of York. The centre of Jorvik was south of the Roman fortress between the banks of the Ouse and Foss. Therefore, the main route from the south-west was redirected from the Roman line to create what is now Micklegate, the Ouse Bridge (their new river crossing), High Ousegate and Pavement.

A comparison between the plan here and a modern map demonstrates how many streets are visible remnants of this densely populated Viking city. Beneath York is far more evidence of the settlement, superbly preserved. This is vividly revealed at the Jorvik Viking Centre in the form of 4 timber tenements excavated at Coppergate between 1976 and 1981.



© Crown Copyright

The city, c. 1000

Many of the city's churches are also of pre-Conquest foundation, though no original structure survives with the exception of parts of St Mary's Bishophill Jr.

2.6 Medieval York

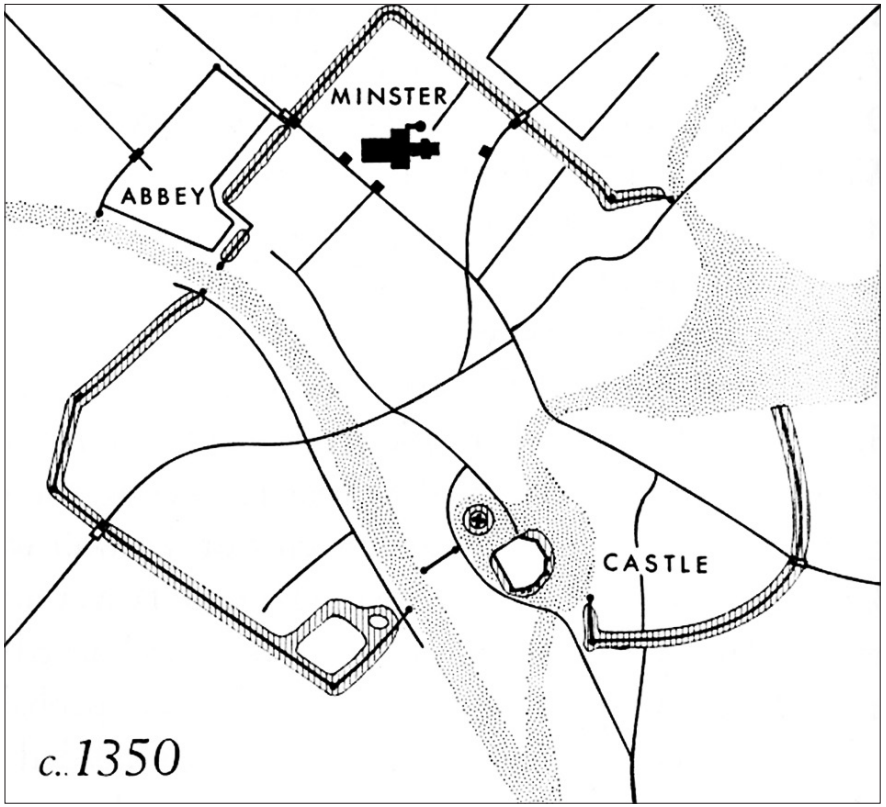
York's continuing strategic importance was recognised by William of Normandy, who in the aftermath of the Conquest constructed two motte-and-bailey castles to guard either bank of the Ouse. Both remain in evidence: one is the basis of Clifford's Tower, the other Baile Hill in Bishophill.

York prospered as the foremost administrative and church centre of the North ans as a major port and trading centre (especially of wool), as well as an important manufacturing district in its own right.

By 1130 it ranked fourth in the country in the amount of tax paid; by 1400 the population had grown by 50% to 15,000 and it was second only to London in size and wealth.

This powerful, heaving city was studded with magnificent buildings and structures: a circuit of walls with impressive gates, or bars, 45 parish churches, half a dozen monasteries and priories (of which St Mary's was one of the wealthiest in the north), and the Guildhall and other civic and communal buildings. Rising above all was a massive new Gothic Minster begun in the 13th century. A remarkable number of these structures survive.

By the end of the Middle Ages these were largely built of stone, and in particular of the creamy Magnesium Limestone quarried near Tadcaster. Houses, shops, warehouses and workshops on the other hand continued to be built of timber. Large numbers of these survive too, not just those in streets such as Stonegate, but others hidden elsewhere by later brick fronts.



© Crown Copyright

York, c. 1350

Converging on this walled world were the four 'strays' – Bootham Stray, Micklegate Stray, Monk Stray and Walmgate Stray - common land on which Freemen of the city could graze livestock. They remain embedded in York today, forming, along with the Ings of the River Ouse, the distinctive wedges of recreational green space converging on the historic core which divide the outer suburbs of the modern city.

2.7 Tudor York

By the time the Minster was completed at the end of the 15th century, York was a city falling into decline: the textile industry was gravitating irreversibly to the unregulated West Riding, and shipping and trade to the deepwater port of Hull. Despite this there was still enough money in the city to erect some major buildings, such as St Michael-le-Belfry.

York reached its nadir at the end of Henry VIII's reign. The population halved to about 8,000 and construction virtually stopped as the Reformation hit York's economy hard and changed its face: the abbeys and priories were sold, partially demolished and turned over to secular use; the number of parish churches was reduced to 25 by 1547.

A revival was sparked by the creation of the King's 'Council of the North', which met at the King's Manor (formerly the abbot's house of St Mary's Abbey). Its 2,000 cases a year brought in lawyers and gentry. Inns, shops and entertainments prospered as the city developed during Elizabeth's reign into a regional administrative and social centre.

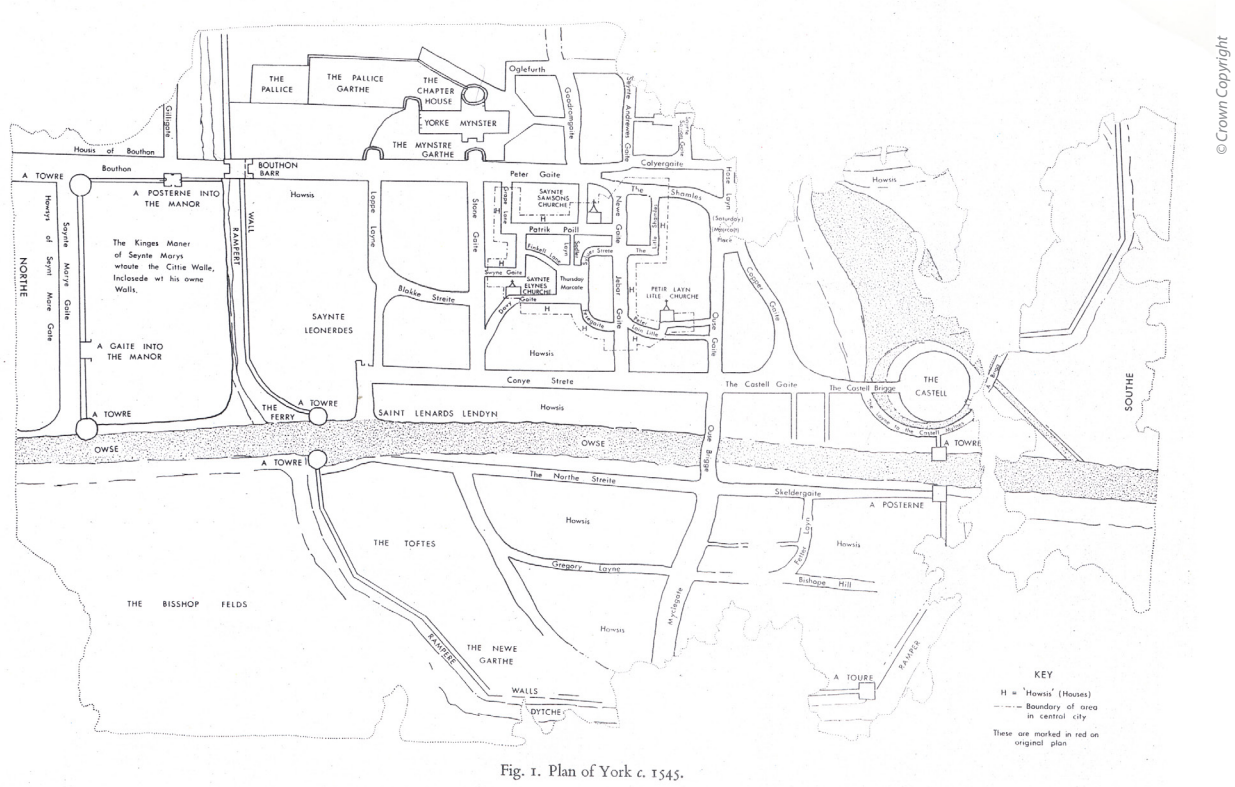


Fig. 1. Plan of York *c.* 1545.

© Crown Copyright

Plan of York, 1545 (redrawn) with Ouse flowing left to right and the Minster at the top. Some of the northern and eastern parts of the city are missing from this damaged document

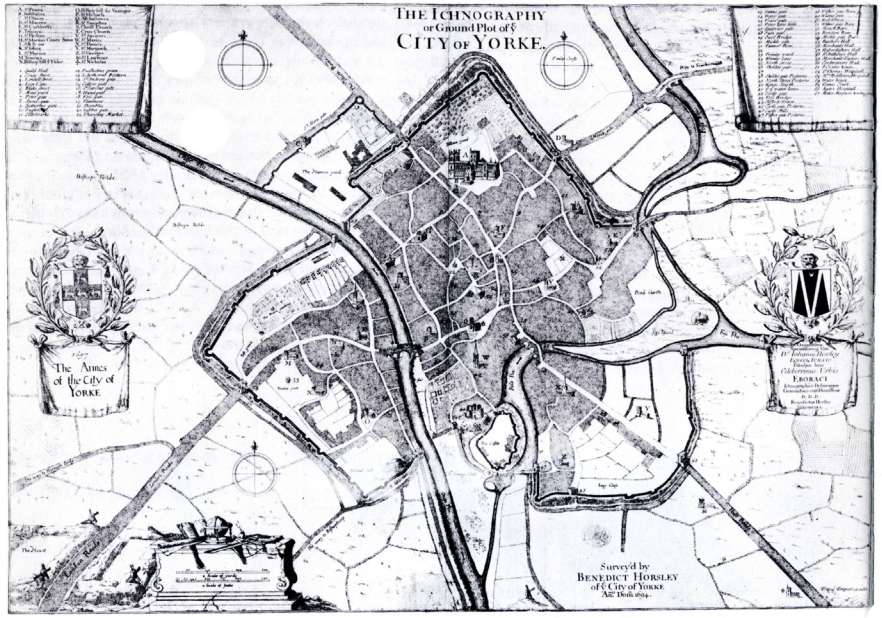
2.8 17th Century York

York was also a garrison town, one reason why Charles I set up his court in the city for five months during the Civil War, in 1642.

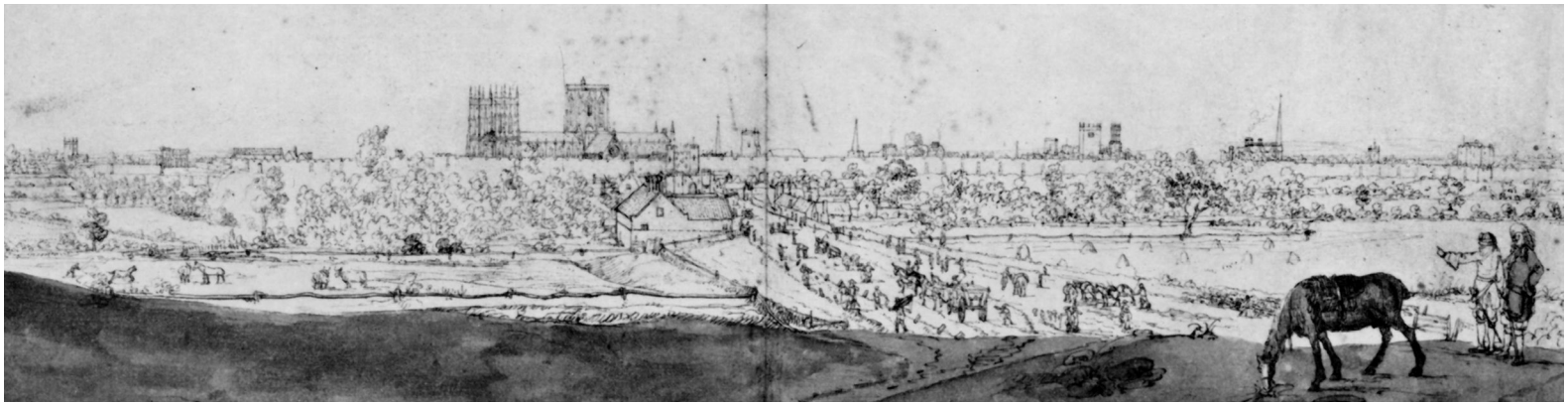
Two years later the Royalist garrison was besieged and outer areas such as Walmgate as well as some inner areas were damaged. When the city finally fell to the Parliamentarians, the Minster and churches were saved from destruction by the personal intervention of the Parliamentarian general Lord Fairfax, one of the great heroes of York's architectural history.

By the 1660s, thanks to improving trade, York had recovered much of its former prominence and was the third largest city after London and Norwich.

However, there was less new construction than earlier centuries. Significantly, though, a decree of 1645 had forbidden the use of timber and thatch - as a consequence of the growing shortage of building timber, made more acute by the need to replace buildings lost or damaged during the Siege of York the previous year. From now on brick would be the basic building material.



Ichnogrpahy of York, 1687



A prospect of York from The Mount, by William Lodge, c. 1675, with Micklegate Bar in the centre, middle distance

© Society of Antiquaries

2.9 Georgian York

York continued to prosper during the Georgian era as the centre of the county's administrative, social and cultural life.

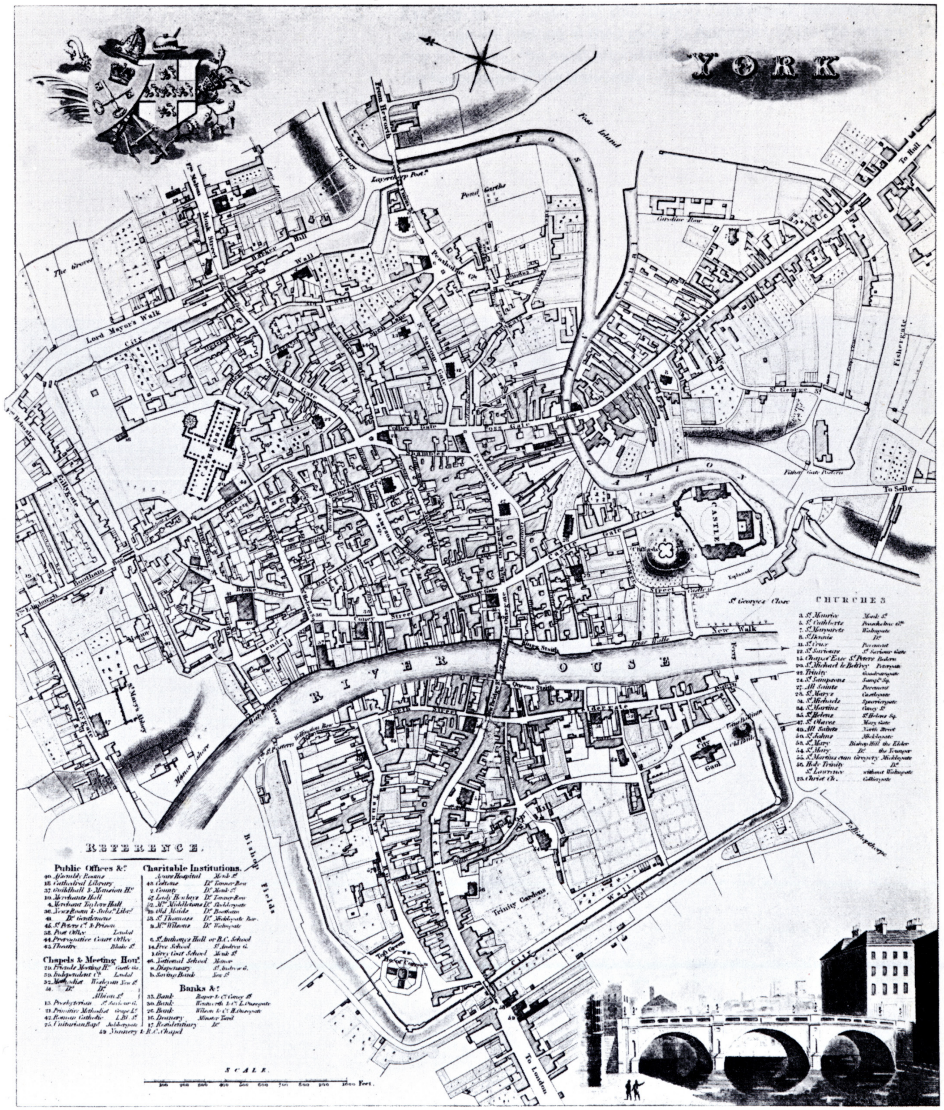
This took expression in the new classical brick houses that sprung up on Micklegate and along the small but growing suburbs beyond the city walls, notably Bootham.

It found form too in a number of major new civic buildings designed in this new style by the leading locally raised architects: Lord Burlington, an immensely influential national figure, designed the Assembly Rooms for dances and other entertainments; John Carr, twice Lord Mayor, built a mental hospital at Bootham and a new court house at the Castle to join the grand jail erected there at the beginning of the century.

Civic enterprise also changed the appearance of whole streets in the city centre, which were widened and straightened to improve their efficiency as traffic levels grew, and a brand new market place - Parliament Street - was created by demolishing dozens of houses.

Carr designed a spa for the New Walk, a promenade along the Ouse laid out by the city corporation in the 1730s. This and Lord Mayor's Walk mark the beginnings of civic landscaping created expressly for leisure and enjoyment - the forerunner of our public parks.

Meanwhile the clearance of shops and houses around the west end of the Minster was the first stirrings of interest in caring for the ancient buildings of the city.



Baines plan of York, 1822. There are still large areas of underdeveloped land within the walls, west of the Ouse and east of the Foss

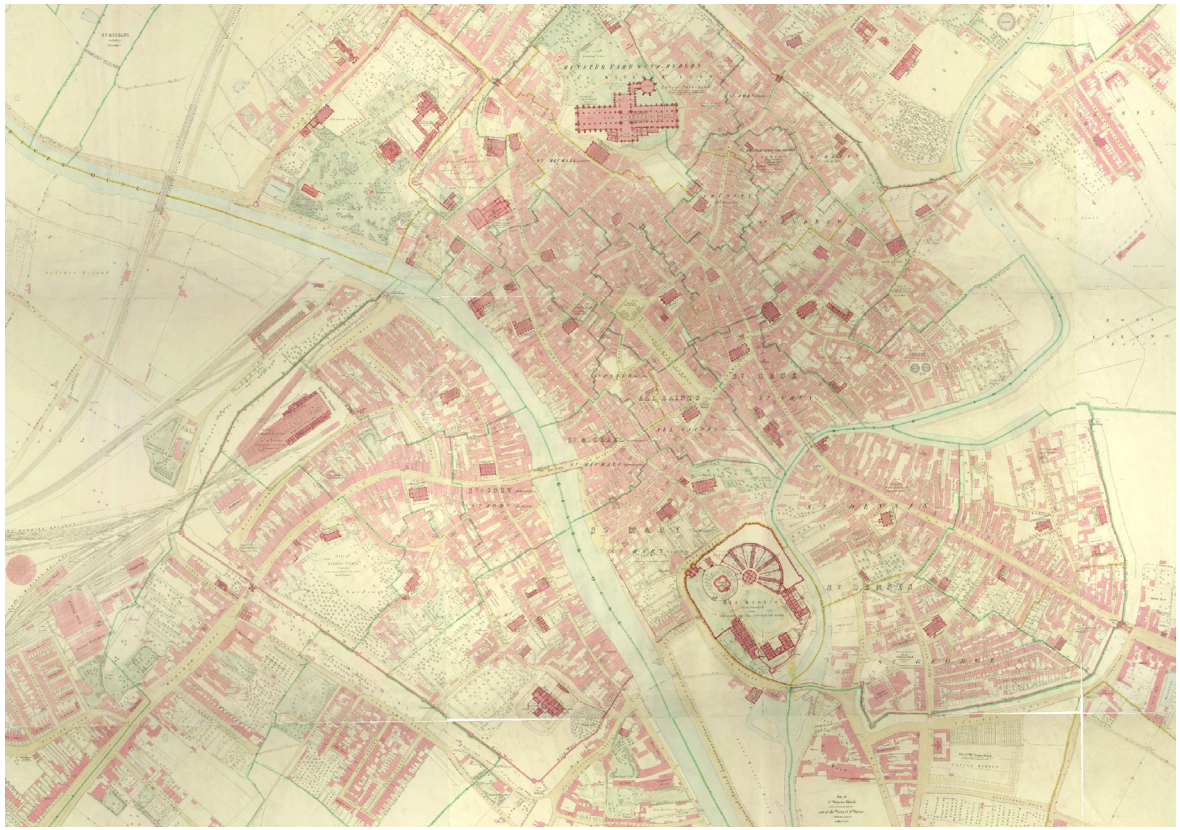
2.10 Victorian & Edwardian York

George Hudson, the 'Railway King', transformed the fortunes of York. His railway company's station, opened at Toft Green in 1841, ushered in a new age of prosperity and unprecedented physical expansion as the city rapidly developed into a key railway interchange with two major railway companies and the confectionary industry.

The population doubled from 40,000 in 1841 to 80,000 in 1911, many of them housed in new suburbs which rapidly spread well beyond the City Walls. Nevertheless, overcrowding in the old centre created chronic slums.

The Victorian spirit of 'progress' and 'improvement' radically changed the appearance and character of some parts of the old city:

- the west side was remodelled to create first one station and hotel inside the walls and then a larger replacement outside them;
- new streets were driven through the city and new bridges erected; and
- new public gardens were created alongside the transformation of older green spaces, such as the precincts of Minster and St Mary's.



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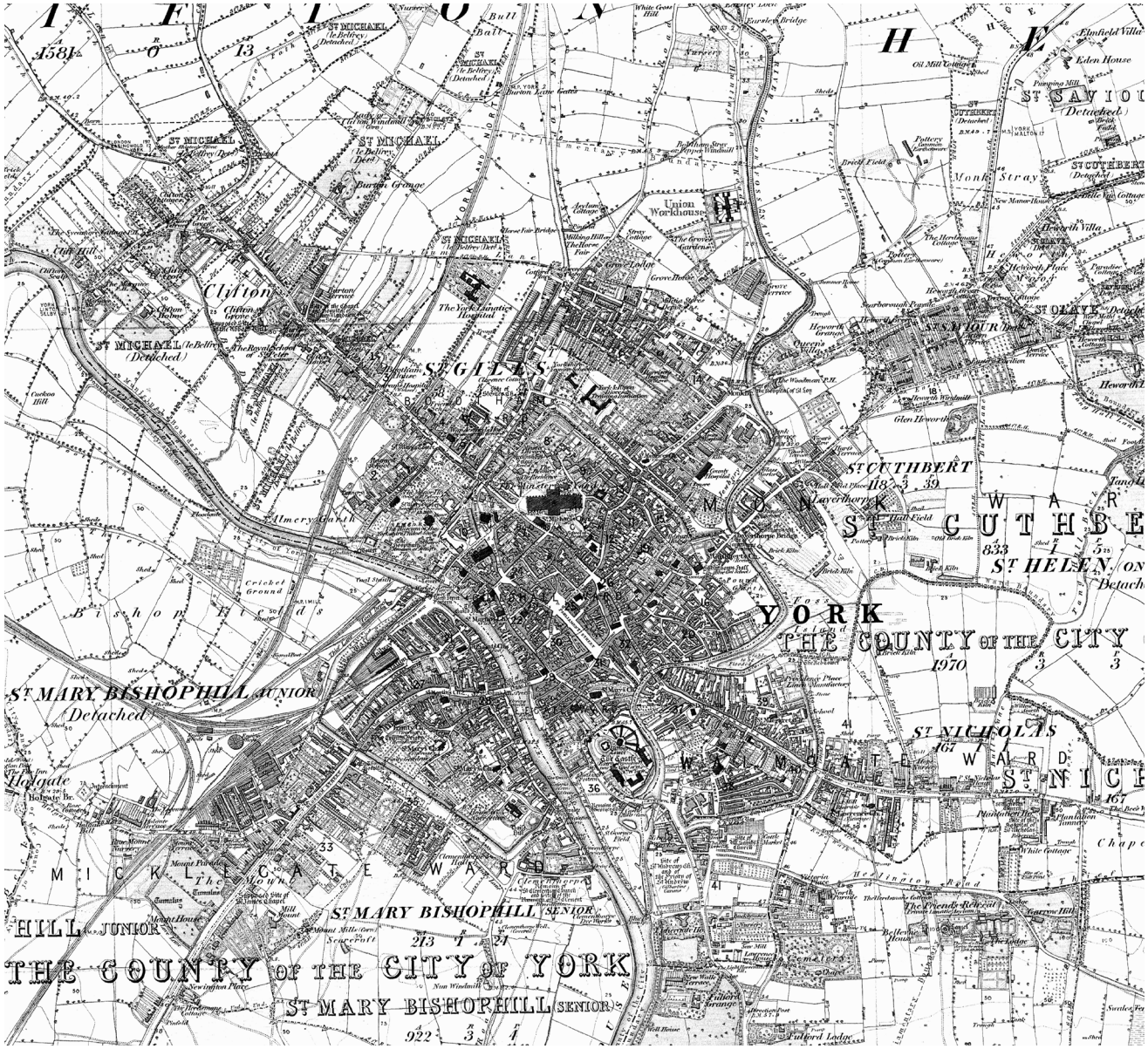
Ordnance Survey 6' to 1 mile Town Plan, 1852. By this date, following the construction of the first station (left), the city was beginning to spread rapidly beyond the old walls

Many ancient buildings were lost in this process of renewal, but at the same time growing interest in the history of the city revealed itself in campaigns to restore historic structures. Most significantly, the City Walls and bars were saved and restored.

The Quaker families who had developed the confectionary industries in the previous century exerted a powerful influence, rooted in a deep concern for poverty and social welfare, that gave a distinctive flavour to the way York evolved from the late 19th century.

The Rowntree factory at the beginning of this period was still in the heart of the city - across the Ouse from the Guildhall. At the turn of the century it was decamped to Haxby Road.

In 1901, Seebohm Rowntree's seminal study on poverty was published, based on surveys he had carried out amongst the working people of York. In response to the findings of his son's study, Joseph Rowntree, acting under the influence of the Garden Cities movement, embarked on the creation of a Garden Village in the same year. This was built beyond the factory at New Earswick to provide a new and higher standard of housing for working people.



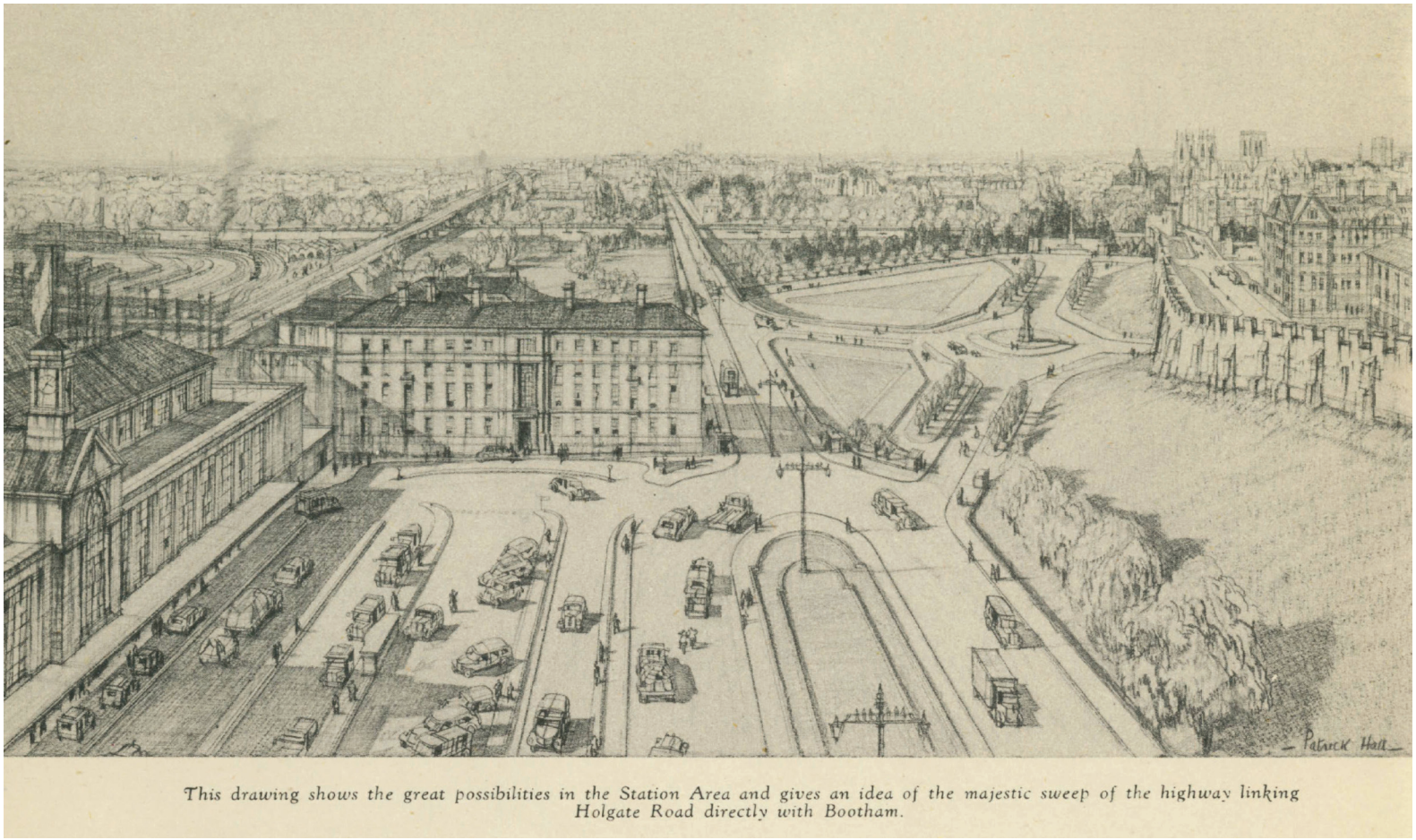
Greater York, c. 1860 (OS)

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2.11 The 20th Century: Esher's York

Seebohm Rowntree's study was influential in the development of a Corporation housing policy. In 1923 it led directly to the City's first council housing, at Tang Hall, and paved the way for slum clearance programmes and further new social housing - such as in Walmgate - and new suburbs.

The damaged caused by the 1942 "Baedeker" bombing raid, although isolated, was an important spur to the development of an ambitious 1948 Plan for the city. Amongst other ideas this suggested rebuilding the station and it forecourt as the centre piece of a grandiose boulevard north across a new river crossing to Bootham.



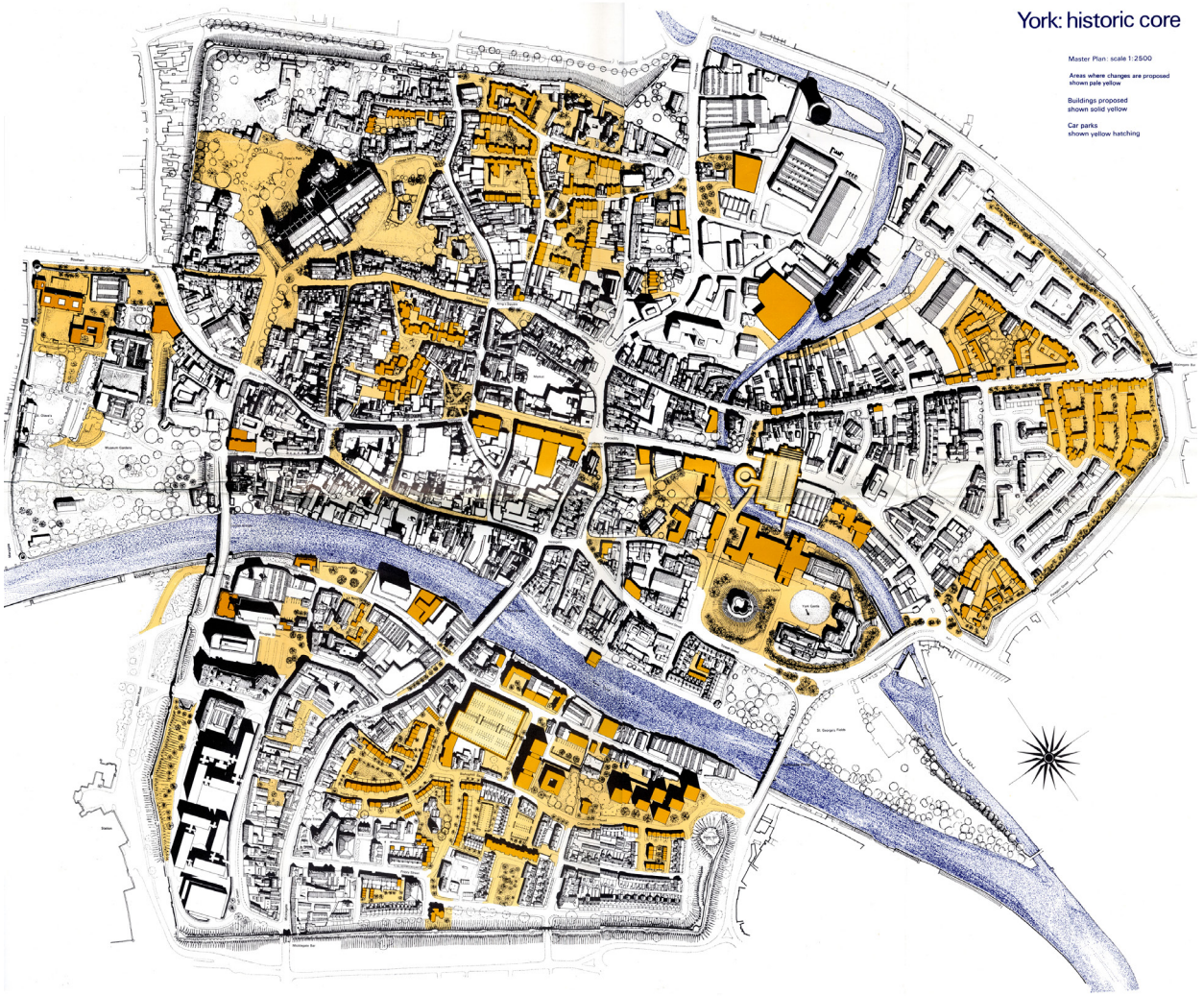
An illustration from the 1948 Plan, showing ambitious plans to rebuild the station and connect Holgate Road to Bootham by a new boulevard across the Ouse

This was never implemented, and when Lord Esher and his team arrived in York in 1967 to begin their landmark study, they found a tired city centre. Little had changed in the previous few decades, and a huge amount of workshop and industrial space still occupied the upper floors and back yards of the walled city.

The Esher report and the subsequent designation of the central historic core conservation area symbolised the fundamental change of attitude towards the city's historic buildings and townscape in the second half of the 20th century. Both were triumphs for the influential York Civic Trust, founded in 1946, which did more than anyone else to re-orientate planning in the city.

There was some large-scale new development in the centre but it is limited to Toft Green and Piccadilly, and the threat of a destructive inner ring road was seen off in the mid-1970s. Instead, as the traditional industries declined, the city was reborn as a tourist, shopping and educational centre (following the foundation of the University of York in 1962) in which the innate qualities and attractions of its historic townscape were celebrated and exploited. Hundreds of historic buildings were repaired under a highly successful Town Scheme, and later an extensive network of pedestrian-priority 'Footstreets' created in centre.

This success, when combined with the huge growth of outer suburbs and of car use, has generated vast increases in road traffic. Despite the construction of an outer ring road this has put additional pressure on the historic routes into the city centre and on the access points - the medieval bars - into the walled city, none of which, of course, were conceived with this in mind.



Esher's plan for York: proposed new development and improvements to streets and spaces are in orange

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2.12 21st Century York

Today the centre of York is an economically and culturally vibrant place. Its historic buildings and spaces are largely in good shape, but the historic core still faces many challenges: the weight of traffic, the pressure to retrofit buildings in order to make them more energy or commercially efficient, vacant floors above shops and the changing pattern of uses as offices and shops expand and the remnants of manufacturing shrink.

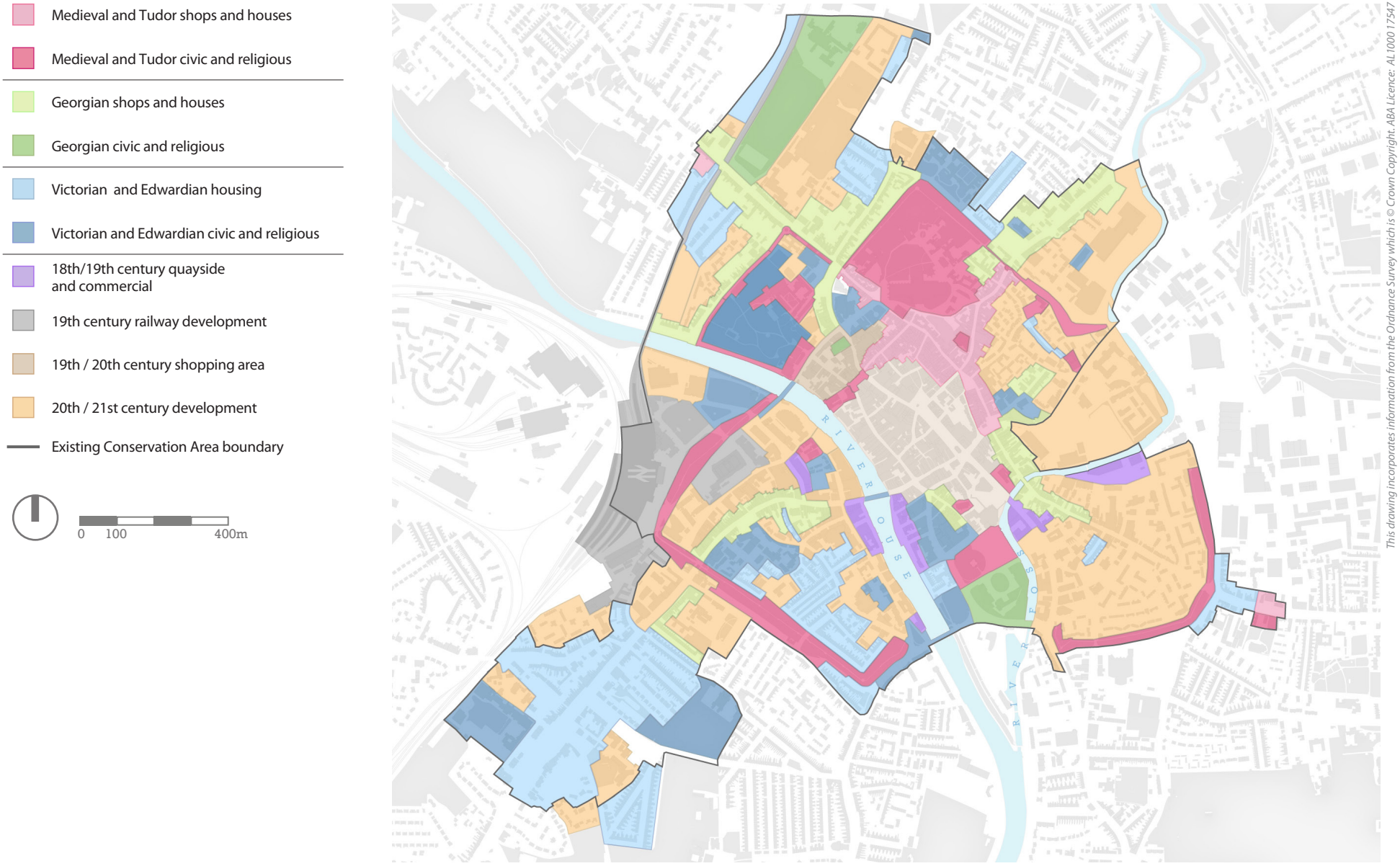
Its health and character continue to be shaped by developments beyond the centre, such as the completion of the outer ring road, the continued expansion of the Universities and the introduction of the Park and Ride system, as well as large-scale redevelopment projects in and around its periphery, notably York Central, Hungate and Castle-Piccadilly.

The following plan – which shows the patchwork of prevailing townscape and architectural character – gives an indication of the richness and diversity which is a defining characteristic of the Conservation Area.

The following sections consider different aspects of the character and appearance of the Conservation Area in more detail.



Satellite image of York today, with the Central Historic Core Conservation Area boundary superimposed



Prevailing townscape and building character

2.13 Land Use

The plan on the following page illustrates broadly the ways in which buildings and land are used across the Conservation Area.

It shows that a wide range of uses are still present in the historic core. The innate qualities of the Conservation Area are a factor in encouraging this.

Of particular note is the survival of housing within the City Walls. One of Esher's key recommendations was to rebuild the city centre population with clusters of new housing in Aldwark, Skeldergate and near Walmgate Bar. By and large this has been realised - if not in the architectural form Esher envisaged - and has proved very successful.

What is less clear is the extent to which the upper floors of buildings in the shopping areas are still used for housing. Historically, shopkeepers lived above their shops, but over the last century many sole-traders have been replaced by commercial chains and those that survive now live in quieter suburbs.

Therefore the concept of reviving 'living above the shop' has been promoted for a number of years as a way to bring life into historic commercial areas and address the neglect of upper floors which might otherwise be empty. However, implementing such a policy can be slow and difficult.

Another significant comparison with Esher is the expansion of the central shopping area. Since he reported York has become a major retail centre, which is one of the main sources of its current prosperity. The concepts for the Piccadilly/Castle site would extend this area further.

As the plan of Esher's proposals illustrates, he suggested considerable large-scale redevelopment, elements of which were undertaken. Today the prospect of major development projects remains for a number of different sites. The scale and the nature of these schemes - Piccadilly/Castle within the Conservation Area and Hungate and York Central on its fringes - will have a considerable impact upon the Area. They will require careful planning, design and development not just to safeguard the special characteristics of the historic core but in order to draw on its inherent strengths so that these new developments generate genuine benefits for the Conservation Area, its residents and users.


Residential
Central shopping area
Independent retail
Big box retail
Commercial
Civic
Station
Hospital and university
Minster Precinct
Existing Conservation Area boundary
0
100
400m
hospital & university
residential
independent retail
Minster precinct
civic
central shopping area
residential
big box retail
station
commercial
independent retail
independent retail
commercial
civic
residential
residential
RIVER OUSE
RIVER OUSE
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Land uses

2.14 Designation

Refer to the plan on following page.

2.14.1 Conservation Area Boundary

The Conservation Area was designated in 1968 to protect the 'central historic core' of the city. The boundary drawn then made it clear that this was considered to be the walled city: the same area which Lord Esher had studied.

The 1975 boundary extensions took in the older suburbs along the approach roads. This in effect extended the definition of 'central historic core' to mean the city as it existed in the early 19th century, before the arrival of the railways and the rapid expansion that this stimulated, though with the addition of the railway station itself!

This Appraisal considers whether the boundary should be modified again was assessed in the character area appraisals and the recommendations are set out in section 5.5.1.

The overall conclusion is that by and large the boundary does represent what might be termed the 'historic central core', though there is a case for transferring the area around the Mount to the adjoining Mount Vale Conservation Area since this is primarily a Victorian suburb.

It has also been concluded that though the Foss Islands were within the defences of the medieval city, this area is devoid of historic character or buildings,)with the exception of the Black Swan public house) – largely because it was flooded as part of the King's Fishpond until drained for industrial development in the 1850s. Therefore there is no convincing case for bringing it back within the conservation area boundary.

2.14.2 Listed Buildings

As would be expected, the Conservation Area contains a very large number of listed buildings, some 993 in all. This number includes 210 grade I or II* listed buildings, which represent the top 9% of listed buildings nationally but in the Conservation Area amount to 21% of the total - a clear indication of the outstanding significance of the historic building stock in York's historic core.

2.14.3 Buildings of Merit and Undesignated Heritage Assets

This Appraisal identifies unlisted buildings which make a positive contribution to the character or appearance of the Conservation Area because of their architectural, historical or social interest, either on their own as part of a group. They are identified on the map in section 5.4.2 and in a gazetteer in Supporting Information, along with the criteria that was used to assess them for inclusion.

Planning Policy Statement 5 (PPS5) has introduced a new concept into planning – the undesignated heritage asset. This is a building, space or element of archaeology which is of interest to a local community for historical, architectural or social reasons, but which do not meet the more rigorous criteria for listing. Under PPS5, the future of heritage assets identified by local authorities in this way must be considered when making planning decisions (that is, they are a 'material consideration'). Therefore, City of York Council is assembling a Local List of buildings. The buildings of merit identified here should be considered for inclusion on this list.

2.14.4 Buildings which detract

This study has considered which buildings in the Conservation Area detract from its character or appearance. This is because in design, materials, mass, detail or the extent of alteration they are at odds with their immediate context. The full criteria used to assess them and a map of their location can be found in section 5.4.3. They are listed in full in an appendix

Opportunities exist to improve the character and appearance of the historic core by replacing these buildings with others which better respond to the area's characteristics, as identified in this study.

2.14.5 Landscapes

There is only one landscape in the Conservation Area which appears on English Heritage's Register of Parks and Gardens of Historic Interest: that is Museum Gardens, which is registered at Grade II.

Grade I listed building

Grade II* listed building

Grade II listed building

Scheduled Ancient Monument

Registered Park and Garden

Area of Archaeological Importance

Central Historic Core Conservation Area boundary

Adjacent Conservation Area boundaries

Adjacent Conservation Areas

4 No. 4 St Paul's Square/Holgate Rd

9 No. 9 Tadcaster Road

6 No. 6 New Walk/Terry Avenue

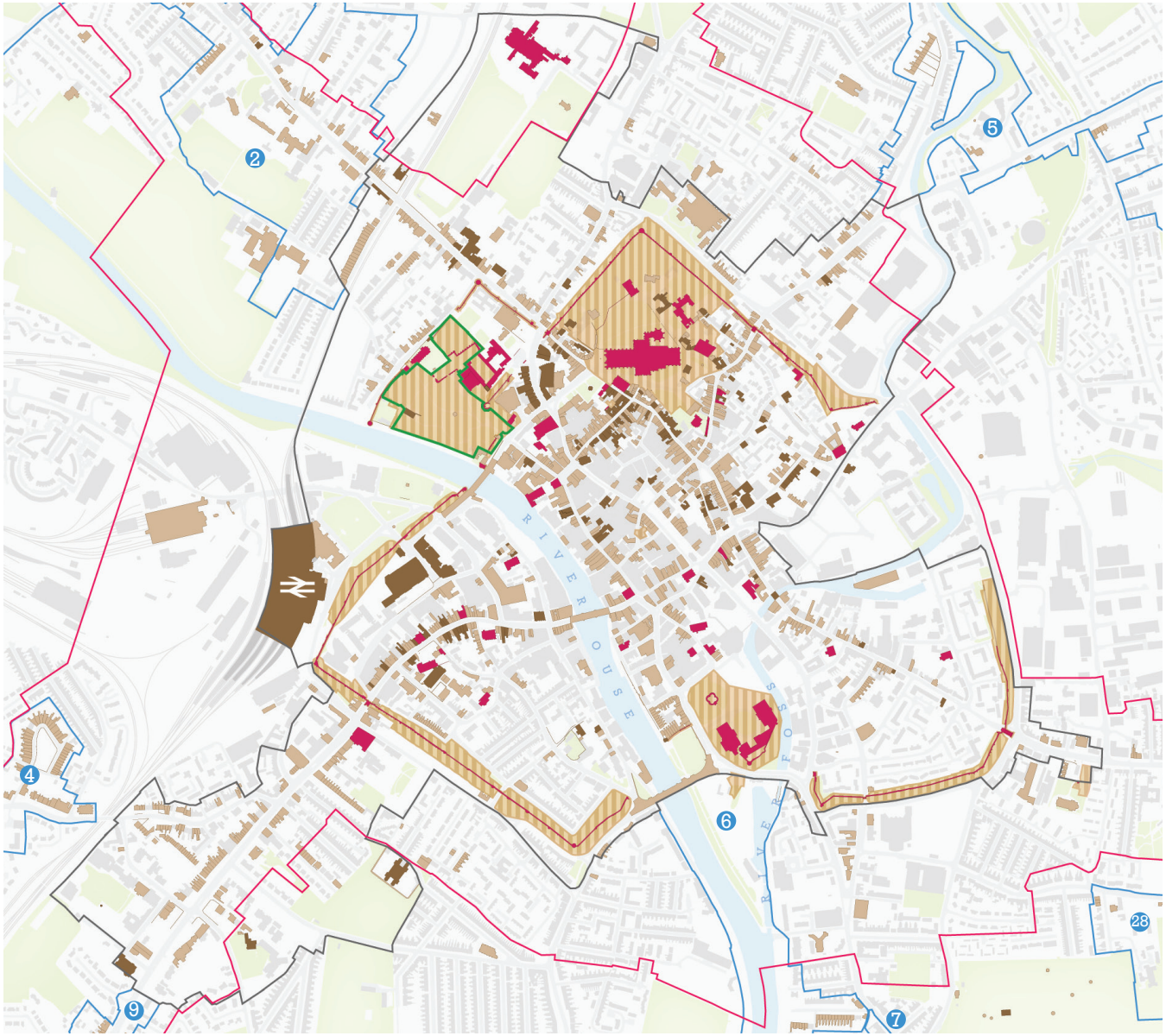
7 No. 7 Fulford Road

28 No. 28 Heslington

5 No. 5 Heworth

2 No. 2 Clifton

0 100 400m



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Designations

2.15 Archaeology

Refer to the plan on previous page

2.15.1 Significance

The archaeology under the centre of York is of international importance. It is Britain's largest, deepest and best preserved urban archaeological site. There are two reasons for this:

- no other city combines in one place a Roman fortress and provincial capital, Anglo-Saxon and Viking royal capital and major medieval city with surviving walls, outstanding cathedral and domestic and civic buildings
- York's low-lying location and underlying clay mean that archaeological remains are waterlogged beneath the water table. They are thus starved of the oxygen necessary for decay and consequently organic materials such as wood and leather which do not normally survive are in a remarkable state of preservation. Only a handful of other places possess these conditions - Dublin and a few sites in Russia. This is what makes York's archaeological deposits of outstanding international importance.

The city's archaeology is also a continuum stretching from these buried remains through to the visible buildings and structures. Moreover, the buried archaeology has an enormous influence over the character of the modern city through the survival of ancient street patterns and building plots.

2.15.2 Management

Conserving this legacy requires careful management by the city council and its partners:

1. The Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act (1979) recognised the significance of the city's archaeology by designating a large part of central York as an Area of Archaeological Importance (see plan on previous page). This designation introduced specific duties on those carrying out operations that "flood, tip or disturb the land". Principally, in York, this afforded the York Archaeological Trust access to record and monitor.
2. The *York Development and Archaeology Study* was commissioned by the city council and English Heritage to investigate the future of archaeology in York and the potential conflict between it and development. It sets out a framework to enable development to be undertaken in a manner that conserves archaeology. It is soon to be reviewed.
3. In policy, City of York Council protects archaeology and mitigates the impacts of development by reference to national policy guidance PPS5 and Local Plan policy HE10. Within the designated Area of Archaeological Importance HE10 requires that:
   - the York Archaeological Trust is informed of any works which may disturb archaeology and can request to observe and record operations (a watching brief) or undertake an excavation (for upto 18 weeks)
   - less than 5% of archaeological remains can be disturbed by the foundations and basements of any proposed development

   Specific sites within the Conservation Area - principally above ground medieval structures and remains - are designated as Scheduled Ancient Monuments. These are shown on the plan. No works can be undertaken to these without the consent of the Department of Culture, Media and Sport, as advised by English Heritage.

   The outstanding international importance of the buried archaeology was the basis of a recent bid for World Heritage Site (WHS) nomination. Although on this occasion the bid was unsuccessful, WHS status remains an aspiration for the city.

2.16 Townscape

The townscape of York is exceptionally rich, and therefore lies at the heart of the Principal Characteristics of the city identified in the Council's recent *Heritage Topic Paper*.

2.16.1 Urban Form

The remarkable townscape of York is the consequence of its historical development and topography. This has created a distinctive 'grain', which is characterised by compact planning, intimate streets and spaces, views both grand and incidental. An overall harmony of scale and roofscape is allied to and contrasted with a wide variety of architectural styles and townscape scenes, creating a stimulating and constantly changing environment.

The legacy of Roman, Anglo-Scandinavian and medieval development is manifest in human-scale streets and informal public spaces, as well as small, often narrow building plots. In this way the buried archaeology of the city is one of the primary influences over the shape and form of the visible city. Alley, courts and lanes lead to hidden little places and spaces, glimpsed through many openings and around quiet corners.

York has been fortunate too, because it escaped large-scale urban redevelopment in the 20th century which has destroyed these characteristics and qualities in many other cities.

2.16.2 Views, Skyline and Roofscape

Views define the experience of the city, at a distance because the topography and the City Walls allow magnificent panoramas of the Minster, and at street level because the winding historic street pattern creates endlessly evolving and glimpsed views with many local focal points such as churches and little squares. In this dense townscape, the rivers and their crossings provide welcome and sometimes unexpected panoramas.

The roofscape and skyline are vital parts of the character of the townscape, first because they are largely still pre-industrial (a 'choppy sea' of tiled roofs dominated by the towers and steeples of the Church) and secondly because they are prominent in the public experience from the elevated view points of the City Walls and Clifford's Tower.

2.16.3 Materials and Details

York has a rich tradition of historic street materials. Excavations in Petergate have revealed that at least the main streets of the medieval city were paved - with riverstone cobbles and Magnesian Limestone chippings. Minor streets and roads beyond the Bars were only dirt.

Riverstone remains a characteristic of the city in the form of cobbled road margins. These replaced grass verges during the 19th century, at a time when what is now considered the traditional palette of paving materials was established. Most important amongst these is York stone. Despite its name, it comes from Pennine quarries, and it was only the advent of canals and then the railways that made its widespread use in York economical. Today we associate it with pavement slabs, but historic photographs show that in the form of small 'setts' it was also once the principal roadway material for more important streets. Examples can still be seen in places such as Mount Parade and many more probably survive under the tarmac which superceded them in the 20th century.

The other important 19th century material is iron, in the form of street furniture, such as the railings and lamps in Dean's Park, manhole covers and sometimes curbs.

Despite this inheritance, the overall quality of the townscape suffers from the mixture and lack of cohesion of modern surfacing, much of it associated with the Footstreets, and above all from the quantity and poor quality of street furniture and clutter. Perhaps the worst aspects are signage, which is of many different designs, and the paraphernalia of modern highways engineering - traffic lights, railings and road signs.

The cumulative impact of poor surfacing, clutter and excess signage is to degrade the quality of the townscape, the setting of historic buildings and monuments and our enjoyment of the city.

2.17 Architecture

York's architectural inheritance is exceptional. As the *Heritage Topic Paper* identifies, it is characterised by outstanding 'landmark' buildings and structures allied to excellent examples from many different eras. These form an almost unbroken architectural tradition stretching back a thousand years, one in which a huge range of styles and forms is harmonised by the palette of local building materials.

2.17.1 Materials

The materials with which buildings are constructed exert a powerful influence over the character of a town or city, not just in their appearance but in the type of buildings that are possible.

For reasons of cost and practicality, historically these materials are often locally sourced, giving rise to distinctive local and regional variations. Improved transport has gradually eroded this: the arrival of the railways were a decisive moment since they made it possible at reasonable cost to employ materials from all around the country.

In York the characteristic building materials fall, broadly, in to two categories: those used for the exceptional buildings and those used for the ordinary.

Since the Roman occupation, Magnesian Limestone has been the material of choice for military, public and religious buildings. It is quarried near Tadcaster, south-west of the city, and is easy to carve and beautifully creamy to behold. Used only in this part of Yorkshire, it is one of the defining elements of the architecture and townscape of York. However, in the last few decades its usage has spread to other buildings, such as commercial offices and hotels, which has begun to weaken its status. Since the arrival of the railways in the mid 19th century, other stones have been used, but not to a degree which is defining.

Everyday buildings were in the Middle Ages built of oak frames. York has many survivors. Unusually, the frames are filled not with wattle and daub but normally thin bricks. These are covered with plaster and historically limewash.

By the end of the 17th century, partly in response to fear of fire, partly because of a shortage of good quality timber and partly because of fashion, timber frames had been superseded by brick. In a range of colours - red, brown, biscuit and yellow - brick has remained the standard walling material ever since. However, today it may only be a cladding to a steel or concrete frame, structural advances which have been increasingly employed since the end of the 19th century, particularly for larger buildings such as offices.

Clay pantiles are a traditional roofing material, but slate has been used extensively since the arrival of the railways.

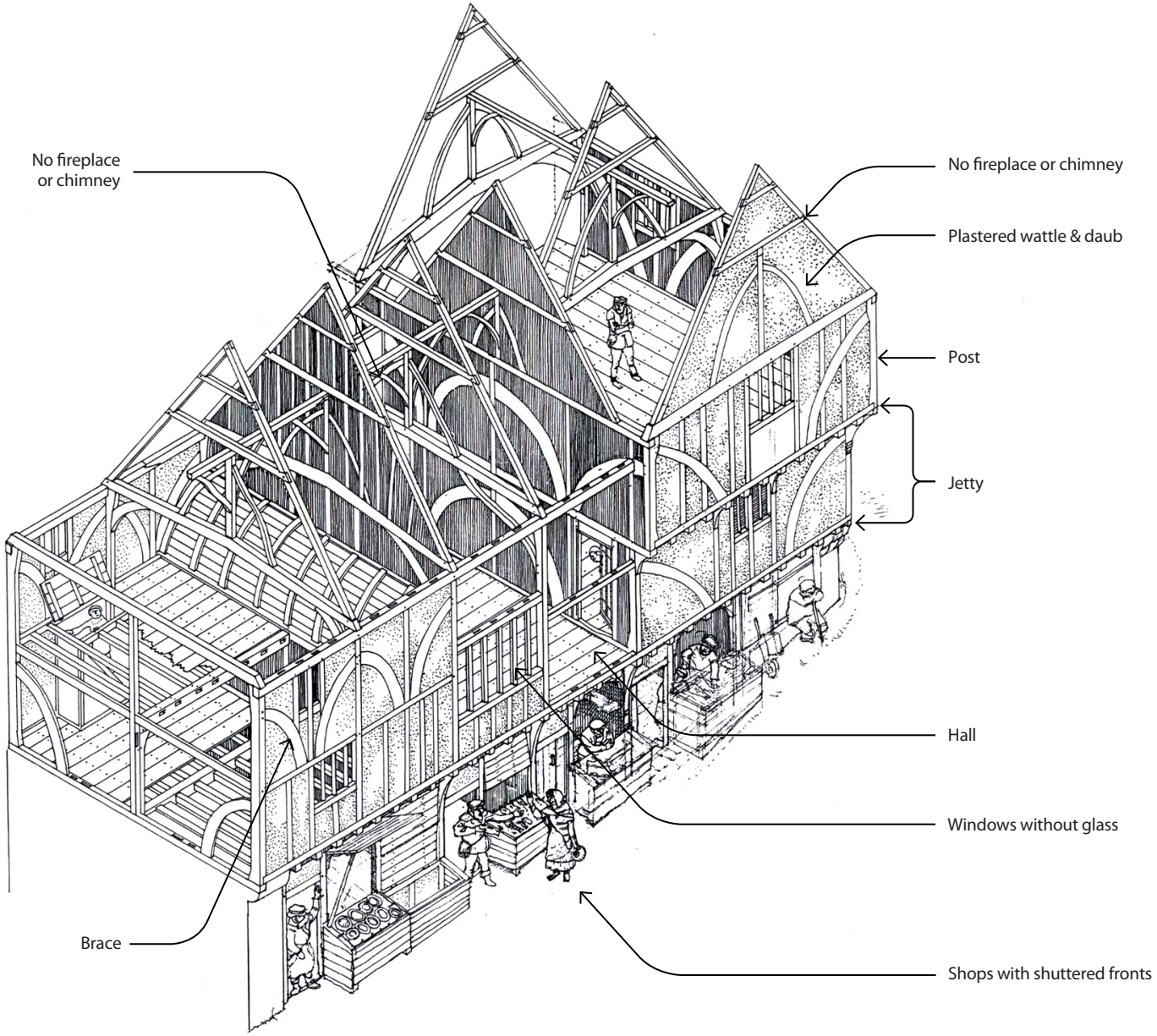
2.17.2 Medieval Architecture

York is remarkable for the quality and quantity of surviving medieval architecture because it was one of the great cities of the Middle Ages and because it has suffered comparatively little from bombing and redevelopment.

Firstly there are the religious buildings, not just the Minster and the ruins of St Mary's Abbey but also the largest group of urban medieval parish churches in the north. Most were built or rebuilt in the later Middle Ages and therefore the predominant style is Perpendicular Gothic, characterised by large windows and flatter pointed arches.

Second, an unmatched collection of state and civic structures in the UK: the City Walls, Clifford's Tower, the Guildhall and the other guildhalls, such as the Merchant Adventurers.

Finally, the city has dozens of timber-framed houses, often hidden behind later facades. These have been recorded in detail by the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments. The characteristic form is the burgage development, with a narrow gabled and jettied house fronting the street, a garden behind and perhaps stabling at the rear (these areas later developed for housing or industry). The house typically contained a merchant's storage or a shop, as well as an upper hall either parallel or at right angles to the street (see drawing). However, there are many variations, such as tenements. Early medieval houses were heated without open hearths: brick fireplaces and chimneystacks are a later development.



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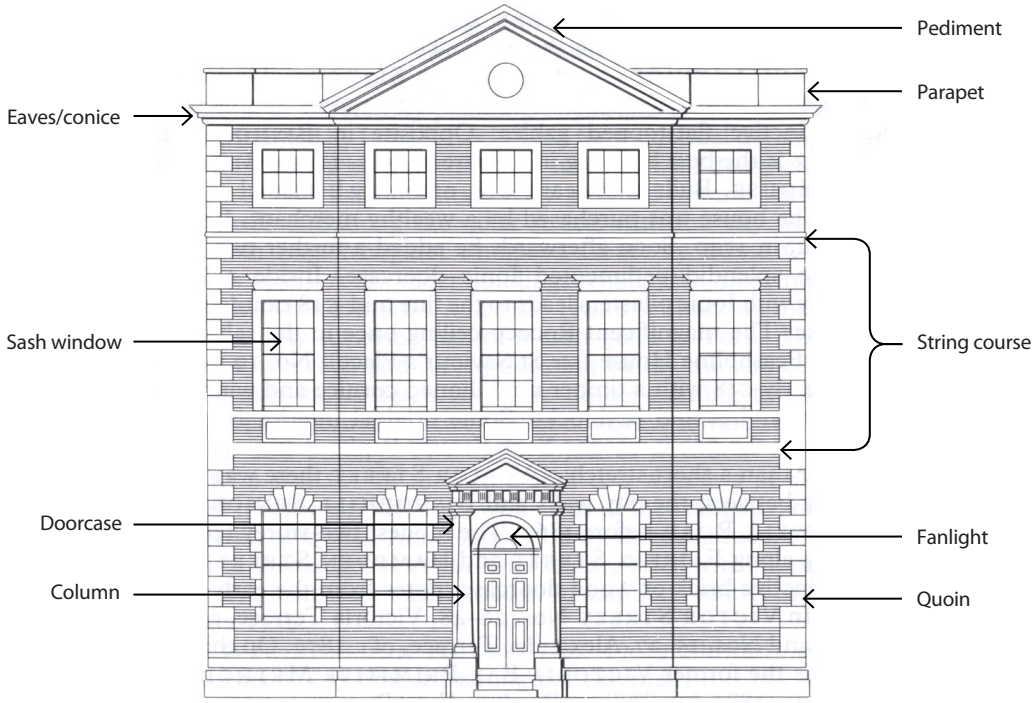
Cut-away drawing of a medieval house and shops

2.17.3 Georgian Architecture

Though there are some notable examples of 17th century buildings - such as the Treasurer's House - they are limited in number. However, Georgian architecture is abundant and of high quality, reflecting the prosperity of the city in the 18th century. Houses are brick and either built in rows or unified terraces, or stand alone if very grand (see the drawing). They are designed according to the principals of classical architecture, which came to Britain from Italy and elsewhere after the Renaissance. The use of inter-related proportions and symmetry are fundamental to their composition.

Local architects, none more so than John Carr, oversaw the construction of houses characterised inside and out by high-quality detailing such as joinery and plasterwork, produced by highly-skilled local craftsmen according to identifiable local styles. For example, a 'York School' of plasterers, some of whom were Italian craftsmen, produced exuberant 'Rococo' plasterwork. These architects and tradesmen also employed the latest building technology, such as the sash window.

The same principals were applied to splendid civic buildings, such as the prisons and courthouse around the Eye of York, but as befits their status these are often built of stone and given grander architectural details - like columns and pediments (see drawing).



Fairfax House, Castlegate, front elevation. By John Carr, 1762

2.17.4 Victorian and Edwardian Architecture

In the 19th century the coming of the railways and the advances of the industrial revolution introduced new materials, structural techniques and functions, and a new scale of construction - all exemplified by the city's magnificent second railway station built by the North Eastern Railway in the 1870s. The result is much greater variety. Imported brick and stone appears in many colours and forms. Iron and later steel allows the construction of more ambitious structures and internal spaces, often exploited by the expanding industries (such as in warehouses). New building types emerged - the station, the bank and the department store, for example. The evolution of architectural theory and the whims of architectural fashion bred a much greater variety of architectural style: classicism developed into a number of different strands (such as 'Italianate' and later Georgian Revival) and was supplemented by the revival of the Gothic and then local 'vernacular' forms inspired by traditional buildings in and around the city.

The characteristic housing types of the century are two in number: modest brick terraces of workers cottages, laid out according to local bylaws to prevent unhealthy overcrowding, and detached and semi-detached 'villas' for the middle classes in the new suburbs spreading beyond the walls, like the Mount.

2.17.5 Architecture since the War

These trends largely held sway until after the Second World War, when the 'modernism' which had been born earlier in the century began to have an impact on the city. It is characterised by the use of new materials like concrete, the extensive use of glazing and flat roofs, and was underpinned by the belief that the appearance of the building should be dictated by function and structure rather than being dressed up in a historic style or elaborate architectural detailing. Rydale House on Piccadilly and Hudson House on Toft Green are examples of this from the 1960s. The extension to the Theatre Royal illustrates how some architects sought to express these ideas and use these new materials in more sculptural form.

Since the 1970s there has been a widespread reaction in the city against the perceived failings and lack of sympathy of this approach. The response was the 'York Aesthetic', which sought to create a uniquely York architectural approach inspired by and suitable for the historic character of the city. It makes use of traditional York materials - especially brick - and characteristic forms - notably broken pitched roofs - allied to plans that emphasise interesting street compositions, incidental views and intimate spaces, all characteristics drawn from the historic townscape of the historic core.

Today this remains an influential view, but there is perhaps a little more architectural pluralism too, and an acceptance evident in developments such as City Screen that modernism can have a place if thoughtfully designed and founded on a deep understanding of the character of York's townscape and its architectural traditions.

2.18 Public Spaces

Refer to the plan on the following page

2.18.1 Character and Significance

The walled city is not a place of formal public spaces, such as grand squares. They did not form a part of the medieval townscape.

Instead, the characteristic public spaces of the walled city are the intimate, informal squares at the junctions of streets and where markets are held and churches were located. These are a part of the organic street network and architecturally are defined by variety and juxtaposition: there are few unified or formal frontages.

A limited number of more formal spaces have been created since the Middle Ages: the Georgian Courts and Prisons around the 'Eye of York', and Parliament Street and Duncombe Place in the 19th century. The Courts and Prisons form one of the grandest and most formal but least celebrated group of Georgian public buildings in the country, but the later creations appear more modest.

Parliament Street, though, was in fact the most ambitious of the many acts of 'improvement' carried out during the 19th century to relieve congestion - it is surprising how many streets in the centre were widened and straightened. Parliament Street is deceptive because it was actually a brand new market square, created in the 1830s by joining St Sampson's Square and Pavement and lined with buildings erected to a uniform design. Only fragments of this have survived subsequent redevelopment, so that today the square is far less formal than was conceived 180 years ago. The modern market place at Newgate has no pretensions: a ragged workaday space created by demolishing backstreet buildings.

Beyond the walls there are more generous public spaces but these are predominantly green spaces.

2.18.2 Condition

The principal issues with these spaces are those discussed under townscape - street clutter and poorly designed surfaces and furniture - and the relentless impact of traffic around the edges of the Footstreets, such as at Exhibition Square, as analysed in the next section.

Parliament Street, at the heart of the shopping district and therefore arguably the most important public space in the city centre, is an area whose use and management deserve special consideration. As it is currently laid out it is not quite big enough for the uses to which it is put. It would therefore benefit from an agreement of a clear vision of its function, the removal of clutter and obstacles, and stronger functional integration with St Sampson Square to the north and physical integration with Piccadilly to the south.

The Minster precinct is another terribly important place. Twenty years ago, the closure of Deangate, Minster Yard and Duncombe Place to through traffic finally created the opportunity to redesign these streets as Esher envisaged, as a single pedestrian paved space that forms a setting worthy of the Minster. However, though the traffic has long gone, the tarmac and road markings are still there.

The decision of the Heritage Lottery Fund to fund paving Minster Yard outside the south transept as a public square should act as the stimulus to continue the process all the way from Goodramgate to Museum Street. The importance of the Minster and the number of visitors it receives points to this being a priority project.



Public space and green space

2.19 Green Spaces

Refer to the plan on the preceeding page

2.19.1 Within the walled city

There is little green space within the densely-packed walled city. What there is is either a legacy of the medieval church - the Minster precinct, the parish churchyards and the grounds of St Mary's Abbey - or the medieval defences - the ramparts and mound of Clifford's Tower.

With the exception of the Abbey and Minster grounds, these are small spaces. The churchyards are intimate and often charming escapes from the crowded streets. On the other hand, the ramparts, though well kept, are in terms of use and access little more than glorified verges. This is a change from the 19th century when they were managed as public parks with railings and gates. They are discussed in more detail under section 2.21, City Walls, below.

Trees play an important role in the townscape. Though they are few in the dense medieval core, they are prominent in defining the character and charm of the green spaces that girdle the centre: the ramparts, Dean's Park and the gardens upstream on either side of Lendal Bridge.

2.19.2 Beyond the City Walls

Mature avenues are also highly characteristic of the principal routes into the centre, creating a wonderfully verdant entry into the city. However, in some key locations (such as the approach to Micklegate Bar) they have been cut down because of road widening.

Beyond the city walls, the development of the 18th and 19th centuries across previously open fields was planned with greater greenery between and amongst buildings – avenues of trees and generous gardens at The Mount for example, or the grounds of the hospital at Bootham. All the major historic routes were planted with trees.

The expansion of the city in this period also brought the Strays within the urban area. However, only the northern tip of Micklegate Stray forms a part of the Central Historic Core Conservation Area.

2.19.3 Victorian & Edwardian parks and gardens

The 19th century was also the period in which the present character of the larger, more formal parks and gardens were created for the specific purposes of leisure and exercise: Dean's Park, Museum Gardens and Tower Gardens.

By contrast the first green space that many visitors come to, between the station and the river, developed almost by accident and therefore lacks cohesion: it is a series of separate spaces, divided by busy roads, created for a variety of functions.

Little has changed in the form of these planned parks and gardens in a hundred years. Section 5.10 of the Management Recommendations and individual Character Area appraisals consider how more pro-active planning and management could make them more attractive public spaces.

2.20 Traffic & Movement

Refer to plans at the end of this section.

Overall, the centre of York is a walkable place - a compact core in which traffic and parking is tightly regulated. However, the weight of traffic has a considerable impact on the character and quality of the conservation area in some key locations.

2.20.1 The historic challenge of traffic

The movement of people and goods around the city centre has been a preoccupation of politicians, citizens and planners for centuries, because the walls, bars and dense medieval street pattern make vehicular movement so difficult.

The Victorian and Edwardian city fathers tackled this by creating new bridges, new breaches in the walls, and new streets such as Museum Street-Duncombe Place-Deangate and Piccadilly.

After the war, an inner ring road was proposed to address rapidly rising vehicle numbers. It was fought off by the Civic Trust and others because of the damage it would cause. Esher proposed a number of multi-storey car-parks in the historic core, and some were built (for example on Piccadilly).

More recently, much traffic has been diverted from the walled city and a comprehensive Park and Ride network has been introduced to encourage people not to drive into the centre.

Though these measures have in their own ways been very successful, the pressure of traffic on the historic core is immense. This is especially true of the walls and the bars since most traffic is now routed around the walled city rather than through it. This circuit has become an inner ring road, and highways engineering – lights, signs, railings etc. – dominates and disfigures the setting of the walls and bars and discourages pedestrians from walking along them.

2.20.2 The Station

The inner-ring road contributes to the failings of the station approaches.

This is the principal modern gateway into the city; the station itself is an outstanding building, and its entrance faces the city walls. However, the initial experience of the visitor to the city is one dominated by traffic, street clutter and highways engineering.

It is then compounded by the requirement for the pedestrian visitor to walk into the city on a narrow pavement alongside nose-to-tail traffic. What should be a tremendous sequence of views – of the walls and the Minster and from Lendal Bridge – is overwhelmed by buses, cars, signage and traffic lights.

As the principal approach to the historic core for visitors, this detracts very considerably from the character, appearance and public experience of the conservation area and is a poor advert for the city.

2.20.3 Footstreets

The inner ring-road forms a barrier to pedestrian access into the city. However, within the walls the streets in the heart of the city are now designated as 'Footstreets'. These are not fully pedestrianised areas, but places where they have priority: all traffic other than that for disabled access is banned within designated hours.

This network was created in the late 1980s as one of the first pedestrian areas in the country and has become grown to become one the largest. It has been a great success which has made a major contribution to the economic vitality of the city centre and to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. However, there are a number of management and design issues:, such as the hours of operation and the 'left over' road surfaces, still marked out for 24hr traffic.

Addressing these issues would have very positive and widespread impacts on the appearance and character of the Conservation Area, and the public's enjoyment of it. They are considered in the Central Shopping Area Character Area Appraisal and management recommendations are made in section 5.10.5.

2.20.4 Cyclists

Bicycle use in York is one of the highest in the country, no doubt helped by its gentle topography. However, the core's narrow streets make the provision of dedicated cycle lanes difficult, and cycling is banned from the Footstreets. The challenge of managing the real and potential conflicts between both cyclists and pedestrians and equally cyclists and vehicles emerged from consultation as one of the key city centre management issues. It is discussed in section 5.9.6.



The Footstreets are very successful, but because of the way many of the them are surfaced, the hours that they operate and the way that they are serviced, they do not always feel like a pedestrian zone

A - road

Main road

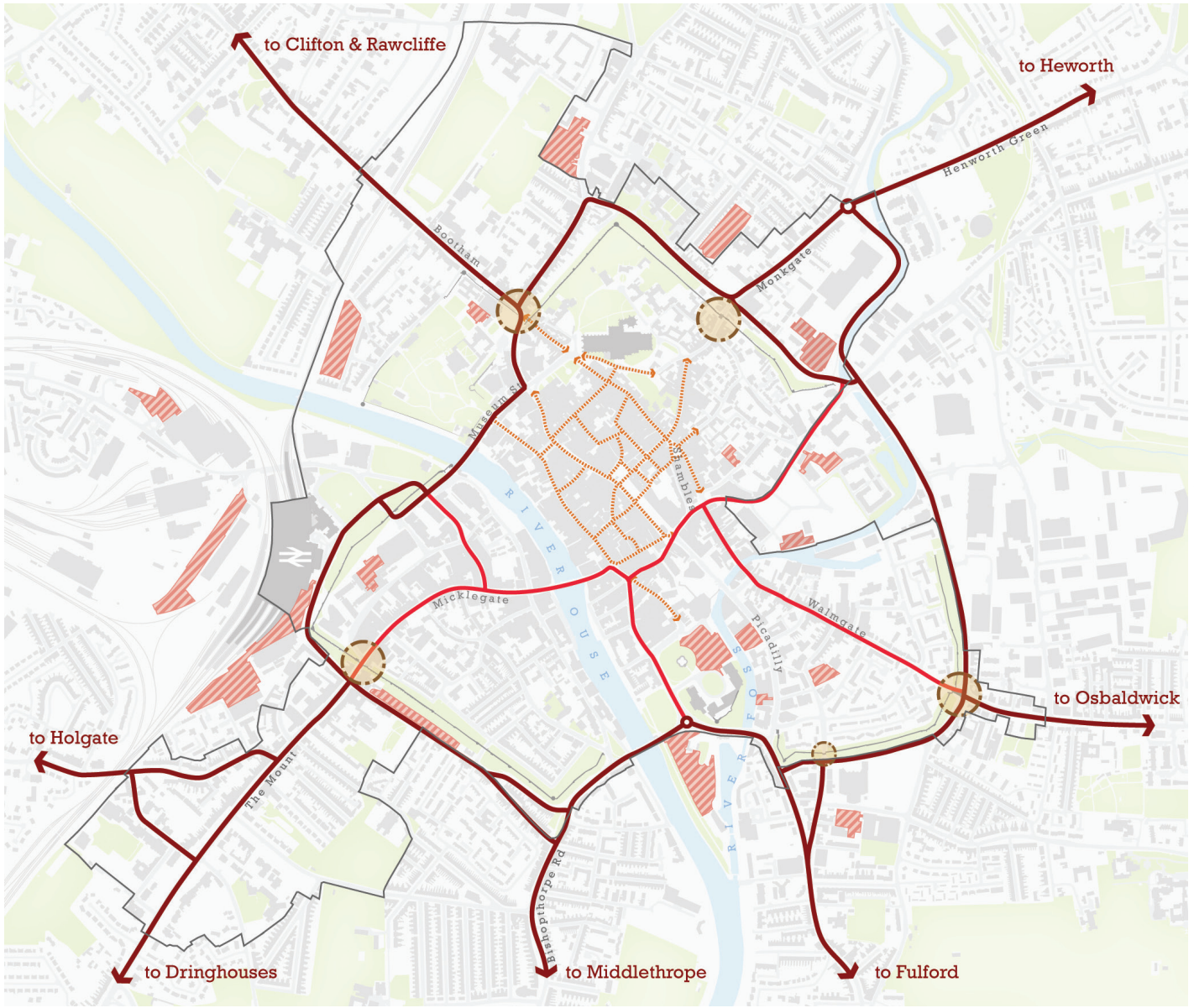
Footstreet

Car park

Bar

Existing Conservation Area boundary

0 100 400m

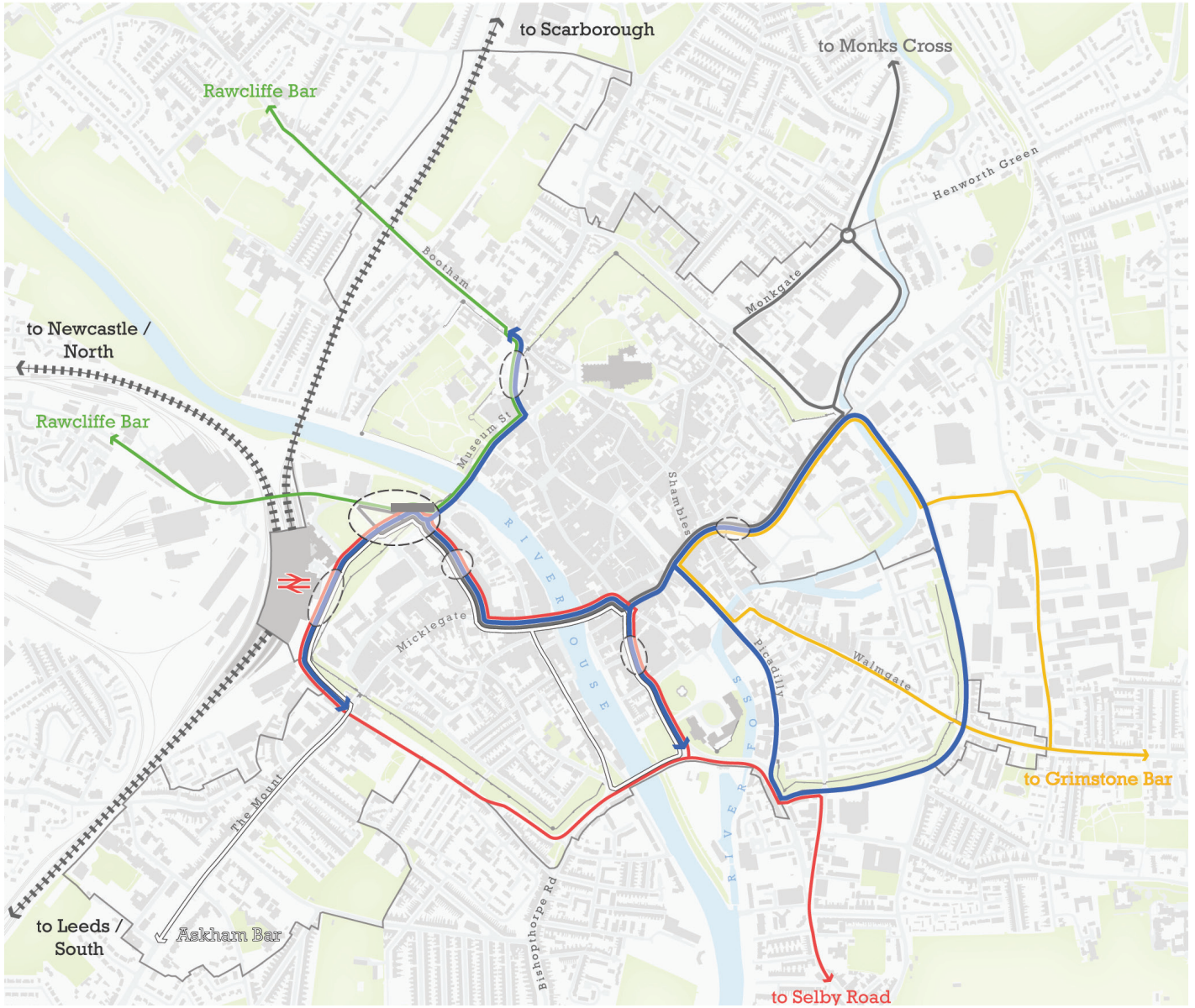


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Traffic and highways

- Main bus routes
- Park and ride - red line
- Park and ride - green line
- Park and ride - yellow line
- Park and ride - silver line
- Park and ride - white line
- Railway
- Concentration of bus and coach stops
- Existing Conservation Area boundary

0 100 400m



Public transport

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2.21 The City Walls

2.21.1 Significance

The City Walls of York are indisputably one of the city's greatest treasures. The longest in England, they are also essentially the only complete city walls in the country, since the Foss always acted as the city defences in the east, and the only small sections which have been demolished are those between Baile Hill and the Ouse and across St Leonard's Place. Therefore, their extent and prominence is one of the features which most clearly distinguishes York from other historic towns and cities in England where unlike say, Italy or France, the survival of medieval city walls is very uncommon.

For this we must thank the lingering strategic importance of York, the relative lack of pressure for expansion in the 18th century, and the efforts of the city's citizens in the 19th century to preserve, restore and celebrate them.

2.21.2 Comparison with other walled cities

The diagram at the end of this section show how York compares with some of the other more well known and complete walled cities of Europe. What emerges from this that firstly York has one of the largest surviving wall circuits in Europe (only Lucca is larger amongst this group); second, that this is contained within a larger and more economically vibrant city than the other examples; third, that the walled city is still the economic, political and cultural heart of the city, which is not the case for example in Carcassone. The net result of this is that the walled city of York is under more pressure in terms of the number of visitors and vehicles and the demand on land use for shopping and offices than other walled cities in Europe.

2.21.3 Permeability

The extent of the walls is at once both fundamental to their significance and the particular character of the areas adjacent to them, and sometimes an impediment to the movement of people into and through the city centre.

This is the challenge often presented by adapting historic defensive sites, which by their very nature are designed to restrict access, once their military function has vanished. Here, however, the walls are so historically and archaeologically important and the number of Bars and Victorian breaches sufficiently numerous that it is almost inconceivable that any further openings could be created. Moreover, the walls have the benefit of helping to restrict the growth of traffic and the damage of the highways engineer in the historic core. They have benefit to the continued commercial success of historic streets such as Goodramgate and Micklegate by forcing people through the Bars on their way to the city centre. Finally, it is not the walls alone that act as barrier, but the inner ring road wrapped around them.

2.12.4 Setting

For long sections of the walls and ramparts their setting is disfigured by the inner ring road which clings to its outer side. The weight of traffic and the paraphernalia of highways engineering are a visual and audio blight, and discourage people from lingering or exploring. In some locations development has also blighted the ditch, notably the car park on Nunnery Lane and north of Monk Bar. By complete contrast the inner ramparts face on to quiet, frequently residential, streets and the setting of the walls is often charming and picturesque.

There are also redevelopment pressures on the city ditch in certain locations, such as either side of Monk Bar, which could degrade the setting of the walls. For this reason, English Heritage has prepared a Position Paper (2011) on development in the ditch and the setting of the walls.

2.12.5 Wall Walk Circuit

Because sections of the walls have been demolished it is not possible to walk a complete circuit of them, and few visitors attempt to walk them in the round even though a route is signed (see plan at the end of section 2.18 Public Space, above). It might be possible to make it much easier and more pleasurable to walk across the gaps with better signage and landscaping. This would give more tourists the confidence to the walk the whole circuit; circular walks are inherently more appealing than linear ones. There would remain the issue of the current quality of the setting of the walls where they are dominated by the inner ring road and flanked in the east by unattractive modern buildings.

2.12.6 Level Access

It is not possible to get onto the walls without walking up steps. Therefore they are inaccessible to those in wheelchairs or of limited mobility. It would be highly desirable to change this for at least a limited section with fine views – as is currently being planned at Lincoln Castle, for example.

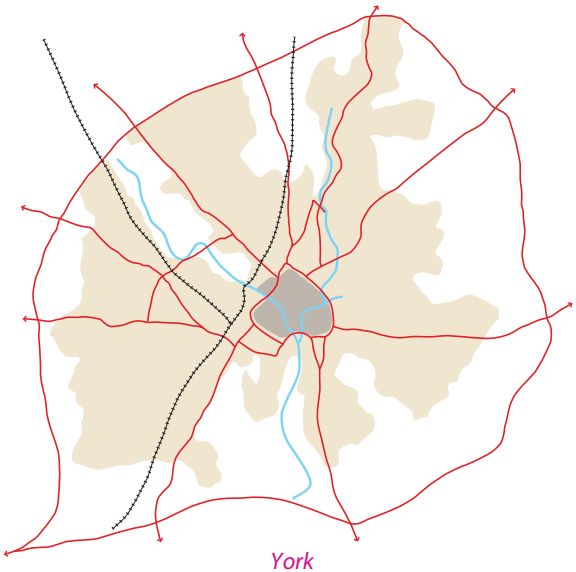
However, this would be very challenging because of the potential visual archaeological and impact of lift towers, safety rails,etc.

2.21.7 Ramparts

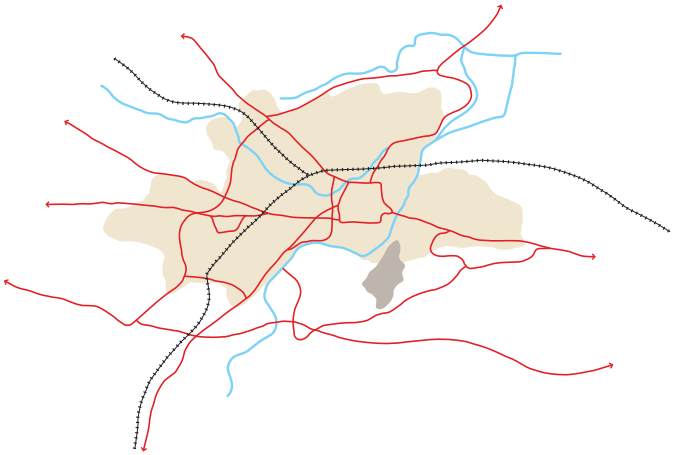
The ramparts are one of the principal green spaces of the city centre and important to its biodiversity. They are well maintained and in the spring they are erupt into vibrant display of daffodils, but because of their slope and proximity to busy roads or back gardens in the main they are unsuitable for more intensive public use. However, at certain locations, near the station or along Lord Mayor's Walk for example, more might be done to exploit their potential as public green space. Indeed, *York New City Beautiful* advocates the creation of a designated Rampart Park along the walls as a key component of a new network of interlinked city parks.



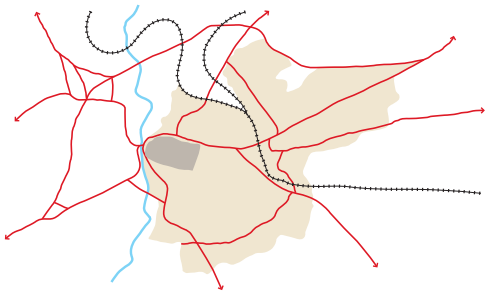
The City Walls and ramparts are some of the most important green spaces in the city centre for both recreation and biodiversity. This is as true for some of the less well visited sections - such as here near Walmgae Bar - as it is for the stretches near the station and Minster



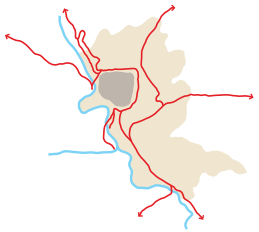
York



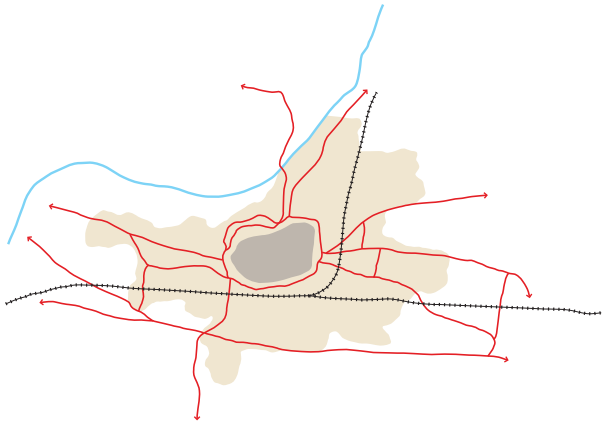
Carcassonne



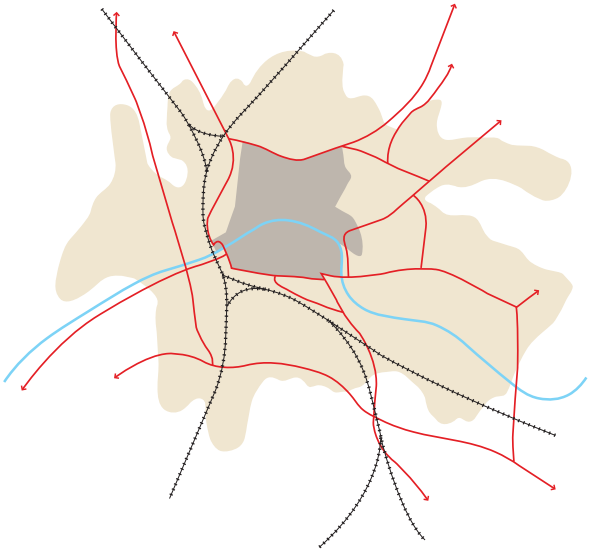
Avila



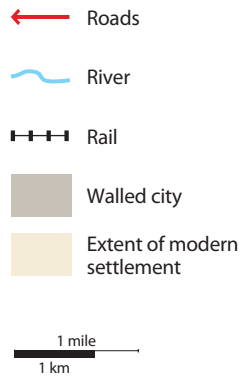
Rothenburg



Lucca



Pisa



Comparison with other European walled cities, drawn to scale.

2.22 The Bars

2.22.1 Significance

The Bars are of outstanding historic and architectural interest. No other town or city in the UK has more or better examples.

2.22.2 Awareness

Though the Bars feature extensively in architectural and pictorial accounts of the city, curiously as a group they do not feature heavily in the experience of either locals or visitors. Commuters and shoppers are likely to be familiar with the one or two on their regular routes into the city; tourists may see none other than Bootham Bar. This is because with exception of this and that of Monk Bar they are far from the central retail and tourist core, beyond intervening residential areas.

2.22.3 Setting

The unfortunate legacy of marking the points at which the main roads into the city centre meet the city walls is that the setting of all the Bars is badly compromised, at least on the outer side, by broad roads and busy junctions and the attendant paraphernalia of highways engineering: signage, lights, pedestrian barriers, etc. The amount and proximity traffic also present a physical threat: from collision and the corrosive effect of pollution. A final factor is the degree to which they can be seen and therefore understood in the context of the walls either side. Monk Bar and Walmgate Bar are where this is most successful.

The degraded setting of the Bars is one of the most significant and enduring wounds to the appearance and quality of the Conservation Area. The Bars remain the principal entrance points to the city centre from most directions; improving their setting to create gateways into the city centre befitting of York not only benefits them, but establishes a better image for the whole city.



Micklegate Bar



Bootham Bar



Walmgate Bar



Monk Bar

2.23 The Rivers

2.23.1 Contrasting Characters

The Ouse and the Foss, the two rivers of York have very different characters. The Ouse is the principal river. It is much wider, used by pleasure craft, crossed by major bridges and lined with parks, public walks and quaysides and significant buildings such as the Guildhall. Visitors to York know about the Ouse. By contrast the Foss is much narrower, no longer navigable, once heavily industrial and therefore with very limited access to its banks.

2.23.2 Significance

York exists because of its rivers. It began as a defended river crossing and the Ouse and the Foss went on to play a powerful role in shaping the city's development and the character of the Conservation Area. For the visitor today, the riverbanks and bridges provide some of the finest views of the city centre. And yet the full potential of the rivers is far from realised.

2.23.3 Access and Use

It is possible to walk considerable lengths of the banks of the Ouse, and there are stretches which adjoin good green spaces like Museum Gardens and others such as King's Staith which are lively with activity, but much is either inaccessible to the public, unwelcoming and unattractive, or underused. As to the Foss, sadly the meaning of its name – 'ditch' – is only too appropriate. There is very little public access at all within the Conservation Area.

Why is this? Historically, there was much less public access because the riverside was too valuable to trade and industry. The Georgians – with the New Walk downstream from the Conservation Area – and then the Victorians opened up large stretches for the public's enjoyment and leisure. However, with the superb exception of the City Screen development, this process has stalled since the 19th century.

2.33.4 Flooding

For reasons explained in section 2.3, Geology and Topography, the risk of flooding to which York has been susceptible since its foundation has been exacerbated in the last few decades by human activity. Parts of the conservation area such as King's Staith and Tower Gardens are part of what is termed the 'functional flood plain' and are allowed to flood regularly as part of the management of the river. Other vulnerable areas are protected from frequent flooding by barriers and other engineering measures.

With climate change this problem can only worsen. Already, the use of the ground-floor spaces of new buildings in the most vulnerable riverside locations, such as Queen's Staith is limited to parking or storage because of the risks, with a subsequent impact on the use and character of this area. If flooding becomes more frequent and severe, will it remain viable to occupy historic buildings along, for example, King's Staith? If further defences are required in the city centre, can such massive civil engineering be sensitively incorporated into the historic townscape?



Recently created public access to the Ouse at the City Screen development





A Conservation Area of contrasting rivers: the Ouse, left, and the Foss