

My Castle Gateway: Masterplan Ideas Feedback

Introduction

The My Castle Gateway conversation started in June 2017. In the first step of the process - through a series of different type of events and online conversations – we asked two fundamental questions about the Castle Gateway area: “what is important to you about this area?” and “what would you like to be able to do here?”. In the spirit of [“every Post-It counts”](#) we gathered every Post-It, along with social media posts, questionnaire responses and snapshots of all sorts of other comment and response in a [Flickr database](#) which acts as an open, publicly-accessible and searchable resource.¹

In August, we used the comments collected on the Flickr database, to underpin an [Open Brief](#) which we return to throughout this report to show the links through from the My Castle Gateway brief to the Masterplan ideas to the recent feedback on the ideas.

Masterplan Ideas: My Castle Gateway Step 3

The My Castle Gateway Open Brief formed a basis – alongside [other financial, policy and technical considerations](#) – for the work of [BDP, engaged by the council to produce masterplan proposals](#). They responded to this brief, looking at:-

- Major sites within the area
- Other interventions in support of wishes stated in the brief, or where other changes created opportunities
- Transport and movement issues
- Financial modelling to investigate costs and benefits

The masterplan ideas were presented in a way which broadly grouped them by area, as:-

1. [King's Staith](#)
2. [Piccadilly](#)
3. [Castle and the Eye of York](#)
4. [St George's Field](#)
5. [The River Corridors](#)

The masterplan ideas were made public in November, and a formal period for feedback ran until 22nd December. During this period there were various ways for people to view the masterplan ideas and to respond to them. One of the features of the My Castle Gateway process has been the use of different “platforms” to provide a variety of ways for people to engage. All have been productive in terms of getting different kinds of responses.

The [Masterplan Ideas Launch Event](#) on 25th/26th November suffered from a short lead time and a bitterly cold weekend, but still got useful attendance of around 80 people. In partnership with Coaching York, who ran Imagination walks to explore the different

¹ More detailed comments can also be found on [our YouTube channel](#), featuring interviews with a variety of people, all with interesting and relevant things to say.

Masterplan Ideas, we were able to elicit rich and thoughtful responses and videos from individuals and groups with a particular interest in the area.

A number of groups made **formal comments**; all of these had been involved at earlier stages of the process and had contributed to discussions, in some cases organising events. These included York Civic Trust, The River Foss Society, York Cycle Campaign, and York Blind & Partially Sighted Society. We also received specific alternative visions for aspects of the development from [retired planner David Barratt](#) and from York Tomorrow.

Through the council's Castle Gateway Masterplan Ideas website we set up **online surveys** for each idea. The surveys were designed both to gather responses and to encourage rich and reflective engagement. 251 surveys were completed. In general people who contribute via the surveys were keen to be constructive and specific. The vast majority of those that used the surveys to respond were interested in taking the opportunity to offer detailed and imaginative feedback.

We have used **social media** throughout the process (Twitter and Facebook) including "Twitter Hours" to encourage discussion around the "Challenges" events. This has been useful in gaining publicity for events and also for casual input (all of which has been incorporated into the Flickr database). During the masterplan consultation period greater activity was stirred, particularly on the general council Facebook group. The responses here was very mixed; there was a considerable amount of positive (if sometimes sceptical) contribution, but also a lot of very wide-ranging and negative posts on anything from potholes in Huntington to the proliferation of student accommodation. There was clear evidence among many of a mistrust of both the process of engagement with the public, and with the competence of the council as a whole. This is an issue we will return to at the end of report in a section outlining the My Castle Gateway next steps.

The council ran three **drop-in events** at 29 Castlegate in late November and early December. Approximately 110 people attended (a total of 14 hours consultation), and around half of those were already familiar with the project. There was a significant number of local residents who came either to express issues they experience in the Castle Gateway area and ensure any ideas addressed these, or those who simply came to find out more. People passing by were encouraged to come in, resulting in introducing several young people (under 25) and visitors to York to the project and again capturing their comments. All age ranges have contributed, including those with young families. Some wanted to feedback online, but on the day feedback generated 90 Post-it comments and 8 Questionnaires providing 169 separate comments (all added to the Flickr database).

Structure of the summary of feedback

This summary draws on the structure of the My Castle Gateway Open Brief and the Castle Gateway Challenge themes. Under each of these themes we make reference to specific sites and ideas (using the same reference codes as the masterplan display boards).

Public Spaces

In terms of Public Space, through the Step 1 Open Brief process people said they wanted to be able to:

- Come together
- Attend large scale [events](#) (music, theatre, fairs)
- Use the Eye of York as a place of [political protest](#)
- [Commemorate and remember](#), especially the 1190 massacre of York's Jewish Community
- Sit down and enjoy the views in lots of different places in the area, including views of the [Ouse and the Foss](#)
- Have spaces where it is possible to reflect, think and remember
- To see interesting things: [art](#), [fountains](#), [wildlife](#), [trees](#)
- To [eat](#) and [drink](#), whether sitting on the ground with a picnic or at cafes/restaurants.
- To linger with [no pressure to buy anything](#)
- Be there at night as well as during the day
- Be there all year round

The masterplan proposals included a number of ideas which responded to the wish for a new public space for a variety of uses, for increased richness of uses of existing public spaces and for the use of street space to create public place rather than simply allow traffic movement.

Perhaps the most important of the Key Ideas was the proposal for new uses for Castle Car Park (Site C1). This received a [large volume of comments and responses](#). The [majority of these supported the closure of the car park](#) and creation of new parking elsewhere, although there were [a minority of responses in favour of retaining and improving parking there](#), or generally stating that city centre parking was important. There were more "keep it" comments on social media than via other routes.

The majority of responses in favour of public space suggested [a place where people could spend time](#). Some people imagined a place where [music](#) or [theatre](#) events took place. Others simply a '[space to relax](#)'. Or a place which provided [orientation](#), [child-focused activities](#), or respite from shopping. There was a number of comments which called for the proposed [Clifford's Tower Visitor Centre to be resited somewhere else as part a new public space](#).

There was a common request at the open brief stage for a place [not taken over by commerce](#), although responses to the masterplan leaned more in favour of [cafes and restaurants](#). For some there was a sense that cafes/restaurants should be permanent and housed within [new and existing buildings](#), for others they imagined food and drink as 'street food' from temporary kiosks. There was some support for increased [green space](#) (perhaps expanding the green around Clifford's Tower) but also suggestions of other ways that green landscape could be introduced into [harder landscaping](#).

Many responses suggested that the re-purposing of the car park area should be part of an [overall landscape scheme](#) for the Eye of York area (T5) which involved artists (T9). That said, there was a feeling that the artistic interventions were an idea that was both [‘fantastic and dangerous’](#), that commissions should be part of the [‘overall design’](#) and that briefing should be done with care and in ways when ensure it [‘reflects York’](#). Imaginative (but not intrusive) [use of lighting](#) was welcomed (T10).

There were [many responses to the suggestion](#) of a new building at the rear of the Coppergate Centre, fronting on to the Castle and Eye of York (Site C3). The [most frequent comments](#) were that this should better link the shopping centre with the proposed new public space, that it should provide toilets, and should be carefully designed to improve the aspect and to maintain views. Removal of the redundant Coppergate service ramp (T8) was mentioned and supported in a small number of responses.

There was support for the possibility of [the Castle Museum extending](#) and creating a new entrance and better links with outdoor space (Site C2), though there were concerns with a [new extension at the end of the Female Prison](#).

Across Tower Street in Tower Gardens (Site RC2), there was [much discussion](#) around the suggestion of a new building (RC2B). There was overwhelming [support for the Arts Barge](#) project (T13) and strongly felt concern for any development or changes that did not accommodate the Arts Barge. The most common response was to [say no to the Pavilion](#) (Idea B) as there was a perception that it may disrupt the Art Barge plans. Yet there were other objections, such as any structure would include [blocking views to the Ouse](#). There was a minority interest in the benefits a building could bring, although maybe located in a different part of Tower Gardens, potentially providing a platform area from the bridge to allow use in times of flood.

There was positive interest [in landscaping](#) (also T12), this included dealing with flood resilience (possibly [with paving](#)), a big vote for [more seating](#) and some interest in using trees to create a [peaceful Tower Gardens](#) (although throughout the entire My Castle Gateway process there have been [conflicting views](#) on trees in Tower Gardens and elsewhere). There were some responses in favour of encouraging [new activities](#) but also others who wanted it to remain simply a quiet space.

On St. George’s Field, there was [a limited but positive response](#) in terms of screening the existing sewage pumping station (T17) and commemorating the site of the Knights Templar chapel (T18). While many were in favour of a multi-storey on St George’s Field (see below), there was a small minority who were concerned for the future of [the fair](#) or interested in it being a [green, open space](#), issues also expressed through [a film made in the first phase of My Castle Gateway](#).

To the other side of the Castle and Eye of York across The Foss, there was support for making the northern end of Piccadilly (P1 and T2) into [a pedestrian space](#), rather than its current perception as an overly-wide and unattractive street. Links across The Foss are discussed below.

Movement

Through the Step 1 Open Brief process people said they wanted to be able to:

- [Walk](#) or [cycle](#) up from the Foss Basin into town and beyond, with continuous, safe, and (preferably) [traffic-free](#) routes
- Cross more easily from [Walmgate](#) into the Castle area
- Cycle safely on the Tower Street [dual-carriage Gyratory](#) and to easily use it to [connect into town and onto Skeldergate Bridge](#)
- See and access [the Foss](#) from Piccadilly, preferably via routes which allow circulation
- See and access [the Foss](#) from the Castle area and to feel closer to the water
- For development between Piccadilly and the Foss to face onto the Castle area and make the most of the [views](#) and connections
- Celebrate and share the industrial history of the Foss and Ouse and to see [barges and boats](#) on the Foss
- Move between the Castle area and Tower Gardens more easily and to feel greater [connection](#) between them.
- Be able to enjoy [Tower Gardens](#) with less background traffic noise
- Be sure [blue badge holders](#) can park
- Use [Park and Ride](#) in the evening to get into town and reduce the need to drive in and to park
- Breathe freely, less air pollution
- Find their way intuitively in order to reduce need for signposting
- Know [parking](#) is dealt with, but in ways which don't conflict with other aspects of the brief
- [Park their bikes](#) securely and then walk easily on from there.

The masterplan included a number of ideas related to either creating new routes or making changes to existing road infrastructure, together with proposals for relocation of parking spaces from Castle car park to other possible locations.

The creation of [a new foot/cycle route](#) (T11 and T13) from Blue Bridge to the proposed new public space in the Castle / Eye of York running behind the Castle Museum alongside the Foss generated [a large volume of responses](#) and was almost universally well-received. There was support for (T16) a [safe crossing over the gyratory](#), and enthusiasm for [the new riverside route](#). A widely noted issue related to providing good reasons to spend time while maintaining a through route. Another – one where there are significantly different views – related to how to providing conflict-free use of the Foss Walk by both pedestrians and cyclists (where we had specific input by York Blind & Partially-Sighted Society and [York Cycle Campaign](#) and [other local cycling campaigners](#)) with 'shared space' being strongly argued against by York Blind & Partially-Sighted Society. Other considerations included flooding, lighting and how to ensure the path is not a lonely space at night.

There was general support for the [proposed new bridge across the Foss](#) (linking the Castle / Eye of York and Piccadilly – T4) and again there were issues of design mentioned – a number of responses suggested the bridge should be wide enough to be a destination in itself (much like the Millennium Bridge). As noted above there were a number of responses suggesting

encouraging pedestrian / cycle use of Piccadilly (T2) and [references](#) were made to the connection between these two ideas and the Foss walk. There were also negative opinions via social media questioning the value of the bridge and questioning [what it was supposed to be linking](#).

Regarding changes to existing roads, there [were some responses](#) to suggested changes to the Tower Street Gyratory, which were mainly in favour of redesigning the existing junctions (T3) to provide better / safer movement (although there were others who found the proposals confusing). Linked to this, traffic reduction (to bus-only or beyond) on Tower Street / Clifford Street (T6) and complete pedestrianisation of Castlegate was [supported by a number of people](#), particularly in respect of better connecting Tower Gardens with the Castle / Eye of York. The issue of parking for people with limited mobility (blue badge holders or not) was mentioned by [a number of respondents](#) although no particular solution emerged as a consensus. There were conflicting responses in respect of amending traffic and bus movements on and around Piccadilly (T1).

The masterplan ideas suggested two possible locations for a new multi-storey car park to replace the Castle car park spaces if this were put to other permanent use. There were a number of responses which were [against the removal of the current car park](#), but these were outnumbered by responses supporting other uses on the site. The replacement with an underground car park on the same site was [mentioned by a few respondents](#) but there was acknowledgement by others [of problems of cost and flooding](#). The Coppergate Centre multi-storey carpark was also mentioned but only by a few respondents (for example the [Civic Trust](#) criticising its location).

Of the responses addressing the [two suggested alternative locations](#), St. George's Field (Site SGF1) was [greatly preferred](#) over Castle Mills (Site P3). Reasons varied, from feelings that St. George's Field was further out from sensitive historic sites and hence had less impact, to the fact that traffic access to Piccadilly was seen as more problematic (as Castle Mills is inside the inner ring road, whereas St. George's Field is outside it). However there were various additional [points made in respect of broader thinking](#) – a number of responses pointed to the use of shuttle vehicles to “shorten” the distance from the relocated car park to the city centre, and some voiced ambivalence over the need for the substantial investment in city centre parking when the council was encouraging the use of [Park & Ride](#).

Living Well With Water

Through the My Castle Gateway Step 1 Open Brief process people said they wanted to be able to:

- [Enjoy the views](#) of both rivers
- Appreciate the [wildlife](#) of the rivers
- Use [boats](#) – barges and canoes – on the Foss
- Walk and cycle both rivers into town
- Recognise that York [will flood](#), and work creatively with that reality
- [See the Foss](#). Reverse the current situation where the town turns its back on the Foss, and recognise the value that water has in an urban setting.

Support for the proposed new Foss River walk has been noted above (in “Movement”). In terms of [The Foss Basin site \(RC1\)](#) there was a general interest in some residential accommodation (RC1 B) and new activity with contributions (e.g. River Foss Society) noting this might address [anti-social behaviour](#). There were some contributions which were [supportive of apartments](#) (RC1 B) but many said that they would support apartments only if [they were affordable](#). There was support for [house boats](#) and for a place [for visiting boats](#). In terms of new activities [swimming](#) and other [water-based activities](#) (mentioned in idea T13) were welcomed. [Wildlife](#) was noted a consideration in any new development.

Some people welcome ideas for [new cafes and bars](#), others very strongly wanted the area [to be left alone](#) and for it to [remain quiet, reflective space](#).

In terms of the [Blue Bridge/Confluence of the Rivers site](#) (RC3) / (T19) a proposal for public art and/or a viewing platform was suggested. This was not an issue which provoked many comments (27). A majority of respondents [were not in favour of this idea](#), partly as it is an area already [well used by anglers](#). Of these people, there was an interest in [more seating](#). A minority were interested in this idea, and that it was full accessible to wheelchair users was flagged.

One proposal (T10) was to [Relocate the river cruise pontoon and embarkation point to Tower gardens](#). Very few people responded to this but those that did [were against it in Tower Gardens](#) (and the responses to the building in Tower Gardens should be read as a wider concern with activities that might affect the Arts Barge), with [one suggestion, from York Civic Trust](#), that this could work in King’s Staith.

Proposal T14 was the [Relocating the war memorial from the Tower Street roundabout to a site within Tower Gardens](#). In general the responses were [in favour of moving the war memorial](#), in large part because it was believed to increase access. There was [one contribution against](#) from York Civic Trust who thought it would ‘reduce its impact’.

Ownership and Values

Looking at the responses through the lens of our final Challenge ‘Ownership and Values’ allows us to draw together contributors’ views on issues of financial delivery and the role of Council in development. Yet is also allows us to connect those questions to the crucial issue of local ownership over the area as well as the ability for people who live in York to continue to be able to shape the Castle Gateway project as decisions start to be made and, more fundamentally, to be active in the city’s local democracy.

Through the Step 1 opening briefing process people said they wanted to be able to:

- Shop at independent shops or visit independent [cafes](#) or restaurants
- Develop small and [independent businesses](#)
- [Not have to spend money](#) – a place to hang out for free
- Develop DIY, small-scale [community](#) enterprise and [community arts](#)
- Be sure that different ways of being in the space will be enabled and encouraged
- Enjoy being in spaces alongside tourists and for both groups to happily co-exist

- Live affordably in their city in [low cost social housing](#)

Community/local ownership over the area

There were a significant number of comments emphasising that the area should be [for 'locals'](#). This was especially articulated in terms of Piccadilly in terms of [small businesses](#) (more on this below) but came up regularly in answer to many other Masterplan Ideas too. Tensions articulated throughout the My Castle Gateway process between the tourists [and locals](#) and between the city which is for tourists and the [suburbs](#) which ['are in decline'](#) came up regularly in response to the masterplan ideas. This was also articulated in terms of tensions between student accommodation versus affordable housing for local people (both on [Piccadilly](#), the [Castle Mills site](#) and [in general](#)). We need ['more student accommodation'](#), ['more coffee shops please'](#) or ['more hotels and restaurants obvs'](#) acted as sarcastic comments which tended to attract 'likes' on the council's Facebook group.

Piccadilly as a place for local and small business

There was almost universal support for creating the [conditions](#) for small business on Piccadilly. Under this banner there was a lot of very positive support for Spark (Site P1), with [very imaginative ideas of what it might mean to visit the area in the future](#). Others were very supportive of the spirit and ethos of Spark but saw a more [permanent set of buildings](#) being necessary. There was a lot of support for creative, artistic business, street food and cafes while others called for [greengrocers](#) and more everyday shops rather than only, what they regarded, as ['hipster' businesses](#).

There was a significant minority who were [against Spark](#) for aesthetic reasons, this was much more prevalent on the council's Facebook page than via any of our other modes of feedback.

The Role of City of York Council

In the Masterplan Ideas [Northminster and Banana Warehouse sites \(36 to 50 Piccadilly\)](#) (Site P2) we ask people about the role they thought the City of York Council should play in relation to developers. While there were a few in support of simply [encouraging developers](#), and some keen on [influencing developers](#), the majority were in favour of the Council taking a more proactive role and acting as [a partner in development](#). Two strongly-worded contributions emphasised the council needed to be [much more proactive that it is currently](#) and another mention possible use of [Compulsory Purchase Orders](#) on Piccadilly.

Paying for the Castle Gateway Ideas

In terms of paying for the regeneration of the area, there were perhaps two main trends. Some acted to make compromises through volunteering certain sites for more commercial development as trade offs (Castle Mills Car Park – Site P3). Another significant strand that arose via Facebook was scepticism about the costs of delivering the project, and suggestions that the money would be better spent on other things such as potholes, [public toilets](#) and social care. This is an area that needs further public exploration in the next step of My Castle Gateway.

A question of local democracy

For many this concern that [locals](#) were not being considered reflected a deeply-rooted scepticism about the council in terms of its ways of working and its sincerity in seeking engagement. Indeed, the [hope that the My Castle Gateway project indicates a new approach](#) has been a feature of feedback on both the My Castle Gateway Briefing and Challenges process.

One issue emerged through the idea for the Pavilion in Tower Garden's Arts Barge, which was seen by many to be an example of the council not working well in partnership. The Arts Barge did figure in the masterplan ideas under [River Corridors Transport and Public Realm ideas](#) but it was not flagged under the RC2 idea for the pavilion. As a result it was very easy for people to think the Arts Barge and its planning approval had been ignored in the masterplan ideas. While it was not the intention to sideline the Arts Barge, the responses do reflect concern amongst local people over the council's ability to respond to and encourage local people's creativity and ambitions. The next phase of My Castle Gateway will very actively seek to keep open the dialogue between Castle Gateway project and this knowledge, creativity and energy. Part of the challenge here is to keep showing the public that the council [is going take the My Castle Gateway process seriously](#).

There were persistent comments on the council's Facebook page - linked to posts on Castle Gateway – which reflected [a lack of faith in the council and in the possibility of a positive future for York more generally](#). It would be easy, perhaps, to dismiss these comments but they reveal their lack of confidence they will be heard and that they can – in partnership with the council and other local people – make a difference to places they live, work and care about. Working, as My Castle Gateway has, across these different platforms (survey, facebook, twitter) and different kinds of events has made visible quite different social networks, information contexts and quite different senses of whether change is possible. The next phase of My Castle Gateway will seek to actively work via the council's general Facebook group to engage the conversation in different ways. We were aware this was an issue going into this phase and there were some [excellent examples of positive Facebook interaction](#) from council officers and between people as part of the Masterplan Ideas.

What happens next?

It was clear from the Step 1 discussions and captured in our brief that people want to be able to:

- Ensure ongoing engagement in the area during the masterplanning process and beyond
- Get involved long term in the area and to make positive changes.

This has been very much confirmed in Step 3. In response to this, this summary has been produced as an interim – rather than in any way “final” – step in the My Castle Gateway process. Below we set out a number of important next steps to continue, develop, deepen and extend the conversation.

BDP: Preferred masterplan work

BDP will be working with the council and with this document to narrow down the choices presented in the masterplan ideas to one preferred masterplan, and this will be taken to the council Executive in April. If adopted, it will form the basis for more formal planning proposals for the area and physical changes which will take a number of years to implement.

But this process of movement towards firm choices will not be simple. Public response to the masterplan ideas does establish a trajectory in some cases (for example there is a clear preference for removal of parking from Castle car park and replacement with a multistorey car park on St. George's Field) but even here – and more so in the case of other sites and ideas – there are challenges which need to be further discussed and explored. Specifically there is a need to develop the partnerships between the council and local groups and individuals which have already led to creative input into the masterplan around public space, movement and use of the rivers.

For **My Castle Gateway Step 4** – as the Preferred Masterplan is developed and beyond – we propose three interlinked strands of work.

Public Debate: The Castle Gateway Challenges Continue

The first is to continue our Step 2 Challenges discussions, to convene ongoing, creative discussion about the underlying and core issues for Castle Gateway. Between January and June 2018 we will run a series of open events to address these challenges head on. As part of these challenge discussions, there is also a need to ensure that the considerable expertise within the city on a variety of issues – transport planning, heritage, flood resilience and others – can be drawn together to cross boundaries between organisations or departments. We will seek to cultivate open and public debate about issues which will not only be important in the development of Castle Gateway but also have wider relevance to the city as a whole.

These might include:-

- Making more publicly accessible the BDP transport modelling done within the masterplan process, and looking at this alongside the transport modelling carried out by Tony May for the Civic Trust, together with the work of York Cycle Campaign and the Walk Cycle Forum
- Continuing conversations between stakeholder bodies which have begun during Advisory Group meetings – for example asking the Environment Agency and Historic England to jointly explore issues around flooding and flood resilience through public events.

Short-term action, Long term influence

The second is that we want to develop – in partnership with, and with practical support from the council – Local Networks for Action based around specific areas within Castle Gateway to ensure:-

- Community-led changes can start to happen now, with necessary small-scale investment through Ward Committees and opportunities for local people to lead change within the framework of the overall Castle Gateway development,

- Ideas can be tried and tested, allowing more radical local change to be given a chance without the need for commitment to permanent change. This might include trialling locations for benches in Tower Gardens, or getting agreement for short-term trials of routes for pedestrian or cycle movement. It might include temporary activities within Castle car park (the Rose Theatre being a pioneer of this idea) or one-off events which might lead to more permanent activities (for example swimming in the Ouse).

Fostering a positive democratic culture in York

Finally, My Castle Gateway has proved – if there was ever any doubt – that there are a large number of people thirsty to be constructively and thoughtfully-engaged with the tough and complex questions facing the city. There are also a significant number of people – through groups, as activists, as professionals – who want to roll up their sleeves and use their knowledge, creativity, ideas and energy to shape the Castle Gateway and York more generally. Yet there are also people who feel let down by local government/public organisations leading to cynicism and negativity, although clearly this is not new and is not a York-only phenomenon. Building on the positive work by the council officers through the council’s Facebook as part of My Castle Gateway, there is scope to develop further ways in which the City of York Council – and the networks developed through Castle Gateway conversation – can actively contribute to fostering a democratic culture via online engagement.

How to remain (or get!) involved

Keep in touch via [Twitter](#) or via [My Castle Gateway Facebook page](#)
Join the discussion on the [My Castle Gateway Facebook group](#)
Follow our project post its and photographs [on Instagram](#) and [on Flickr](#).
Email: mycastlegateway@gmail.com