



York Civic Trust response to York Castle Gateway Open Brief

Overall, York Civic Trust welcomes the draft Brief as a positive statement of intent. It is well considered and draws extensively on the public engagement exercises that have been undertaken. It considers the site(s) from a range of issues: access, heritage, commercial, playfulness, movement, green space, views, etc. – and benefits from this broad approach.

We particularly are supportive of the broad range of perspectives that the brief brings to the site, linking the past and the future. In particular, the focus on individual and personal narratives for discussing the significance of the area both historically and in the present.

Before offering specific and thematically arranged comments that are offered as reflections on the Brief, the Trust suggests more guidance might be given in the Brief as way of a 'hierarchy' or 'priorities' of what is required for the site(s). The budget, let alone the complex spatial and conservation restrictions of the site(s), will likely restrict the ability to satisfy all proposed aspects of the Brief; compromises must be expected. Such a hierarchy may help successful designs come to fruition, as well as help to channel realistic public expectations. We think this is important – not to restrict creativity but as a way of assisting in helping to concentrate this creativity for the greatest impact.

Open brief for the Whole Area

One of the elements of this site that is so appealing is that for the first time ever the site can be considered as whole, and we can celebrate the open nature of the site. The open brief could reinforce this wonderful aspect further.

Thinking beyond the red lines

There is a need to make better connection between this site(s) as a destination and point of arrival, and the journey taken *en route*. Mention is given to visitors arriving at the Railway Station and then trying to find a route to the Castle complex area, or the problem of the southern end of Coney Street feeling like a terminus and blocked off from the Castle complex area. But the link routes – noticeably Clifford St, Castlegate, Coppergate (and its associated riverside-walk route from Piccadilly) need to be pleasant spaces in their own rights: to move through, gather, shop, dawdle. Otherwise, the Brief site(s) will always feel like that area 'beyond the city-centre shops', not an extension of the city centre.

There are two recommended, wider ambitions here:

The pedestrianisation of Castlegate as the official route to the Castle complex for those travelling on foot and the arterial link to Coney Street (as mentioned in the Brief), and the widening of the pathway on the east-side of Clifford St as an auxiliary route, .

Identify Castlegate as a destination area, akin to the success of Fossgate and Walmgate. Perhaps developing its café culture, including street-café areas where and when appropriate.

The Brief for the Castle Complex might take into account opportunities that would arise from either of these options.

Rivers

We feel there is a lack of a mention of the city's rivers, especially the River Foss (Banana Warehouse etc), and how this river served as the King's Fishponds and later as a canalised industrial river with Empire connections. The confluence of the two rivers offered social control that could be exerted on people's movement, using both the river and land created the gateway itself. Indeed, people will be partly arriving from the new multi-storey car park adjacent to the river or may be crossing the Foss from the new build project and bridge across the Foss.

Heritage sightlines

The Brief feels too inward looking. Aside from making the connection between Clifford's Tower and Baile Hill, almost all other points of heritage reference are centred internally on the site: the former prison buildings, the castle and its walls. Indeed, there feels an over-emphasis on walls. As dramatic as they were, as an intervention into the urban landscape, it is perhaps the people's stories and the context of the site that matter more.

There is some mention of the historic importance of Castlegate to the Castle Complex in terms of an access route and being on a differing level to the proposed Castle Museum extension, but no real mention of the heritage of Castlegate as a formal entrance route to the Castle Complex and used by those that made the law, kings, queens and courts, and those who fell foul of it: prisoners.

There are wider heritage opportunities of association too, such as Tower Gardens with its 'WW1 Gift Tank' that was located here from 1919 to 1939, and the war memorial that was moved to the roundabout. Both act as reminders that this area had importance as a site of public-engagement with the city's military associations.

A design code

The open brief is a great opportunity to invite potential creative practitioner to explore a unified design code to unite the area by clever and appropriate use of stylised hardware (benches, bins, fountains, street lighting, bike storage etc.).

This would be a something that the wider city centre could also benefit from.

Amenity provision

Thought will be needed on the provision of amenities and infrastructure – water and power especially – to service the multiple-uses of the space. Some guidance is given for the Eye of York site in terms of live music (p.14), but no mention of this is given for elsewhere or for what types of use.

There is no mention of the new pedestrian /cycle route across the Foss and how this will engage with the use of the Briefing site(s).

With YorkBID about to install the new wayfinding for the city, including for this site, some acknowledgment and the locations for this will need to be factored-in as a permanent fixture of the design scheme.

Need for greater clarity

For the Eye of York's Brief, mention is given of 'a roughly-circular grass area with a tree located centrally' outside the Castle Museum buildings (pp.13-14). Whereas guidance is given that there may be support for removal of the tree there, no mention is given as to the fate of the grass area. Design possibilities arising from the Brief would be expanded and likely improved if it was acknowledged that the grass-area is not sacrosanct, but that some visual form of an oculus, as way of the Eye of York(shire) reference , should be factored in for any such replacement.

Quality of materials and Expectations

There is no mention of expectation of the quality of the materials to be used. Guidance in the Brief on this, especially in reference to hardstanding surface materials would be highly welcome. It would help provide insight of priorities and expectations – such as provision of multiple uses of the area versus high quality (and cost) of surface materials of the site(s).

Please note: it should be 'Baile Hill' rather than 'Baille Hill'.