



# York Civic Trust

## **Explanatory note to accompany a YCT design scheme for the Bootham / Gillygate / Exhibition Square junction**

**26<sup>th</sup> August 2021**

This explanatory note is to accompany the design scheme that York Civic Trust has created in conjunction with local residents, commercial concerns, interest groups and other stakeholders.

The purpose of this note is to explain the design concept and its rationale. The contents provided here are thematic rather than zonal (the latter is covered in the annotation details found in the design scheme.)

### **Identity**

The Bootham / Gillygate / Exhibition Square junction currently lacks an identity. It is presented, principally, as a traffic junction, with priority given to vehicle users rather than pedestrians and cyclists (counter to CYC's 'Hierarchy of Transport Users').

The junction is therefore to be raised and repaved using materials to give it the appearance and tactile nature of a slow traffic surface, a 'shared space'. This will bring identity, helping to marry the historic associations of Bootham with Gillygate, Bootham Bar, Exhibition Square and St Leonard's Place.

In order to safely forewarn and introduce this shared space realm to users – vehicle users especially – the raised junction is to be extend from the junction to the T-junctions with Bootham Row and Portland Street and back to the Theatre Royal on St Leonard's Place.

### **Safety**

The junction is currently a dangerous space for users – especially cyclists and pedestrians. A series of measures are therefore to be introduced to improve safety for all users. These measures include:

- Advanced signals for cyclists with low level signals with early starts

- A facility to allow cyclists to enter from High Petergate, avoiding the dangerous right turn at Museum St, to run concurrently with the advanced signal on Bootham
- Prioritising outbound cyclists in designated single-lane narrow sections on Bootham and Gillygate, aided by the advanced signalling at the junction
- Mandatory cycle lanes in- and outbound on Gillygate north of Portland Street and inbound near the Bootham junction; mandatory cycle lane with wands on outbound Bootham stretch (combined with Clifton-Bootham cycle scheme)
- Permitting two-way cycling on High Petergate. The street otherwise to be closed to vehicles, with commercial vehicles rerouted to Duncombe Place via Museum St / St Leonard's Place with restricted time access. The creation of cycle reservoirs at the foot of Bootham Bar will assist with safe in- and outbound passage.
- A new cycle track is to bypass the bus stops near Exhibition Square. The track will run behind the bus stops, which will be brought forward, and to use shared paving (as is successfully used at University Road).
- Widening of pavements throughout Gillygate, near Bootham Bar and at Exhibition Square to allow safer passage. Elsewhere, paving to be cut back to allow direct cycle route through Bootham Bar and better protect cyclists leaving the junction through Bootham Bar

### **Air Quality**

The junction is currently York's worst traffic junction in terms of traffic congestion and hence air quality. This is the result of (over)capacity use. It would be most challenging to address the issues afflicting the junction without a managed reduction of traffic using the junction. Therefore, a new bus gate on Gillygate between Miller's Yard and the junction will restrict access in both directions to buses, taxis, emergency vehicles and cycles (with access for servicing at designated times). We estimate that this will reduce traffic using the junction by around 40%, and hence greatly assist bus services.

The inbound lanes at Exhibition Square will be reduced to a single vehicle lane (in line with CYC's 'Option B' scheme in its 2021 consultation).

In addition to providing greater safety for cyclists, the setting back of all stoplines for the junction will lessen standing traffic afflicting the junction.

To support the Council's public health policy, there is the opportunity to display 'real time' air-quality data with health warnings at key points in and around the junction, such as Exhibition Square, Gillygate, and St Leonard's Place. (It would be most welcome if CYC were to agree to take emergency action if data shows above acceptable levels for air pollution for more than a specified number of days, perhaps by restricting traffic to only emergency and public transport until data shows air-quality levels are restored to safe levels for a specified number of consecutive days.)

### **Enhanced public realm and heritage**

The junction is currently an unattractive and chaotic public realm space. Pavements are often too narrow with fast-moving traffic running alongside. Street furniture – some of which is damaged or no longer in use – clutters the streetscape. There is minimal green space. There is no intuitive wayfinding for visitors arriving at the junction. The surrounding area includes the largest collection of heritage and listed buildings in York, uniquely charting its history from AD70 to the present day.

Street furniture is to be removed or, if necessary, replaced or repaired. Guard rails are to be removed, and where required to protect users, heritage-style bollards used instead.

The narrowing of the carriageway as single-use lanes allows for greater provision of the public realm, especially near Bootham Bar.

The Abbey Precinct Wall pocket garden (which will detail the history of the Abbey and its walls, the booths in ‘Bootham’ and the Bar) is to be better incorporated into the street layout.

The largest area of public realm connected with the junction is Exhibition Square. This space currently suffers from (unauthorised) off-road use by vehicles, the semi-permanent presence of the tourist bus, and the positioning of the Etty statue and fountain. The removal of the tourist bus to Union Terrace car park for arriving visitors’ use; the removal of the fountain and relocating of Etty’s statue would collectively provide a good-sized public realm area in front of the Art Gallery, one that will offer a range of uses. The public realm, here, would be sub-divided by an avenue of trees into a.) a family-friendly and flexible space nearer the art gallery, and, b.) a more commercially-minded and transitory space on the roadside. The use of a new paved ‘avenue’ and connecting path will establish intuitive connectivity on arrival at the square for movement to the rear entrance and grounds of the Art Gallery, and Manor Lane and the Museum Gardens.

Important historic connections between heritage in and surrounding the junction are currently poorly presented (if at all). The Exhibition Square area was historically governed by the presence of the Abbey of St Mary’s and its Precinct Walls and the City Walls that ran parallel – emphasising the tension that existed in the city between Church and secular officials; the St Leonard’s Place area was historically the site of the medieval St Leonard’s Hospital. All of this heritage were severed with the creation of the St Leonard’s thoroughfare in 1822 and the widening of the traffic junction in the last century. This internationally-significant heritage has been poorly presented ever since.

Arrangement of the avenue of trees in front of the Art Gallery will reveal direct visual connections between elements of heritage around the junction. The use of a new 15m wide crossing will offer immediate association between the former Abbey Precinct space and the City Walls; enhanced by the route of (missing) City Walls and Abbey Precinct Walls and the footprint of the former Bootham Bar barbican being highlighted in the paving. An avenue of trees will make the visual connection between Queen Margaret’s Arch (an important medieval entrance to the former Abbey) and Manor Lane and the ruins of the Abbey within the Museum Gardens. Greater use will be made of Manor Lane’s good connectivity and commercial use potential.

Despite moving the Etty statue to the north side of Exhibition Square, its importance in relaying the role William Etty played in helping found a design school in the city that became York Art Gallery and his campaigning work to save the City Walls and its Bars, including Bootham Bar, will be maintained.

### **Commercial space**

The proposed design scheme aims to enhance commercial activity in the area. The improved public realm will attract and maintain footfall in ways that are currently lacking. The area’s use for cultural activities, in particular, including the incorporation of the pocket park to the side of Theatre Royal in the shared space paving scheme, will provide new opportunities for commercial and educational enterprise.

Taxis and local bus services will continue to be accommodated near Exhibition Square and will be assisted by the bus gate in Gillygate.

The widening of pavements in Gillygate and Bootham will provide a better active front environment for local traders, with more footfall and better air quality. In addition, the transition of Gillygate as a bus gate will provide a more time efficient route for bus services, increasing the ease with which local shoppers and visitors can access the city.

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