



YORK  
CIVIC  
TRUST

Strategy

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This 2026 strategy sets out our priorities for the decade ahead based on the needs of the city and influenced by what we have already achieved in protecting York's historic places, championing good design, and celebrating the people and stories that define the city.

Our future work will focus on four key areas:

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## Our Commitment

We will protect York today and enrich it for tomorrow – working with communities, partners and supporters to ensure the city's heritage continues to inspire and benefit future generations.

# Protecting York today, enriching it for tomorrow

For 80 years, York Civic Trust has championed the heritage that makes this city extraordinary.

Founded in 1946, we are a membership charity dedicated to protecting York's historic places, encouraging thoughtful development, and celebrating the stories that define this city.

The Trust's work spans advocating for high-quality design, conserving buildings at risk, and inspiring people to see York differently through events, exhibitions and learning programmes.

## Heritage for all

Through our **Blue Plaque programme**, our award-winning Georgian townhouse museum **Fairfax House**, and an annual **programme of events**, we help people see the city differently.

# York Civic Trust's Key Achievements



## Founding the University of York

Helping establish a world-class university.



## Conserving York's historic buildings

Restoring 13 landmark buildings.



## Blue Plaques

Celebrating York's people and places.



## Planning Club

10 years of providing opportunities for career development and training.



## Enhancing the city

Pedestrianisation, public art, sculptures, fountains.



## Introduction

80 years of commitment to York offers a moment to reflect on how far we've come and to look ahead with renewed purpose. The Trust has brought people together to protect the places, stories and character that make York such an extraordinary city. That work has always depended on the passion of our Members, volunteers and partners, and I am deeply grateful for their commitment.

This strategy sets out our priorities for the decade ahead. It builds on recent achievements, from safeguarding vulnerable historic buildings and expanding our Blue Plaque programme, to strengthening Fairfax House as a welcoming and imaginative museum. It also embraces new opportunities, particularly through Our Place, a new heritage programme created with local communities to explore and celebrate the heritage that matters most to them.

As we mark this milestone year, we remain committed to protecting York today and enriching it for tomorrow, together.

Thank you for your support,

*Delma Tomlin*

**Delma Tomlin**

Chair, York Civic Trust

# 1. Protecting and enhancing local places

## What we have achieved

York is a city defined by its history, buildings and places – attracting some 10 million visitors a year. Through the generosity of legacies and gifts from York Civic Trust Members, businesses and individuals, alongside intensive fund-raising, we have been able to invest significant funds in York's built and natural environment.

## City Enhancement Fund

Through our City Enhancement Fund, we have conserved and repaired many of the parts of the city that create the texture and character of the city.



### Headline Achievement:

#### Coney Street riverside redevelopment

The Trust has helped make the scheme more sensitive, inclusive and future-focused, advocating for a high-quality public realm and improved riverside access.

£7.5 million invested in York since 1946,  
in today's money



### Advocating and advising for York's future

York Civic Trust has played an active role in shaping the city through championing high quality sustainable development, including the rejuvenation of Aldwark. We have commissioned influential works such as the Esher Report and early area character studies, including Bishophill and River Ouse Corridor. Today's constructive engagement with developers continues this work.



### Heritage at Risk

Our unique Citizens' Heritage at Risk Register has saved locally valued buildings from demolition. The former Carriageworks canteen in Holgate was added to the register following its sudden roof collapse in April 2023. Working with City of York Council and Railway Heritage Trust we challenged and supported Network Rail to save the building from demolition and give it a new life.



### Blue plaques

York Civic Trust has installed over 150 blue plaques across the city in the last 60 years celebrating people, places and stories that have shaped York. We have introduced world-first stained glass and rainbow plaques.

#### Headline Achievement:

#### Anne Lister blue plaque

Our plaque to 'the first modern lesbian', Anne Lister was the first LGBTQ+ plaque in the UK, and has inspired a series of them across the country.

Our unique Citizens' Heritage at Risk Register has saved locally valued buildings from demolition.

# What needs to be done in the next 10 years

## Championing high quality sustainable development

York Civic Trust will continue to promote the best outcomes for places, embracing heritage, built and natural environments, and the creation of strong, lasting communities. We will continue to work closely with developers across the city; at York Central, strategic sites as set out in York's Local Plan and key commercial developments such as Coney Street Riverside.





### Enhancing the city's environment

York Civic Trust will enhance the city's public realm through practical action, advocacy and stewardship. Through partnership working, we will continue to champion high-quality design, public art and conservation.



### Local heritage and places

Working with local communities more closely has clearly demonstrated the appetite for their heritage to be reflected more widely in the city. We will launch a new long-term heritage programme, Our Place.

Starting in Acomb and Westfield (supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund) we will work with communities of all ages and backgrounds to connect with their surroundings and local heritage, learn new skills and become more active.



### Blue plaques

We will continue to expand our Blue Plaque programme. The Trust will challenge expectations—to broaden who and what is commemorated and find innovative ways to celebrate York's heritage using the latest technologies.

Over 150 blue plaques across York.



## 2. Developing innovative ideas

### What we have achieved

From the outset York Civic Trust has championed ambitious ideas. Across decades of dedication, we have turned vision into tangible change through landmark projects that continue to shape the city today.

#### Headline Achievement:

#### Founding the University of York

The Trust through its Academic Development Committee led the campaign to establish a university in the city – eventually coming to fruition in 1963.





### Saving historic buildings

When many historic buildings were being demolished in swathes of modernisation, we saved and restored over thirteen of York's most significant buildings such as St Sampson's Church, St Anthony's Hall and Bowes Morrell House.



### City centre pedestrianisation

Creating a city centre that puts pedestrians first has been a core activity of the Civic Trust – often at times when others disagreed. Removing traffic around the Minster was a notable success.

York Civic Trust led the campaign for the pedestrianisation of Deangate.

£750,000 spent conserving Fairfax House, (£2,473,800, in today's money).



### Headline Achievement:

#### Fairfax House

York Civic Trust is committed to making heritage visible, meaningful and engaging. In 2025, Fairfax House, one of the Civic Trust's most significant conservation achievements, received the Historic Houses' Collections Award for its creative and innovative interpretation of its collections.

1 million visitors to Fairfax House since it opened.

# What needs to be done in the next 10 years

York Civic Trust's priorities must be the challenges and opportunities that face us all; a powerfully changing digital world, affordable housing, climate change, social cohesion and ensuring the city's historic estate and cultural sector has a thriving future.

## Climate change

The most significant problem facing York's historic buildings and the future of the city is the impact of the changes in our climate. How we adapt buildings and places to deal with extreme heat in the summer months, to reduce carbon emissions and pressure from flooding will need to be addressed.





### **Housing for all**

We will actively contribute to a new Local Plan which will respond to the government's housing ambitions. We will advocate for York's future housing to create new strong and sustainable communities.



### **Sustainable tourism**

York's tourism economy will continue to grow. The Civic Trust, as part of wider city initiatives, will encourage tourists to adopt more sustainable means of transport, support the city's diverse cultural heritage infrastructure that makes the city so attractive and contribute to the regeneration of areas outside of the city walls.



### **Paving a new way ahead for historic houses**

We will make Fairfax House a sector-leading historic house known for innovation. Key priorities include deepening research into the house's longer and more complex history - bringing to light the diverse social lives, uses and communities that have shaped the building over time. We will create an accessible and inspiring place for learning that can be enjoyed by diverse audiences.

| We will actively contribute to a new Local Plan which will respond to the government's housing ambitions.

# 3. Investing in people

## **What we have achieved**

One of York Civic Trust's priorities is to engage and support the people of York.

Through our commitment to learning and shared discovery, we are cultivating the people and skills that will safeguard heritage for generations to come.



### Headline Achievement:

#### Training the next generation of heritage professionals

Our Student Placement programme at Fairfax House offers hands-on experience of museum and collections work. "Planning Club", our unique award-winning partnership with the University of York, is recognised as sector-leading. Having gained real planning experience, postgraduate students' recommendations on live planning cases impact city decision-making. The Civic Trust offers paid internships to provide work experience for the most promising next-generation heritage professionals.



#### Volunteering

At Fairfax House, more than 150 volunteers support visitor engagement, research and collections care, strengthened by a growing student volunteer base and successful Volunteer Open Days. The volunteer team is consistently praised by visitors for their warmth, knowledge, and enthusiasm.



#### Providing unique heritage experiences

York Civic Trust creates opportunities for our Members to see York differently. Our growing events programme opens doors rarely unlocked and reveals the city's hidden histories.

Over 400 postgraduate students have been trained through Planning Club.

82% progress into heritage careers.

Collectively contributing more than 10,000 volunteer hours each year.

# What needs to be done in the next 10 years

York's residents, including both students and retired, are ever more looking for rich voluntary and social experiences as well as potential career opportunities.





### Membership

York Civic Trust's membership will continue to grow as we represent more of York's population. We will respond to this growing demand by enriching our member offer by offering exciting opportunities for deeper engagement with the city's heritage.



### Heritage experiences

We will expand our events programme for both Members and the public. We will create a digital record of more events, improving accessibility and ensuring Members can enjoy them wherever they are.



### Professional development opportunities

Over the next decade, we will strengthen and expand both paid and voluntary pathways into heritage and conservation through collaborations within the education sector. We are also building a developing professional network for former volunteers and placement students.

| As we look to engage new audiences, we will introduce a Young Person's and Local Heritage group membership.

# 4. Being independently resilient

## What we have achieved

We have successfully navigated 80 years as an independently funded charity through the generosity of our Members, partners and other charitable trusts.

## Investing in the city

York's communities have benefited from the improvements to their local heritage from our City Enhancement Fund. From repairing historic objects in the city that make York unique to the revitalisation of forgotten urban spaces into "pocket parks", these have been made possible by the generous support of local donors and philanthropy.





**Headline Achievement:**  
**Trailblazers project**

Our project York Trailblazers celebrated the people who have shaped the city through a trail of 17 Tansy Beetle sculptures, created with the help of community groups and schoolchildren. Supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund in partnership with Make it York.

Trailblazers engaged over 300,000 people. Involved 81 community groups with £249,000 invested in local economy.



**Fundraising**

The Civic Trust’s work could not have happened without the support of numerous charitable trusts, in particular the National Heritage Memorial Fund, the Pilgrim Trust and Noel G Terry Charitable Trust.

Charitable trusts, corporate and individual supporters have allowed us to acquire important works of art for Fairfax House. The V&A, Art Fund and the National Heritage Lottery Fund, among others, helped us purchase the earliest known work by internationally renowned sculptor Grinling Gibbons and the presumed lost portrait of Elizabeth Clifford, Viscountess of Dunbar, the first wife of Lord Fairfax.

The Noel G Terry Charitable Fund, Friends of Fairfax House and visitors to Fairfax House have supported the conservation of the house’s paintings, clocks, books and ceramics – securing these objects for the future.



**Bequest and legacies**

Bequests and gifts create permanent legacies. Recently, long-standing supporters of the Trust, Darrell Buttery, Michael Bearpark and Agnes Winter have helped protect numerous historic buildings in the city and conserve Fairfax House’s collection.

# What needs to be done in the next 10 years

As a growing independent charity, raising funds to continue our work is a top priority. We will intensify our fund-raising activity to increase the accessibility of our award-winning museum at Fairfax House, extending the Our Place programme to other priority communities, and build on our successful education and learning work.

We will increase our support for people who have a passion for York and a desire to see the city's heritage flourish.





### Gifts in Life

We will work with donors through our Gifts in Life scheme and future legacies and bequests to identify and enjoy the work that their generosity can inspire. We will continue to deliver projects supported by recent donors.

By choosing to make a Gift in Life, Members can directly support the projects and places they care about most, from conserving Fairfax House to enhancing the city's public realm. Giving this way allows you to see the impact of your generosity first-hand.



### Membership

We are refreshing our membership so more people can feel part of York Civic Trust. Alongside our Single, Joint, Life and Corporate memberships, we will introduce a Young Person membership with new opportunities for skills and career development.

A Local Heritage Group membership will help us support local heritage organisations. For our most dedicated supporters, a new Patron programme will offer closer involvement and special events celebrating York's story.

# Joining York Civic Trust

By becoming a member, you'll help safeguard the city you love and enjoy special access to the best of York.

### Members enjoy:

- ✓ Priority access to this annual programme of events
- ✓ Free & unlimited entry to Fairfax House
- ✓ 10% discount in the gift shop
- ✓ A bi-annual members' magazine
- ✓ A monthly digital newsletter, with the latest planning and heritage news
- ✓ Exclusive access to York Civic Trust podcasts and videos
- ✓ A vote on the Blue Plaques to prioritise which we put up
- ✓ A York Civic Trust pin badge



Scan the QR code to join today

Be part of York's next chapter. Support, join or collaborate with us to help protect what makes this city special.



FAIRFAX  
HOUSE



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