

# HARROGATE STATION GATEWAY PROJECT

## HCS AGM 2024 \_\_ PRESENTATION BY BARRY ADAMS

Harrogate is not against change but the meaningless Gateway Project is one that NYC seem determined to champion at all cost. Is this because it will affect their reputation on the back of failures they have already experienced on schemes such as Otley Road Cycleway.

It was born out of the politically manipulated 2019 Congestion Study. Results can be deceptive - wording of surveys limit your response, steering you in a particular direction. This effectively and quite wrongly misinformed and manoeuvred the people of Harrogate to kill off the idea of a Northern Relief road. NYCC were then able to claim "the only other option is the Gateway Project.

In May 2023 a document setting out an "Alternative Approach to a Vision for Harrogate" was presented to Councillors. Developed by a number of us including William Woods one of the founding members of Harrogate Civic Society and Independent Harrogate it set out thoughts for discussion on NYC's proposals on the basis of the "Wrong Scheme, Wrong Time". It included a safer option to relocate the cycleway from Station Parade to East Parade, an idea dismissed by NYC.

Unfortunately the level of public consultation was poor and totally flawed. The Highways Executive has a history of ignoring the democratic process; not listening and dismissive of public comment, hiding behind a meaningless excess of words in press releases.

It was marketed as creating high-quality sustainable transport links with a choice of walking (which many people in Harrogate already do), cycling and the use of public transport as well as creating an exemplary and attractive public realm. No scheme will fully address their vision unless the problem of dealing with the ever increasing level of through traffic is dealt with in a bold and positive approach - not just tinkering at the edges.

Businesses and residents understand what is at the heart of the town far better than those on the Executive representing disparate constituencies across the new County.

Therefore, if ANY vision for Harrogate or a Gateway project stands any chance of being successful 4 key or fundamental issues have to be addressed:

1. **A rethink on a bypass.** Gateway fails to tackle the congestion issue at source.
2. **The introduction of Park and Ride.** Why delay introducing it?
3. **The appearance of Harrogate.** Frankly, Harrogate looks scruffy let alone capable of reclaiming its place as a jewel in Yorkshire's crown.
4. **Update the Masterplan.** The current Masterplan for Harrogate dates back to 2016. It is time expired.

Their proposals - a solution led by Highway Engineers. A vanity project, blinkered and contrived with a "hint" of Urban Design as the original proposals demonstrated, not capable of celebrating this as an exemplary and attractive Gateway to the town. Highway Engineers have NO understanding of the built environment especially in a largely cohesive Conservation Area or the way it influences people's use of an urban environment. In other words, no joined up writing' but

rather a 'pepper-pot' solution. Then we need ongoing maintenance – something which has been sadly missing over the last decade or more.

We do care what the millions are spent on so why all this public realm expenditure if it doesn't amount to real improvements. Consider, what has made the town successful in the past. We are getting nothing more than a "desktop" design because of this lack of awareness from NYC's Consultants (WSP) who have limited understanding of Harrogate, its character and the largely cohesive Conservation Area it sits in. Gateway has relied on their irrelevant and questionable data relating to much larger towns with a totally different demographic. Proposals MUST clearly say "This is Harrogate" - not Leeds, not York or any other place. The DNA of these is so different.

NYC had to eventually confess their initial plans were legally flawed. This threw a spanner in the works and they considered it prudent not to proceed. But they seem determined to champion the Gateway Project at all cost contrary to the opinion of our MP Andrew Jones. We were not totally surprised then, when in the last quarter of 2023, they announced they had ploughed on hastily assembling new proposals for a scaled back version of the original project. Perhaps a knee-jerk reaction to the possibility of losing the funding?

Whilst the opportunity of considered investment for the benefit of Harrogate is always welcome, a view supported by the Chamber of Commerce, we also decided to build on the momentum achieved resulting in an Addendum Document - A Vision for Harrogate, Beyond Gateway to demonstrate how the funding could sensibly be used without detriment to the town centre.

We have tried unsuccessfully to encourage a more open debate on what will be a highly important decision for this town for at least the next 50 years. NYC's refusal to meet us along with the ongoing lack of consultation are a major concern. History will repeat itself. NYC will deliver a scheme that inherits the same problems from when Oxford and Cambridge Streets were pedestrianised. We all know how they look today.

Sadly, the scaled back version of the original scheme received funding approval from the West Yorkshire Combined Authority in March. The actual plans were not made public prior to this meeting. We have been "drip fed" with limited written statements on the scaled back version. How can NYC force this upon us when we have not received any details?

Branded "poor value for money" by professional experts we are totally against it because of the cost uncertainty. February 2021 - Original project stated cost **£7.9m**, February 2024 – Scaled back project reported cost increases to **£12.1m**. Doubtless this will be even more by the time the project starts. What will costs reach on completion? Will they have no option as suggested in an NYC report but to further scale back the scheme. Imagine what an abortion we could end up with.

We need to stop this right now. How? First, a petition has been set up online. Second, in a determined effort we ALL need to be more proactive and robust as individuals, groups and societies in constructive criticism of Council projects. Harrogate has this reputation of sitting on the fence until it is almost too late. As well as Celebrating our Past here is an opportunity to **"Enhance our Present and Shape our Future"**.