



STATION SQUARE HARROGATE CIRCA 1950's

## **A VISION FOR HARROGATE – BEYOND GATEWAY ADDENDUM DOCUMENT**

FOR ONGOING DISCUSSION

A BASIS FOR AN UPDATED MASTERPLAN 2023

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### **FORWARD**

In May 2023 a document setting out an “Alternative Approach to a Vision for Harrogate” was made available for discussion. This was the result following months of work between Harrogate Residents Association\_1,000+ members, Granville Road Resident’s Group \_ 300+ members and Independent Harrogate\_156+ experienced local business members that includes key landowners who have a considerable stake in the town. This subsequently involved extensive consultations with other business groups such as BID and the Chamber of Commerce and with various Councillors. It set out thoughts on the NYC proposals on the basis of the “Wrong Scheme Wrong Time”. At the time it was considered that this vision should be a document for discussion and form the basis of an updated Masterplan for Harrogate.

Unfortunately with the Gateway Project the level of public consultation was poor and totally flawed. The Highways Executive had a history of ignoring the democratic process; not listening and dismissive of public comment, hiding behind a meaningless excess of words in press releases hence why it failed. The massaging and presentation of results together with the ongoing lack of consultation generated considerable public outrage and anger.

Following on from NYC’s recent announcement, not to proceed with the Station Gateway in the face of a legal challenge, we must however build on the momentum that has now been achieved. This has resulted in this Addendum to the initial Vision for Harrogate document dated May 2023 which was and still is considered to be a document for discussion and ongoing development. The Addendum takes the opportunity to update certain information following hours of further concerted and focussed discussions between Harrogate Residents Association, Independent Harrogate, Councillors and other interested organisations. It is still intended this will form the basis of an updated Masterplan for Harrogate.

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# **A VISION FOR HARROGATE – BEYOND GATEWAY ADDENDUM DOCUMENT**

## **1.00 INTRODUCTION**

No so called Gateway type project or indeed any such vision will attempt to be successful unless the ever increasing and apparently forgotten problem of traffic congestion is dealt with. A problem generated by levels of traffic in and out of as well as through the town. No tinkering at the edges as the doomed Gateway Project proposed. All this was doing was brushing the problem to one side, redirecting traffic to adjacent streets - a distraction or an illusion to a void dealing with the main problem.

Whilst we fully understand there is a desire to ensure funding available through the Transforming Cities Programme is used for the benefit of Harrogate we strongly believe monies should not be spent just for the sake of spending it.

Ideas need to be carefully considered, not piecemeal and discussed with all interested parties otherwise we could end up with ad-hoc solution which we regret for many years to come. This is where an updated Masterplan forms a solid basis for a comprehensive “Vision for Harrogate”, one which identifies future co-ordinated projects rather than ‘Pocket Planning’ of the Gateway Project.

## **2.00 FUNDAMENTAL ISSUES**

These were initially set out in Section 2.0 of the Vision for Harrogate – An Alternative approach, May 2023. They are still considered to be the 4 key or fundamental issues that have to be addressed if ANY vision for Harrogate or Gateway type project stands any chance of being successful. As a reminder they are:

### **1. The Introduction Park and Ride**



Park and Ride York

It is essential the ever increasing problem of congestion caused by traffic in and out of the centre of Harrogate should be addressed by the introduction of a Park and Ride system without any further delay, whether it be for business or pleasure or indeed any other reason for visiting the town. This idea could be further developed to include a Drop and Ride system linked to various education establishments in town to address the major problem generated by parents dropping children off directly outside schools in residential neighbourhoods. The Park and Ride idea should have been introduced many years ago. York has successfully operated a system for over 30 years but for Harrogate the idea always appeared to be brushed aside and stalled for various reasons by Don Mackenzie when he was Cabinet Member for Highways. A high quality sustainable transport system using electric powered buses is a key element to deal with congestion. It is an inclusive vision that would appeal to more people and not discriminate against the majority who cannot or who do not wish to cycle or walk.

## 2. A Rethink on a Bypass



Traffic congestion Wetherby Road

The ongoing and ever increasing level of congestion caused by through traffic needs to be dealt with in a bold and positive approach in order to create a safer, more healthy and pleasant environment in the town itself. The Gateway Project fails to tackle this issue at source. All it is doing is brushing the problem to one side, shifting a problem to adjacent streets - a distraction to avoid dealing with the main problem. Despite previous so called consultations as recently as 2019, the problem of congestion will not be addressed until a bypass or relief road is considered to the west and north of the town linking up at both ends with the existing bypass. Even with the increasing number of electric cars and hopefully in the not too distant future the use of hydrogen power this will not automatically reduce the ever increasing levels of congestion. It requires “joined up writing” and has to be in conjunction with other considerations such as Park and Ride.

## 3. The Appearance of Harrogate



Harrogate looks scruffy let alone capable of reclaiming its place as a “Jewel” in Yorkshire’s crown. It needs looking after properly and returned to the glory it was some 10 years ago or more - make sure everywhere looks clean, tidy and cared for in the first instance. Paving and other hard landscaped areas must be properly maintained, road signs clean and of a consistent appearance. Understand and appreciate the floral reputation of the town and the contribution this makes to its reputation and visitor numbers. No so called “wilding”. It contributes nothing when it consists of an excuse not to maintain grassed areas just to let the weeds grow. Proper wilding can look attractive but takes a lot of time and money to be successful.

Address these problems in a simple but considered way as part of a long term vision and Harrogate, along with a distinctive retail environment, will sell itself. No fancy gimmicks are needed. Harrogate is Harrogate. It has a unique character and ambience of its own.

## 4. Update the Masterplan

The current Masterplan dates back to 2016, is time expired and not up-to-date. What is required is an holistic Masterplan for Harrogate that looks at ALL factors and influences which forms a solid basis for a Vision for Harrogate and identifies future co-ordinated projects rather than ‘Pocket Planning’ which the Gateway Project was. This should be influenced not only by appropriate professionals who have a thorough knowledge and understanding of Harrogate but also other towns with a similar demographic to Harrogate. Input is essential from the business community with all their knowledge, vast expertise and experience of the town. We may then have some joined up writing when addressing issues and when funding becomes available for identified projects.

### **3.00 DISCUSSION**

It is absolutely essential we develop a “Vision for Harrogate” – a document for discussion to form the foundation for a comprehensive “Masterplan” to replace the outdated 2016 version and the pocket planning of recent years.

Harrogate is different to most other towns and this contributed to its success and reputation for many years. History has shown though it is not against change.

Businesses and residents together understand what is at the heart of the town. It must involve everyone as part of a democratic process, not just blinkered lobby groups unrepresentative of the majority of businesses and people in Harrogate.

It must also include local Councillors. This is a fundamental reason why it is absolutely essential a Town Council for Harrogate must be elected without any further delay. No more talking and no more consultations on this important issue.

We need a bold and innovative “Vision”, capable of solving the ever increasing levels of traffic in and out of as well as through the town and the congestion it generates. Priority must be given to dealing with access to the town centre, especially on routes like Wetherby Road and ease of parking once visitors arrive. This is a prime factor to unlocking and addressing a number of fundamental issues.

We must ask what made Harrogate so successful in the past. It once had an enviable reputation for quality and excellence. We must take reference from history when Harrogate was the “Jewel in the Crown” to inform and bring progressive but well considered ideas into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

- It must clearly say "This is Harrogate" - not Leeds, not York, Sheffield, Huddersfield or any other place. The DNA of these is so different.
- It must be capable of celebrating the whole town as an exemplary, attractive place to visit, shop, work in, live in, look smart and well maintained and have appeal.
- It must have an understanding of Harrogate, its character and the largely cohesive Conservation Area the town centre sits in
- It must look at all factors and influences to form a solid basis for regeneration and future co-ordinated projects.
- It must deliver an inclusive vision and a balanced green approach to travel with the supporting infrastructure to embrace all road users, such as, commercial vehicles, private vehicles, school buses, pedestrians and cyclists.
- Visitors to and those people who work in Harrogate should be encouraged to park out of town and be able to use a “park and ride” scheme.
- Likewise such a scheme could be used for a “drop and ride scheme” where parents would be encouraged to drop off children who would then use a shuttle bus service to various education establishments.
- It must consider high quality sustainable public transport links in the form improved bus travel and rail services.

Above all it **MUST** be based on a thriving town economy which is not jeopardised in any way, treating Harrogate as a unique and very special town, which we all need to keep working at for a successful future.



## **4.00 MOVING FORWARD**

As a consequence of NYC's recent announcement, not to proceed with the Station Gateway in the face of a legal challenge and in the absence at this stage of how the funding could sensibly be used (subject to Government approval and public consultation) there is a danger of a knee jerk and short sighted reaction to the possibility of losing the funding. This must be avoided. The risk is that it will result in yet more pocket planning rather than co-ordinated or integrated design solutions without a Vision for Harrogate and an updated Masterplan.

And why spend the monies just for the sake of it and just on Station Parade. There are many other areas of town such as Cambridge Street and particularly Oxford Street that would equally benefit from improvements.

Whilst the opportunity of considered investment is always welcome, the suggestions shown in Appendix A of this document demonstrate how the funding could sensibly be used at this stage without detriment to the town centre.

## **5.00 CONCLUSION**

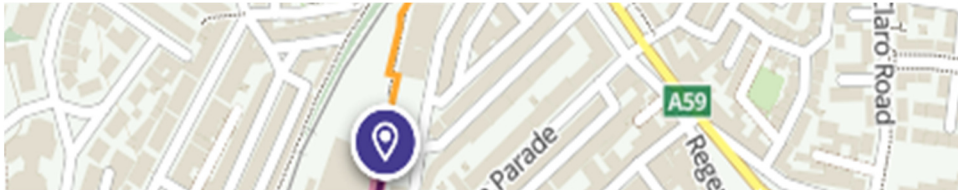
The Gateway Project was unfortunately a Highway Engineer's led solution through and through and not capable of celebrating this as an exemplary and attractive Gateway to the town. We do care what the millions are spent on so why all this public realm expenditure if it doesn't amount to real improvements. It was a vanity project, blinkered and contrived.

We do need an updated Masterplan and then we need clear leadership on the design side to then deliver high quality design solutions to a Vision for Harrogate based on good Urban Design principles and practice, capable of bringing together all stakeholders and co-ordinating professional disciplines to deliver a considered solution knowledgeable of the town, capable of engaging in original, imaginative but structured thinking.

Then, just as important, we need ongoing maintenance – something which has been missing over the last decade or more.

**Barry Adams** Chartered Architect (Retired) \_ Resident of Harrogate  
on behalf of  
Harrogate Resident's Association \_ 1,000+ members  
Granville Road Resident's Group \_ 300+ members  
Independent Harrogate \_ 156 business members

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### 6.00 Appendix A Moving Forward - Suggestions with Comments

- Synchronising traffic lights sequences.  
*Potentially this could improve traffic flow through the town centre, lead to less holding of traffic, less congestion and hence less pollution.*
- Improvements to One Arch and Public Realm Areas on either side.  
*The lighting does need improving but, any solution should be kept very simple with no contrived solutions or gimmicks such as NYC were focusing on. Above all, it must be “fit for purpose”. Make the structure waterproof if you can. Consider paving the whole of this area (both sides of One Arch and One Arch itself in the same paving material to visually link the whole area. At the end of the day, it is and always will be an underpass. No matter how much effort you put into improving this area the physical restrictions of this whole space will unfortunately continue to attract the wrong people. Will it be respected any further?*
- Make improvements for cyclists  
*Any solution which harks back to the Gateway Project should be avoided - question whether cycling fits into a town centre busy with pedestrians. It will add another element to an already busy through route along Station Parade. In addition, as has been pointed out before, any cycle lane along Station Parade will start nowhere and finish nowhere. It would introduce another obstacle for pedestrians to tackle when trying to cross from the town centre to both the bus and train station and yet one of the aims is to improve pedestrian access.*

*As a keen cyclist and a Member of the Civic Society wrote recently “I would have thought it is more important to establish the radial routes so that people can travel to and from the town centre and then leave their cycle there in a dedicated secure covered parking provision whilst they shop on foot”. He understands the Council has such a cycle plan previously developed by HBC, NYCC and the cycling groups - the priorities there are the radial routes. He concurs that cycling does not fit into the town centre.*



*Although a number of people disagree, the East Parade Option is an alternative route that deserves further more detailed consideration. This was set out in some detail in Appendix A of the Vision for Harrogate - Alternative Approach dated May 2023, East Parade Cycle Route – A Safer Route.*

*The responses from NYC on why this will not work are not convincing in any way with NYC. They have not shown any tangible evidence that clearly demonstrates this option will not work apart from issuing brief spoken or written statements in an attempt to dismiss this idea outright. Is this because they were determined to push for dedicated cycle lanes on Station Parade at all costs.*

*According to a recent update from the NYC Highways Team the alternative solutions were dismissed at an early stage and this decision should be challenged. No one is aware of any public engagement taking place at any time specifically on this issue.*

- **Improvements to Station Square Public Realm**

*The proposals forming the Gateway Project previously put forward by NYC were unfortunately a Highway Engineer's solution with JUST a "hint" of Urban Design. They did not show any cohesive concept, design form or consideration through a lack of understanding on how this space functions and relied on existing mature trees being removed.*



*The existing Station Square Gardens should be retained subject to minor improvements and ongoing maintenance. This area with its seating screened from Station Parade is already well used facility and reflects or takes reference from the 1950's layout for Station Square.*

*It has to be pointed out from the start that this area will never read as a proper Public Square until at least the very busy main A61 through traffic route is totally removed from the town centre. It read more as a public square in the 1950's in the days before the intrusion of the Victoria Centre and when the old Station entrance provided more of a "sense of arrival". Of course, in those days traffic volumes were far less.*

*The Station Square does seriously need de-cluttering but without the loss of any existing mature trees. Unfortunately, the sad appearance of this area has been compounded by the lack of proper ongoing maintenance over the last decade or so by the previous HBC. The Tempietto although not an historic structure serves as an interesting feature which contributes to the Conservation Area and historic character of the street scene. Its removal would be regrettable in terms of loss of visual interest.*

*The idea that there should be no planters on the Shopping Centre Public Performance Space is supported. The existing isolated planters do not contribute in a positive way to the appearance of this part of Station Square and will free up space for performance activities. The whole of this area up to James Street would benefit from repaving in a quality material appropriate to a Conservation Area.*

*Consideration should be given to extending the paving materials along with “softer” kerb installations across Station Parade and into (at least) the top end of the Station Car Park give the illusion of a much larger space to visually link both sides of Station Parade at this point. Similar concepts have successfully been adopted in other towns such as Exeter. This would also provide the opportunity for the introduction of a well-designed, modern but elegant canopy to the railway station entrance facing the car park which could then wrap around to the Station Parade entrance. It would have the benefit of signposting the station entrance in a more considered way to create a “sense of arrival”. The existing signage announcing the station entrance is a very commercial solution and does not contribute to the Conservation Area.*

*The idea of cleaning up the Queen Victoria Monument is welcome. The existing overgrown planting surrounding this important historic landmark should be totally grubbed out and replaced with a considered high quality paving layout perhaps integrating and flowing into an improved garden/landscaped area. It provides the opportunity to floodlight the Monument. The paving materials and layouts could flow across the top end of James Street to visually extend Station Square and give the illusion of a pedestrian link across this end of the important retail street – all without restricting existing traffic flows along James Street.*