



# RISE

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# York's Neighbourhood Plan

## Case study


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# Introduction

This case study describes the innovative use of the Localism Act 2011 to develop a neighbourhood plan that guided the development at York Minster. Since its adoption in 2022, the York Minster Precinct Neighbourhood Plan has formed the policy base for a number of planning decisions that advance the Minster's environmental and financial sustainability goals. As this includes the installation of energy efficiency measures to highly protected heritage assets, the experience at York Minster should be useful to those also aiming to make estates comprising of heritage buildings more sustainable.

## Summary

Though the York Minster Precinct is a small area geographically, it is covered by every layer of heritage planning in English Planning Law. It can therefore be seen as a microcosm of how a heritage planning context can both constrain and offer opportunity for development. We spoke to the Director of Works and Precinct, Alex McCallion, about the impetus for the neighbourhood plan, how it came into being and its impact so far.

This publication aims to share insights, good practices, and lessons learned from relevant retrofit, sustainability and warm homes projects. It is intended for informational purposes only and does not constitute recommendations or endorsements of specific suppliers, products, or services within the sector.

## The York Minster Precinct

The York Minster Precinct is a 7-hectare estate in York city centre managed by the Chapter of York. The centre is dominated by York Minster, a Gothic masterpiece of stone and glass home to the largest collection of medieval glass in the UK. The Minster is a magnet to York, attracting over 700,000 visitors to the city each year.

The Precinct area (figure 1) sits in a conservation area and is designated below ground as a scheduled ancient monument. It contains more than 60 listed buildings, including three at grade I. The whole area is therefore heavily protected for its heritage significance, which can make planning permission for energy efficiency difficult to obtain. Barriers to planning such as this would make it challenging for Chapter to realise one of its strategic aims for the Minster and Precinct area:

To establish York Minster as a pioneering, low carbon heritage estate with environmental sustainability integrated throughout our behaviours, business practices and building innovation.

York Minster Vision and Strategy for 2030

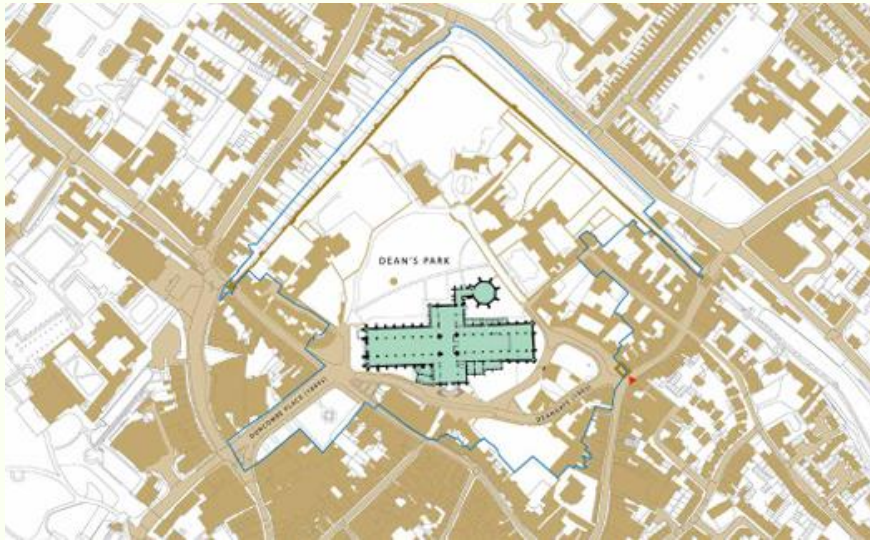


Figure 1 shows the York Minster at the centre of the Precinct's boundary (in blue). Historic buildings are denoted by dark brown, while the streets are lighter brown. Source: York Minster neighbourhood plan. Reproduced by kind permission of the Chapter of York

Recognising this, the Chapter has worked innovatively to develop the York Minster Precinct Neighbourhood Plan. Adopted by the City of York Council in June 2022, it is a masterplan that creates a suite of planning policies to guide local development in the area. The use of neighbourhood planning to establish policy that forms the backdrop for significant change within a heritage estate is a national first.

## Masterplan for sustainability

That the Chapter's strategic aim around environmental sustainability relates to both business practices and building innovation is noted above. The neighbourhood plan delivers in both these areas: as a masterplan linked to planning policies, it supports the building innovations that will inform business practices. Examples of this in practice are shown in figure 2 below.

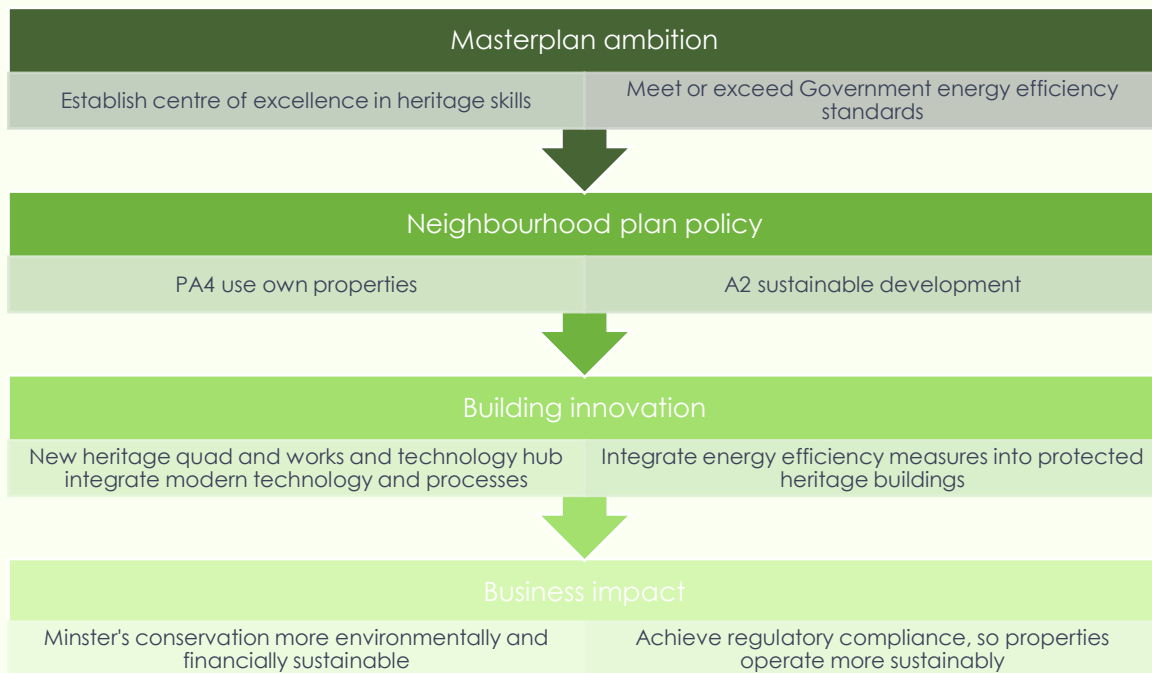


Figure 2 shows how the policies in the neighbourhood plan provide the backdrop for the Chapter to achieve its sustainability goals for the Minster

## The neighbourhood plan's impact

Between 1958 and 2025, York City Council did not formally adopt a city-wide local plan. This meant that when the York Minster Precinct Neighbourhood Plan was adopted in 2022, it had greater weight in local planning terms than York's then draft local plan. This is important because the planning policies it created have made some of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) more locally relevant and deliverable.

In particular, the NPPF is clear that local planning authorities should give 'great weight' to the conservation of heritage assets, which means harm to heritage assets should be avoided if possible. Harm should only be accepted where it is outweighed by the public benefit achieved. The York Minster Precinct Neighbourhood Plan provides detail on ways that public benefit can outweigh harm to heritage in the local area:

1. By establishing York Minster as a centre for heritage and climate leadership
2. By creating opportunities for revenue generation within the estate to generate funds to support the operation and conservation of York Minster and its estate
3. By sustaining York Minster as a centre for traditional craft skills and cutting-edge technology

Clarity on how to balance harm to heritage with public benefit has led to several positive development management decisions:

- **Historic building adaptation**

- While the neighbourhood plan was in draft, Chapter received permission for the conversion of the refectory, a listed building in the setting of York Minster. This was the first time that solar slates were approved within York city centre. Historic England, the statutory Government consultee on the proposals affecting grade I listed buildings, took the view that there would be harm to heritage, but that whether this was outweighed by public benefit should be locally determined. The refectory is now in use as a café and restaurant, and has an EPC B rating.
- In April 2023, planning permission was granted for change of use and deep retrofit of number 1 Deangate, an unlisted building in the conservation area and scheduled ancient monument. The installation of double-glazing will make the Minster's ambition for an EPC A rating more achievable. The planning officer's report cited concern that there would be harm to the setting of the Minster from the loss of the chimney and use of solar (instead of traditional) roof slates, but again these were outweighed by the public benefit. The building's conversion from residential to offices means that it is of a scale that is directly relevant to those making homes more energy efficient.

- **Planning permission for solar panels:**

- In November 2022, Chapter applied for planning permission to install 199 solar panels on the roof of York Minster's south quire. The application received several comments from local and national amenity societies and heritage specialists. Most were in support of the principle and had some concerns about the detail. Historic England stated its support if the local authority determined the 'modest' harm would be outweighed by public benefit. The development was approved in March 2023 and 184 panels have since been installed (figure 3).

- **New development:**

- The neighbourhood plan effectively allocated four development sites, including sites for the heritage quad and works and technology hub. Planning permission for these new buildings was achieved in 2022 (after the neighbourhood plan's adoption) and they opened in 2024 (figure 3). As well as housing new facilities for the building conservation workforce, the solar panels incorporated into the heritage quad's design now power the building's air source heat pump.



Figure 3 shows the solar panels on the South Quire roof being switched on. Reproduced by kind permission of the Chapter of York



Figure 4 shows the heritage quad, a new building within York's city walls that incorporates. Reproduced by kind permission of the Chapter of York

## Energy savings

Chapter is measuring and monitoring the amount of energy used and generated by the Minster Precinct. In the early afternoon of March 6<sup>th</sup> 2025, a clear and bright day, it was:

- Consuming 33.8 kilo Watts of energy per hour (kWh)
- Producing 27.3 kWh
- Taking the difference (6.5KWh) from the grid

This builds on a recent landmark for Minster in energy generation. On February 28<sup>th</sup> 2025, it produced 80% of the energy used to heat and power the building.

## Masterplan options

Neighbourhood planning is one of several tools that can be utilised to deliver a masterplan. Described in York Minster's (2023) *Planning for Your Estate: Managing change to heritage estates*, they include:

- **An unratified client masterplan:** Relatively quick (3-6 months) and cheap to produce, the changes to your estate visualised can provide a positive starting point for the planning process. However, they hold no planning weight
- **A client masterplan ratified by the local planning authority:** Carries more weight than an unratified plan and is similarly quick (6-9 months) and cheap to produce. Changes visualised can provide a positive starting point for planning. However, it doesn't hold any weight in planning terms and the ratification is vulnerable to political change
- **Supplementary planning document (SPD):** It will carry planning weight as long as there is a primary policy framework (e.g., an adopted local plan). Provides specific design and planning guidance that's useful for developing the estate. This benefits from public consultation however will take time (18-24 months) and need to be led by the local planning authority
- **Area action plan:** This carries weight in the planning process and can create new planning policy (unlike SPD). Involves community from the outset. However, it can be lengthy (18-24 months) and expensive to deliver. It is also led by the local authority, so investment in it could be subject to political change before its adoption
- **Neighbourhood plan:** The planning process carries the most weight and can be adopted even when there is no primary local policy (as was the case in York). Lengthy public consultation means the community is bought-in, lowering risk of refusal at planning application stage. However, they take time (36+ months) and can be expensive to produce

## Developing the neighbourhood plan

Once the Chapter of York had determined that a neighbourhood plan was the best option for the estate, it established the independent York Minster Precinct Neighbourhood Forum in 2019. Advised by Chapter, the forum remains the



independent lead on the neighbourhood plan, which also includes property outside the Minster's estate.

The plan took around 4-years to develop and adopt. This involved:

- Initial meetings with the local authority and Historic England to discuss the provisions in the Localism Act and Chapter's intentions to use them to progress its masterplan independently
- 32-weeks of public consultation within the neighbourhood plan area
- Examination by a planning inspector

During examination, the inspector found that the public consultation area should have been larger and asked that it be broadened. Though this led to a tripling of the consultation area, 80% of consultees still voted in favour of the plan's adoption.

The length and breadth of the public consultation exercise have arguably given the neighbourhood plan great legitimacy. The tools used included providing paper-based and online information, opportunities to meet the neighbourhood plan team for discussion, and online forms for feedback. All comments received were collected and recorded in an appendix to the plan thematically.

The consultation exercise involved storytelling and collaboration. Two of the Chapter's visions, a centre of heritage skills excellence and a new museum, seem to have captured the public and were supported from the plan's initial drafts. Other proposals, such as the removal of trees and changes to bike lanes were less well received and thus amended.

## Next steps

The following questions can help you decide which plan is for you:

- What are the operational and other issues you are facing and what do you need to address?
- What are the limitations of your estate and where could there be opportunities?
- What are the special characteristics of your estate?
- Where might there be potential for change, and what is fixed? Who are the key stakeholders and how should they be involved?
- What is the local planning context? Is there any adopted local planning policy?
- Is the local authority supportive and do they have capacity to support or lead the masterplanning?

Once you're sure which plan is for you, you need to decide how to take it forward:

- What is your budget and timescale for the work?
- Do you have the necessary skills to develop the plan internally? Masterplan design projects are typically led by an urban design, architecture or landscape architecture practice or a multi-disciplinary consultancy. The following skills may also be required:

- Town planner
  - Highways engineer
  - Conservation and archaeology
  - Ecology and arboriculture
  - Sustainability consultant
  - Consultation and engagement specialist
  - Commercial advisor / viability specialist
  - Cost consultant
- If employing a third party, you will need to provide them with baseline information as quickly as possible. This can include:
    - Land ownership boundaries
    - Existing uses
    - Physical and planning constraints information
    - Previous technical studies and surveys, visitor data, management plans, business case, strategic plans etc
    - Assessment of heritage significance (conservation management plan, statement of significance or similar)
    - Carbon audit, sustainability strategy or similar
    - Relevant planning applications, masterplans and other proposals
    - Previous consultation findings

Ultimately, regardless of the type of masterplan you develop, and the composition of the team assembled, the estate owner needs to own, understand and advocate for the plan. The York Minster Precinct Neighbourhood Plan was led by the Chapter of York, supported by the York Minster Precinct Neighbourhood Forum, local planning authority and important stakeholders like Historic England. Local support for its contents underpinned its ambitions, easing its delivery through the development management process.

## Resources

- [York Minster Precinct Neighbourhood Plan \(2022\)](#)
- York Minster (2023). [Planning for Your Estate: Managing change to heritage estates](#)
- [York City Council Planning Search](#)
  - Heritage quad planning permission (search 22/00803/FUL)
  - Number 1 Deangate planning permission (search 23/00134/FUL)
  - Refectory planning permission and listed building (search 21/01535/FUL and 21/01536/LBC)
  - South quire solar panels planning permission (search 22/02392/FUL)

