

Gloucester City Centre

Our 5 year vision, 2023 to 2028

Produced by Gloucester City Council on behalf of the Gloucester City Centre Commission

Our vision for the City Centre

By 2028 Gloucester city centre will be a healthy, safe and vibrant place where people come together, and enterprise and nature thrive. It will be transformed from a centre based on traditional retail to one that is repopulated with residents, workers and visitors enjoying a variety of experiences throughout the day and night. Business will sit at its heart with a diverse community of small businesses in growing sectors of the economy. It will be full of nature, with accessible green spaces within and adjacent to the city centre, and well-designed development playing its part towards reaching zero carbon. Above all it will be Gloucester – proud of its unique heritage, culture and identity.

Gloucester is a city of promise and opportunity. It has massive strengths, like its young and diverse population, its glorious history, its community of dynamic businesses, and the quality of its surrounding countryside and natural environment. It is the County-city of Gloucestershire, benefiting from good transport links, a first-class hospital, numerous large employers, and the administrative HQs of the City, County and Police authorities.

But like every other city in the UK Gloucester has challenges, like increasing demand for space – for homes, businesses and recreation. It suffers pockets of deprivation and inequality within communities, it has areas that are ripe for physical regeneration, and a high street that is witnessing fundamental changes to the traditional retail economy. It is also seeing changes to the way people work, to the ways they spend their leisure time, their use of digital technologies, and their expectations of the role and purpose of the city centre.

And just like every other location Gloucester needs to address climate change, doing its part to facilitate growth whilst reducing carbon dependency and improving its relationship with the natural environment.

This vision is about the city centre; a great place where people live, work, meet and visit day in day out; a place steeped in heritage and beauty, and a home to many hundreds of dynamic businesses and local organisations. It is the place that gives Gloucester its unique and special identity, and it is a crucial cog in the engine that will create jobs and wealth for the city's 125,000 residents.

Gloucester city centre is changing and changing for the better. Anyone who has been in the city for the past 20 years will have witnessed a great transformation of the Docks and Quays. Within the Gate Streets the Barbican area is now a thriving student community, the bus and rail stations are being redeveloped into a modern, purposeful transport interchange, and the Cathedral has seen its environs and facilities dramatically improved.

There are many other developments currently underway, like The Forum, the University of Gloucestershire's new City Campus, and the new Food Dock on Victoria Basin. These are just three of the large-scale investment projects that are currently updating and transforming the city centre over the next few years.

The Gloucester City Centre Commission

In 2021 Gloucester City Council commissioned a group of 20 organisations to come together to inform this vision. Comprising environmental organisations, businesses and community representatives, and chaired by the Dean of Gloucester Cathedral, The Gloucester City Centre Commission spent a year compiling evidence, debating, and consulting with the public.

The vision was also informed by an engagement exercise carried out during September to November 2022 by the University of Gloucestershire. The University contacted over 600 users of the city centre, to gather their views of the city centre as it is now, and their hopes and expectations of their city in the future.

The vision was endorsed by Gloucester City Council in February 2023. It will be a reference point for decisions made by the Council that affect the city centre and will inform the strategies and policies that guide the growth and regeneration of the city centre in the period to 2028.

This vision is presented on a dedicated website at: [www.....](#)

The website includes a page to collect views on the development of the city centre, so please take a look and post your thoughts on how the city centre is getting on against this vision.

Gloucester in 2022 – Current views of the city centre

This section presents a summary of the findings of research carried out by the University of Gloucestershire over the period September to November 2022 amongst members of the public and businesses to inform the vision.

- Gloucester is viewed to be an inclusive, authentic city, with a clear historical identity.
- It is viewed to have real potential for growth, with a passionate, creative and diverse community. Gloucester has a genuine opportunity to become a thriving city, attracting more tourists, young people and investment in the next 5 years.
- Developments in areas such as the Quays have been well received. Historical buildings, especially the Cathedral, were considered the best things about Gloucester, while the City Centre was considered the worst thing about the City. Gloucester Rugby was also seen as a major positive.
- Concerns were expressed about the broader development of Gloucester, including accessible green spaces, the hospitality offering, and support for small businesses in the city. Many believe the City Centre has deteriorated in the last 5 years.
- 'Developing the high street' was considered the most important issue for the council to focus on in the next 5 years, followed by 'Taking forward the regeneration programme', and 'Supporting businesses in Gloucester'. While 'Tackling the climate emergency' and 'Making the city more inclusive' were considered the least important issues.
- The majority of respondents do not consider Gloucester to be an environmentally friendly city.
- The majority of respondents are not proud of the City Centre.
- The majority of respondents believe that the investment taking place in the City Centre will have a positive impact on the Future of Gloucester. Specifically related to the city centre, despite positive comments about the regeneration work so far, focus groups raised ongoing concerns about the physical environment, safety when in the city centre, and increasingly empty retail space, particularly around Westgate Street.
- Personal safety is an important issue for many, with women and the age group of 25 to 34 more likely to feel unsafe in City Centre.
- The 'Cost of living crisis' is considered the biggest threat to a thriving future for the city in the next 5 years, followed by 'Lack of investment', 'High street usage', and 'Crime'.
- When identifying priorities for further improving the city, focus groups identified issues of accessibility, support for vulnerable people, developing Gloucester's attractiveness as a historical destination and support for small, independent businesses.
- When identifying key barriers to change respondents identified four key challenges; access to funding during a challenging financial context, the inclusion of a diverse group of stakeholders in decision-making, representation of diverse communities at senior levels in local council bodies, and, accessible support for small businesses.

The full report of the University's research is available on the vision's website at www.vision2022.co.uk.

A vision for Gloucester in 2028

This is a vision for what Gloucester people and Gloucester organisations want Gloucester City Centre to look and feel like in 2028. It's a relatively short-term timescale so that actions taken now can directly influence its implementation. However, it is also deliberately ambitious, and whilst some of the aims may be beyond our collective reach, by 2028 we will have made clear and positive steps towards achieving them.

The vision is underpinned by six core principles

Nature rich	nature and biodiversity are at the heart of the city centre
Inclusive	the city centre reflects its whole community and is mindful of the needs of all members; it is a safe and inclusive space
Authentic	Gloucester's unique heritage and identity is reinforced in the city centre
Zero carbon	Gloucester is playing its part in addressing the climate emergency
Flexibility	the spaces and buildings we create need to be adaptable to changing future needs and market demands
Co-created	The public are properly engaged in new major developments and the design of public spaces and public services

Green and nature-rich

The city centre is nature-rich and making a positive contribution to tackling climate change

It is green and biodiverse, and the impact on the natural environment is taken into consideration in everything that goes on. The relationship between the city centre and Gloucester's surrounding countryside, including its waterways, is positive.

- ❖ There are attractive green and open spaces throughout the city centre, providing recreation, supporting wildlife and nature, and reducing water offset. These spaces have been co-designed with local people, particularly end users, to encourage people to gather, enabling more outdoor arts, events and culture. King's Square will be seen as the city's main gathering place, with an active programme of cultural events and activities.
- ❖ There will be more trees and plants, using trees and plants that are suited to a drier climate and require less watering. These will be watered and maintained properly.
- ❖ People have less need to use a car. There is a clearly defined network of safe and attractive routes for people walking, cycling and wheeling, which is integrated to

the public transport system. These routes connect all parts of the city centre, as well as connecting it to the Docks and The Quays, the Kingsholm Stadium, and the rest of the city. For those who still depend on a car there is a network of car clubs and electric vehicle charging hubs.

- ❖ Water enhances the city centre's identity, be it Gloucester's unique docks or the majestic river Severn as it passes through, creating and sustaining nature and beauty.
- ❖ There are accessible and visible links to the nearby countryside within the Severn Vale and Robinswood Hill. Alney Island and the Gloucester Nature Park are a natural extension and enhancement of the city centre, helping to protect the city from the flooding of the river Severn
- ❖ Businesses are aware of the role they play in achieving net zero, and they are taking steps towards reducing their carbon footprint.

A well-designed place

The city centre is continually changing and improving.

It contains more and better homes, workspaces, community and commercial spaces, and a network of historic streets that are thronging with people.

- ❖ There is ongoing physical regeneration and change, building on the success of The Forum, the University of Gloucestershire City Campus and Cathedral Quarter, and progressing the next phase of projects, including The Fleece Hotel, the Eastgate Shopping Centre and adjacent Greyfriars Quarter, Project Pilgrim II and the Prison.
- ❖ New buildings and public realm are well designed, drawing on local materials and local features. They can be repurposed to meet changing market trends and user needs.
- ❖ The retrofitting of buildings is prioritised over replacement, enabling the preserving of embodied carbon. When new properties are built they use low carbon building technologies and materials, they are well-insulated, energy efficient and heated, and powered by low-cost, renewable energy.
- ❖ The built heritage engages the public in the city's rich history. People celebrate heritage gems like the Cathedral and Cathedral Quarter, The Fleece Hotel and the New Inn, as well as the history beneath. It attracts more visitors to the city, drives regeneration, and makes Gloucester's great past relevant to everyone in the community.
- ❖ It is a legible city with better signage and interpretation in the Gate Streets as well as to and from adjacent areas. There are also better physical connections, providing safe and accessible routes for people of all abilities.
- ❖ Digital infrastructure strengthens communications and delivers information to city centre users.
- ❖ The city centre offers an attractive and safe place to live, and as a result more people live there. As well as hosting more homes the standard of housing is

also improved. Many of those residents work from home or work hubs and they shop, eat and drink locally.

A growing local economy

The city centre has a diverse economy, growing in size and stature as a University City. It has shifted away from generic high street retail towards other types of service industry as well as production and knowledge based sectors. The growing population of the city is reflected in year-on-year growth in productivity and the benefits of economic growth are felt by everyone in the city. There are many more young people, including students, bringing a demand for new types of businesses.

- ❖ The Gate Streets and the Docks are complementary destinations for Gloucester residents and visitors to the city. Both areas are actively promoted to visitors and investors resulting in a stronger level of awareness of the city within the UK.
- ❖ The city centre is still dominated by the retail, leisure and visitor economy, but there is an increasing diversification, including reusing empty shops to support offices and small-scale manufacturers.
- ❖ It is an enterprising place with workspace that is adaptable to new business models - more flexible office space, markets and street trading, pop up shops and restaurants, and meanwhile uses in vacant shops. It will be flourishing habitat for entrepreneurs and small, independent retailers.
- ❖ It will be an inclusive economy, home to businesses that reflect Gloucester's diverse ethnic make up and offering employment opportunities for Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority people.
- ❖ Digital, cyber and other forms of knowledge based industries provide well-paid jobs in the heart of the city within a community of small firms and national brands.
- ❖ The Employment Hub within The Forum is working alongside local colleges and universities and supporting employers to attract and train local talent.
- ❖ Culture and the creative industries are driving economic growth, strengthening Gloucester's unique identity through heritage, events and the arts and adding to the many reasons to visit and stay in the city centre.
- ❖ There are more food and entertainment outlets to support a stronger evening and night time economy. Gloucester has a national reputation for food, building on the success of the Quays, The Fleece Hotel, The Forum and the Food Dock.

Thriving quarters

- ❖ The Eastgate Quarter comprises Eastgate Street and the Eastgate Shopping Centre, retaining its reputation as the main retail area of the city centre with a strong food and drink offering in lower Eastgate, while the area to the rear of

Eastgate Shopping centre has become a new recreational and cultural quarter within the setting of the magnificent Greyfriars Priory.

- ❖ The Cathedral Quarter is an attractive visitor and leisure destination, drawing many more visitors to appreciate its unique heritage and history and the attractive public realm.
- ❖ King's Quarter is a thriving, bustling commercial area with a community of cultural, creative and digital businesses, drawing on the student population within the new City Campus, The Forum, and the nearby public transport infrastructure.
- ❖ The Docks and Quays maintain a national reputation for retail, food & drink, and leisure in a superb waterfront setting.
- ❖ The Severnside Country Park sits alongside the city centre, offering nature and tranquility to Gloucester's residents and its visitors along both sides of the river.

A city centre owned by its people

The city centre is inclusive and has people at its heart.

It is welcoming to all, offering a safe and clean space in which people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities are welcomed. It appeals to the existing local community as well as to those residents who are new to the county, embodying the diversity of Gloucestershire's communities in the County-City.

- ❖ It has the culture and appeal of a University City, attracting students from across the UK and internationally, and providing services and businesses to meet their needs.
- ❖ It is a place that draws on the strengths and ideas of its residents, including younger voices, providing opportunities for positive engagement in shaping new developments.
- ❖ There is active participation in the city's local organisations, cultural and sporting events, and democratic institutions amongst people of all ages and ethnic backgrounds.
- ❖ Gloucester is a healthy and a safe place. It has lower levels of pollution, less crime, fewer cars, and it encourages healthy lifestyles through walking, cycling and active engagement in sports.
- ❖ It's a space for people to be innovative and creative, with an environment that fosters and nurtures talent and enterprise. It supports entrepreneurs to create new collaborative spaces, building on the success of creative places like Jolt and the Music Works.
- ❖ It celebrates and focuses Gloucester's unique cultural identity; its history, environment, people, communities, and its future.

Measuring progress

The Natural Environment

1. A significant increase in the number of trees in the Gate Streets per year
2. Completion of the Gloucester Nature Park by 2028 with more planting and the attraction of thousands of visitors each year.
3. Reduced levels of Nitrogen Dioxide levels in the city centre

Regeneration

4. Completion of The Forum and other developments in King's Quarter, improving the environment and creating new business opportunities and jobs in new business sectors
5. Completion of the redevelopment of The Fleece and The Prison providing new residential and business accommodation. The redevelopment of Greyfriars and the Eastgate Shopping Centre will have commenced.

The Economy

6. An increase in the number of pubs, clubs, bars and other establishments open during the evening in the city centre.
7. A decrease in the number of empty retail units within the Gate Streets.

City centre users

8. An increase in the number of people living in the city centre
9. The number of visitors will have increased and the length of time they spend in the city centre will also have gone up.
10. More people feel safe in the city centre throughout the daytime and evening.

Taking the Vision forward

The preparation and publication of this vision represents the start of a journey. For it to remain meaningful it needs to be reviewed and measured, with regular discussion and assessment of how the city is progressing towards achieving it.

- ❖ Action 1: Gloucester City Council to endorse the City Centre Vision and encourage the other City Centre Commission members to also endorse it.

The vision needs to be kept 'alive' in an interesting and engaging way, so that engagement will continue, and progress can be measured and monitored.

- ❖ Action 2: The vision, the city centre user research and other material will be presented on a dedicated website, inviting members of the public to submit their views on the progress of the city centre

The Vision will sit above topic-based and thematic strategies in the city centre, ensuring that new policy is coordinated and aligned.

- ❖ Action 3: The City Council and its partners in the Gloucester City Centre Commission will draw on the vision to inform decisions relating to the city centre. It will underpin relevant strategies and funding bids submitted to the Government and other relevant bodies..

Ongoing dialogue and engagement with city centre users is crucial to keeping the vision alive, be they residents, visitors, or the businesses that occupy the Gate Streets and Docks. Only by listening to and understanding the many voices in the city can agencies take effective decisions that meet the aims of this vision. The University of Gloucestershire carried out engagement research within the city centre during September to November 2022, obtaining the views of over 500 people on how they would like to see the city centre move forward in the next 5 years.

- ❖ Action 4: The City Council will commission a repeat of the city centre user research in late 2024 to obtain an update of local views on the city centre and a measure of progress towards achieving the vision..

The City Centre Commission has become a useful forum to bring differing perspectives on the city centre together, and to share understanding of the challenges and opportunities. If it is to have a future it is important that many different voices and views are heard and that it continues to have input from industry, the environment, government, and most importantly, city centre residents and users.

- ❖ Action 5: the City Centre Commission will continue to meet to track progress of the implementation of the vision and the progress of the city centre.