

North Yorkshire Council

Harrogate and Knaresborough Area Committee

4 June 2026

Receipt of Knaresborough Castle Petition

Report of the Assistant Chief Executive – Legal and Democratic Services

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To advise of a petition containing more than 500 signatures which has been received by North Yorkshire Council.
- 1.2 To ask the Area Committee to consider a response.

2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 A petition has been received by North Yorkshire Council. This is a combination of a paper-based and an online petition with over 500 signatures from people who live, work, or study in the county.
- 2.2 The signatories urge North Yorkshire Council to take steps to preserve Knaresborough Castle.

Knaresborough Castle has a wonderful history, and is a special place for visitors and residents alike whether to walk around its grounds, to participate in local events or to enjoy one of the best views in England. But today, this magnificent symbol of our heritage faces threats from neglect and underfunding. The castle is in a very poor state of repair causing erosion of its structure and obscuring the famous views from Castle top. The castle's deterioration jeopardizes economic contributions from tourism. If Knaresborough Castle's decline continues ultimately it could be closed to the public which would be disastrous for the town.

Our key concerns are:

- *weeds in the castle walls are obscuring features and causing cracks in the masonry*
- *uncontrolled tree growth is undermining the stunning views over the Gorge*
- *Paths and steps up to the castle are in urgent need of attention*
- *Views of the moat are also obscured by trees*
- *Money raised by North Yorkshire Council from the castle estate including car parking revenue needs to be ringfenced for the maintenance of the castle estate and this should be transparent.*

We urge North Yorkshire Council, who is responsible for Knaresborough Castle's maintenance, and all stakeholders, to prioritise its conservation. By uniting as a community, we can rally to preserve this iconic landmark and its contribution to Knaresborough's identity and economy. Join us in signing this petition to secure a dedicated funding stream and a comprehensive restoration plan, ensuring the integrity of the Castle and its story continues.

Our heritage needs our help, and together we can make a difference.

3.0 COUNCIL'S ARRANGEMENTS FOR RESPONDING TO PETITIONS

3.1 The key features of the Council's arrangements for receiving and debating petitions, as published on the Council's website, are as follows:

- a) Receipt of the petition is published on the Council's website, which has been done in the case of this petition.
- b) If a petition contains 500 or more signatures (but less than 30,130 signatories), it will be scheduled for debate at the next meeting of the appropriate Area Committee.
- c) The petition organiser is offered the opportunity to speak for five minutes at the Area Committee meeting to present their petition. Subsequently, at the meeting, the petition will be discussed by Councillors for a maximum of 15 minutes, and a decision will be made on how to respond to the petition.
- d) Possible responses by the Council to petitions, as shown on the website, are:
 - i. **Option 1:** to take the action requested by the petition,
 - ii. **Option 2:** not to take the action requested for reasons put forward in the debate,
 - iii. **Option 3:** to commission further investigation into the matter, for example by a relevant committee; or,
 - iv. **Option 4:** where the issue is one on which the Council Executive are required to make the final decision, the Council will decide whether to make recommendations to inform that decision.
- e) The petition organiser will receive written confirmation of this decision. This confirmation will also be published on the website.
- f) In accordance with the arrangements described above, the petition organisers have been invited to join today's meeting to present their petition.

4.0 OFFICER'S COMMENTS AND BACKGROUND

4.1 Knaresborough Castle is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (no. 34841) which includes the castle grounds and Courthouse range of buildings (Grade II Listed) and has been part of the Royal estates for most of its 900-year history.

4.2 The Council currently hold a 50-year lease from the Duchy of Lancaster (Duchy) in respect of the Estate (shown edged red on the attached plan in Appendix 1 but excluding the section highlighted grey). The lease will expire on 28 September 2032.

4.3 The lease restricts use of the castle and grounds for public pleasure purposes including the bowling and putting greens, the Old Court House as a museum, the Former Girls School for letting to local societies (at the tenant's discretion), use of the yard areas for free public car parking (subsequently varied to allow then Harrogate Borough Council to charge, paying the Duchy 20% of the Net Initial Turnover), two parking areas for letting to North Yorkshire Police Authority, and 14 spaces to be made available free of charge to named local occupiers.

- 4.4 In addition to the 20% of the car parking net initial turnover, the Council pay a base rent to the Duchy.
- 4.5 The lease requires the Council to insure the site and give full indemnity to the Landlord and is not permitted to assign or sublet as a whole. Subletting of part, is only permitted on the basis described above.
- 4.6 The Council is responsible for all repairs and decorations. It is to keep all buildings (except the castle ruins) in good and tenable repair and condition including metalled and surfaced areas. It is to protect and preserve, prevent further decay and make good any damage to the castle ruins, and is to maintain the castle grounds, including lawns, trees, hedges and flowerbeds. The exterior of all buildings are to be well painted. If the Council fail to undertake the work within six months of notification, the Duchy has the right to do the work and recharge the Council for the costs plus 2%.
- 4.7 The Council are also to pay a reasonable proportion of the upkeep of party walls, sewers etc. and must comply with legislation including Ancient Monuments & Archaeological Areas Act 1979 together with additional obligations regarding safety of ruined Castle.
- 4.8 The Council generates an annual income from the permitted sub tenancies and public car parking fees; however historically the expenditure has been greater than the income resulting in a net cost of managing the asset.
- 4.9 The Council is currently preparing a schedule of planned maintenance for the asset up to the end of the lease in 2032. Alongside this, the Council is reviewing and updating the costs and income of managing the asset. This detail addresses the concerns set out in paragraph 2.2 above.

5.0 CURRENT MAINTENANCE POSITION

- 5.1 Since late 2025, the Property Maintenance Team has been working closely with the Council's consultants, Align Property Partners, alongside Historic England, to develop a programme of works at Knaresborough Castle, focusing primarily on vegetation removal at the castle keep and perimeter walls. As part of this, the Council established a programme of vegetation cutback and targeted treatment, to be delivered by specialist contractors. A tender package of work was issued in January 2026 for a 5-week period, following which Stone Technical were appointed to undertake the works.
- 5.2 Due to the scarcity of suitably qualified contractors, Stone Technical had limited availability and are therefore scheduled to carry out the works in two phases: 29 June – 10 July 2026, and 17 – 28 August 2026.
- 5.3 The timing of these works raised concerns in relation to the bird nesting season and the potential impact on local wildlife. To address this, we have been working closely with Whitcher Wildlife Ecological Consultants to ensure that all activities are undertaken in a manner that avoids disturbance to wildlife within the castle grounds. While some elements of the original scope have been adjusted in line with their recommendations, the Council are still able to proceed with most of the planned works.
- 5.4 The Council have also conducted several site visits and meetings with Historic England and the Duchy of Lancaster to review and agree our proposed approach. Feedback from all parties has been positive, with support for the methodology and programme outlined.
- 5.5 In addition, it has been identified that the handrails around the castle keep are in a poor condition and require attention. The Council are therefore working on a proposed design in collaboration with Purcell Conservation Architects, who are Ancient Monument specialists

based in York. This will form part of a planning application process to secure the necessary approvals. Timescales around this are currently unknown.

5.6 Furthermore, Purcell has been commissioned to undertake a detailed condition assessment of the entire site and to develop a Conservation Maintenance Plan in line with the obligations of the lease terms and conditions. This plan will guide works over the next six years and beyond, aligned with the duration of the Council's lease, which runs until 2032.

5.7 This information is anticipated by October 2026, at which point the Council will begin programming future maintenance works in strict accordance with the Conservation Maintenance Plan. The NYC Parks & Grounds team has also played a key role in supporting site maintenance, assisting with general tidying and upkeep where required, while ensuring that all activities remain fully compliant with relevant planning approvals and guidance.

6.0 COMMENTS ON THE OPTIONS AVAILABLE TO MEMBERS

6.1 As set out at 3.1 d), there are four options available to Members when responding to petitions. A comment on each is listed below:

a) **Options 1 and 2:** It is not possible to select Options 1 or 2, as the decision is not within the competence of the Harrogate and Knaresborough Area Committee.

b) **Option 3:** The matter could be referred to the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee for further investigation, if the Area Committee feels there is additional information it could use to prepare a report to the decision maker or responsible Corporate Director, with recommendations.

c) **Option 4:** The Harrogate and Knaresborough Area Committee can itself prepare a report to the decision maker or responsible Corporate Director, with recommendations.

6.2 The Committee also has the option to note the report and take no further action.

7.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 None identified.

8.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 None identified.

9.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

9.1 None identified.

10.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

10.1 Neutral implications.

11.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

11.1 That the Committee notes the petition and considers a response as listed at 6.1.

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BACKGROUND PAPERS:

North Yorkshire Council's petitions scheme information and advice
[Petitions | North Yorkshire Council](#)

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