

THE PRESS

White Swan breakthrough could spark flats revolution for York



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Exclusive By Gavin Aitchison

UP to 800 new flats or offices could be created above shops in York city centre, a landmark new report has revealed.

A council-funded study by the North of England Civic Trust (NECT) says 36 per cent of upper floors in the city centre are unused and there is potential for flats for 1,000 to 1,500 people, or hundreds of small offices.

The Press can reveal the city has been awarded £450,000 to help convert the upper floors of the old White Swan hotel in Piccadilly into 18 flats, and hundreds more city-centre flats could now follow elsewhere, to go some way to easing the city's housing crisis.

Council leader James Alexander said the work between various organisations on the White Swan project, coupled with the study's conclusions, "provides evidence of a wealth of potential accommodation for people or businesses which supports our ambition for new homes and jobs, as outlined in the Local Plan".

He said the council's role on the White Swan indicated its willingness and innovation to help turn city-centre premises into homes. The building's upper floors have been empty for more than 30 years, but talks are now ongoing between the council, the White Swan's owners and the Fabrick Group, which runs the Tees Valley Housing Association.

Martin Hawthorne, chief executive of development for Fabrick, said: "This is a fantastic project that's bringing much-needed homes into the heart of the city. We're delighted to be working with [City of York Council](#) to make this development a viable option."

Graham Bell, director of the NECT, said: "Much discussion nationally about the future of the High Street has focussed on shops, but for every shop there might be two or three times that area in the floors above as an untapped resource. Think of what could be unlocked in terms of jobs or housing and the benefits for York."

The council commissioned the NECT study last October to find out the extent of unused floors above commercial property within the walled city centre.

In a statement, the council said the study re-affirmed the "economic, social and cultural challenges" facing the High Street, and the wider potential costs of any decline.

It said more city-centre housing could help boost the city centre, create a more diverse economy and reduce car dependence.

[Tracey Simpson-Laing](#), council cabinet member for housing, said the council would work with building owners to support conversions and said they could help conserve architecturally-important buildings.

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