



Adventure. For the first time and a lifetime.

Our 10-year strategy for
connecting people and places.



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Chair

Margaret Hart



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Foreword

As we write it is almost exactly 90 years since YHA was founded. We are proud to present our strategy for the next ten years, developed through work undertaken throughout 2019, and approved by the Board in February 2020. A few months ago, this foreword would have focused on how the thinking behind our new, long-term strategy has been inspired by YHA's history. But in a few short weeks, the impact of coronavirus on those we serve and those we aim to reach has been huge and widespread.

In our 90-year history, the pandemic is the most severe crisis we have ever experienced. It has led us to close the entire network of hostels for the very first time. It is significantly affecting our finances and ability to deliver our impact in 2020 and potentially further into the future. This year, because of the effect on YHA alone, more than 200,000 young people will miss out on the chance of a life-changing stay. For many of them, this would have been their first break and a rare positive childhood experience.

Much about the future remains uncertain. Yet this period has reinforced our view that we must use history to inform our future. Coronavirus is far from the only crisis YHA has faced. And - just as it was for our founders - in adversity we see most clearly the value and vitality of our *raison d'être*.

Founded in April 1930, the national association emerged from a nation in crisis. The 1929 stock market crash resulted in the Great Slump. The economy crumbled. Unemployment soared. In the words of our first chairman, Barclay Baron, "we could not have chosen a more difficult time for the start of a movement." But start, it did.

In the Second World War, only 10 years after being established, a third of YHA's hostels were requisitioned to accommodate soldiers on leave, ambulance training camps, makeshift schools, emergency meeting and feeding stations. They became refuges for the sick, the vulnerable, refugees and those made homeless by air raids. Half a century later, YHA had to close most hostels for a summer as the countryside battled against Foot and Mouth disease.

In both crises, leaders faced a level of upheaval that brought into question YHA's long term future. But in both cases, YHA emerged stronger: the need for our mission enhanced, the case for organisational reform more urgent.

Our strategy draws on 90 years' experience in overcoming adversity and managing change. As we emerge from the ravages of Covid-19, we will have an important role to play in the national effort to rebuild society. And inspired by our history, we will connect people to each other, to nature, culture and the world around them, and to the unique health and wellbeing benefits that come with travel and adventure. Our strategy and our vision - that every child can access the benefits of adventure, for the first time and a lifetime - will be even more urgent. We remain committed to these, and they will guide our decision-making through the uncertainties that lie ahead.

Thank you for reading our 10-year strategy. We look forward to working with you to deliver it.

Margaret and James

We are YHA

We believe in the power of travel and adventure. Every year, through our network of 150 hostels across England and Wales, we connect nearly a million people to each other, to nature and the outdoors, to culture and to heritage.

Hostelling makes travel and adventure accessible to everyone, everywhere. YHA operates sites throughout England and Wales – a community of shared spaces, open to all and for the benefit of everybody.

We provide inclusive adventures, in extraordinary buildings, in amazing places. We're proud to rank first globally for guest satisfaction. Yet we are much more than accommodation.

We are a leading social enterprise and part of a 90-year-old international movement. A charity on a mission to enrich the lives of all, but especially young people, and improve physical health, mental wellbeing and life skills through the experiences we create.

Ninety years on from our foundation, the nation faces pressing challenges. A population rocked by crisis. Society increasingly polarised, with people disconnected from each other within and between countries. A climate emergency of global scale and consequences. Higher expectations and pressures on young people in the internet age.

We can make an important contribution to tackling these challenges. We are not primarily an environmental organisation, but we are well placed to contribute to the protection of the natural world. We are not a mental health organisation, but residential, physical activity, being outdoors and culture all lead to greater wellbeing and connections between people. We are not a hotel chain, but we must maintain the highest standards for overnight stays, food and customer service.



This strategy will see us reaching more people and growing our impact, with a particular focus on those who could benefit the most, in an era that needs us more than ever.

Finding our future in our past

In 2020, the year of our 90th birthday, we return to our roots. In 1930, we were born from economic disaster and demand for social reform. Our founders determined to improve the lives and life-chances of young people living in crowded, polluted cities, lacking access to activity, adventure and fresh air. Today that's a situation many young people still find themselves in – a situation compounded by new, complex and varied challenges.

Building on all that's been

Our last strategy has been a real success. It focused on putting YHA on a firm commercial and operational footing. This foundation has ensured our survival and allows us to lift our sights for the future. We can already see – in our hostels, in our people, and in our supporter base – the potential to achieve even more.

If the last 10 years has been about modernising our business, the next 10 will be about modernising our mission and becoming a leading national charity for young people.

An ambitious vision and mission

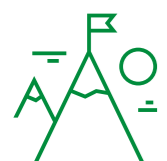


Vision

Everyone has access to the benefits of adventure, for the first time and a lifetime.

By 2030, every child is able to stay away from home, travel, experience adventure and access the outdoors, nature, culture and heritage.

YHA will work with others to end the inequity that means some children have never been to a beach, visited a museum or rolled down a hill.



Mission





To enrich the lives of all, especially young people, by providing brilliant hostel stays and experiences that improve physical health, mental wellbeing and life skills.

We remain committed to our charitable object

To help all, especially young people of limited means, to a greater knowledge, love and care of the countryside, and appreciation of the cultural values of towns and cities, particularly by providing youth hostels or other accommodation for them in their travels, and thus to promote their health, recreation and education.



Our five-year targets:

-  For 5 million people of all ages to stay with YHA
-  To be certain that access for all means all – that those who stay with us, benefit from our provision and support, our employees and volunteers, reflect the demographics of England and Wales
-  To ensure at least 2.5 million children and young people have an overnight stay with YHA
-  To ensure at least 250,000 of these children and young people are those that have the most challenging lives

These four targets are intrinsically linked. We will not have succeeded if we increase our reach but not our diversity. If we reach 2.5 million young people but not those who face the most challenging circumstances.

Our message

We are YHA.
We transform young lives forever through travel and real adventure.
Because where you go changes who you become.

We have a 140,000-strong membership base, very many of whom are committed supporters with a lifelong relationship with hostelling and YHA. They know first-hand that where you go changes who you become.

Our values



Welcoming and inclusive



Proud of our heritage



Passionate about our purpose



Knowledgeable and inspiring



We live our brand values through the

YHA people values and behaviours framework



Helpful

Helpfulness is about making life easier for other people, being hospitable and creating a pleasant working environment.



Efficient

Being efficient means being organised, thoughtful in decision-making, hardworking and committed to improvement. As a charity, it's our duty to make best use of our resources.



Authentic

Being authentic combines the qualities of honesty, trustworthiness and transparency. It's about being genuine and straightforward.



Respectful

Respect is about valuing the time, energy, opinions, achievements and working styles of colleagues, volunteers and supporters. It's about promoting equality and diversity.



Team-spirited

YHA is one team. And for the health and success of the team, we take individual responsibility, show personal leadership qualities and collaborate towards our goals.



Our theory of change

- ✓ Staying away from home, and connections to the nature and outdoors, heritage and culture, all have an evidenced positive impact on life outcomes. We know that developing skills for employment, volunteering and being part of a community all improve life chances and wellbeing. And we know that connections to nature help to protect the environment and improve wellbeing.
- ✓ Evidence shows us that many people are increasingly disconnected from these things.
- ✓ Using our places and spaces we connect people to each other, to nature and the outdoors, culture and heritage, and to activities that support the development of essential skills for work and life.
- ✓ By doing this we support improvements to people's physical health, sense of mental wellbeing, life skill development and employment prospects. We help protect nature and heritage.

In practice

Through our network of over 150 hostels, and as part of a worldwide movement, we will:

- ✓ offer inclusive experiences that enable access to the outdoors, nature, culture and heritage for all, especially young people
- ✓ target our support to reach those with the fewest opportunities and the most to gain
- ✓ offer programmes that develop life and work skills – through residentials and a varied programme of work experience, volunteering and flexible employment
- ✓ ensure our places and spaces foster connections between people – young and old, across all sections of society in England and Wales and beyond

Overall, we want to grow so that more people stay with and experience YHA – including a higher proportion of young people, especially the most disadvantaged – and to make greater impact with each stay and experience.

Our strategic priorities

To help us effect change we have identified 10 strategic priorities – five that focus on our impact on people and five that enable us to achieve this in line with our values.

Impact priorities

1. Our top priority is to ensure that all means all, increasing the scale and breadth of our reach and ensuring that YHA is for everyone; **we will promote social inclusion and equity of access** with a particular focus on young people under 26 and by proactively targeting our efforts on those with challenging lives.

Ensuring that all means all is our core priority. We are a charity that holds our resources in trust for all of the public.

It is our ethical responsibility to ensure we reduce any barriers that stop people accessing our services. To ensure that our users reflect the public as a whole.

It is commercially imperative to maximise the number of people who find us relevant, have a positive user experience, and who then stay, join, give, and volunteer with us.

2. **We will increase access to stays away from home and improve connections to nature, outdoors, heritage and culture** – recognising that our hostel network provides a unique opportunity to make these things for the many not just for a few.
3. **We will improve physical and mental wellbeing** by providing activities and programmes and by supporting people to take their own action using our hostels as a base – both through overnight stays and as part of day visits.

4. **We will develop life skills and employability** by developing the YHA Campus and YHA Curriculum – for our staff, volunteers and the young people that we work with.

A campus is buildings and grounds that form a place of learning. The YHA Campus is 153 hostels that provide over 1 million hours of learning a year for over 100,000 young people undertaking activities with us, over 1,000 active young volunteers and over 250 young employees.

We are looking at how we can develop the scale, reach and outputs of YHA Campus over the next five years, and connect them together in a meaningful pathway that supports young people's development.

A curriculum is the subjects and experiences that form the basis of a programme of learning. The skills and knowledge that you learn. Based on evidence of our impact, the YHA Curriculum will outline what young people can learn through the YHA Campus. Whether on an activity programme or residential experience or through working or volunteering with the charity.

5. **We will contribute to social cohesion.** We will encourage different sectors of the community who visit us – both overnight and for day visits – to learn from and with each other. We are part of the sharing economy. We will make best use of our places and spaces, and our activities programme, to make stronger links to local communities.

Many don't realise we have cafés, toilets and day facilities. Others don't realise you don't have to be a member to stay. But once they visit many are converts for life.

Operation Threshold is our three-year plan to put our hostels at the core of the community and build on existing great outreach work. We want more people of all ages and backgrounds to use our meeting rooms, cafés and shared spaces.

Enabling priorities

6. **Maintain a viable network of quality hostels** – places and spaces – that matches our strategic ambitions.
7. **Deliver against a framework of industry-standard benchmarks** that draws on the best quality models across charity, social enterprise, hospitality and work with young people. Work with transparency and with a focus on the experiences of our users – excelling in both digital and offline services.
8. Support growth by continuing to **generate an annual cash surplus** that supports our strategic intent, based on **social enterprise principles**.

A social enterprise is an organisation that makes social impact in whole or part through trading. YHA is a charity and a social enterprise. YHA is one of the largest and oldest social enterprises in England and Wales. Our trading activity itself does have direct social impact – with every bed space we sell, we have the potential to impact positively on the person sleeping in it. And the income we generate helps us to run our organisation, pay our staff and maintain our hostels.

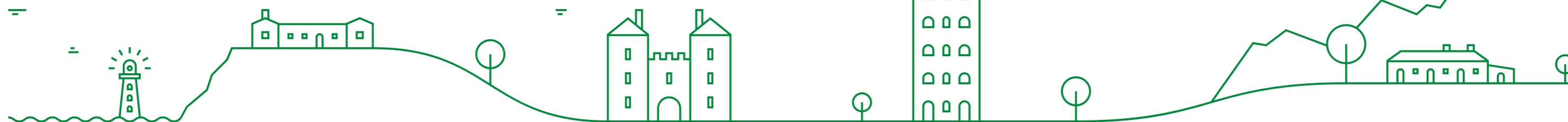
Social enterprise gives YHA scale, the ability to roll things out to a set standard and generate a sustainable income. This sustainability allows us to plan for and fund increased impact and, when combined with fundraised income and membership fees, we are able to develop new programmes connecting even more people to nature, the outdoors, culture and heritage and helping to develop life skills.

9. Recognise that the risks to the environment and to the world and its population are a real and immediate threat by connecting people to nature. We will set a strong example – in how we use our assets and through our work with partners **we will help to improve the environment**.
10. **Build support for the hostelling cause** – drawing on our 90-year history to establish the importance of hostelling for all today; growing both the numbers of members but also how many members are active with YHA; and leading the movement for those who support hostelling as a route to affordable travel and adventure.

We are reclaiming hostelling as a movement and the word hostel as an asset. Hostelling should be an essential part of a young person's toolkit for life.

Hostelling – the practice of staying in a hostel when travelling as part of an international movement committed to eco travel, sustainable tourism and the sharing economy.

Hostel – a lower cost form of short term shared sociable accommodation, including use of a lounge and a kitchen. Private rooms and dormitories are always available. Hostels are part of the sharing economy and allow people to meet others from all over the world, find travel partners and share travel ideas and experiences. Hostels – including youth hostels – are for all ages.





In summary

A strategy is a framework for change.

What does the strategy, this vision and mission, KPIs and targets mean that we are doing differently?

- ✓ **We have started from evidence that what we are already doing is impactful but that we could reach more people, a broader range of people and people who need what we have to offer the most.**
- ✓ **We also know impact is greater if we develop deeper relationships with people so that they stay, join, give and volunteer with us.**
- ✓ **And we know that our quality is good but can be developed – particularly in those things that we currently do as incidental, accidental and at a lesser scale than we do overnight stays e.g. activities, life skills development, day visits and supporting connections to nature and outdoors, heritage and culture.**

What we will do to achieve our goals

We develop business plans which set out the work we are doing to deliver the strategy in practice. Key actions over the coming years include:

Scale

We

will increase our focus on how more groups can use our hostels – particularly schools and youth groups but also communities, groups of friends and those wanting to hire out entire hostels.

will develop our capital strategy to continue to ensure we have the right hostels, in the right places to the right standards.

will consider all of our potential income streams and ensure we have the best mix for a modern charity and thriving social enterprise.

will use our 90th anniversary and launch of the strategy to reach new audiences, partners and profile.

Depth

We

will develop our member offer to encourage members to be even more involved with YHA at every level.

will better understand our estate and – maintaining charity-wide standards – look at how we can make the most of each hostel's unique characteristics.

will continue investment in people, IT and digital services with a particular focus on how this improves user experience and encourages a lifelong journey with YHA.

Access

We

will ensure our governance, staff and users reflect the demographics of England and Wales, with an early focus on youth engagement and better understanding of who currently stays and works with us.

will prioritise our user experience including looking at every stage of the user journey.

will increasingly look at how we use our hostels for both day visits and as part of their local community.

will develop our profile, presence and relationships in Wales.

will develop new programmes aimed at specific audiences including those with the most challenging lives.

Quality

We

will work with partners and funders across the public and voluntary sector to develop our programme offer – continuing to be the leading residential provider and offering an increasing range of high quality activities that connect people to nature and outdoors, culture and heritage.

will set up a coalition – Access Unlimited – bringing together ambitious not-for-profit organisations to help ensure every child has the opportunity for regular trips and stays.

will develop the YHA Campus and Curriculum – expanding our volunteering offer and working to provide new work experiences, internships and routes to employment.

will develop and deliver a quality framework that ensures we are proud of every hostel and that benchmarks us against the best in the charity and hospitality sectors.

will develop the next phase of our environmental strategy, defining how our hostels and hostelling can lead the way in sustainable tourism.

Where does our confidence that we can grow come from?

We

already run 150 hostels, wonderful places and spaces, and we're rated as the number one organisation in the world for guest satisfaction by Hostelling International.

are one of the largest and most successful social enterprises in England and Wales. Through efficient operation of our network, the revenue we make covers the bulk of our costs meaning we are stable and, with this, able to use fundraised income to further support our impact and ambitions.

already work with 1 million people a year. Almost half of these guests are under 26 and we provide activities to over 150,000 young people each year.

have more than 140,000 members whose contributions support our work and whose voices shape our governance.

are part of an international hostelling movement and have 90 years of experience.

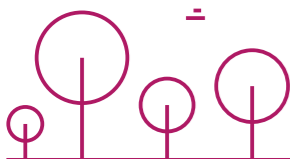
have over 1,300 amazing employees and 16,000 registered volunteers.

work with wonderful partners.



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And how can people be confident in us?

We will report honestly and transparently on our progress against these priorities. This will include measuring how we are doing against a set of key performance indicators. And we will include the stories of those we have worked with and for. In addition to assessing progress against our five-year targets:

We

will measure the number of schools with least resources staying or training young people with YHA.

will measure the number of young people accessing an adventure or experience with YHA.

will measure the number of people who say that they accessed nature, outdoors, culture and heritage as part of their stay.

This will be brought together in our annual impact report and annual accounts, which will also set out our performance against key financial, environmental and risk indicators, and overall levels of satisfaction amongst those who stay, volunteer and work with us. And as part of this, we intend to develop an overall measure of our social value.



Building the strategy. Living the strategy.

In organisations people often focus on the strategy document as the end point. However, in truth it is the mid-way point.

Work on this strategy started in early 2019 – reviewing the impact of our previous work in our 2018/19 impact review and considering how the experience of 90 years could add most value in contemporary society.

Trustees, staff, members, users and partners have shaped our thinking and in May 2019 we launched our strategy conversation document. The responses to this took our work even further forward and will be summarised in a forthcoming document ‘You said, we did: responses to YHA’s strategy conversation document’.

Adventure. For the first time and a lifetime was agreed by the YHA Board in February 2020 and forms the basis of our plans for the years ahead.

Thank you to all who have been on the journey with us so far. And to those who will join us on our next adventures, as we emerge from these uncertain times.

We are YHA.
Because where you go changes who you become.

Visions of 2030

What we could be saying about YHA in 10 years’ time

“YHA provides inclusive adventures in unique buildings in amazing places. We connect people to each other, to nature, to heritage and to new passions. We are the world’s leading hostel provider.

We are one of the largest social enterprises in the UK. We are proud to be a charity. We are proud to have pioneered sustainable tourism and to have reinvented it for our times.

We are a leading youth and education charity. We have connections with every school in England and Wales and work with teachers and youth workers to support access to a rich and rounded curriculum and learning outside the classroom.

We have supported the personal development of young adventurers leading them to new interests in nature and heritage; skilling them to support themselves and their communities and connecting them to others who share the values of the hostelling movement.

At a time when it is increasingly difficult to navigate careers – and with growing gaps in life chances – we have led the way in developing the skills of young people. We have helped them support their own employability. We have helped them develop as active and connected citizens of their community and their country, Europe and the world.

Thousands of young people have used the YHA Campus to develop their life chances and many have secured jobs across the charity, hospitality, outdoor activities, heritage and education sectors.

We can evidence that our work improves mental wellbeing and physical activity and we now play a key part in the health of England and Wales.

We have introduced a generation of citizens to the outdoors and a fierce desire to protect the environment. We have done this through our presence in National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty; through access to the outdoors that all our hostels provide – in cities, countryside and the coast – and through partnerships with environmental charities.

We are recognised as one of the leading guardians of access to heritage and our places and spaces are loved across all parts of society.

We have raised the bar on charity transparency and efficiency. We are one of most trusted charities in the UK.

Our Board and workforce reflect the communities we serve. We have tackled not just the gender pay gap but the gap across all protected characteristics. Our investment in people has benefitted us, the wider community and the industries that we are part of.

And we have redefined the hostelling movement to be a high profile and well-connected cause-based community – placing hostelling at the heart of civil renewal.”

We are YHA.

We transform young lives forever through travel and real adventure.

Because where you go changes who you become

stay | join | give | volunteer yha.org.uk