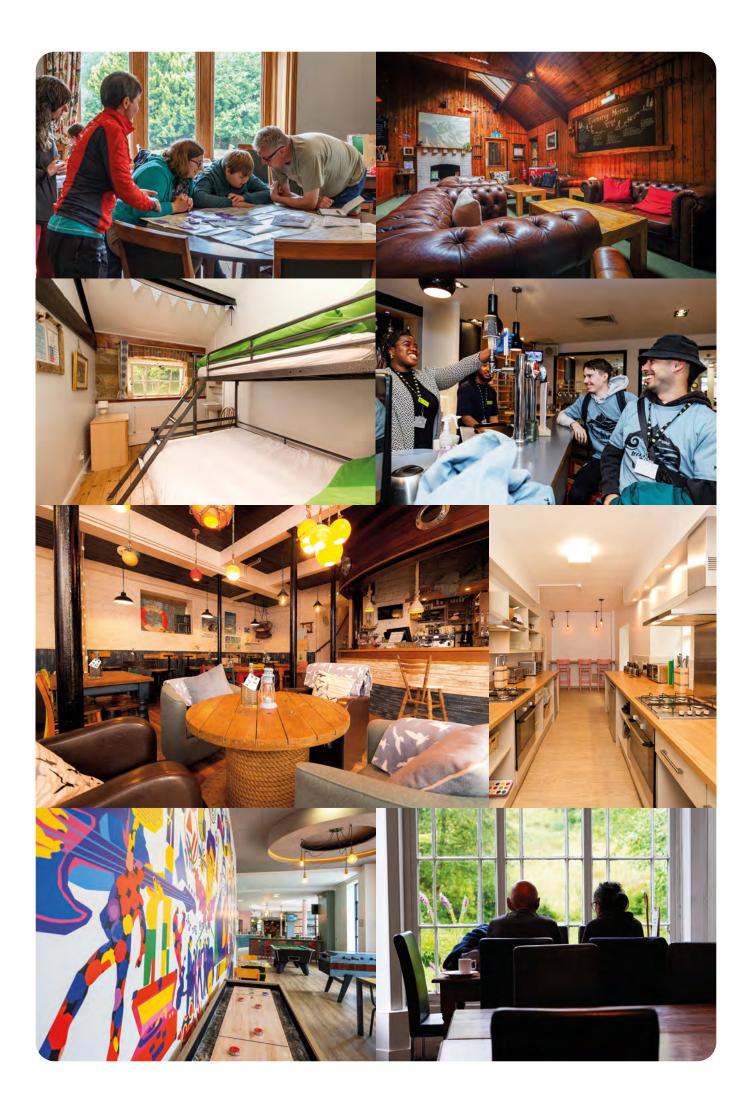
# Adventige For the first time and a figure.

Our 10-year strategy, refreshed.

Published spring 2025

yha



# **Charitable objects**

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.

YHA is a charity and a social enterprise. A social enterprise is an organisation that makes social impact in whole or part through trading. YHA is one of the largest and oldest social enterprises in England and Wales.

Social enterprise trading gives YHA a sustained income. This helps us run our organisation, pay our staff and maintain our hostels. When combined with fundraised income and membership fees, it enables us to develop and deliver programmes that reach and connect more people to the outdoors, nature and heritage.

When you stay with YHA, the benefits don't stop with you — you're helping others access life-changing adventures too.



## We are YHA.

We believe in the power of travel and adventure to connect people to each other, nature and heritage. These connections do wonders for wellbeing.

Since 1930, YHA has operated a unique network of hostels 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 — yet we offer much more than accommodation.

YHA is a sector-leading residential provider, a champion of access to the outdoors for all – especially young people, and an Investors in People Gold employer.

We are a large social enterprise leading the way in social tourism and nurturing partnerships that deliver impact across multiple sectors and at every level — in our communities, in our regions, and nationally.

95 years on from our pioneering beginnings, our founding principles and determination to achieve social good remain at the heart of what we do.

With our course set for long-term sustainability, we stride out on the road to our centenary with a refreshed strategy to enable everyone to access adventure, for the first time and a lifetime.

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



Map updated March 2025



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# Foreword

### We are delighted to share YHA's refreshed strategy for connecting people with each other, nature and heritage through hostels in amazing places.

We have now reached the mid-point of our 10-year strategy *Adventure. For the first time and a lifetime*. The strategy set our direction of travel for the decade, with the aim of increasing access to adventure for all. This remains our North Star and has guided our journey through unprecedented upheaval.

Since we developed our strategy in 2019/20, YHA has been challenged and changed by the pandemic and compounding economic crises. And in this period we have learned a great deal. Through the isolation of lockdowns, we witnessed the profound need for access to green space and the resilience that time in nature brings. Through the cost-of-living crisis, we understood the impact of supporting schools and families struggling financially. And through the turbulence of recent years, we learned anew the power of nurturing confidence and connection in an uncertain world.

During these changing times we've drawn strength from enduring truths. That access to the outdoors, nature and heritage roots and replenishes us, improves health and wellbeing, and inspires care of the environment. Those truths that led to YHA's foundation remain central to our purpose 95 years on.

Born of a determination to improve lives, YHA built the infrastructure through which young people could explore the country for the first time, meet and make friends, broaden their horizons and contribute to the preservation of precious places for future generations.

YHA was established against a backdrop of deep economic hardship to help solve the problems of the day. Today, we too face significant and ongoing challenges. Challenges that mean we must adapt and evolve to deliver the impact people need now and achieve the long-term sustainability that will support beneficiaries into the future.

It is our social impact that drives us. And in the first five years of the strategy, we have achieved important work.

While poverty and other challenges mean too many children start life at a disadvantage, our No Child Left Behind bursary has funded crucial developmental outdoor learning experiences for young people at risk of missing out — ensuring they too can access our sector-leading residentials alongside hundreds of thousands of their peers each year.

With the climate in crisis and nature restoration critical to our future, through Generation Green we've connected 140,000 disadvantaged young people with the natural world — working with our partners to encourage the environmentalists of the future and promote green jobs through activities in protected landscapes.

In a world where all too often background is a barrier, with our Outdoor Citizens community, we've empowered organisations tackling systemic inequities and opened up funding streams to grassroots groups.

At a time when people feel disconnected from each other and the world around them, our Festival of Walking has inspired beginners to explore landscapes more confidently and find kinship in the company of others.

While social media's influence exerts new mental pressures on young people, connection to nature offers an antidote. Our outdoor activities are nurturing confidence, self-esteem, resilience and relationships in the real world.

Facing the reality of health inequalities, thanks to support from Sport England, we're helping to make the benefits of physical activity more widely available – especially to women and girls, and under-represented groups.

These are just some of the ways we're making a difference through targeted programmes that bring new people to YHA and unlock a lifetime of adventures in England and Wales's most inspiring locations.

In launching our refreshed strategy, we reaffirm our commitment to broadening access by celebrating the achievements of the first five years and setting out our plan to build on them in the next – acknowledging that a changed financial picture means we must sharpen our strategy to deepen our impact.

We will approach our centenary with a laser-like focus on increasing the benefit we provide to people – prioritising activities that make the biggest difference and delivering them with purpose and consistency across our unique hostel network.

As we stride onward to our 100th anniversary in 2030 with clarity of purpose, we hope you'll continue to support YHA in its mission to connect people with each other, the outdoors, nature and heritage – especially young people and those accessing adventures for the first time.

Our hostels are much more than safe and welcoming places to rest; they're seedbeds for growing confidence, connection and a sense of belonging. We look forward to bringing this refreshed strategy to fruition.

Thank you.

Margaret and James



Margaret Hart



James Blake Chief Executive

# Building on recent progress

Our 2020 strategy has guided us well over the last five years. Warmly received both within and outside the organisation, it helped put YHA back on the map as a leading national charity for young people, and opened doors for many impact programmes and successful partnerships.

Broadening our beneficiaries beyond young people, the strategy cemented our commitment to increasing access and participation for all – but especially under-served communities. And since the launch of our strategy, we have achieved significant progress in meaningfully growing our reach and embedding equity, diversity and inclusion.

Following the pandemic, we welcomed returning demand from our loyal customers and built back overnights from our base while also finding ways to welcome first-time guests to YHA experiences.

Understanding the pressures on school and family budgets, we've made the case for funded residentials and delivered them across England and Wales. Opportunities to connect to nature, access adventure and try new activities are formative experiences that bring a unique dimension to learning and child development — helping young people grow and develop essential skills for school and life. We champion the right of every child and young person to these experiences.

Thanks to the generosity of our donors, YHA Breaks Programme funding and No Child Left Behind bursaries have made the difference for tens of thousands of disadvantaged young people and families who are only able to benefit from a first night away from home thanks to direct support.





Thanks to Defra funding, as leaders of the Access Unlimited coalition of not-for-profit youth organisations and protected landscapes, we've delivered two ground-breaking Generation Green initiatives and connected 140,000 young people with nature. A proven delivery model, Generation Green has demonstrated the power of aligning public investment with civil society capability and laid the foundation for large-scale, long-term change.

In the next phase of our strategy, we're ambitious to build on these foundations, extend the reach of our youth impact programmes and work closely with government, funders and schools, multiacademy trusts and others to help every child achieve and thrive.

Turning to our programmes for people of all ages, through Outdoor Citizens and the Festival of Walking, we've engaged new allies in the outdoor sector and brought new people over our hostel thresholds. Hostels that are tailor-made for outdoor adventures and where everyone is made to feel that they belong.

#### "

Making residentials an entitlement for every child – what a powerful thing that would be. Certainly for our 500 children, post-COVID, it was a life-changing experience. The power of the outdoors is really unlocked when a person feels a strong sense of belonging. 'I feel comfortable here, I belong here, I feel part of this and I have an equal footing with everybody else here.' Exactly what happens when you check into a youth hostel.

#### "

Helena Brothwell, Interim Education Director – North | Ormiston Academies Trust, organised a summer residential with YHA to support students' return to school in the aftermath of the pandemic, while at David Ross Education Trust

### The unique qualities of hostelling

Our facilities set us apart. With dorms, private rooms, camping and glamping, social spaces, self-catering kitchens, classrooms and cafés, hostels are unique in their offer and broad in their appeal. Safe, sustainable and affordable, hostels make exploring easy and accessible.

Yet our insight tells us that over half of the population remain unaware of YHA and most people have yet to experience the benefits of a YHA stay.

With this refreshed strategy we will place more emphasis on the first-time experience – focusing on reaching new users and beneficiaries. By supporting people to take the first step, our aim is to set them on a path to a lifetime of adventures with YHA, to help them reap the benefits of connection to nature and heritage again and again.

To increase our reach, we will build awareness of our brand, purpose and products, deepen stakeholder engagement and broaden our base of support.

To reach and positively impact the lives of more people from more diverse backgrounds, we will strengthen our appeal. We will continue the work of modernising our accessibility and improving our customer journey – becoming more efficient as an organisation to deliver value for money and build surpluses to invest in our strategic network which includes an array of heritage assets.

Our new franchise model, launched in 2023, has brought innovative entrepreneurs on board and vital investment into hostel properties. Franchise partners bring a wealth of hospitality experience and provide a quality offer aligned to our purpose. There are now 12 franchised hostels operating alongside our strategic network, strengthening hostelling's presence across England and Wales.

In the delivery of this refreshed strategy and through our partnerships we will reach first-time adventurers and capitalise on our unique offer across a range of locations and experiences.

Throughout life, opportunities to connect to nature and heritage improve our wellbeing. Being active outdoors opens up more than just beautiful views — it can transform our outlook, raise our aspirations, fortify our resilience and give us new perspectives.

Our commitment to breaking down barriers is age old. As we approach our centenary we will continue to support the access agenda from the top down and the ground up – contributing our knowledge and experience to policy consultations and strengthening the grassroots organisations working to end inequity of opportunity so that people of all backgrounds and abilities are supported to engage with and benefit from nature and heritage.





#### 66

Oh what a wonderful weekend. We've not had such a great weekend for ages and it really worked for everyone. My husband and I felt like we'd met our adoption 'tribe' – people who 'get' us, finally.

#### "

Parent attending a Breaks Programme-funded trip to YHA Edale Activity Centre for groups of families who have adopted children with additional needs

#### "

All of our parents and families are ambitious — they want their children to have these experiences but they don't always have the resources to enable them to go. The funding from YHA is absolutely vital to our children being able to access a residential and these amazing experiences in the outdoors. Without it they wouldn't have developed into the young people they are.

Andrew Wills, assistant headteacher at Welford Primary School — a Birmingham School in receipt of No Child Left Behind bursary funding

#### "



#### "

I love this place. You can be open, you can be active, be free, do lots of things. The staff treat you as adults. It's been amazing. Best time ever.

"

Young adult on a break funded by the South Wales Police and Crime Commissioner through Llamau Cardiff, a registered charity working to eradicate homelessness for young people and vulnerable women

#### "

I have had an amazing weekend. I was diagnosed as autistic recently and I was worried how I would cope being social for a whole weekend. I did it! Thanks to the brilliant, strong and inspirational women around me I felt supported and welcome. Thank you for the opportunity.

#### "

YHA Festival of Walking participant from Love Her Wild – a non-profit women's adventure community

# A more focussed and efficient charity

Our strategy refresh is informed by our journey towards recovery.

It's well known that the hospitality industry was severely impacted by the pandemic. But losses to hostelling organisations ran disproportionately higher due to restrictions on the use of shared spaces. In total, our lost income over the worst affected years amounted to £69m.

While we came through COVID, we emerged with a structural deficit worsened by huge rises in core cost lines as a result of the energy and cost-of-living crises, and compounded by higher interest rates on the borrowing needed to see the charity through the pandemic.

To mitigate the impact on the charity, in May 2023, we set out a three-year recovery and transformation plan to return YHA to a trading surplus by the end of 2025/26, based on:

- 30% growth in trading contribution of the strategic network a core network of YHA-owned hostels
- 20% savings in central costs facilitated by a smaller network, efficiencies, and a revised central staff structure
- a hostel network strategy that would move some hostels out of direct YHA management, and where possible, into franchise

We are on track with our recovery plan. But the quicker we complete it, the better.

As part of the process of refreshing our strategy, we have revised our plan to expedite a return to break even and speed up recovery. The activities outlined on pages 22 and 23 of this refreshed strategy will drive this accelerated journey to surplus and sustainability.

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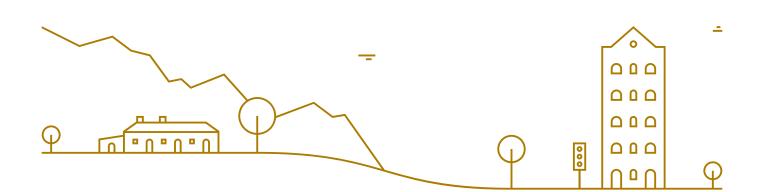
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# Developing our roadmap for impact

Put simply, a theory of change explains how and why certain actions will lead to desired outcomes.

Over the last year we have revised our theory of change and mapped our activities against our target audiences, informed by insights from our network and membership, to create a roadmap for growing our impact.

Cross-organisational workshops involving Trustees and colleagues from all areas of the charity began in May 2023 and concluded work in March 2024.

In these workshops, we:

- 1. discussed the societal need that drives our purpose
- 2. explored the unique qualities of hostelling, the key components of YHA's impact, and the special nature of what we do as a charity
- 3. identified our targets for impact, thinking about how we might structure our programmes and activities according to the level of need of our target beneficiaries

From this we have reviewed and reduced the number of strategic priorities. In narrowing this list, we have identified the things we do best, and stripped out those that others can do better.

With greater clarity on how we purposely deliver impact through hostel activities, we can now set meaningful measures to track specific outcomes, enabling us to make best use of our limited resources to maximise our contribution to social change.

Our new theory of change is embedded into business planning in the short, medium and long term and will be a critical tool in decision-making.

# **Our new theory of** change



### 

There are disparities in access to experiences that connect people to nature and heritage. We know that connecting with others and adventures away from home involving nature, heritage, and physical activity builds key skills and attributes that contribute towards improved wellbeing.

### 🐼 Vision

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

### **Mission**

Enabling everyone, especially young people, to connect with people, nature and heritage through hostels in amazing places

### 🔀 Impact

Improved access to experiences in nature and heritage contributes towards enhanced wellbeing.\*

### C Outcomes

### [7]

Improved confidence to try something new

### [7]

Improved connection with people, nature and heritage

### [7]

Improved sense of belonging at YHA

We've identified confidence, connection and belonging as the three elements of wellbeing that we enhance through our work.

### Confidence

From route maps and social walks tailored for different abilities, to that final pep talk before a pupil takes the leap of faith on our high ropes course, YHA specialises in building confidence in people of all ages. We turn trepidation into "I want to do that again!" and support people to push themselves to new successes and self-led adventures.

### Connection

Be it a hostel manager recommending local hidden gems over breakfast, or the enthusiasm and knowledge of an activity leader helping a child abseil a rock face, we're passionate about helping people connect with the world around them.

### Belonging

With social spaces, practical facilities and grounds to relax (or run around) in, YHA places are built for people to feel at home. We pride ourselves on active inclusion and promote social interaction to help everyone feel they belong at YHA. You don't have to be a member to stay, but membership brings further benefits to the 123,000+ people who've joined and are an important part of YHA.



# Our strategic priorities

We have refined down the 10 impact and enabling priorities of our 2020 strategy to a focussed set of five.

Two enabling priorities form the bedrock of our strategy, the foundations and infrastructure through which we will deliver on our purpose.

- We will build a strong base of support for YHA and the hostelling cause through deeper engagement with staff, members, donors, volunteers, partners and funders.
- We will maintain a viable network of quality, affordable and sustainable hostels, supported by an efficient central office, that generates an annual surplus.

Three audience-based impact priorities sit on top.

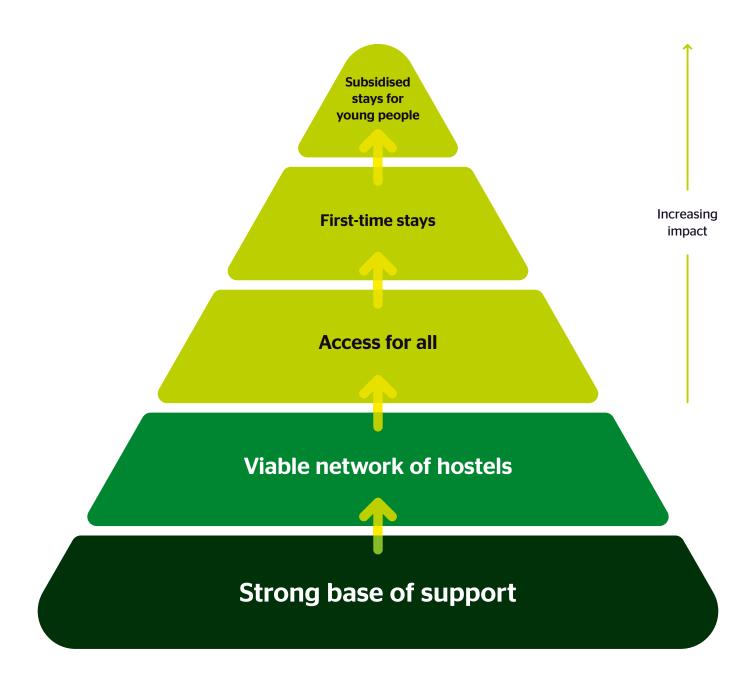
- We will enable everyone to access our places and use our network to connect our guests to people, nature, heritage and physical activity in and around our hostels.
- We will increase access to overnight stays in hostels, supporting opportunities for anyone who would benefit from the first-time experience and empowering them towards self-led adventures.
- We will subsidise first-time overnight stays for young people least likely to access experiences in nature and heritage, targeting those who stand to benefit the most from an overnight stay.

### **Our approach**

In delivering our refreshed strategy, we will concentrate first on our enabling priorities to set YHA on a firm footing for the future.

With our recovery plan complete and the charity back to surplus, we can focus more heavily on our impact priorities.

Over the lifetime of the strategy, we'll benefit from a growing bank of data and insight that'll enable us to fine-tune programmes and activities to maximise our impact.



# How we will measure our progress

We have clear measures for each of our five priorities.

### Subsidised stays for young people

By 2030, we will have doubled the proportion of disadvantaged young people\* staying with us – from 10% to 20% of guests under 26.

### 2. First time stays

By 2030, we will have increased by 50% the proportion of people staying from educational and funded groups – growing to one third of all guests.

### **3. Access for all**

By 2030, those who stay with us, benefit from our provision and support, our employees and volunteers, reflect the demographics of England and Wales. And across everyone who stays with us by 2030 we will have seen year-on-year growth in guests' confidence, connection and belonging.

We will benchmark and track uplift in these three wellbeing outcomes to demonstrate the impact of a YHA stay on guests and beneficiaries.

### 4. Viable network of hostels

By 2030, we will be back in surplus, enabled by year-on-year growth in the occupancy of our sites and our trading income, and by meeting national charity and hospitality benchmarks for operational efficiency.

By generating a net annual surplus and growing our reserves we can support longer-term investment in our places, programmes and people.

### 5. Strong base of support

By 2030, we will have developed a broader base of support for YHA, enabled by year-on-year growth in supporter numbers, net promoter scores ahead of the sector average, and an employee engagement score above 75%.



# What we will do to achieve our objectives

These are the high-level activities through which we will deliver the strategy.

### 1. Maximise purposeful impact

We'll make every stay with YHA meaningful, ensuring more people get to enjoy the outdoors, connect to nature and heritage, and feel part of something special.

### We will

- bring YHA's impact plan to life by making sure every hostel delivers experiences and activities that build guests' confidence, connection and sense of belonging
- deliver programmes that increase the number of beneficiaries of supported and targeted stays, making it easier for more people to access green spaces, explore treasured places, and take part in physical activities especially those facing barriers
- track and share the difference we're making, using data and insights to improve what we do

### 2. Work smarter and leaner

We'll run YHA more efficiently, making it easier for our teams to do their jobs and deliver an improved customer experience.

#### We will

- streamline activities and boost efficiency in our central teams to focus on the tasks that will deliver our strategic priorities and best support our hostels
- simplify our processes, improve our planning, cut out waste and make the most of our resources to enhance financial performance and customer experience
- upgrade our IT and website to make them easier to use for everyone

### 3. Create sustained demand

We'll grow YHA by attracting more guests, promoting what makes us special and providing quality accommodation in places people want to stay.

#### We will

- put our commercial strategy into action to attract more guests, increase income and strengthen YHA's financial sustainability
- raise awareness of YHA's offer, charitable purpose and variety of products
- complete our hostel network strategy

### 4. Build for the future

We'll strengthen YHA for the future by becoming financially secure, evolving our hostels and reducing our impact on the environment.

### We will

- secure YHA's future by getting back to surplus and reducing debt
- bring together our vision for 'hostel of the future' and develop our investment plans to create better spaces and experiences for our guests
- make YHA more environmentally sustainable, reducing our carbon footprint towards achieving Net Zero by 2050

# 5. Embed passion and deepen engagement

We'll make our members and supporters proud — by delivering brilliant hostel stays, shouting about the work we do, and encouraging people to be part of our mission.

### We will

- keep guests coming back by focusing on our hospitality standards, great service and delivering a product that matches their needs and expectations
- deepen supporter engagement by demonstrating our impact and encouraging more people to get involved – through the introduction of digital, youth and life membership alongside our existing standard membership, and fundraising activities
- empower, support and recognise our people's contributions to the delivery of the strategy to enhance employee engagement

# What's changed?

#### □→ ←□

Our core focus of access to experiences in nature and heritage aligns our social enterprise activities, or universal offer, with our targeted support programmes.

#### □→ ←□

The first-time experience is placed at the heart of our offer, for young people and wider, to ensure we reach those who face the biggest barriers but would benefit the most from improved access to nature and heritage.

#### □→ ←□

We have replaced the broader outcomes of benefits to health, wellbeing and life skills with the specific aspects of wellbeing we know we can improve: confidence, connection and sense of belonging.

#### □→ ←□

We're bringing clarity and simplicity to our impact reporting so we can meaningfully measure progress against strategic priorities, guest profile, engagement and performance targets.

#### □→ ←□

We're bringing greater intentionality to our impact, being deliberate in our actions and activities to deliver outcomes consciously and consistently in our hostels.

#### □→ ←□

Connection and belonging will be embedded into our supporter journey. Our aim is to keep people engaged with YHA from their very first stay. From that earliest childhood adventure or school trip, we'll equip people with the benefits of hostelling for life.

#### □→ ←□

We'll pursue a tighter portfolio of activities to enable a clear focus on a smaller number of strategic priorities.

#### □→ ←□

We have embedded our theory of change as a strategic tool for decision-making.

# Our HEART people values

We subscribe to a set of core values and behaviours to nurture a positive environment for our people and volunteers so we can best serve our users and beneficiaries, and deliver on our purpose.



### Helpful

Helpfulness is about making life easier for other people, being hospitable and creating a pleasant work 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 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 the working styles of colleagues, volunteers and supporters. It's about promoting equality and diversity.





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.

# Looking forward to our centenary

### What we could be saying about YHA at 100

A century ago, our founders imagined a world where the joy of adventure, the solace of nature, and the shared bond of human connection were within reach for all. Today, their vision lives and breathes in YHA.

We provide brilliant stays in amazing places – unique buildings nestled in stunning landscapes, cities rich with history and culture, and along coasts that inspire awe. Through these places, we connect people: to each other, to the wonders of nature, and to the treasures of our shared heritage.

YHA is one of the UK's largest social enterprises and a leading light in the Hostelling International movement, sharing best practice in purpose and impact with associations across the world, and learning from others in our turn.

Through the decades we've broadened horizons, changed lives and evolved the charity to meet the changing needs of society.

Our work as a sector-leading residential provider has enabled young adventurers across England and Wales to explore, learn, and grow. Through partnerships with schools and youth groups, we've made outdoor learning a cornerstone of education, enriching lives and empowering young people to push beyond their boundaries.

Together, we've cultivated generations of explorers with a profound connection to nature and heritage, equipped with the skills and confidence to contribute meaningfully to protection of the environment and their communities.

YHA has introduced countless people to the wonders of the outdoors. Our presence in National Parks, National Landscapes, and other precious green and blue spaces ensures everyone can access and cherish them.

Our work enhances mental wellbeing – building confidence, connection and belonging – and promotes physical activity, elevating the health and happiness of all who engage with us.

Our spaces are beacons of inclusivity, beloved across society, spaces where everyone feels warmly welcome, and celebrated as gateways to new experiences. We are a trusted provider and partner with a clear purpose and products people recommend.

We've shown what can be grown from the ashes of adversity, not only surviving the turbulence of the last decade but laying the foundations for the charity to thrive long into the future. With sustainable finances YHA can look to invest and grow.

YHA is more than a network of hostels; it is a testament to the enduring power of connection, exploration, and care for one another and the world we share. We think our founders would be proud.



# Next steps on our journey

We are now working on the delivery plans that will make our goals a reality and the evaluation framework that will enable us to quantify our impact.

We want to make a big difference. But we can't do it alone.

Strategic partnerships will help us achieve our ambitions and amplify our message.

If you would like to learn more about YHA's strategy and discuss how we can work together, we'd love to hear from you.

Visit yha.org.uk or contact strategy@yha.org.uk

## Help us connect people to each other, nature and heritage

#### Stay with us

Book with YHA and feel the benefit of time away while supporting a social enterprise dedicated to improving access for all.

#### Support us

Become a member or donate and enjoy the rewards of making a difference. Together we can help more people access adventures that build confidence, connection and belonging.

#### Learn with us

Make YHA your residential provider of choice and bring the benefits of outdoor learning to your school or group.

#### Partner with us

Team up with us to fund, design and deliver targeted programmes that connect people to each other, the outdoors, nature and heritage.

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

yha.org.uk

YHA (ENGLAND AND WALES), Trevelyan House, Dimple Road, Matlock, Derbyshire DE4 3YH



FUNDRAISING REGULATOR