Braille books are just one of the ways you can access the world of literature. With World Book Day approaching, we take a closer look at books, reading and audio equipment inside.
From the Editor…

The first signs of spring are appearing and it is heartening to see nature coming back to life. At the same time, life at MySight York continues apace, with regular activities continuing alongside one-off social events, meetings and consultations. We have tried to include as many as possible of these events in this Newsletter, but there are always more that we would like to publicise. Our Facebook and Twitter pages are full of information about what’s coming up. Our website also holds up to date information on our own activities. We would like to know how best to keep you abreast of all of this activity—see Karen’s article for more detail.

World Book Day on 5th March gives us an opportunity to focus on the world of reading. Karen Newell shares her extensive knowledge of literature for children on p12, while our Equipment & Information team focus on audio devices including book players on p10. Don’t forget, we can offer specialist advice and equipment to help with all aspects of reading. Just get in touch and we will be happy to talk you through the options. We also make a mean cup of tea.

Deborah
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From the Chief Executive

MySight York - what will 2020 bring?

We have been in our new premises at Merchantgate for over 6 months now and actually it feels like we have always been here which must be a good sign. Thank you everyone for your patience whilst we got everything back on track.

Now we are well and truly settled in there will be lots of things to look forward to in 2020.

We welcome four new Trustees to the Board and look forward to working with them and utilizing their varied skills and expertise to ensure we are well placed and resourced to respond with flexibility to the changing needs of people with sight loss.

We are passionate about ensuring that the voices of people with sight loss are heard and we will continue to campaign at a local and national level to bring about improvement in services.

Ophthalmology is now the busiest outpatient specialty with a predicted increase in demand of 30-40% over the next 20 years. This means there will be more people than ever requiring sight loss advice and support. The City of York is no exception with the number of people living with sight threatening eye conditions set to increase significantly.

Over this next year we will continue to develop our core services as the funding landscape continues to change to ensure we effectively meet the needs of all our members and service users.

Communication is a key part of what we do here at MySight York and to improve the way we share important information with you we would like to be able to send you a quick text message. Please provide us with your mobile number if you haven’t already done so. We can then send you a reminder about key events you are involved in or let you know quickly and easily if
One of the things that we need to think carefully about is this Newsletter. It costs over £2000 a year to produce and distribute 4 editions in various accessible formats. It takes a lot of staff time and resources and we just want to make sure this is money well spent. Last year we received specific funding from Feoffees of St Michael, Spurriergate to cover the costs.

I hope everyone enjoys reading the various articles and that we provide valuable information and advice but should we be doing something different?

Would you prefer shorter more frequent bulletins?

Can we send the newsletter or bulletins to you by email?

If so, have we got your email address?

Do you have ideas of specific articles you would like to see included?

This Newsletter is for you and so I would be extremely grateful if you could contact me and let me know your thoughts and ideas. We send this to everyone in good faith and hope that you read it and find it interesting and useful but we actually don’t know any of this for sure. I am asking you therefore to contact me and reassure me that you look forward to receiving this Newsletter, that you take note of its contents and it provides you with relevant information that is helpful and informative.

Please call me on 01904 731121, email Karen.froggatt@mysightyork.org or pop in and see me next time you visit.

Once we have collated your feedback we can make some informed decisions along with the Board of Trustees and ensure we continue to communicate with everyone in the most appropriate and cost effective way.

Your help is very much appreciated so please share your thoughts and ideas as we are keen to hear from as many people as possible. Thank you and please watch this space…

Karen

See our interview with Karen on p9 for more news of our Chief
News in Brief

Update on Sunflower Lanyard
The sunflower lanyard, which indicates that you have a hidden disability, is gradually being adopted by more organisations across the country, including the whole of the LNER rail network. In August 2019, children’s museum Eureka! joined the scheme. We are also pleased to hear that P&O Ferries are issuing lanyards for use on their Hull-Rotterdam and Hull-Zeebrugge lines. The scheme is also recognised throughout the Vangarde shopping centre, as well as in M&S, Sainsbury’s, Argos and Tesco shops nationwide—great news!

Ask at the customer service desk or booking office, or pop in to our offices if you would like a lanyard.

British Blind Sport Activity Finder
January saw the launch of the British Blind Sport Activity Finder: a new way to search over 1,000 sight loss-friendly clubs and community groups across the UK. You just type your postcode into their website, specify the distance you are able to travel, and the Activity Finder finds all the relevant groups in your area:
https://britishblindsport.org.uk/activity-finder/

York Disability Tennis Network
York Disability Tennis Network provides specialist disability sessions, including Blind Tennis, at several venues around York for those who want to play socially or compete. For more details see:
https://www.ydtn.org.uk/

MySight York can provide a volunteer if you need someone to help you to attend an activity in your community. Whether it’s tennis or billiards, meditation or local history, just get in touch with our Community Project team.
World Book Day 2020

Thanks to National Book Tokens, publishers and booksellers, World Book Day will be distributing more than 15 million £1 book tokens to children and young people with 15 exclusive new titles to choose from.

But how do you get your hands on a large print, audio or braille copy?

For large print contact Guide Dogs on 0118 9838275.

For braille and audio contact RNIB on 0303 123 9999.

World Book Day tokens are valid from 27th February to Sunday 29th March 2020.

Free Astronomy Workshop

The University of York Physics Department presents Tactile Universe, a free astronomy workshop for people with a visual impairment and their families. Recommended for children aged 7 to 14, the event will include a range of accessible activities including 3D models.

Saturday 7th March at Tang Hall and York Explore libraries. Book your free places in advance:

www.tactileuniverse-tanghall.eventbrite.co.uk
www.tactileuniverse-york.eventbrite.co.uk

Macular Society Working Age & Young People’s service

The Macular Society has launched a dedicated service for younger people and those of working age with macular disease. The new service aims to provide a full range of support for young people and their families, including information on work, benefits, welfare and housing and digital services. There will also be a monthly telephone support forum for parents of children with macular conditions, and a Facebook group.

Contact Colin Daniels on 0300 3030 111 or email help@macularsociety.org
Accessible Information Standard – a reminder

On 1st August 2016, all organisations that provide NHS care and/or publicly-funded adult social care became legally required to follow the Accessible Information Standard. This means that anyone who has specific communication needs such as Large Print, Audio, Braille or Sign Language should have those needs recorded by the health care provider.

MySight York has a contract with York Hospital Trust to provide alternative formats for visually impaired patients. However, we are aware that some GPs and hospital departments may not be adhering to the standard and people are not receiving information in a format they can read.

If you would like to receive communication in an alternative format, please contact your GP or hospital department and ask them to mark your record with your requirements. If you have already done this but your health care provider is not complying with your request, we will be happy to support you to take the issue further. Alternatively, you can contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) at York Hospital on 01904 726262.

York Literature Festival

Poetry for All will once again be running a session as part of York Literature Festival at York Theatre Royal on Friday 27th March at 7.45pm. The event is open to all but will be especially adapted for people with sight loss, hearing loss or other disabilities. Tickets cost £6 and are available from the Theatre Royal box office:

https://www.yorktheatreroyal.co.uk/show/poetry-for-all/

New NHS app launched

The NHS has brought out a new app which can be used to order prescriptions, book and manage appointments, check symptoms or view your medical history. Better still, Apple users can set it up entirely using voiceover. 95% of UK GP surgeries are now linked up to this system.

https://apps.apple.com/gb/app/nhs-app/id1388411277
Interview with the Chief

We recently heard that our Chief Executive Karen Froggatt is to step down from her current role at the end of March to spend time with her family. We took the opportunity to interview Karen about her achievements at the helm and her vision for the future of MySight York.

What do you consider your greatest achievement here? It’s hard to think of one—I see it as our achievement, not mine alone. It has to be sourcing new premises and getting us up and running really quickly to provide a seamless service to our members.

What have you enjoyed most during your time here? Meeting all the wonderful members and people with sight loss. I always feel humbled and amazed by what people with sight loss can do and their ability to be positive and try new things. It’s really inspirational.

What has been your greatest challenge? There have been many! But I thrive on a challenge. Probably making sure that we have a steady income stream from a diverse range of sources, so that we maintain the freedom to go forward in the way that we want.

What do you see as the biggest challenge for visually impaired people in the next ten years? It’s both a challenge and an opportunity: keeping up to speed and abreast of all the amazing new technology that comes out. Of course that’s a challenge for us too, as we work to support people to navigate what’s out there.

Where would you like to see more public money being spent? Mental health services and Social Services need a much better focus. And statutory and voluntary services need to work more closely together to create holistic support for the people they serve.

What are you most looking forward to in the future? Spending time with my family and my grandchildren. And watching with interest as MySight York develops—as well as being there to help if ever I can.

Tell me one thing you will miss Every single person in the team!
Amazon Alexa £49.99-£189.99

Alexa is a home assistant produced by Amazon. It requires the internet and a smartphone, tablet or computer to set up, which you do by downloading the Alexa app.

Alexa has a wide range of capabilities, all controlled by voice commands, so it can be used hands-free. For example you could say “Alexa play Radio York”. It also has Bluetooth capability, meaning you can connect it to devices such as computers, laptops, tablets and phones and play audio files from them through its built-in speakers.

Some features require you to download specific (usually free) apps or to enable an Alexa ‘skill’. This can usually be done by asking Alexa herself. For example, you can play audiobooks using the Audible app.

You can also personalise Alexa to suit your needs. Different people can each create a separate account, allowing them to use the same features with their own personal settings. So if two people were listening to an audiobook each of you could switch to your own account and pick up from where you left off, without affecting the other person’s experience.

Alexa can do anything from explaining the weather and playing your favourite music to telling you a no doubt terrible joke. It’s fun and interactive for all the family with no end to the games and features to explore.

Portable Solo USB Player £66.65

This new USB player is small and portable enough to fit into your pocket, allowing you to listen to your favourite talking book, music playlist or podcast on the go. One thing to note is that the Solo player requires the use of headphones as it has no external speaker-perfect for use on public transport. Bluetooth is built in, allowing you to connect the player to a phone or tablet by searching on your device.
The Solo player has raised buttons with tactile markings so you can navigate through books or playlists with ease, and a useful volume control on the side. It is charged with a built-in rechargeable battery that plugs into a mains socket.

A useful feature is the lock button on the side. This allows you to lock the keypad, so that the buttons will not be activated even if they are pressed while the device is in your pocket. There is also a memory function that ensures you don’t lose your place when you want to start back where you left off.

This product is a great addition to the Kings Audio range and is perfect for people who are always on the go or for traveling.

Based on the design of the familiar Communiclock, this is a simple and cheap way to listen to your audio books on USB. It has a large white play/pause button on the top face with back and forward buttons on the front on either side of the volume setting. It can bookmark up to 20 USBs and has a battery life of up to 8 hours. It also includes Bluetooth for remote connection to devices like a mobile phone.

Optelec/Dolphin Focus Day

We are pleased to be hosting technology companies Optelec and Dolphin once again on Wednesday 15th April. Drop in between 10am and 2pm to discuss your needs and try out their latest magnification, reading and computer accessibility products.
Families Corner

Karen Newell continues her column for children and families

Story time can be great fun and very accessible for children with visual impairments. There are so many ways to experience a book. Can’t see the words very well? No problem; let’s explore a few ways to bring stories alive and set everyone’s imagination alight.

**Tactile books**

Children love a tactile book. It can bring elements of the story alive through your fingers and help develop concepts through touch and feel. Our favourites have to be *Off to the Park* and *Off to The Beach* by Child’s Play (www.childs-play.com).

![Image of Off to the Park and Off to The Beach](image)

DK Books and RNIB have partnered on a series of books that include braille too. (See the front cover for an example.) There are lots of other options available but do check the quality of the tactile materials and shapes. It can be very annoying when trying to understand the shape and texture of a crocodile tail when all they give you is a square of fabric.

If you have a favourite picture book that isn’t available as a tactile book then DIY. Just grab some material, arts resources and a glue gun and create your very own.

**Story boxes, bags, baskets and buckets**

A Story Box is a great multi sensory way for young children with visual impairments to experience a story. It is simply a collection of items in a box or bag that are chosen to express the story. It is both a family activity and an early literacy event that can easily fit into your daily routines, as well as a tool to enhance the learning of concepts. Once you venture into this, be warned: it is quite addictive and the charity shop becomes your friend.

I try to ensure there is a representation of the main characters, the environment, key props (like a nut in *The Gruffalo*) and the key elements of the story. You can enhance all this with sound, smells and even taste. *The Tiger who Came to Tea* offers a
great supper opportunity! My advice is to dive right into story and rhyme time and remember all the senses, but leave yourself enough time to create the resources and explore them.

Audio books
These are a great way to experience storytime independently or together. We use RNIB Overdrive (https://www.rnib.org.uk/talking-books-digital-download) as well as CDs and Amazon Alexa. My son has moved from Nursery Rhymes to the Julia Donaldson collection and on to Roald Dahl, Enid Blyton, David Walliams and Harry Potter.

We have enhanced the audio experience with story sacs alongside the audio. In York we have also been working with the Library service to include more story sac options, which is great for all different types of learners and readers. Both my children, sighted and visually impaired, love story time so much more with the enhanced elements.

We also regularly receive books from Living Paintings (www.livingpaintings.org) and Clear Vision (www.clearvisionproject.org). These offer braille options, tactile drawings and an audio lead. Positive representation

It also worth looking for stories that incidentally include children with sight loss. It is so important that children see themselves included in a positive way in both books and toys. A list can be found on the Book Trust website (www.booktrust.org.uk) and there is more information at www.inclusiveminds.com. A couple of my favourite stories are Cerrie Burnell’s Harper and the Scarlet Umbrella and Max the Champion.
Courses and Events

Finding your Feet course

Are you new to living with sight loss or have changes to your sight impacted on your daily life? Our FREE 2 day Finding your Feet confidence building course may be for you.

Wednesday 11th and 18th March 2020 10am to 3.30pm

Lunch and refreshments provided

- Barriers and solutions to getting out and about
- RNIB Connect
- Wellbeing & how to improve it
- Technology and how it can help with daily tasks
- Tour our equipment centre and explore practical solutions to day-to-day difficulties
- Share information about local groups and activities

Contact Caroline Robertson on 01904 731124 or the Eye Clinic Liaison officer at York Hospital on 01904 721858 for more details.

A regular community presence

Sally Chignell, our Community Engagement Officer, can often be seen at community hubs around York. She attends the Red Tower, Foss Islands Road (redtoweryork.org.uk) on the first Monday of the month from 11.30-1.30 and Lidgett Grove Community Centre on the second Wednesday of alternate months, 9.30 – 11.30 (www.treasurechest.org.uk/lidgett-grove-community-cafe-a/4591960416).

If you would like to see us with an awareness-raising stand or have a talk in your local community club, please contact Sally on 731127 or Sally.chignell@mysightyork.org
Selby Superbowl trips

21st February and 27th March

After our successful trip to Selby Superbowl last year, we are pleased to announce not one but TWO further trips this spring. On both dates the coach will leave from Memorial Gardens, Leeman Road at 9:45, returning at 3:45. These FREE sessions include two games and lunch. Please contact Mike Hickman to book on mike.hickman@mysightyork.org or 01904 731126.

VI Talk will be running an arts and crafts event at our offices on Saturday 4th April, 10 - 4. Lunch and refreshments will be provided. Activities will include bath bomb making, air drying clay, card making and jewellery making. There will be a nominal charge of £5 to cover the cost of materials. Volunteers will be available to help throughout the day. To book please email info@vitalk.co.uk

Audio Described Theatre

York Theatre Royal  
(tel 01904 623568)

Alone in Berlin  
Saturday 21st March 2.30pm

No Horizon—a musical about a blind man’s journey in 17th Century England  
Thursday 9th April 7.30pm

Leeds Grand Theatre  
(tel 0844 848 2700)

Northern Ballet - Geisha  
Sat 21st March 2.30pm

With a free touch tour at 12.00pm
Our Home Visiting service can help you do the things that matter to you by providing you with support and friendship from one of our dedicated volunteer home visitors.

Volunteers can help with small tasks such as reading correspondence, reading a book to you, taking you out or helping you take part in activities. Sometimes it can be as simple as a volunteer sitting and having a chat; a talk can make all the difference.

Volunteers usually visit weekly for between 1 and 3 hours. The service is free and anyone living in the York area who is struggling due to sight loss, whether practically or emotionally, can access the service. All volunteers are police checked and have undergone extensive training.

If you are interested in having a volunteer home visitor then please contact me. I will arrange a time to visit you to discuss the kind of things you would like to do with a volunteer, your interests and availability. I will then try my hardest to find you a suitable volunteer. This can sometimes take a few weeks or even months but I will do my best to find the right person for you.

I often see people who have a volunteer home visitor and I am regularly blown away by the difference they make to someone living with sight loss. One client said, ‘The home visiting service is absolutely champion. I got back to being me’. My favourite quote about the service was from a client who said that his volunteer cuts the loneliness out of his life. To me this sums up the whole service. To find out more please contact me on 01904 731122.
### Regular Activities

Full monthly lists are available from Caroline Robertson on 731124 or on the Events page of our website: [www.mysightyork.org](http://www.mysightyork.org)

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<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Days/Time Details</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Tai Chi</strong></td>
<td>Weekly on Mondays 13:15 – 14:30 Sessions run for 5 weeks from 24.2.20</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Booking essential</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Book Group</strong></td>
<td>1(^{st}) Tuesday of the month 10:30-12:00</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Discussion</strong></td>
<td>4(^{th}) Wednesday of the month 10:30-12:00</td>
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<td><strong>Boccia</strong></td>
<td>Fortnightly on Fridays 10:00-11:30 No Boccia on 10.4.20 or 8.5.20</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Games</strong></td>
<td>3(^{rd}) Wednesday of the month 10:30-12:00</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Exercise</strong></td>
<td>Weekly on Thursdays 10:30-12:00</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Knitting</strong></td>
<td>2(^{nd}) &amp; 4(^{th}) Tuesday of the month 10:30-12:00 No Knitting on 14.4.20</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Support with MySight Group</strong></td>
<td>First Wednesday of alternate months 10:30-12:00 Next meeting on 4.3.20</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Mobile Technology Group</strong></td>
<td>1(^{st}) Thursday of the month 12:00-2:00</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>1 to 1 Technology Support</strong></td>
<td>Mondays Booking required</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Esme’s Room</strong></td>
<td>Last Wednesday of the month 10:00-12:00</td>
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### Office Closures

MySight York will be closed on the following dates:
- **Staff/Trustees away day:** 25th March
- **Stocktake:** 2\(^{nd}\) and 3\(^{rd}\) April
- **Easter break:** 3pm Thursday 9\(^{th}\) April to 10am Wednesday 15\(^{th}\) April
- **May Bank Holiday:** Friday 8\(^{th}\) May VE Day celebrations
- **Bank holiday Monday:** 25\(^{th}\) May
Whether you have been volunteering at events, raising money for us or simply supporting our work, thank you for your support this year. Our **Carol Singing** events at the Coppergate Centre and York Train Station were a great success, raising a total of £764.28 - a big well done and thank you to everyone who helped! We will be hosting Carol Singing again this year but in some NEW venues. Watch this space...

We recently welcomed Lizzy Powell as our new Partnership and Fundraising Officer. Lizzy says: ‘I was born and raised in South Manchester, and have just graduated in Christian Theology from York St John University. As a result of my voluntary work experience, I developed a passion to work in the Charity Sector. Before moving to York, I took part in a programme called NCS: The Challenge where we were trained in skills such as public speaking, fundraising and teamwork. This, I believe, is where my interest in Charity work first began. I am looking forward to working with the rest of the team to make a difference to our members’ lives and promise to do my best to contribute to the fantastic service they receive.’

Would you like to join our team of volunteer Pink Elephant collectors? If you can spare some time to help, or want to get involved in any of our other events, please contact Lizzy: lizzy.powell@mysightyork.org. We would be grateful for any time you can give.

*By Mike Hickman and Lizzy Powell*
Thank You
We have received £1000 from the Dolly Mixtures, a group of ladies who raise money for small local charities through various events. Thank you ladies!

We would also like to thank York Unitarian Church for their generous donation of £1200.

We benefitted from the Waitrose Community Matters scheme in January 2020 and we have recently been one of the Co-Op’s supported charities at its Paragon Street Store. If you are aware of similar opportunities – many of which require individual customer nominations – please get in touch. Let us know if you need any information or help. Our charity number, often required, is 1159188.

Since August we have received generous donations amounting to £20,067.95. We are extremely grateful to the families of Bernard Graham, Jean Whitehouse, Marjory Stewart Barker, Sylvia Fearn, Moira Thorpe, Patricia Bowes and Alan Bodill for their generosity in supporting our work.

MySight York benefits from the support of many Trusts and Foundations who recognise the huge benefits we provide to our members. Thanks go to the following for supporting our Equipment & Information Centre, our Home Visiting Service, and our Activities programme:

- The Whitwam Family Charitable Foundation
- The Lynn Foundation
- Arlish and Chambers Charities
- Dixie Rose Findlay Charitable Trust
- Sylvia and Colin Shepherd Charitable Trust
- N Smith Charitable Settlement
- York Common Good Trust
- Postcode Community Trust
- The Sir Jules Thorn Charitable Trust
- The Edward Gostling Foundation
- The HBJ Trust

If you are aware of any Trusts or funds that support people with sight loss, please get in touch with Mike: mike.hickman@mysightyork.org.

Finally, don’t forget the many ways to support MySight York when shopping. Please let family and friends know about Give As You Live, where they can shop at over 4,300 stores and donate money to us at no extra cost! Visit https://www.giveasyoulive.com/join/mysightyork for more information. Amazon Smile also allows you to donate to us while you shop, again at no extra cost: https://smile.amazon.co.uk/ch/1159188-0.
Diary dates

All events take place at MySight York unless highlighted in blue

<table>
<thead>
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<th>February</th>
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<tr>
<td>Friday 21st</td>
<td>Selby Superbowl trip 1</td>
<td>9.45-3.45</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wednesday 11th</td>
<td>Finding your Feet course day 1</td>
<td>10-3.30</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wednesday 18th</td>
<td>Finding your Feet course day 2</td>
<td>10-3.30</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wednesday 25th</td>
<td>MySight York closed for Staff away day</td>
<td>All day</td>
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<tr>
<td>Friday 27th</td>
<td>Selby Superbowl trip 2</td>
<td>9.45-3.45</td>
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<td>Thursday 2nd—Friday 3rd</td>
<td>MySight York closed for stock take</td>
<td>All day</td>
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<tr>
<td>Saturday 4th</td>
<td>VI Talk arts and crafts event</td>
<td>10-4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Friday 10th—Tuesday 14th</td>
<td>MySight York closed for Easter</td>
<td>All day</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wednesday 15th</td>
<td>Optelec / Dolphin Focus Day</td>
<td>10-2</td>
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<th>May</th>
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<tr>
<td>Friday 8th</td>
<td>MySight York closed for Bank Holiday</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monday 25th</td>
<td>MySight York closed for Bank Holiday</td>
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