

**Report of the Executive Director Core Services  
and the Executive Director Growth and Sustainability  
to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC)  
on 5 March 2024**

**Visitor Economy and Destination Management Plan for Barnsley**

## **1.0 Introduction**

- 1.1 This report summarises the major developments in the strategic tourism landscape during the last three years. It also outlines the progress made in developing the borough's Visitor Economy and the route map towards the development of an appropriate strategy for Barnsley.
- 1.2 The purpose of a Visitor Economy Strategy (or a Destination Management Plan as they are more commonly known) is to set out a broad vision and key priorities for the Council and its visitor economy sector partners to address.
- 1.3 Work began in 2022 to refresh Barnsley's Visitor Economy Strategy 2017-2020 to align with Barnsley 2030 priorities and to take the strategy forward to 2027. However, this was put on hold due to the major shifts in the strategic and operational tourism landscape that have taken place during the last two years. Work will start again in the near future and be completed by the Autumn of 2024.

## **2.0 Background**

- 2.1 Destination Management Organisations (DMOs) are best thought of as local or regional tourist boards built around a visitor destination such as a town, city or county.
- 2.2 During 2021, the government commissioned the national De Bois review. This landmark review of DMOs in the UK recommended major reforms to make DMOs more efficient, accountable, and sustainable.
- 2.3 This review pointed out that the existing DMO landscape was fragmented across the UK and needs to be delivered in a different and more consistent way to maximise growth and investment. The government responded by agreeing to many of the recommendations in the De Bois review. It tasked VisitEngland (VE) with creating a portfolio of nationally supported, strategic, and high-performing Local Visitor Economy Partnerships (LVEPs). These LVEPs will provide strong local leadership and governance in tourism destinations all over the country.
- 2.4 VE therefore put in place a process for the identification and development of LVEPs across England. These LVEPs were expected to be of a significant critical mass, representing a sub-regional and/or combined authority geographical area.
- 2.5 In 2022 Welcome to Yorkshire, the region's key Destination Management Organisation went into administration. As a result of these significant developments, work on Barnsley's Visitor Economy Strategy 2022-2027 was put on hold until further clarity concerning how the DMO landscape would look in the future, and how it might impact on Barnsley, was secured.

### **3.0 Summary of Barnsley Visitor Economy Strategy 2017-2020**

- 3.1 The Visitor Economy Strategy 2017-20 for Barnsley set out a broad vision and key priorities for the Council and its Visitor Economy sector partners to address. Coordinating activity across the sector would enable the borough to realise the benefits from the development and growth of the Visitor Economy sector. The strategy linked closely to the borough's corporate priority of growing a Thriving and Vibrant Economy and to the themes of the approved Jobs and Business Plan. It also built on initiatives and investment that had already been delivered across the borough by the Council, by funding agencies such as the Heritage Lottery Fund and by sector partners, such as Cannon Hall Farm and RSPB.
- 3.2 To realise the potential of the Visitor Economy tourism in Barnsley the strategy aimed to do a number of things delivered over a sustained period of time:
- Enable improvement and investment in the products and experiences offered.
  - Develop promotion of the place that is truthful and compelling.
- 3.3 To deliver these outcomes four priority areas were identified:
- Partnerships: Recognising that we need to work together to get results.
  - Investment: Providing high quality and distinctive experiences for visitors.
  - Promotion: Telling visitors and potential visitors about the offer.
  - Intelligence gathering: Improving data and evidence across the sector.
- 3.4 The Strategy recognised that we did need to be realistic about our offer, particularly in a highly competitive market, however by working together with our partners we felt we could realise tangible benefits, which included an enhanced profile for the borough, increased visitor spend and economic impact, increased viability of attractions and Visitor Economy sector business, job creation, investment and an enhanced sense of pride in the borough for residents.

### **4.0 Barnsley – Key Developments**

- 4.1 During 2022 and 2023, the Council has worked with partners in Barnsley to focus on promoting the broader culture and heritage offer (e.g. around Elsecar Heritage Centre), and the development of Barnsley town centre (particularly through the Glass Works) and its promotion.

#### Town Centre Brand

- 4.2 A new brand narrative and style was launched for Barnsley town centre in April 2023. The brand presents the town centre as an ambitious, adventurous, welcoming, inclusive, and co-operative place, with an experience for everyone. Marketing campaigns in 2023 focused on attracting day visits to the town centre from South and West Yorkshire.

#### Town Centre Events

- 4.3 Following the opening of the Glass Works in 2021 a wide-ranging programme of events has been delivered in the Town Centre to celebrate the redevelopment, encourage a greater footfall and to ensure residents are proud of their town. This programme has included Barnsley Live, Bright Nights, and the Garden Party, and has been further developed in 2023 with the re-introduction of the Christmas Markets in Barnsley.
- 4.4 We have seen real success because of the high-quality events programme and improved communications and marketing approach, including:

- A 99% uplift on event webpage visitors from 2022 to 2023.
- Over 5,000 new followers across the town centre Facebook and Instagram profiles, and post reach of over 3.5million combined.
- Glass Works footfall up 22% on 2022.
- Cheapside footfall up 5.7% on 2022.
- Events webpage visitors up 99% on 2022.
- Barnsley town centre social media channels grew by over 5,000 followers.
- Headline events in 2023 saw huge footfall increases on 2022:
  - Flavours Food Festival +22%
  - Barnsley's Big Weekend +26%
  - Barnsley Bright Nights +27%

### Culture and Heritage

- 4.5 The Council, through the Culture and Visitor Economy Team, has focused on promoting the award-winning museum service it is responsible for, as well as key partners such as Wentworth Castle Gardens and Monk Bretton Priory. This service includes the likes of Elsecar Heritage Centre and Cannon Hall Museum and Gardens.
- 4.6 The popularity and profile of the museum service has continued to grow, with some headline data included below:
- Barnsley Museums footfall up by 9% to over 2M.
  - 220k users to the Barnsley Museum webpages.
  - Museums social media channels grew by 8k followers.
  - Donations grew by approximately 17%.
  - Museum newsletter sign ups increased by 29% (to 3,363) and open rate increased from 35% to 42%.
  - Cannon Hall footfall increased by 14%.
  - Downloads on the website increased by 20% to 29,687.
  - Over 100k views on the Barnsley Museums YouTube page.

### The Visitor Economy Forum

- 4.7 The Borough's Visitor Economy Forum (VEF) has been in place for a number of years, however Covid resulted in a significant downturn in engagement.
- 4.8 The VEF continues to meet on a quarterly cycle and is currently comprised of over 70 private sector businesses operating within the visitor economy across the Barnsley borough. There are ongoing efforts to increase the levels of participation and engagement though improving communication and consulting with stakeholders to ensure the content and frequency of the meetings is relevant and engaging. A monthly newsletter was also sent out in December 2023 and January 2024.

### The Visitor Economy Forum Steering Group

- 4.9 A Visitor Economy Steering Group was introduced in September 2023 and represents significant progress in terms of the development of an effective public/private sector partnership to underpin the borough's tourism offer. The Group has met four times in total and is comprised of representatives from the private sector including:
- Barnsley Premier Leisure (Metrodome)

- Wortley Hall
- National Trust Wentworth Castle and Gardens
- Yorkshire Sculpture Park
- The Glass Works
- Globe Holidays
- Barnsley and Rotherham Chamber of Commerce

4.10 The purpose of the Steering Group is to support the growth and development of the tourism sector in the borough and guide, oversee, and influence the successful development of an appropriate Barnsley tourism strategic framework. It will also provide an ongoing link between the sector and the Council to ensure that all opportunities are being maximised, to provide ongoing intelligence and insight from the market and to encourage collaboration across the sector.

4.11 Key functions of the Steering Group include:

- Providing oversight and guidance on the refreshing and implementation of the Barnsley Visitor Economy Strategy & Action Plan.
- Exchanging information, ideas, and advice to support the implementation of the Action Plan and the South Yorkshire LVEP Plan.
- Ensuring maximum impact is achieved from the actions within the plans.
- Developing a forward programme of opportunities for the sector.
- Lobbying Barnsley Council and other bodies on issues affecting the sector and actively encouraging stakeholders to do the same.
- Creating ambassadors for Barnsley, the Visitor Economy Strategy, and its associated actions.
- Encouraging active participation of the whole sector in the delivery of the Action Plan
- Ongoing research and insights into the sector.
- Sharing intelligence about key trends and opportunities.
- Promoting the area, as well as the Visitor Economy Strategy and its objectives, as widely as possible.

4.12 The Steering Group is purely advisory, and its recommendations will be considered through the governance arrangements of the bodies represented, which will retain their decision making and oversight and scrutiny arrangements.

## **5.0 South Yorkshire - Key Developments**

### South Yorkshire Local Visitor Economy Partnership (SYLVEP)

5.1 As a result of the recommendations from the De Bois review, and as a direct response to the emergence of Visit England's LVEP programme, South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority (SYMCA), Sheffield City Council, Doncaster City Council, Rotherham MBC, and Barnsley Council began to work together to identify the potential benefits of a strategic tourism partnership.

5.2 In July 2023, VisitEngland accredited the South Yorkshire Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP), a collaboration between Barnsley Council and SYMCA, Sheffield City Council, Doncaster City Council, and Rotherham MBC to work together on shared priorities and targets to grow the local visitor economy. SYMCA has agreed to provide funding to help support the development of the SYLVEP, including the appointment of a Programme Co-ordinator.

- 5.3 The SYLVEP programme, which is led by Sheffield City Council, will be part of a national portfolio of strategic and high-performing partnerships working in collaboration locally, regionally and nationally on shared priorities and targets to support tourism.
- 5.4 The SYLVEP is now finalising a Growth Plan which looks to ensure that the LVEP can become sustainable. A Project Manager will be appointed before the end of March 2024.
- 5.5 The SYLVEP is also currently finalising Terms of Reference and will shortly be recruiting a Governance Board comprised of public and private sector representatives to provide strategic leadership for the LVEP.

#### South Yorkshire Destination Management Plan

- 5.6 Visit Britain describes a Destination Management Plan (DMP) as a shared statement of intent to manage a destination over a stated period of time. It articulates the roles of the different stakeholders and identifies clear actions that they will take and the apportionment of resources. Crucially, destination management includes the planning, development and marketing of a destination, as well as how it is managed physically, financially, operationally and in other ways.
- 5.7 The early discussions between the South Yorkshire partners identified the need for a sub-regional DMP which can ensure the support and development of South Yorkshire's Tourism offer. Funding was secured from SYMCA to support the development.
- 5.8 As a result Blue Chip Tourism were appointed to develop a South Yorkshire Destination Management Plan. The plan was consulted upon with the sector in January and is likely to be published in the spring. The plan provides a galvanising framework for the whole of South Yorkshire to move forward together, building on our collective and individual strengths. This plan focuses on the priorities and collaborative activities that, at a South Yorkshire level, will build a better and more productive visitor economy sector. Barnsley borough is key to this plan and key priorities within the plan include identifying particular strengths in visitor attractions – notably heritage, family and cultural – with some key players like the Cannon Hall Museum, Cannon Hall Farm, and Elsecar Heritage Centre. It also recognises significant recent investment in visitor economy related developments, these include the Glass Works.
- 5.9 The Final draft of the Destination Management Plan outlines two primary aims:
- To generate more (and longer) visits and spend in the local economy.
  - To use the visitor economy to continue to develop and enhance the appeal and image of places in South Yorkshire to a range of audiences.

And a third underlying aim:

- To engage with our residents through development of our visitor economy and hospitality sector to enhance their pride and quality of life.
- 5.10 These will be achieved through the delivery of five action areas:
- Action Area 1: Develop our product and places.
  - Action Area 2: Increase awareness of our destinations.
  - Action Area 3: Develop specific reasons to visit.
  - Action Area 4: Enhance our transport provision and connectivity.
  - Action Area 5: Manage our visitor economy effectively.

## 6.0 Yorkshire - Key Developments

### Summary of Yorkshire Tourism Initiative, and Barnsley's lead role

- 6.1 The Yorkshire Tourism Initiative (YTI) is a light touch partnership of all the Yorkshire local authorities to support collaborative activity and is managed and co-ordinated by Barnsley Council in a lead capacity. The YTI was commissioned in the summer of 2023 by the Yorkshire Leader's Board as a response to the demise of Welcome to Yorkshire and aims to add value to the destination marketing work going on locally and within the LVEPs across Yorkshire.
- 6.2 Each sub-region is providing a small budget to resource the YTI, and interim support was procured for a 3-month period and a Project Manager was appointed in December 2023. The project is due to run until March 2025, and will then be reviewed. There are specific workstreams as follows:

### Tourism Awards Event Analysis

- 6.3 An analysis for the development and delivery of a region-wide tourism awards event was undertaken in October 2023. This included evaluating the potential synergy and competition with existing awards events in York and East Yorkshire as well as identifying how such an event could add value to the tourism sector in the region and considering the role of potential partners.

### Tourism Trade and Consumer Shows and Conferences Review

- 6.4 A review of all partners attendance at Travel Trade and Consumer Shows was undertaken and presented to the Yorkshire Leaders meeting on 6 November. The main aim was to understand which shows are attended currently (or in the pipeline) and which may be beneficial to attend on behalf of Yorkshire. It was agreed at the Leaders Meeting to attend ITB Berlin in March, initially as a pilot. Work is well underway with partners to ensure attendance at this event is a success.

### Yorkshire Brand Assessment

- 6.5 The objective of this project is to conduct a comprehensive assessment of the Yorkshire Brand, including current awareness and perceptions as well as focusing on its performance as a tourism destination in regional, national, and international markets. The assessment will identify current market segments visiting Yorkshire, as well as potential new markets in the short to medium term, with an emphasis on growth potential, overnight stays, and visitor spending. It is also important to acknowledge that this project recognises and accommodates distinctive sub-regional and local brands within the overarching branding exercise. It is expected that this exercise will be completed by spring 2024.

### Development of Major Events Approach

- 6.6 Work is currently underway with an external consultant to undertake specific recommendations. The purpose of this workstream is to identify and explore large scale event opportunities for collaboration between local authorities, LVEPs, and any other relevant partners to develop and deliver major events across Yorkshire. The consultant has been tasked with scoping opportunities, timescales, costs and likely return on investment.
- 6.7 An audit was also undertaken to assess what large scale events are currently being planned across Yorkshire. The research for this paper was conducted following a transition phase of a Local Government Review, with newly formed LVEPs, and other entities finalising their budgets and capacities. Despite this, partners demonstrated a strong commitment to organising or supporting a diverse range of events across Yorkshire, with the potential to deliver significant reputational and economic benefits for the region.

6.8 It was recommended to appoint an external consultant to scope and present an options paper which is on track for completion by the end of March 2024.

## 7.0 Future Plans & Challenges

7.1 It is recommended that the future Barnsley Visitor Economy Strategy (or Destination Management Plan to use the terminology preferred by Visit Britain) should be structured in a similar way to the South Yorkshire DMP with the following action areas.

- Action Area 1: Develop our product and places.
- Action Area 2: Increase awareness of our destinations.
- Action Area 3: Develop specific reasons to visit.
- Action Area 4: Enhance our transport provision and connectivity.
- Action Area 5: Manage our visitor economy effectively.

7.2 The borough's Visitor Economy Strategy should also be based around conversations that have taken place with the sector in the locality. The future of Barnsley's tourism sector was discussed with the Visitor Economy Forum (VEF) during late 2022 and early 2023. It was agreed to set up a sub-group to work with Barnsley Council to help shape a strategic framework for the sector. Two sessions were held with the sub-group of Barnsley's VEF. The sub-group identified and then prioritised a set of key themes for the tourism sector in the borough. These priority themes were then discussed with a range of relevant colleagues across Barnsley Council.

7.3 Three immediate priorities were identified as follows:

- Cost-of-Living Crisis.
- Development of a single narrative for the borough.
- Promoting Barnsley's brilliant offer.

7.4 Two additional, longer-term issues were also highlighted:

- Transport and Infrastructure.
- Skills and Employment.

7.5 The Visitor Economy Strategy/Destination Management Plan will be developed during the summer and autumn of 2024, once the SY DMP has been completed and published in late spring. In order to develop the strategy for Barnsley and maximise the benefits of being part of the SYVLEP, we need additional capacity in the Culture and Visitor Economy team. This is being picked up in the transformation work whereby we will explore 'turbo-charging' our cultural engagement and visitor economy work, with our private sector and other partners. While this work is being implemented, we are progressing a number of pieces of work which will create a stronger infrastructure for the visitor economy.

7.6 In the meantime, the following plans are now in place to utilise Shared Prosperity Funding to enhance the visitor economy across Barnsley borough through the following activities:

- Website Development
- Social Media Channels
- An image library
- Information Provision
- Marketing Campaigns
- Itineraries

## Website Development

7.7 A website is the most popular information source, for the consumers play a significant role in potential visitors' choices related to the destinations. Websites are used as a distribution and marketing tool in promotion and marketing of the destination and all the businesses operating within the hospitality, tourism, cultural and retail sectors within the Barnsley borough. The key considerations for the development of a new Visit Barnsley website are as follows:

- Industry Engagement for Ownership
- Hosting and IT Protocols
- Content Creation
- Target Audience
- Website Content
- Sustainability
- Functionality
- Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) and Futureproofing
- Statistics and Analytics

## Social Media

7.8 Promoting Barnsley through social media and highlighting the fantastic choice of activities or services available to visitors is a vital part of raising awareness, increasing footfall, and generating revenue. Initially this includes using "Influencers" to promote itineraries and great things to see and do in Barnsley borough and will also resource the building of engaged followers on social media platforms.

7.9 The proposed development of the Visit Barnsley website emphasises industry engagement, optimal hosting and IT protocols, targeted content creation, and a sustainable approach.

## Image Library

7.10 The image of the destination is important since it influences not only the choice of the destination by visitors but also their level of satisfaction. Often, destinations compete through a little bit more than the image that they can create in the minds of potential travellers – the imagery. It is proposed to collate stock images of the Barnsley borough, and:

- Commission seasonal stock images.
- Collate existing images with proper permissions.

## Information Points

7.11 They are usually the first point of contact for visitors and residents who depend on reliable and up-to-date information on places to visit, attractions to see and activities to engage in leisure time. An Information Point helps individuals plan their trips by offering details about attractions, accommodation, transport options, and activities available in a specific destination. It enables people to make informed decisions about where to go, what to see, and how to get there as well as raising pride of place. It is planned to install information racks in key sites across the borough that will stock literature from local businesses which will include things to see and do, places to eat, family friendly, places to get active, places to be inspired and learn.

## Marketing Campaigns

7.12 Marketing campaigns are proposed to further boost tourism, with an emphasis on industry involvement, themed campaigns, and careful delivery planning. A survey was undertaken in late



2023 with stakeholders of the Visitor Economy Forum invited to identify their key marketing priorities. Strong themes emerged including, Genealogy/Ancestry, Film and TV Locations (Setjetting), Great Houses and Gardens, Industrial Heritage, and Cycle Tourism. It is important that the campaigns engage at both a local level with residents as well as individuals, families and groups. Itineraries have also been identified as a priority area, so that Barnsley is positioned to attract travel trade and the lucrative groups market.

## **8.0 Invited Witnesses**

8.1 The following witnesses have been invited to answer questions from the Committee:

- Matt O'Neill, Executive Director Growth & Sustainability, Barnsley Council
- Jon Finch, Head of Culture & Visitor Economy, Barnsley Council
- Kathy McArdle, Service Director, Regeneration & Culture, Barnsley Council
- Cllr Robin Franklin, Cabinet Member Regeneration & Culture, Barnsley Council

## **9.0 Possible Areas for Investigation**

9.1 Members may wish to ask questions around the following areas:

- What learning can be taken from the previous visitor economy strategy – what went well, what could've gone better?
- What outcomes do you hope to achieve with the new strategy – what is the vision?
- What problems do you hope to solve by introducing the strategy?
- How will the strategy fit in with the wider vision for Barnsley 2030?
- How will residents benefit from the strategy?
- How will you know if the strategy is successful and how will this be demonstrated?
- As a destination, what are Barnsley's strengths, challenges & opportunities?
- What research has been done to understand the market and how is this information being used?
- What are the obstacles and challenges to delivery that may arise along the way?
- How will you achieve 'buy-in' from local partners?
- How do you plan to build trust, manage expectations, and support communities such as Elsecar and Cawthorne?
- What considerations will be made to ensure that town centre events and heritage sites are safe and inclusive spaces and do not negatively impact on the Council's sustainability ambitions?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages linked to the new Local Visitor Economy Partnership arrangements?
- What more needs to be done to ensure that the VEF Steering Group is effective?

- How will you ensure that Barnsley can successfully compete against other local authorities in attracting visitors?
- What can elected members do to support the work and the development of the strategy?

## 10.0 Background Papers and Useful Links

Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport - Independent Review of Destination Management Organisations (DMOs):-

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/independent-review-of-destination-management-organisations-dmos>

Government's response to the De Bois Report:-

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/government-response-to-the-independent-review-of-destination-management-organisations-in-england/government-response-to-the-independent-review-of-destination-management-organisations-in-england>

Visit Britain – Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP) Programme:-

<https://www.visitbritain.org/resources-destination-partners/local-visitor-economy-partnership-lvep-programme>.

## 11.0 Glossary

|      |         |   |
|------|---------|---|
| 11.1 | DMO     | Destination Management Organisation               |
|      | DMP     | Destination Management Plan                       |
|      | LVEP    | Local Visitor Economy Partnership                 |
|      | MBC     | Metropolitan Borough Council                      |
|      | OSC     | Overview & Scrutiny Committee                     |
|      | RSPB    | The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds     |
|      | SEO     | Search Engine Optimisation                        |
|      | SPF     | Shared Prosperity Fund                            |
|      | SY LVEP | South Yorkshire Local Visitor Economy Partnership |
|      | SYMCA   | South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority        |
|      | VE      | Visitor Economy                                   |
|      | VEF     | Visitor Economy Forum                             |
|      | VESG    | Visitor Economy Steering Group                    |
|      | YTI     | Yorkshire Tourism Initiative                      |

## 12.0 Officer Contact

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