

MEETING:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Growing Barnsley Workstream
DATE:	Tuesday 5 March 2024
TIME:	2.00 pm
VENUE:	Council Chamber, Barnsley Town Hall

MINUTES

Present

Councillors Ennis OBE (Chair), Barnard, Booker, Bowler, Denton, Eastwood, Fielding, Hayward, Lodge, Mitchell, Morrell, Osborne, Peace, Sheard, Tattersall, Webster and N. Wright

28 Apologies for Absence - Parent Governor Representatives

No apologies for absence were received from Ms E Iles in accordance with Regulation 7(6) of the Parent Governor Representatives (England) Regulations 2001.

29 Declarations of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interest

Councillor Tattersall declared a non pecuniary interest as a member on the Berneslai Homes Board.

30 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 February 2024 were received.

31 Visitor Economy & Destination Management Plan for Barnsley

The following witnesses were welcomed to the meeting:

- Jon Finch, Head of Culture & Visitor Economy, Barnsley Council
- Kathy McArdle, Service Director, Regeneration & Culture, Barnsley Council
- Devinia Skirrow, Communications and Marketing Manager, Barnsley Council
- Ellie Pate, Communications and Marketing Manager, Barnsley Council
- Cllr Robin Franklin, Cabinet Member Regeneration & Culture, Barnsley Council

Kathy McArdle provided members with a brief introduction to the report submitted for members attention. Members were informed that the report submitted covered a series of developments that had happened at a national, strategic, regional and local level to support visitor economy across the UK, South Yorkshire and Barnsley. Work was underway to maximise the advantages of the Borough with its location, heritage and culture and sports aspects to ensure that Barnsley benefits from the growing visitor economy.

Jon Finch provided members with an in-depth update of the Visitor Economy and Destination Management Plan for Barnsley. Members were informed that there would be two tiers of delivery one being at regional level with Destination Development Partnerships and the second tier of Visitor Economy Partnerships.

Following Welcome to Yorkshire going into administration in Spring 2022, the Yorkshire Leaders Board felt this had left a gap so had put in place a light touch Yorkshire tourism initiative regional partnership which started in 2023 focussing on each Yorkshire County ensuring equal representation. Members heard of the in depth work being undertaken with partners in the private and public sectors and the developments in place for the forthcoming development of the Barnsley Visitor Economy Strategy.

Members commented that whilst this was an optimistic view, there were concerns that Barnsley would be competing for visitor economy against Towns and Cities with tourist attractions such as Oxford and Bath. There was also a worry as to travel options on offer. Members were informed that whilst Barnsley had a strong sport and hospitality culture, it also had the strength of a rural tourism offer for people to visit and explore the countryside as Barnsley had a vast green offer. It was important to promote the ecological story of Barnsley alongside what the Town Centre can offer. It was noted that Barnsley also had a number of incredible quality parks in the Borough which was part of the green tourism offer as well as the wider countryside offer.

It was acknowledged that there was a need to work with partners in the transport sector to address and strengthen the travel infrastructure so people could easily access key sites whether they were to be heritage, restaurants and bars or areas of scenery. An initiative that had been put forward was to work with tourism sector partners to enable travel to places such as Wentworth Castle Gardens and other heritage offers across borders. Conversations were also being held with bordering Local Authorities to create a linked travel initiative as connectivity was critical.

In terms of possible developments of a conference centre between the Metrodome and Oakwell, members were informed that whilst in the past this had been touted as a possible location for a conference centre, no plans had come to fruition. Members heard that there would need to be a demand for such a venue and there would need to be a demand study. Members were informed that there had been successes holding dispersed conferences across three or four venues across the Town Centre, which also showcased what Barnsley had to offer. A piece of work was being undertaken for a future masterplan of the Town Centre including the Oakwell area and options to develop that as a destination for leisure.

In regards to visitor numbers and where they were visiting from, members were informed that venues across Barnsley saw visitors from varying geographical areas. Cannon Hall for example, saw more visitors from outside of Barnsley than inside, whereas the other side of the Borough saw visitors from as far as Nottingham. There were fluctuations of visitors depending on the programme of events.

A Visit Barnsley website was in development in order to showcase and bring together everything that Barnsley has on offer and would include all public events taking place across the Borough.

Members raised the need to think about future planning for events in the longer term, and a full and frank discussion took place around the 50th anniversary of the miners' strike, with opposing opinions being taken into account.

Whilst Barnsley merchandise was not available to purchase online, there were some items that could be purchased from the Market reception and that this was something to be explored as commercialisation. It was noted that venues such as Cannon Hall and Worsbrough Mill had seen success in selling merchandise and unique products and that there had been an increase in microbreweries across the Borough.

It was felt that the Borough did not have an adequate breadth of overnight accommodation on offer. A piece of work was being undertaken during 2024 to analyse the current offer and what was needed in order to move forward in providing accommodation for people visiting. It was recognised that overnight visitors were essential for the nighttime economy, but that a diverse range of accommodation within the principal towns was also required. There was a need for an accommodation offer in the green belt of the Borough and conversations were being had with Planning on how to facilitate this.

Members were informed that the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority were on Step 3 of the process of bus franchising tendering of bus routes. Buses had been badly hit by the impact of the pandemic and were still in recovery which had resulted in them only considering particular routes that were profitable. One way of boosting the profitability of a route would be to increase patronage and for it to be tailored to meet need and demand. The Visitor Economy Strategy would be clear in what routes would add value. Private operators such as Globe and White Rose could also be considered as an alternate option for some routes.

A key concern was around skills and employment which had faced significant challenges. It is important to work closely with the SY Mayoral Combined Authority to secure investments in hospitality. Further work would be to carry out a detailed skills analysis to target future investments at sub regional level by working with partners such as Enterprising Barnsley. Zero hours contracts would remain in use for staff employed for events and in museums to provide additional support as and when needed for short periods of time.

Members heard how changing the perceptions of Barnsley was a complex process of addressing different age groups, audiences and markets and required Borough wide efforts in order to do so. There had been significant investments and improvements in what Barnsley had to offer and it was felt that the creation of the Visit Barnsley website would bring everything together to help change the Barnsley story and brand. There had been a number of positive press stories including King Tut in the phone box for Experience Barnsley, Tom Walker playing in the Glassworks Square which had created huge social media coverage, and Barnsley Youth Choir had performed on Radio 4 in December. A number of customer surveys had been carried out in 2022 and 2023 and one of the biggest features to come out of them was that the people of Barnsley felt very proud about the range of events and activities taking place in the Borough.

Members were informed that an events calendar would be a key feature within the Visit Barnsley website in order to keep people up to date and informed of what is happening in and around the Borough. Members were keen that in the meantime they are informed of any wider events planned in order to help promote them. Members heard that there would be no plans to split the Big Weekend and Pride Events in the calendar as they had been a huge success running concurrently.

Resources had been secured to look at how the entrance to the upper floors in the Glassworks could be enhanced to potentially expand the market kitchen and create a new visitor destination. Barnsley had created a can-do environment for entrepreneurs setting up business with support through Enterprising Barnsley. The Glassworks and Market were unique destinations that drew in coach parties to come and visit.

Members were provided with a progress update to the regeneration of the Civic. The capital projects were being finalised and work was being undertaken to progress securing food and drinks suppliers. Plans were in place to promote the opening of the venue in the weeks and months leading up to a big celebration event at the end of the project.

It was agreed that Barnsley had a lot to offer people of varying backgrounds and interests and everyone should act as an ambassador for the Borough in order to promote the attractions and different experiences on offer.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) that the witnesses be thanked for their attendance and contribution;
- (ii) that the report be noted;
- (iii) that when developing the strategy and plans for the Borough, officers should consider the following:
 - Options to connect communities to heritage sites via public transport
 - Options to develop the educational tourism offer linked to the curriculum
 - Horizon scanning for future events (Long-term)
 - Promoting parks and wetlands/marshlands as part of the 'green' offer
 - Commercial opportunities eg. selling promotional materials online; and
- (iv) that witnesses share the events calendar with elected members, and elected members should send any events information to a named contact in the Culture & Visitor Economy Team

Chair