

MEETING:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Thriving and Vibrant Economy Workstream
DATE:	Tuesday, 9 February 2021
TIME:	2.00 pm
VENUE:	This Meeting Will Be Held Virtually

MINUTES

Present

Councillors Ennis OBE (Chair), Bowler, Carr, Clarke, Fielding, Gillis, Gollick, Green, Hayward, Hunt, W. Johnson, Lofts, McCarthy, Newing, Richardson, Smith, Sumner, Tattersall and Wraith MBE together with co-opted member Ms. G Carter

5 Apologies for Absence - Parent Governor Representatives

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

6 Declarations of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interest

Members of the Committee made declarations of non-pecuniary interest in connection with the items on this agenda as follows:

Cllr Tattersall - Cabinet Support Member (Place)

Cllr Richardson - Trustee of Cooper Art Gallery, vice-chair of Northern College, Heritage Champion and involved in the Eldon Street project.

Cllr Smith - sits on the Maurice Dobson Committee Trust.

Cllr Lofts volunteered at Hemmingfield pit for many years.

7 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 12th January 2021 were received by Members.

8 Barnsley's Culture and Visitor Economy Offer

Members were invited to consider a report of the Executive Director Core Services and the Executive Director Place in respect Barnsley's Culture and Visitor Economy Offer including the impact of Covid-19.

The following witnesses were welcomed to the meeting:

Matt Gladstone, Executive Director-Place, BMBC

Kathy McArdle, Service Director, Regeneration & Culture, Place Directorate, BMBC

Sue Thiedeman, Head of Culture & Visitor Economy, Place Directorate, BMBC

Lynn Dunning, Group Leader, Heritage & Arts, Place Directorate, BMBC

Matt Mitchell, Events & Logistics Manager, Place Directorate, BMBC

Devinia Skirrow, Communications & Marketing Manager, BMBC
Cllr Cheetham, Cabinet Spokesperson, Regeneration & Culture

The Head of Culture & Visitor Economy, Place Directorate, introduced the item, highlighting Barnsley's culture and visitor economy offer, including the impact of Covid-19. It was explained that Barnsley has a relative abundance of heritage assets which form the backbone of Barnsley's visitor economy. Barnsley has five museum sites which are BMBC managed and which along with heritage assets make a positive impact on people's lives, particularly the vulnerable, and also enhance civic pride. The situation with Covid has been exceptionally challenging but Barnsley has still managed to win various national awards and accolades. Barnsley has also supported independent artists and freelancers during this difficult and challenging period. There is no doubt that the forthcoming year will continue to be very challenging.

In the ensuing discussion, and in response to detailed questioning and challenge the following matters were highlighted:

It was reported that the Worsbrough Wetlands Project received £100,000 of funding just before the Covid outbreak to conserve and enhance habitat sites at Worsbrough (particularly those of the harvest mouse and the willow tit), focusing on biodiversity and care for the site, balanced with the needs of the public and the access they require. A Cultural Recovery Grant of £160,000 was received from the National Lottery Heritage Fund to support post-Covid recovery work at Worsbrough Mill to enlarge the shop, café and offices and to undertake emergency works to the mill machinery which has seen a four-fold increase in demand for flour during the pandemic to fulfil orders from bakeries and retail customers. The current layout of the accommodation makes it difficult to socially distance.

Although attendance at Worsborough has fallen by 8%, it appears busier than ever and is clearly important to the local community. However there has been a negative impact on the site in terms of litter, maintenance of footpaths, and issues and repair work which will need to be addressed in the future. The next year will focus on what further investment can be brought in for Worsbrough and a masterplan exercise is currently underway. There are plans for a new micro bakery, a new shop and an enhanced café business.

In terms of wider recovery plans, Experience Barnsley will reopen with new content, extra investment has been made, some high profile exhibitions have been rescheduled and some exhibitions have been held on line. Events will be reinvigorated and held 'in person' to increase footfall in the town centre when it is safe to do so. The schools offer will be adapted and changed. Some volunteering programmes have continued. The Sheffield City Region (SCR) have a new Director in post for the arts, culture and heritage and hopefully will lead to increased funding. The Welcome to Yorkshire offer has been refreshed but at the moment it is not possible to promote travelling to the area. Culture has been vitally important during Covid, with unprecedented numbers during lockdown but the future is still uncertain about reopening. Events will present a challenge and social distancing could be in place for years. However the team is very creative and innovative and will continue to look at different opportunities.

Barnsley MBC has worked very closely with the Maurice Dobson Museum in Darfield and other local heritage groups, with grant support from the National Lottery Heritage Emergency Fund for equipment and materials needed to help with Covid recovery and small discretionary grants. The Maurice Dobson Museum received business rates relief in the first tranche of Covid and smaller grants to help with the cost of PPE, signage etc., post Covid. Barnsley was very proactive with discretionary grants, with money placed directly in to bank accounts by the finance team.

A report in 2017 referred to the Visitor Economy Strategy in Barnsley and a vision for Barnsley to be one of the UK's emerging visitor destination by 2020. It was highlighted that the Visitor Economy strategy is due to be refreshed in line with the 2030 plans. There have been some successes but there are weak areas, one of which is governance, linked to the fact that most of the attractions are run or supported by the Council and there is a weaker offer from external partners. The pandemic has also affected partner's ability to engage, with furlough schemes etc., being used, although great strides have been made with Welcome to Yorkshire. The Visit Barnsley platform will be replaced and will be made more relevant to the current situation, linked to the town centre. The big events previously held put Barnsley on the global map and this continues, albeit virtually, and helped to change people's perceptions. A professional high-quality film will be used to promote Barnsley, in conjunction with Welcome to Yorkshire, both nationally and internationally, once the Glassworks project is officially launched.

Elsecar attracted Great Place Funding from the Arts Council and National Lottery Fund, one of their aims of the programme was to support the development of a high quality, brand new tourism proposition for England linked to Wentworth Woodhouse and Wentworth Castle Gardens. Funding will need to be secured and a masterplan and options appraisal is being worked up alongside partners with the railway as a complementary and integrated tourism offer. It was explained that the Elsecar Railway Trust surrendered the lease back to Barnsley Council in August because of various issues, exacerbated by the pandemic. Barnsley is working closely with the Trust with a view to getting the railway up and running as soon as possible although at the moment there is a lot of work to be done and investment will need to be secured.

There are a number of railway interest and volunteer groups across the Borough, such as the Hull and Barnsley Railway group and the fledgling Community Rail partnership (which covers the whole of the Borough). The team is happy to promote and facilitate joint working amongst these groups once the pandemic is over. Hemmingfield pit is located at the end of the Elsecar railway line and is an integral part of the Elsecar project due to its historical and cultural importance. Volunteers at the site have been supported with lottery funding and have been put forward for discretionary grants.

Barnsley is responsible for wetlands and biodiversity projects alongside Natural England, Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, the Environment Agency and neighbouring Local Authorities to look at biodiversity across the Dearne Valley and the Region. The Yorkshire Wildlife Trust is involved in the Fleets site in Barnsley but this project has stalled recently due to staff absences and other factors. Natural England is currently looking at the Borough as a whole with a view to securing Sites of Specific Scientific

Interest (SSSI) status. The consultation document for this will be shared with Councillor Lofts, who is involved with the canal to the west of the Fleets.

Barnsley has many heritage sites such as Wortley Top Forge, Monk Bretton Priory and Rockley Abbey. These attractions are an important part of Barnsley's heritage and have received grants during the pandemic. Prior to the pandemic work was underway with English Heritage and friends groups looking at improved facilities for the public, possibly linked to the principal towns project. It was highlighted that Monk Bretton Priory is in a flood risk area and a large part of the area is classed as a high rated flood zone with the Environment Agency. Part of the investment for floodwork along Lang Avenue is being done with a view to reclassifying this status.

The impact of the pandemic has been huge and has put enormous financial pressure on the Council. Survival of cultural organisations is critical but there is a need to be realistic and prioritise the sites which can attract matched funding for investment. Wentworth Castle Gardens is now led by the National Trust. Cannon Hall and Cannon Hall Farm have made admirable efforts during the pandemic. Hotel provision across the Borough needs to improve but the team is working hard to develop this.

Some of Barnsley's attractions, such as Cannon Hall, are inaccessible to families who do not have their own transport, with an expensive and infrequent bus service. Discussions have taken place with partners around public transport and campaigns to enable families to access travel in school holidays for a special rate has been promoted issues will continue to be raised. Active travel routes are being explored but this also brings difficulties. It was felt that the future success of visitor attractions is important for regeneration and should be referred to the Mayor of the Combined Authority. The bus review highlighted the need for investment but funding is currently being used to bail out bus, rail and tram services etc., which are around 70% down compared to pre-Covid. There is a need to look at more creative options such as an 'uber' style service and use of electric vehicles to help with the carbon footprint. There are difficult issues to confront but there needs to be an affordable option going forward.

Barnsley Museums is now responsible for Barnsley Main Colliery whilst the Parks Department looks after the park. The building is part of the Council's planned maintenance programme and there is a good system for responding to repairs and looking at long term potential usage for the site alongside active volunteer groups. Important structural work has taken place to the head gear to conserve it for the future and it is now a grade II listed building. It was also noted that Helen and Richard Totty have contributed voluntary work led on the Barnsley Main Heritage site and have been instrumental in keeping the site looking good throughout the pandemic.

The Trans Pennine Trail (TPT) is difficult to access in some areas (around Wickes) but is no longer the responsibility of the Culture and Visitor Economy Team, as it now falls under strategic Transportation within the BMBC structure. Various upgrades are planned, funding is being sought for improvements and volunteers work along many of the sections. It was felt that there had been a large increase in littering along the TPT (and at Worsbrough) since the pandemic began, with a need for more litter bins. Tracey Brewer now has responsibility for the TPT and will be informed of this.

It is essential that children and young people are involved in taking the culture and visitor economy forward, as this is their future. It was suggested that the young Mayor could take a lead on this. Barnsley's first ever Children's Festival is planned for September 2021, with a key theme of Regeneration 2030 and encompassing future town design, future housing etc.

It was reported that just over 100,000 visitors come to Cannon Hall in a year, with 500,000 visiting the park and outdoor green space. The £4m Parks for People project is just coming to an end, and did have a focus on encouraging people to visit the museum. It was reported that 60% of visitors to the museum are from outside the Borough. Lots of work has been done to make the Hall more interesting and child friendly; the Hall has been showcased digitally during lockdown, which has led to an increase in interest which should lead to an increase in visitors once lockdown ends.

Councillor Ennis felt that as lockdown eases an opportunity should be taken to promote 'staycations' rather than planning holidays abroad and that Barnsley has much to offer in terms of visitor attractions and this will be an opportunity to encourage overnight stays in Barnsley, which will help with recovery. Promotional planning is already underway on this agenda along with partners such as Welcome to Yorkshire, the City Region and Visit England.

Members felt that volunteers, friends' groups and charities across the Borough have worked very hard during the pandemic and that should be commended for their contribution, which has included litter picking, housekeeping, interpretations, workshops, consultations, future service planning and promotion. Many essential things could not have been done without the goodwill and support of volunteers

RESOLVED that:

- (i) Representatives be thanked for their attendance, contribution and for the success in achieving various national awards and accolades
- (ii) Volunteers be officially thanked, once the pandemic is over, for their unstinting work across the Borough;
- (iii) Lynn Dunning be tasked with contacting Barnsley College with a view to taking forward the Fleets project and
- (iv) Members provide details of specific litter bins needed at Worsbrough to Lynn Dunning and along the TPT to Tracy Brewer.

Chair