

# North Yorkshire Council

## Richmond (Yorks) Area Constituency Committee

18<sup>th</sup> December 2023

### Vibrancy of Market Towns

#### Report of the Corporate Director of Community Development

#### 1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To brief Division Members on the work undertaken previously in relation to the vibrancy of market towns in Hambleton, how the district work is continuing and to provide an update on the visitor economy and transport provision in the area.

#### 2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The 2014-2024 Hambleton Economic Strategy identified Vibrant Market Towns as one of 4 key priorities for Hambleton District Council. In 2017 Hambleton District Council adopted a 5-year Vibrant Market Town Investment Plan, the purpose of which was to increase footfall, dwell time and visitor spend in the market towns Bedale, Easingwold, Northallerton, Stokesley and Thirsk. A Vibrant Market Town Project Officer was appointed to deliver a programme of activities to help ensure Hambleton's 5 market towns remained vibrant, sustainable and resilient. This report provides an overview of this activity undertaken between 2017 and 2023.

#### 3.0 HAMBLETON DISTRICT COUNCIL'S VIBRANT MARKET TOWNS INITIATIVE: ACTIVITY AND IMPACT

- 3.1 In 2017 Hambleton District Council adopted a 5-year Vibrant Market Town Investment Plan, the purpose of which was to increase footfall, dwell time and visitor spend in Bedale, Easingwold, Northallerton, Stokesley and Thirsk. The 5 themes of the Investment Plan were:

- Digital engagement
- Professional communications and media
- Developing the visitor experience
- Reinvigorating and revitalising markets
- Improving the built and natural environments, and ensuring accessibility
- Distinctiveness

Though the Investment Plan is now at end the Council's Vibrant Market Town Project Officer continues to support initiatives that promote High Street regeneration and post-Covid economic recovery.

Town vibrancy is about creating economic and social activity in attractive, connected, lively, stimulating, and exciting destinations to increase both footfall and dwell time. Key to the vibrancy of the 5 market towns has been the animation of the High Street, hosting live music events throughout 2022/2023 to encourage visitors to spend both time and money. Government 'Welcome Back' funding was used creatively to demonstrate that post-lockdown the market towns were safe, welcoming and 'open for business'. Information

packs were distributed to all High Street businesses, pavement stickers were deployed to ensure social distancing guidelines were adhered to and a marketing campaign was launched encouraging people to return to the High Street only when it was safe to do so. Northallerton High Street was closed to facilitate the safe operation of the market and the sale of essential items, an initiative welcomed by traders and residents alike and which helped stimulate post-lockdown economic recovery.

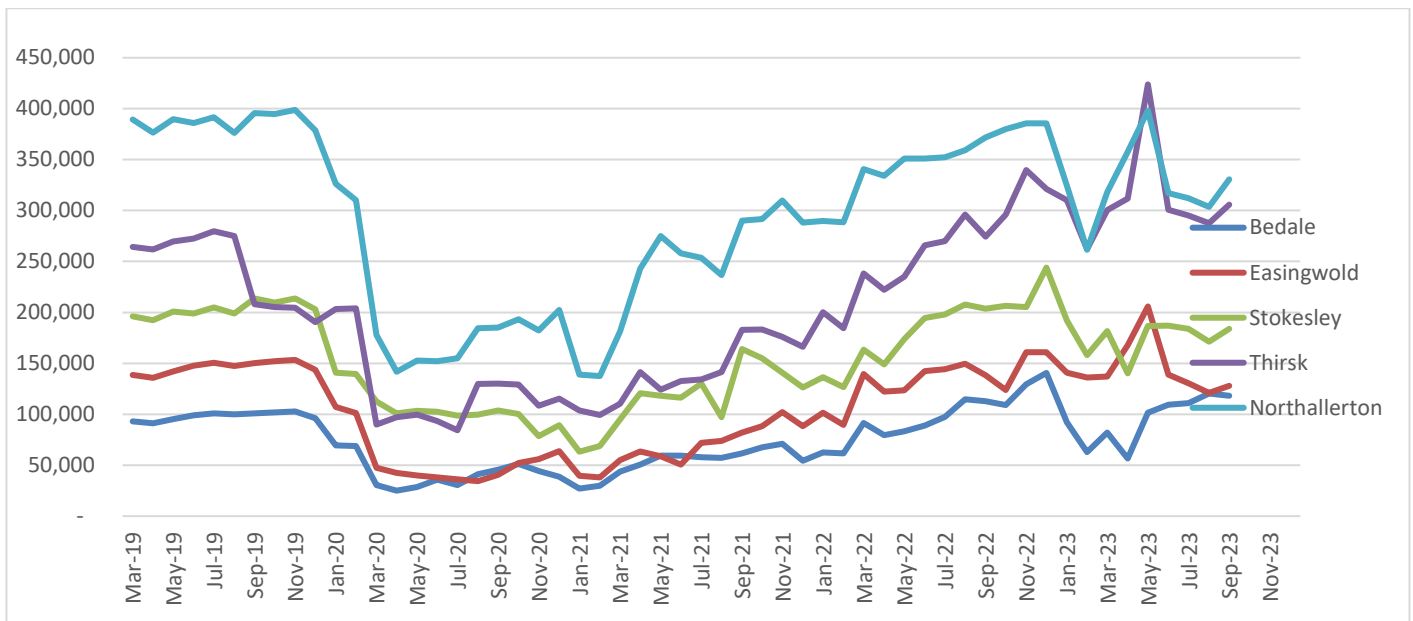
To promote outdoor 'café culture' and post-Covid recovery the VMT team were responsible for processing Pavement Licence applications that allowed businesses to sell food and/or drink on the pavement outside their premises. Pavement Licences were issued free of charge and the VMT Officer worked closely with business owners to resolve any barriers to a successful application. The positive working relationship with High Street businesses allowed pubs and restaurants to adapt their business models quickly and take advantage of changes in the Planning legislation which in turn allowed them to operate successfully once lockdown restrictions were relaxed.

By working in partnership with Town Councils, business networks and other key stakeholders the VMT team were able to share ideas, experience and resources and make best use of recent public realm enhancement projects such as the Northallerton Town Square Improvement Scheme and installation of power bollards in Thirsk Market Place. The creation of 'Town Teams', a partnership between the VMT team and Town Councils and Business Networks in Easingwold and Northallerton has helped ensure that local issues are identified, addressed and resolved (ie. public toilet and coach parking provision in Northallerton and improved signage/wayfinding in Easingwold Market Place) and common priorities agreed.

Effective communication is key to understanding the pressures and challenges faced by High Street businesses and the VMT Project Officer continues to publish fortnightly e-bulletins which provide information on funding, learning and local networking opportunities. These e-bulletins, first published in 2017, attract a readership of over 400 small and medium sized businesses. Regular attendance at business network meetings has helped raise the profile of the VMT initiative and reassure businesses that one-to-one business support is still available from North Yorkshire Council.

Since 2019 over £70k in grant funding has been allocated from the VMT budget to support 22 projects that sought to promote economic regeneration, address local issues and improve wayfinding in the market towns. These included the design and print of town maps in Stokesley, the installation of heritage interpretation panels in Thirsk and the refurbishment of the Tourist Information Centre in Easingwold.

As a key performance indicator footfall data continues to be monitored closely to determine the impact of the work undertaken to increase footfall and dwell time in the High Street and to evidence post-covid economic recovery. High street businesses in all 5 market towns have proved resilient against the challenges posed by covid and evidence suggests that footfall is now close to pre-covid levels and occupancy rates remain above the national average. Footfall data is also being used to determine where visitors to our market town are travelling from, where the 'hot spots' are in each town and the length of time visitors spend in the High Street. The graph overleaf showing total monthly footfall in all 5 market towns illustrates the gradual post-Covid recovery of the market towns of Bedale, Easingwold, Northallerton, Stokesley and Thirsk.



The Vibrant Market Town Project Officer continues to support the delivery of the Historic England-funded Heritage Action Zone (HAZ) programme which explores different elements of Northallerton’s rich heritage, history and culture and which provides the platform to drive footfall and visitor spend. One recent example has been the installation of the ‘Ballad of Sophia Constable’ statue designed and fabricated by renowned artist Ray Lonsdale which continues to attract significant interest from residents and tourists alike and which has helped raised the town’s cultural profile. As part of the wider HAZ programme the Council has also developed an Augmented Reality ‘Heritage Trail’ app which uses the town’s heritage to encourage visitors to spend more time exploring the High Street and awarded shopfront improvement grants to High Street property owners wanting to improve the appearance of their properties.

In 2022 Town Investment Plans for Bedale, Easingwold, Stokesley and Thirsk were published. These Town Investment Plans capture the key opportunities for enhancing the economic potential of each town and optimise the synergy between each town and with the wider County. They include portfolio of projects for each town that fit with investment priorities including 2 to 3 specific proposals presented as investment-ready with headline concept designs and costings.

By creating a ‘sense of place’ where residents and visitors feel welcome, safe and valued the Vibrant Market Town Initiative has helped support post-Covid regeneration, raise awareness of the high-quality market town ‘offer’ and establish the market towns of Bedale, Easingwold, Northallerton, Stokesley and Thirsk as popular tourist destinations of choice.

#### 4.0 CONTRIBUTION TO COUNCIL PRIORITIES

##### 4.1 North Yorkshire Council Plan 2023 – 2027: Economy:

- *We want the county to have economically vibrant and thriving town centres, market towns, villages, hamlets and communities, where places can work together to drive growth whilst utilising their distinctive cultural and physical assets.*
- *North Yorkshire Council will continue to build on the successful applications for High Street Heritage Action Zones in Northallerton and Selby.*

North Yorkshire Council Economic Strategy: Pillar 2 Investment, Infrastructure and Connectivity:

- *Priority 1: Equipping Our Towns for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*

## **5.0 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

5.1 None.

## **6.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

6.1 None.

## **7.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

7.1 None.

## **8.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

8.1 None.

## **9.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 None.

## **10.0 RECOMMENDATION**

That members note the update report on the work undertaken previously in relation to vibrancy of market towns in Hambleton, how the district work is continuing and the update on the visitor economy and transport provision in the area.

### **APPENDICES:**

Appendix A – Campaign Report #Discover Hambleton May 2022  
Appendix B – Coach Tourism in Northallerton Report April 2023

### **BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:**

- Vibrant Market Town Investment Plan 2017-2022

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Presenter of Report – Peter Cole – Vibrant Market Town Project Officer, North Yorkshire Council

Note: Members are invited to contact the author in advance of the meeting with any detailed queries or questions.

## **APPENDIX A - Campaign Report #Discover Hambleton**

### **Background**

Following on from the ongoing impact of Covid through 2020, 2021 and into 2022 the need to support the hospitality sector and the high street became increasingly important. Hambleton DC was already working to support the vibrant market towns agenda across the district; therefore, the creation of a new tourism campaign was developed to further enhance this work and to do more to promote the wider district to a larger and potentially new audience. #DiscoverHambleton launched in May 2021 to deliver activity to support tourism businesses, the market towns and surrounding areas in Hambleton. This campaign was funded through the governments' Welcome Back fund. In addition to paid for campaign activity, new social channels were created and launched, a private sector group (Hambleton Tourism Forum) was formed and new assets for the district were commissioned and delivered.

### **Aims**

The aim was to increase awareness of #DiscoverHambleton at both a local and regional (those living within a 90-minute drivetime from any part of the district) level to increase visitors and tourism spend into the district over the next 12-month period through a cross – channel campaign. Therefore, increasing the value and volume of tourism within the business economy of Hambleton. The campaign included a combination of paid-for activity, support through HDC and partners and ongoing content creation across the new social media. The paid-for elements of the campaign have been multi-channels and started at the beginning of the year. The main thrust of activity finished on the 31st of March in line with Welcome Back Funding guidelines.

### **Marketing Activity, Assets and Added Value Support**

Activity included the creation of a new 1/3 A4 DL leaflet covering the key messages about the district including market day information. Distribution is across the target market area in key footfall locations and will continue through to September. A package for bus & radio advertisement was delivered through Global, magazine & e-newsletter content across both regional & local titles including Living North, The Market Place and Handy Mag. To grow the social footprint HDC worked with Flying Scot Girl, a social media travel influencer, delivering content about Hambleton across multiple platforms. Lamp post banners were installed in destination to reinforce the brand #DiscoverHambleton and to add to the welcome into the market towns. Alongside the activity new assets have been produced to support ongoing promotion. This has included a new destination promotional film for Hambleton and a series of thematic films to promote the district including food and drink, heritage, days out, places to stay, outdoor and shopping.

A collection of branding merchandise has been created to provide to partners attending exhibitions and events. This includes banners, pop-ups, pens, pads, t-shirts and tote bags. Finally, a new photography commission has been delivered to provide a suite of images across all the towns to support ongoing social media promotion. In addition to paid-for activity we have enhanced the campaign with added value free activity through partner channels and through HDC routes to market (for example bin wagons and council tax circulars).

### **Leveraging the Brand**

The campaign identity has been used to support activity throughout the period including the recent Music in March initiative across the market towns. We have also adapted the

campaign identify to support key seasons when businesses are delivering specific events and activity including Halloween and Christmas and we plan to continue this throughout 2022. B2B support The campaign has been adapted to support other audiences in a more b2b capacity demonstrating flexibility of creative. Partnering with The Herriot Country Tourism Group and Northallerton Bid we are working together to attract more coach operators into the district. With new coach parking facilities in Bedale, Northallerton and Stokesley to compliment the facilities already in Thirsk we have a string offer for this sector. This work will bring additional spend into the towns. #DiscoverHambleton materials have been produced to be distributed at exhibitions and used on familiarisation trips that are tailored to this sector.

## **Reach and Impact**

So far, the campaign has achieved a reach of in excess of 4m across all activity. Highlights include a reach of 1.5m through bus and radio with an overall impact figure of 6.8m. the work with Flying Scots girl delivered over 9k views of Hambleton content across TikTok and over 77k views of the market towns reel on Instagram. In addition, the anecdotal comments shared across the stories and reels was inspiring to read, so many people discovering Hambleton for the first time and looking forward to visiting soon. The social channels now have 2k followers and we are working to continue to grow numbers and increase engagement levels. Since the launch of the #DH social channels across Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, #DiscoverHambleton has reached over half a million people. This figure continues to rise, gaining more followers week on week. To date over 350 posts have been shared, promoting all things happening across the district, supporting the market towns, attractions, seasonal events and so much more

## Coach Tourism in Northallerton Update April 2023

This is a follow-on report to mark 12 months of welcoming coaches to Northallerton. The first report was issued in August 22 and this report will update on the current position.

### Background

The development of coach tourism for Northallerton started in 2021 when an agreement was reached to install 2 coach bays in the Applegarth car park that allowed coaches to park for 4 hours for free. A working group was created off the Northallerton Town Team group to work through the detail. This group has met every 6 weeks to work through the developments.

This group included representation from Northallerton BID, the TIC, Northallerton Community Action, HDC and the Town council.

### Partnerships

Engagement with the Herriot Tourism Group continues and Northallerton as a coach friendly town with specific services in places is part of the offering in Northallerton both for the driver and the passengers. When the Herriot group attend ongoing travel trade events Northallerton is part of their message. This continues to build awareness especially when word of mouth through this sector is key and talking to coach operators and coach travel companies has been a significant part of building awareness.

#### Exhibitions for 2023

- British Tourism and Travel Show
- Britain and Ireland Market Place
- Excursions Travel Show
- CTA Conference & Workshop
- International Confex



## CPT Support

CPT continue to be supportive of Northallerton. A new Northallerton Welcome Coaches



leaflet was produced in February 23 and CPT distributed this through the newsletter.

## The Offer

The offer has been updated with new offers in the voucher booklet. This has been reprinted for 2023.

- A team of Ambassadors to Meet & Greet coaches were recruited and would be available Wednesday and Saturday to tie into market day
- Ambassador uniforms
- A £8 driver voucher
- A town voucher booklet for the shops in the town
- Various leaflets were created to provide visitor information, toilets, things to see etc
- Videos were created to help the driver navigate to the spaces
- Signage in the Applegarth to direct the coaches
- Booking system via David Cundell

The offer has been very well received. A quote from the Bus Federation – ‘For Coach travel Northallerton are using a template that all other towns should follow’

## 2022 Final numbers

- June – December – 40 coaches
- 1507 passengers
- All over Yorkshire and beyond
- Estimated average length of stay over 3 hours
- Estimated average no of passengers per coach 38
- 60,280 shopping hours in Northallerton in 2022

## 2023 So Far

- So far 100 coaches booked in for 2023 and 11 booked in for 2024
- Estimated 1540 passengers



- All over Yorkshire and beyond including Kent
- Estimated average length of stay over 3 hours
- Estimated average no of passengers per coach 29, however this includes a number of small minibuses which brings the overall average down.
- 80,080 shopping hours for 2023 to date
- 1 coach so far booked for 2024
- This report covers coaches that book in however there are coaches that arrive in Northallerton especially on market days and throughout the week. The number of these coaches is also growing but difficult to report on. If coaches are spotted, they are contacted to make them aware of the free spaces and the offer package by booking in.

**From this initial report we can confidently state:**

*In 2022 1507 people, from a radius of over 50 miles, have spent over 127 hours in Northallerton through coach visits in 2022 between June and December. This equates to 60,280 shopping hours in Northallerton in 2022. We estimate to date that a further 1540 people, from a radius greater than 50 miles will spend a minimum of 163 hours in Northallerton through coach visits in 2023. This equates to 80,080 shopping hours in Northallerton estimated for 2023.*

## Appendix

A few facts for context:

- There are circa 2,500 coach operators in the UK, 81% of which are family or individually owned.
- Together these businesses provide 42,000 jobs across the country.
- Coach travel is 6 times safer than car use.
- Coaches make work viable in areas or during hours poorly served by rail; coach operates 24 hours a day seven days a week and can support shift patterns for industries such as airports and airlines.
- The coach can be two to three times cheaper than rail travel.

Coaches are a vital part of the UK's tourism economy. The facts below highlight the key contributions coaches make:

- Pre-pandemic British people made an estimated 500 million passenger journeys by coach in the UK each year.
- Of the 6.3 million people who took a coach trip in 2019, 40% were 55 years old or older.
- In 2019 there were 23 million visits to tourist attractions and locations by coach, which contributed £14 billion to the UK economy.
- Coaches are an attractive travel option for international visitors, with 46% reportedly nervous about driving in Britain.
- In 2019 more than 68,000 passengers (accounting for nearly 40% of festival-goers) were transported to Glastonbury by coach from cities as far afield as Penzance and Dundee, with 880 passengers per hour being transported in the peak period.

The need to address air quality and the climate emergency has risen to the forefront of public and political consciousness. The facts below demonstrate the power coaches will play to reach legally binding Government targets:

- Just one coachload of people can keep up to 50 cars off the roads.
- For coach, average carbon dioxide emissions per passenger per journey are around 1.5 times lower than rail, 5 times lower than air and 6 times lower than car travel.
- Just a 15% increase in coach passenger journeys by British people each year could lead to approximately 47 million fewer cars on the road, saving over a quarter of a million tonnes of carbon dioxide and significantly reducing congestion.
- The cost of ultra-low and zero emission coaches is currently considerably more – around 75% more - than the latest Euro VI diesel vehicles.
- It is estimated that an electric charging point would cost between £20,000 and £35,000, plus the associated infrastructure costs which would vary depending on the site. This adds significant cost to the investment in electric vehicles.
- 56% of carbon dioxide emissions come from cars & taxis, just 3% come from buses & coaches.
- Through improvements to the coach fleet we can reduce carbon dioxide emissions even further – by around 56,000 tonnes over the next decade - and reduce

emissions of nitrogen oxides by enough to equate to £225 million in damage cost savings.

Source - [The value of bus and coach | CPT \(cpt-uk.org\)](#)