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Justice

York St. John University

Est.  
1841

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# Community-led Sustainable Tourism A York Perspective



Bethan Jones, Natasha Almond and Kenny Lieske

**About Good Organisation**

Good Organisation (Social Ventures) CIC is an award-winning Community Interest Company (Reg No 11555159) which supports marginalised people to share in the positive benefits of tourism within York. Its aim is to effect positive change with speed and passion, by offering training opportunities, managing micro-enterprise projects and providing personal development support to individuals affected by homelessness, addiction, and those with experience of the criminal justice system.

As one of only a handful of specialist social enterprises working within tourism across the UK, it is currently shaping a manifesto for inclusive economic growth whilst simultaneously contributing to new thinking which promotes authentic community engagement across the heritage sector.

**About The Institute for Social Justice**

The Institute for Social Justice was launched in 2020 to underpin York St John University's mission to stand up for social justice'. It does so through developing collaborative research and practice that seeks to identify, expose and address some of the inequalities, injustices and challenges facing society today. At its core the Institute seeks to work *with* people, *with* partners and *with* communities in a manner that sees participation, implementation and change as vital parts of its mission.

# Community-led Tourism - A York Perspective

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## Executive Summary

This report explores the impacts of tourism in York and the opportunities to utilise tourism more effectively to promote local community wealth building in the area. It draws on analysis of industry reports relating to sustainable and community-led or community-based tourism, questionnaire data, interviews with 12 individuals working or living in York and community conversation events carried out at York St John University.

While there is an acknowledgement among residents that tourism makes a positive contribution to the city, a number of negative effects are also identified, including overcrowding, anti-social behaviour, traffic and increased costs.

This report first focuses on tourism in York. While there is an acknowledgement among residents that tourism makes a positive contribution to the city, a number of negative effects are also identified, including overcrowding, anti-social behaviour, traffic and increased costs. The history of residents' involvement in discussions about tourism in the city is also examined, as participants felt that residents' needs were taken into account less than the needs of tourists.

The report then looks at sustainable, community-led tourism in, focusing on how both could be implemented in York. Participants identified barriers and opportunities for sustainable, community-led tourism in the city, highlighting the existing wealth of knowledge and experience and the number of community groups making a positive contribution to the city. Finally, community wealth building through sustainable tourism is explored, particularly in relation to the raising and reinvestment of tourist pounds spent in the area.

The third chapter highlights case studies where sustainable, community-led tourism

has been successfully implemented and has brought social, economic and cultural benefits to the location. Five examples are explored with best practice for creating and maintaining sustainable community-led tourism.

Finally, the report offers recommendations for community-led tourism in York that could be implemented to ensure a sustainable tourism model that includes residents and community members:

- Ensure residents are represented on tourism working group/advisory board
- The implementation of a tourist tax should be explored
- Invest in community owned assets
- Explore the concept of luxury community-led tourism



# 1. Introduction

Tourism is the largest industry in the world and one of the fastest-growing sectors worldwide (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2022). While it was heavily impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic data from the 2024 UNWTO World Tourism Barometer found that the sector is recovering, with international tourism reaching 97% of pre-pandemic levels in the first quarter of 2024 (2024). VisitBritain has forecast 38.7 million inbound visits and £32.5 billion spend in 2024, a growth of 2% in visits and 5% in nominal spend compared to 2023 (VisitBritain 2024a), and recently announced it would be launching a new campaign in association with the British Film Institute to encourage film tourism to the UK's regional destinations. Tourism, both domestic and international, is thus of significant economic importance to the UK, contributing nearly four per cent of the country's economic output and sustaining 1.7 million jobs in 2019 (Department for Media, Culture and Sport, 2023). In 2023 the country saw 38 million visits from overseas visitors who spent £31.1 billion; of which 1.1 million visitors and £644 million were spent in Yorkshire and the Humber (VisitBritain 2024b; 2024c). Domestically, the UK saw 117.3 million overnight trips and a total spend of £30.9 billion, with 8.8 million overnight trips and a spend of £2,201 million in Yorkshire and the Humber (VisitBritain 2024d). In addition to its economic impact, tourism can be beneficial socially and culturally, leading to reduced stress, higher quality of life and happiness, improved physical health and work-life balance (Chen and Petrick, 2013). Tourism also provides an opportunity to meet new people and explore new regions and cultures, facilitating cultural exchange and understanding.

Yet tourism also has major negative consequences. The industry is responsible for around 8% of worldwide greenhouse gas emissions (Khatib, 2023), with transport being the largest emitting sector of greenhouse gas emissions in the UK (Department for Transport, 2023). Tourists also produce significant amounts of waste, including food, solid waste and plastic, which many destinations struggle to manage (Ezeah et al., 2015; Baloch et al., 2023). In addition, local communities may suffer from increased rent and costs of living, congestion, over-development and air pollution (Environmental Audit Committee, 2019; Baloch et al., 2023). This has been the

case with York: as its medieval walls and streets, the Minster, the Jorvik Centre, the Castle Museum and the National Railway Museum continue to draw visitors, congestion, issues with parking, litter, increases in housing and commercial rent and a feeling of disembeddedness among residents increases (Meethan, 1997; Snaith and Haley, 1999; Bahaire and Elliott-White, 1999).

When properly managed tourism can contribute to economic growth, environmental conservation, and poverty reduction and recent years have seen an increasing focus on sustainable, community-based tourism. Sustainable tourism, as Rebecca Reichmann Tavares, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Brazil Foundation, points out, "can be part of a global solution by combating the devastation of natural resources and further encroachment on Indigenous lands by private interests [and] can address the exploitation of local communities already present in much of the commercial tourism industry" (2024). Although sustainable, community-led tourism has largely been considered in relation to developing, rather than developed, countries and rural rather than urban areas (López Guzmán, Sánchez-Cañizares & Pavón, 2011; Zielinski, Jeong and Milanés, 2021; Dolezal and Novelli, 2022) there are nevertheless opportunities for cities in the UK, Europe and elsewhere to engage with sustainable tourism to build community wealth and improve the tourism offer for visitors, residents and the environment.

## 1.2 Research aims

The purpose of this research is to understand how tourism can be utilised more effectively to promote local community wealth building. In particular, the research aims to:

- identify community-led regenerative approaches to sustainable tourism development;
- examine the potential relevance of community-led tourism for York;
- consider policy solutions for the social, environmental, and ethical development of tourism in the city.

### 1.3 Methodology

A mixed methods approach was used for this research to gather data from residents, visitors, business owners, local charities and other relevant organisations. In the first instance, data collection was carried out through the use of a questionnaire, which asked questions about the impact of tourism on respondents, how tourism can create value for the area and its residents and what challenges need to be dealt with to achieve sustainable, community-led tourism in the city. The questionnaire was shared via The Good Organisation and Institute of Social Justice mailing lists, in Facebook groups, on LinkedIn and via Twitter, and was conducted anonymously. 131 people responded with 77 of those completing the questionnaire. Following cleansing of the data 65 valid responses were received on which a thematic analysis was conducted to identify key themes.

Structured interviews were held with 12 participants including business owners, York residents and charitable organisations. Questions asked included how tourism has influenced participants' daily routines, their experiences of the inclusion of resident perspectives in decision-making processes related to tourism development and what opportunities exist for growth and

development. In addition to a thematic analysis being conducted on these responses to identify key themes, the interviews were also used to create a film to be hosted on the Good Organisation website.

Two community conversations were also held at York St John University in March and April 2024, with 15 local stakeholders attending. Utilising elements of deep democracy conflict resolution and counter mapping techniques, topics discussed included what locals need in addition to the expectations of tourists and led to the development of a community wealth building through tourism manifesto (see appendix 1).

Three key themes were identified based on questionnaire and interview responses and desk-based research, and are discussed in detail in the following chapters:

- the need for residents' involvement in discussions about and planning for tourism
- the role community-led tourism can play in community wealth building
- the need to reinvest money spent in the tourist economy into the community





## 2. Tourism in York

York, founded by the Romans in AD 71, has been receiving visitors for thousands of years, from pilgrimages to the early Minster and visitors brought with the advent of the railway to the immersive Van Gogh experience and hen parties. Its long history and narrow medieval streets are a key draw for visitors, but its status as a heritage city is relatively new. Meethan (1996) suggests that tourism was of little significance in York until the 1960s, when the UK government began placing more emphasis on conserving historic towns and cities – York becoming one of four pilots for the government's historic towns project. The main industries in the city at the time were manufacturing – of both railways stock and chocolate – and the council saw tourism as peripheral when compared to the need for inward investment in terms of manufacturing (Bahaire and Elliott-White, 2000). Tourism was mostly tolerated rather than encouraged, with the sector seen as contributing to low paid employment. Meethan points out that during the “anti-tourist sentiments within the city ran high, and there were calls for the numbers to be limited or, at least, better managed” (1996, 329). The decline of the city's manufacturing industry in the 1980s and 1990s, however, saw tourism become York's biggest economic sector (Paddison and Walmsley, 2018).

In addition to bringing money into the city, however, the rise in tourism also created a number of political issues, not least the perception that the city inside the walls – and its visitors – was given more consideration than the city outside the walls – and its residents. The positioning of York as a heritage city foregrounds certain aspects of its appearance and attractions and can lead to “the authenticity of its cultural products: buildings, artefacts, performances, culture and lifestyles [being] replaced by a surrogate, staged authenticity” (Croft 2021, 23). It also raises the question of York becoming a tale of two cities, where tourists with money to spend are able to enjoy a quality of life that is unattainable for residents beyond the city walls. Indeed, research by Snaith and Haley (1999) suggested that those who lived outside the city walls viewed tourism in a negative light despite recognising its economic benefits.

Discussions about tourism have long taken place, with residents recognising the

importance of the sector to York's economy while also being concerned about tourism's effect on their own quality of life. As Mordue points out, “three issues were seen as pivotal: the quality of tourism employment; the quality of the tourists themselves; and local people's growing sense of disembedded-ness from the city centre” (2005, 187). These issues were evident in the 1990s (Augustyn and Knowles, 2000), and the latter two in particular remain of concern today.

### 2.1 Positive impacts of tourism

Despite the negative impacts of tourism highlighted above and discussed elsewhere in this report, residents of York recognise the positive impacts of tourism. Just under half (32) of the 65 questionnaire respondents noted the positive ways in which tourism affects them specifically, and the city more broadly (see figure 1).

#### *Economy*

The most positive impact of tourism was felt on the economy, which was highlighted by sixteen respondents (“it provides income for York” (respondent 9); “Tourism is obviously central to the York economy” (respondent 20)). Examples of ways in which tourism contributes to the city was highlighted by Respondent 29: “people bring money, to spend directly on culture and heritage, and indirectly in shops, pubs, restaurants, hotels, etc.”. Jake Furby, a resident of York and trustee for the York LGBT forum, emphasised the impact that tourists visiting the city to attend specific events had on the economy:

Thinking of all those people that come to York Pride, not all of them are from York. Many are tourists and the money that that brings to the local economy is quite substantial. From booking a hotel room, to an Airbnb, to going into restaurants and cafes, it really does create a new economic system when Pride is about in York every year.

York is home to a range of festival and events each year, including York Trailblazers, Festival of Ideas, York Proms and the Christmas market. With a major event happening every month, tourism to the city contributes millions. The visitor economy was seen as benefiting small businesses, cultural and historical institutions and infrastructure, although there was a perception among



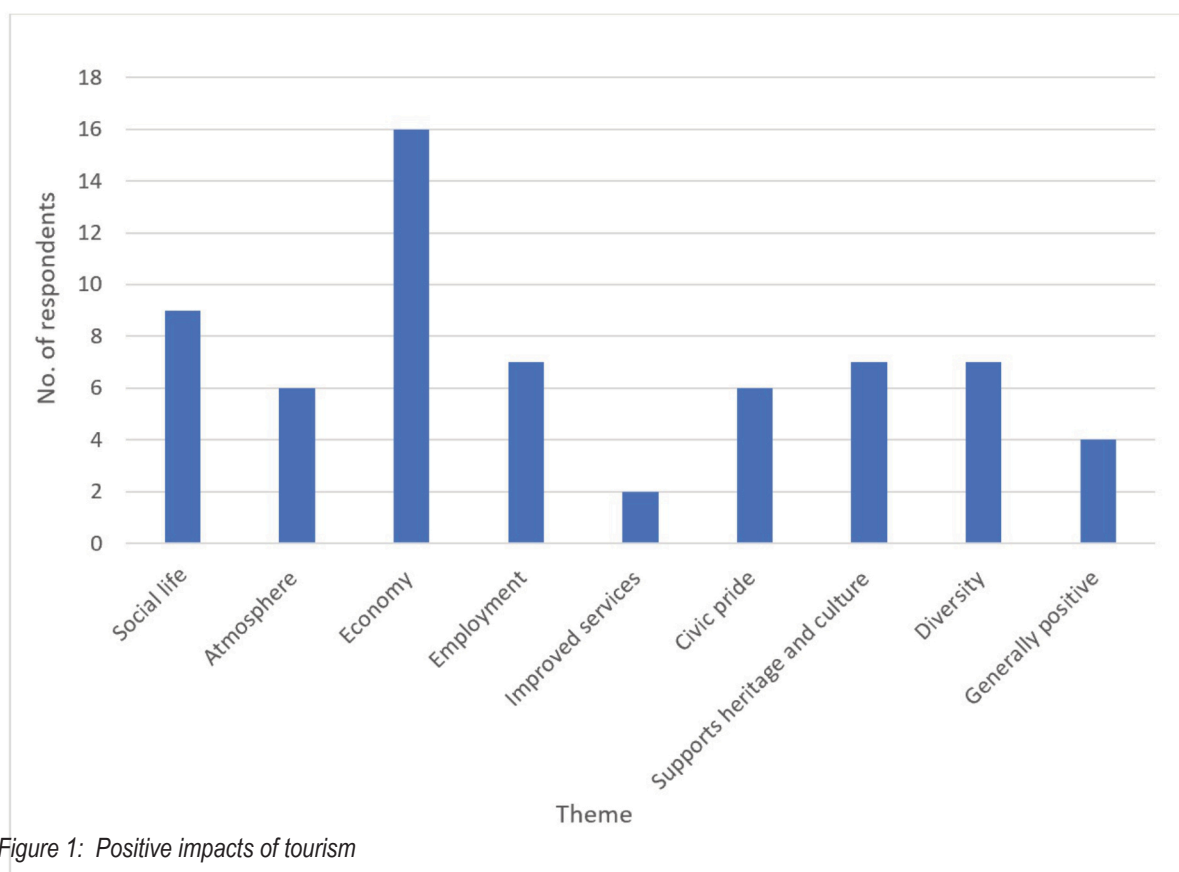


Figure 1: Positive impacts of tourism

some respondents that certain people or organisations were benefiting more than others, and transparency in how tourists' spending was being used was requested.

Two of the questionnaire respondents run businesses in the city, as do several of the interviewees, and these pointed out the economic value of tourism to them specifically, including Claire who owns an Airbnb and rents out rooms to tourists, and a questionnaire respondent who leads walking tours around York and notes that they are somewhat dependent on tourists visiting the city.

Of course, as the number of visitors rise so do the number of people who need to be employed to cater to them. Participants discussed employment primarily in relation to the hospitality and tourism sector, which was seen as a double-edged sword given the low wages and precarious nature of the sector:

*Keeps the city going and people employed – though often precariously. Provides for a greater range of choice regarding entertainment. (Respondent 28)*

Nevertheless, participants recognised that tourism offered more employment

opportunities and jobs in the tourism and hospitality sector provided work experience and a salary for students and young people just beginning their career.

#### *Social and cultural life*

A better social life for residents was another area highlighted as a positive impact of tourism. Participants felt that the money brought into the city by tourists enabled better shops, more choice of bars or restaurants and a range of entertainment from theatre to concerts and festivals: "I benefit from better shops, more choice of bars and better quality restaurants than I would otherwise have for a city of this size" (Respondent 5).

One respondent did note that businesses in the city centre are more focused on hospitality than shops, but "one reason we moved here was wide range of restaurants and excellent pubs, so I can't complain about this" (Respondent 24) while another, who had lived in Scarborough as a child and moved to York from London two years ago, wrote:

*I love how amazing York is on so many levels be it history, architecture, food, nights out etc etc and fully support the need for tourism. York is*

one of only a few city's I can think of that is bustling and on the face of it the shops seem more successful, some of this must be down to tourists. (Respondent 30)

Tourism was seen as a way of supporting heritage and culture, particularly given York's heritage and history is an important aspect of the city and is foregrounded in marketing the city to visitors.

Tourism attracts monetary investment through people visiting the city paying admission fees to museums, national trust sites, theatres and other venues. This investment helps to pay for the upkeep of buildings and maintenance of the city. (Respondent 16)

Residents benefit from York Residents Festival when attractions like the Minster, JORVIK Viking Centre, Clifford's Tower and Merchant Adventurers' Hall give free access to residents as a "way of saying 'thank you' for the warm welcome our residents continue to give to York's visitors" (Make It York, 2024). Although this wasn't mentioned specifically by any of the research participants, felt that tourism created value through preserving historical buildings and maintaining events and attractions that benefit residents as well as visitors, and York's unique culture and heritage was mentioned:

Tourism brings people to the city, and the people bring money, to spend directly on culture and heritage, and indirectly in shops, pubs, restaurants, hotels, etc. (Respondent 29)

However, some felt that smaller, less mainstream aspects of culture were sidelined in favour of the more well-known attractions.

#### *Diversity and civic pride*

Interestingly, given much of the discourse more broadly about tourists impacting local communities, affecting social mobility and driving some residents away, diversity was seen as a positive impact of tourism in York. One noted that it "widens our 'cultural' interactions eg talk to people from other countries" (Respondent 10) while another wrote "It creates a diverse student community to interact with which increases our cultural capital" (Respondent 52). The importance of ensuring a range of voices

were heard was highlighted by one respondent who noted:

Residents from vulnerable community's well being is impacted because they are not included in the City's history or heritage. Some communities are unrecognised. If other cultures are valued and showcased, it reduces hate crime incidents and prevents safeguarding issues. If there is a lack of awareness about other cultures and backgrounds, that impacts on social cohesion and wider understanding. Tourism can create value for areas and people in the City if communities from other backgrounds were included in citywide Tourism projects from the start. (Respondent 32)

Despite these valid criticisms, York was referred to as a 'vibrant', 'bustling' city which tourism allows to 'thrive'. Respondents also felt a sense of civic pride that tourists choose to visit the city they call home, although this was tempered by the acknowledgement that it makes the city busier and contributes to some of the issues already discussed above.

## 2.2 Negative impacts of tourism

While many respondents were able to highlight the positive impacts of tourism a number of negative impacts were identified (see figure 2).

#### *Overcrowding and anti-social behaviour*

Overcrowding resulting from an increase in tourism and the subsequent high numbers of people being brought into the city was by far the biggest negative impact for questionnaire respondents. Weekends and holidays were cited as times when the city is overwhelmingly busy, with some avoiding York at those times:

Tourism in York affects when and where I go to places - especially on weekends. I plan my time so that I am avoiding the busy periods - choosing to go to town earlier in the day and avoiding going there altogether from mid-Nov to the end of Dec. I'll avoid areas such as Parliament Street when there are markets on and I'll use short cuts to navigate the city. If I have something to do in town which is a quick task it can be made more

difficult when it's busy. (Respondent 15)

Makes the city centre rather unappealing / to be avoided at all costs, particularly during peak times. When not working, I spend most of my time in my neighbourhood or around the periphery of the city centre. (Respondent 28)

Linked to this was anti-social behaviour, which has been highlighted as a concern for tourist destinations more broadly (Deery and Jago, 2010; Hughes, 2018; Araya López, 2020). Nearly 50% of survey respondents referred to stag and hen parties in their responses, with drinking, vomit and litter in the streets, and loud groups of people being mentioned by almost all. Sam and Tom, owners of Sparks Community Venue York, agreed that this was an issue and that they see their venue as a safe haven for residents:

York's lucky to have so many people that want to visit it for whatever reasons, but there can be a situation on a Saturday where alcohol based tourism is a thing, people coming for a day out in York, basically, a lot of drinking, a lot of same sex groups, and we try and often be a bit of a safe haven from that, really, as best we

can in the centre of town. I think some of the nicest comments we get from customers are like, you know, I don't like going into the city centre on a weekend, but I will come to Spark with the family, or with the kids, or with the dog.

Over-tourism is one of the most widely cited negative impacts of tourism and given the large number of attractions on offer and events taking place within the medieval streets of York it is no surprise that it was one of the largest negatives here.

#### *Environment*

As highlighted in other research on the negative impacts of tourism (Cohen, 1978; Briassoulis and van der Straaten, 2000; Sadeghian, 2019), the impacts on the environment, infrastructure and perceptions of York were also raised. One respondent, for example, pointed out that tourism "is bad for climate change eg building new hotels and demolishing other premises to do so, flights and cars to get to the city" (Respondent 40) while another referred to damage being done to buildings and locations by tourists:

in terms of the physical heritage some of us being damaged by the poor behaviour of visitors eg Clifford tower is scarred by people climbing the banks. It could generate income to

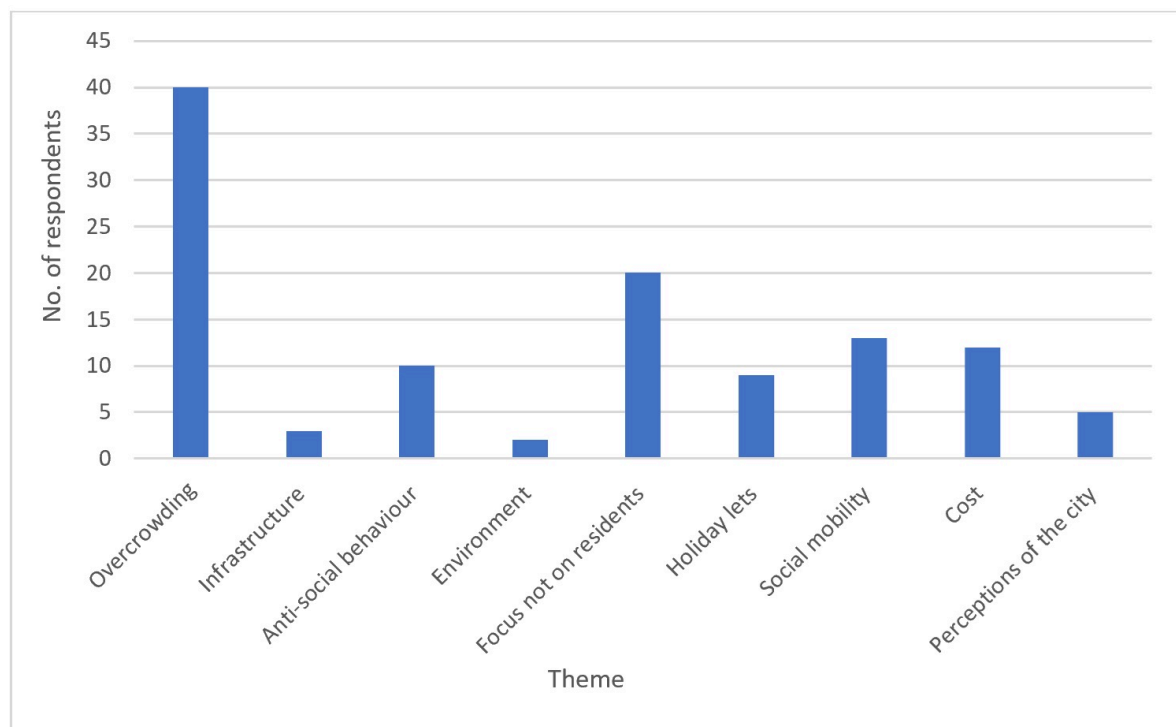


Figure 2: Negative impacts of tourism in York

invest in the cultural/heritage assets or wider Community its but this doesn't happen. (Respondent 14)

Given many of the buildings in York are medieval and/or listed buildings, this damage and the perceived lack of investment to counter tourists' behaviour was particularly egregious.

Interestingly, although traffic issues were highlighted by respondents this was in relation to their ease of access to and movement within the city rather than pollution. Similarly, issues relating to infrastructure were specifically highlighted by three respondents. One pointed out that there are "not always the amenities such as public toilets to support the number of tourists" (respondent 33) while another highlighted this an issue for local residents:

The number of visitors combined with the lack of local amenities, confined streets and poor infrastructure means the city centre is place to avoid as a local resident. (Respondent 37)

A third drew comparisons with other cities and referred to development work currently taking place in the city:

Noticeable that in cities which do not have traditional tourist attractions, the centres tend to be poorer and more run-down. Good that York has attractions other than retail to keep people coming, and great that residents benefit from this. Having said that, the Christmas Market and other big events in Parliament Street can have a detrimental effect on residents using the city centre due to excess crowds. There is a great need to relocate these big markets to a more suitable area - ideally the redeveloped Castle Car Park. This worked extremely well for the Open-Air Shakespeare in the summers pre-pandemic, and should work well for the Christmas market once the area has been redeveloped as proposed and the new car park has been constructed at St George's Fields. (Respondent 47)

Environmental issues were thus many, and not restricted to the impacts of tourism seen elsewhere such as damage to flora and

fauna, increased air pollution and the negative effects of climate change.

#### *Perceptions of York*

While York's heritage and history dominated responses, some participants felt that the perception of York marketed to tourists was not what the city should be recognised for. One pointed to work being done by organisations in York, and the idea that there is more to York than the locations and attractions that tourists spend their time on:

the day-trippers add little to York's offer - see the Minster & Shambles and get back on the bus. We need to focus more on quality events. York BID provides many of these and is to be congratulated. Also York Unlocked. As the YNYLEP report "Celebrating our Distinctive Heritage" reminds us there is MUCH more to York than the Minster & The Shambles (Respondent 25)

Another argued that tourism "perhaps places an emphasis on the built heritage that leads to the city having a bit of a conservative and stodgy culture, unable to move towards a more progressive and vibrant future" (Respondent 63). Shamim Iman, resident and founder of the York Mela Festival, comment on the lack of diversity in York, and the need for tourism in York to include its more diverse residents:

I grew up in Birmingham, so when I first came to York, the biggest thing that was, you know, glaring out to me was that lack of diversity in the city and inclusion and over the 37 years that I've lived here I haven't seen much improvement on that sort of aspect. So for me, I think what would make York even more greater as a beautiful city is if we had more diverse inclusion and equality focused events and opportunities. There's over a hundred different ethnic groups that live in York. There's so much talent from these communities that are sadly not being showcased. It would be great to have a space where we can regularly showcase that and bring in that ethnic tourism. We do see it in York, however, when they do come, there's not much for them to see from, from other backgrounds.



Phil Bixby, a York resident and architect who works with My Future York, also discussed the perception of York marketed to tourists and the way that this creates a Catch-22 situation:

It's an extraordinary city in that the scale of it and the kind of people in York mean that potentially it's an incredibly creative place to be and to work and to think about all the good stuff that comes out of living in cities. And all of that gets derailed as soon as you start saying you can't change things. Or as soon as you realise that people are looking backwards. Or as soon as you realise that the shaping of the city depends upon how others see it, and therefore how tourism works. So there's that huge kind of challenge there about, how tourism and how the relationship between tourism and our history and heritage in York stifles thinking creatively about the future.

Respondents also felt that there was more of an emphasis on tourists than on residents' needs (discussed in more detail below).

#### *Holiday lets and affordable housing*

Issues relating to social mobility were mentioned by several respondents, with affordable housing being the most commonly referred to. Holiday lets, short-term lets and Airbnb were specifically referred to by respondents as having a detrimental effect on the atmosphere of parts of the city and preventing young people who have grown up in the area buying their own property. These responses mirror those by members of other communities across the UK affected by holiday lets (Mermet, 2017; Gurran, Zhang and Shrestha, 2020; Cocola-Gant and Gago, 2021), and was seen as one of the most important issues by participants. Paul Jones, co-founder of creative agency HYPHA, explained this in more detail:

There's a real danger that investment properties, like Airbnbs for instance, and other holiday lets, take over and distort the city's property market, especially the inner city. A lot of those investment properties, a lot of Airbnbs, are owned by people who live outside the city, there's a lot of international ownership of property in the inner city, and you see money just

flowing out of York, and it's not really then being reinvested in the local economy. I think there's a need to think about how can we have a fair approach to holiday lets of the city, like Airbnb, you know. No one's saying that they shouldn't be there, but it's about how can they be part of a thriving mix, which makes sure there's still room, um, for younger people, for local people, for a wide diversity of people to live in the city.

The issue of affordable property, though perhaps most immediately affecting those who want to live in the city, also has implications for business. Commercial rents are increasing and threaten to push out the independent businesses which make up much of the shops inside the city walls, as well as potentially affecting future events. As Harkirit Boparai, York resident and venue manager at The Crescent Community Venue, note:

It's becoming really difficult to bring that talent to York, purely just because of the accommodation prices alone. And I think that it's not just that aspect as well. It's like, you know, if we're pricing young creative people out of living in the city, people who are into music, into coming to gigs or just being involved in creative industries, we're not just kind of taking away the punters to the gigs, but also the kids who are going to be in the next band, you know, the kids who are thinking, oh, let's put a band together and then they get to 18, 19 or whatever. And they're thinking like, what's our opportunities here? Maybe we should live somewhere with cheaper rent and you know, a larger city with more venues, more gigs going on and so on.

Research participants thus felt there was a need to address both holiday lets and the cost of housing and commercial rent in the city, not simply for the immediate future but also to ensure York remains a viable location for future residents, festivals and creative artists.

## **2.3 The journey of residents' involvement**

York's approach to its tourism strategy has developed over the years, evolving through a

number of key assessments, public consultations and input from external consultants. Bahaire and Elliott-White argue that “management of tourism in York has evolved from a largely agnostic to a proactive approach based on public–private sector partnership” (1999: 243), an approach solidified by the 2007 York Tourism Strategy and Action Plan which acknowledged the significance of tourism in the city. The action plan recommended that the City of York Council strengthened its tourism partnership, First Stop York, which comprised the City of York Council, York Tourism Bureau, and the York Hospitality Association, to a single organisation. This single organisation, Visit York, was created in 2008 to deliver a more coordinated approach with greater efficiency and reduced costs and attract private and regional funding with the aim of enabling York to maintain itself as a premier visitor destination in the future.

The 2007 the ‘Area Tourism Strategy’ had clear objectives to create “A strategic long-term investment framework, designed to renew and enhance York’s visitor offer and encourage the high-spending, long-stay visitor by adding value to their visit” (York Tourism Partnership 2007, 2). The focus of this strategy was to seek investment into the main heritage sights or cultural centres, such as the Minster, St Mary’s cultural Quarter, York Central and Terry’s. As such, only one of the objectives referenced ‘residents’, stating: “To ensure that the future needs of visitors and residents are taken fully into account in developing the needs of present-day visitors” (York Tourism Partnership 2007, 5). No outputs or measures were included to indicate mechanisms for residents’ input, or to measure the impact of input.

The next significant consultation took place in 2019, when the Council’s ‘Talk York’ consultation set out to consult with residents, visitors, businesses, students, and anyone with an opinion about York and what they think makes York special. The consultation underpinned the creation of the ‘York Narrative’, a narrative based on research into

perceptions of York carried out by Hemingway Design, Creative Tourist Consults, For The Love of Place, Mediale and City of York Council between March and October 2019. The Covid pandemic impacted York, and other tourism locations around the world, as lockdowns were implemented across the globe. In 2020 the council commissioned Group NAO to carry out research into “what kind of tourism do we want in the future and how can the visitor economy create value for the city beyond the visitor spending and the jobs that follow?” (Group NAO 2021, 4). The report highlighted that

*The city belongs to the citizens – not the visitors, nor the stakeholders of the visitor economy. Quality of life in the city has moved to the core of destination management. This means that the end-purpose of destination management has moved well beyond the growth imperative and the immediate visitor experience to “better life in the city”. This reflects resident concerns on over-reliance on the tourism and the night-time economy, and the needs of tourists over those of residents. (2021, 15)*

Stakeholders called for Make It York and Visit York to launch and operate a grand plan for sustainable and integral tourism with real and positive impact on the unique quality of life and cultural diversity of the city.

Despite the extensive development of York’s tourism strategy over the last two decades however, residents still feel that there is more of an emphasis on tourists than on residents’ needs. Two questionnaire respondents specifically referred to the ‘Disneyfication’ of York, with one writing “Genuinely feel like the city is a giant Disney land for tourists and residents don’t matter” (Respondent 6). The perception that residents came ‘second to visitors’ (Respondent 1) was felt in a variety of ways, from city centre facilities being diminished or replaced by those aimed at tourists (such as bars replacing useful shops) to the city offering a homogenous experience to visitors (generic bars and nightclubs) which lacks diverse and inclusive events and opportunities, and a lack of investment by the Council in community services and facilities:

*The increase in tourism in York, and the reduction of the councils money to fund local festivals and decreased*



the variety of cultural experiences for residents in the city. Where the city used to have opportunities for residents to get involved in activities such as the Peace Festival, Festival of Lights, Dance Festivals etc. the reduction of these has decreased the opportunities for residents to get involved, including children. (Respondent 36)

It's the dominant political and social approach of York. It's built around tourism, there's a distinct lack of dynamism and investment outside of fleeting commercial offerings towards tourism. It breeds complacency and over confidence in the city's prospects and outlook. (Respondent 39)

The inclusion of resident and community voices was seen as particularly important if tourism is to add value to the area, and participants offered different ways in which this inclusion could occur. One respondent highlighted our questionnaire as an example of community inclusion: "Ask residents their views (as you are doing) about how the city gets promoted and to whom" (Respondent 1) suggesting that further community engagement could be as simple as sharing a questionnaire among residents, businesses and other stakeholders to establish their thoughts. Another suggested that "Funds from tourism could go to a peoples assembly where locals get to vote on how money is spent" (Respondent 27). Helen Jones of the York Disability Rights Forum suggested that one solution to improving accessibility in the city was

to pay local disabled consultants to think about this in more depth. And it's important to remember that solutions for disabled residents will benefit disabled tourists and everyone else. A really, really obvious example of that is drop curbs. They help wheelchair users, and they help people who are carrying luggage, pushing luggage, or who pushchair with them. Solutions that help disabled people help everybody.

Participants didn't always feel that the organisations responsible for tourism (such as the council, Visit York) valued them as much as they do tourists, and expressed that residents need to be engaged with more

often, particularly in relation to big decisions. This extends to marketing strategies and festivals or events, as well as they day-to-day aspects of tourism management. As Harkirit Boparai said:

I remember when [Make It York] had a big national promoter, Cuff and Taylor. Suddenly I got a phone call out of the blue being like, "we're Cuff and Taylor, we're gonna do a festival in York called the York Festival (you know, in the same way as Leeds Festival, Reading Festival) and we're gonna book some big Britpop acts and we want a local band to round off the bill". And in my head I'm just thinking, like, if we're having something called York Festival, why has none of the creative people who actually live in York been involved in it? Why have you just taken what is an incredibly valuable brand name and just given it away to a large national promoter?

There is therefore a very real need for the Council, Make It York and other organisations involved in tourism in the city to actively seek out and engage with residents in order to ensure their diverse voices are heard.

### 3. Sustainable, community-led tourism as a means of building community wealth

The term community-based tourism (CBT) emerged in the 1990s and is used interchangeably with community-led tourism (CLT), although there are differences between the two. According to the World Tourism Organisation (2009), CBT is “Tourism development that places the community at the centre of tourism planning, development and management. CBT aims to improve the residents’ quality of life by optimising local economic benefits, protecting the natural and cultural environments and providing high quality visitor experiences”. Community-based tourism is therefore

centred around the notion of enabling community development, empowerment and self-reliance through collective action by a group of people sharing common social and cultural characteristics, to voluntarily participate in or develop tourism activities within the community thereby contributing to sustainable livelihoods and poverty alleviation (UNWTO 2020, 53).

López Guzmán, Sánchez-Cañizares & Pavón (2011) point out that CBT is associated with adverse effects of mass tourism in developing countries, though Bello et al. (2017) note that CBT has become a widely utilised approach, particularly for its promises of bottom-up development and control over tourism planning and management in rural and often marginalised communities. While CBT is generally small scale and involves interactions between visitor and host community, Manyara and Jones developed a useful working definition for the concept of CLT development as: “a sustainable, community-owned and community-based tourism initiative that enhances conservation and in which the local community is fully involved throughout its development and management and are the main beneficiaries through community development” (2007: 637). Rather than simply being *based* in the community, involving community participation but not necessarily community inclusion in strategy, planning, etc., community-led tourism is *led*

by the community, which has knowledge of the locale and its needs that outsiders – no matter how well-intentioned – might not. CLT thus aims to:

- benefit local communities economically, socially, physically and culturally
- involve the local community in tourism planning, management and operations
- manage a tourism scheme communally
- host tourists in the local community
- share the profits and benefits equitably
- use a portion of the profits or resources for conservation and community development

Guinan and O'Neill define community wealth building (CWB) as “a local economic development strategy focused on building collaborative, inclusive, sustainable and democratically controlled local economies” (2019, 4). CWB emerged in the early 2000s and unlike CBT has been primarily applied in urban areas. Rather than assuming that inward investment to a location will see economic benefits trickle down to the local community, CWB harnesses the wealth that exists locally, recruits from lower incomes areas, pays the living wage and extends community use of assets, land and property. Developing sustainable, community-led tourism in York thus has the potential for community wealth-building, as the following sections demonstrate.

#### 3.1 Community-led tourism in York

Respondents were aware that York is a must-visit location for many visitors and 85% (55) highlighted the things which make the city a strong and distinctive destination for community-led sustainable tourism (see figure 3).

##### *Heritage and location*

Unsurprisingly, given how often it was referred to in the previous questions, York's heritage and culture was considered its main strength for sustainable tourism, being seen



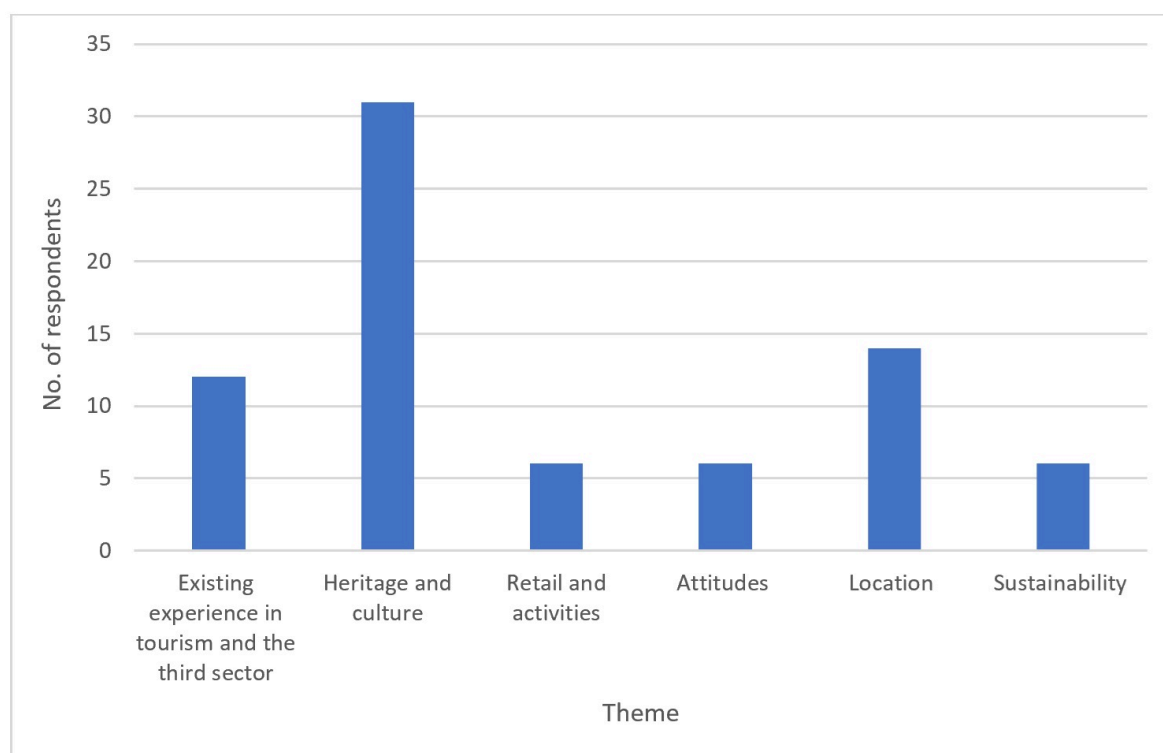


Figure 3: attributes which make York suitable for community-led sustainable tourism

by respondents as unique, diverse, rich and fluid.

Our history is what makes York unique for other cities, so it is of great importance to ensure upkeep and maintenance of our cities buildings and streets in a way that complements this and offers a tourist experience different to that of other cities. People come because they see York as quaint and pretty, we are at risk of losing that with over development (Respondent 4)

In addition to the city's history, the wealth of activities available was also highlighted, with 3 respondents specifically mentioning the number of independent businesses in the city which contribute to its unique character.

Respondents also highlighted the city's location as one of its strengths, in terms of its physical location and transport links; its size, making it easy to walk around; and its accessibility.

York is also a very small city, where everything is easily accessible, which I think is a draw for some. Great transport links make it easy to visit and there is a lot of affordable accommodation (e.g. budget hotels

and air bnbs - perhaps these accommodation providers could be encouraged to invest more in to the area they have their business based in?) (Respondent 15)

Many of the respondents who talked about York's location also referred to sustainability – either in relation to what York currently does well or its future potential. The fact that the city is navigable by foot and by public transport meant that it is a suitable sustainable tourism destination: "York is a brilliant size for sustainable tourism. It is a city and yet it is flat and small enough to be navigated by bus" (Respondent 7). While current work, such as the York Central development, was cited as having great potential for sustainable tourism projects.

*Existing skills and community organisations*  
Existing experience, skills and knowledge in both the tourism and third sector was another strength highlighted by respondents. As mentioned, respondents accepted that York had a long history of tourism and this had developed expertise as a tourism location; as Sam and Tom noted: "You know, there's great examples of people that have been doing that [locally led, properly community focused and driven models of activity] in York for years and years". Several respondents highlighted the work being done by

community organisations, social enterprises and the voluntary sector and suggested that this culture “could support the development of community owned assets that support both tourists and residents alike” (Respondent 35). Some respondents offered suggestions for how this could be done, suggesting that education or creative thinking was required to enable York residents and charities to see what the potential was:

There are innovative social enterprises and charities that have a lot to offer but probably have not thought about it, diversification from what they do already eg Edible York could offer walking tours of edible growing, as in Todmorden, In York many people will have worked with tourists when they were students or doing that while finding a more long term post in their chosen field. they have knowledge and skills, but may dismiss that whereas it is an asset. (Respondent 39)

Despite the challenges of tourism highlighted in responses to previous questions, respondents felt that on the whole the city was a welcoming one and tolerant of tourists. Two respondents referred to the city as a ‘friendly’ one, with one respondent also suggesting that the city’s resilience and determination made it a strong and distinctive destination for community-led sustainable tourism.

Three respondents highlighted areas which *could* potentially make York a strong and distinctive destination for community-led tourism, suggesting that while it may not be that now it can be in the future. In addition to Edible York (respondent 39), York Central development was suggested as having “great potential for sustainable tourism projects” (respondent 17) and another respondent referred to the homeless-led tours that are offered in the city. Respondent 24 felt that “a joined-up, coherent offer would help develop quality sustainable tourism where people truly interact with our cultural offering and also stay and spend locally”, reflecting the need for community inclusion and collaboration highlighted previously.

### 3.2 Sustainable tourism in York

Community-led sustainable tourism combines aspects of community-led tourism and sustainable tourism to deliver social,

environmental and economic benefits. By working with community groups, leaders and residents, sustainable tourism can “invest in much-needed energy and information infrastructure to provide tourists with educational and nature experiences, exposure to traditional art, culture, music and sports, local cuisine and simple locally produced food, lodging and hospitality” (World Economic Forum 2023). The question of sustainable community-led tourism seemed to be a more difficult one for respondents to answer, however. Nine questionnaire respondents didn’t know what makes York a destination for community-led sustainable tourism, while three felt that it wasn’t. Two were unsure what the question meant, while other responses were divided between environmental sustainability and tourism as a permanent offer for the city. One respondent suggested that “Tourism in York feels extractive of the city’s resources (we need better biodiversity and the rivers are polluted)” (Respondent 26) while three felt that tourism and sustainability are mutually incompatible, “tourism in York [being] about capitalism and short term profit” (Respondent 16). It is clear that more needs to be done to educate the local community on what community-led sustainable tourism is, and indeed two respondents felt it would be useful to see case studies of other locations which do it well (see chapter four),

Participants nevertheless identified challenges that must be tackled to ensure any community-led tourism in York is sustainable (see figure 4) as well as offering potential solutions.

#### *Communication and collaboration*

By far the largest challenge respondents highlighted was that of communication and collaboration, both within and beyond York. We have previously mentioned both the perceptions of York foregrounded in marketing and need to include residents’ voices, and these were raised again by participants. Key for this was the development of a strategy that takes into account best practice and working with other stakeholders in the city. Marketing Marketing could be aimed at both tourists and residents, both to make tourists aware “that York is a living and working city” (Respondent 34) and to

Ensure that the community is kept on board and not left to feel like the

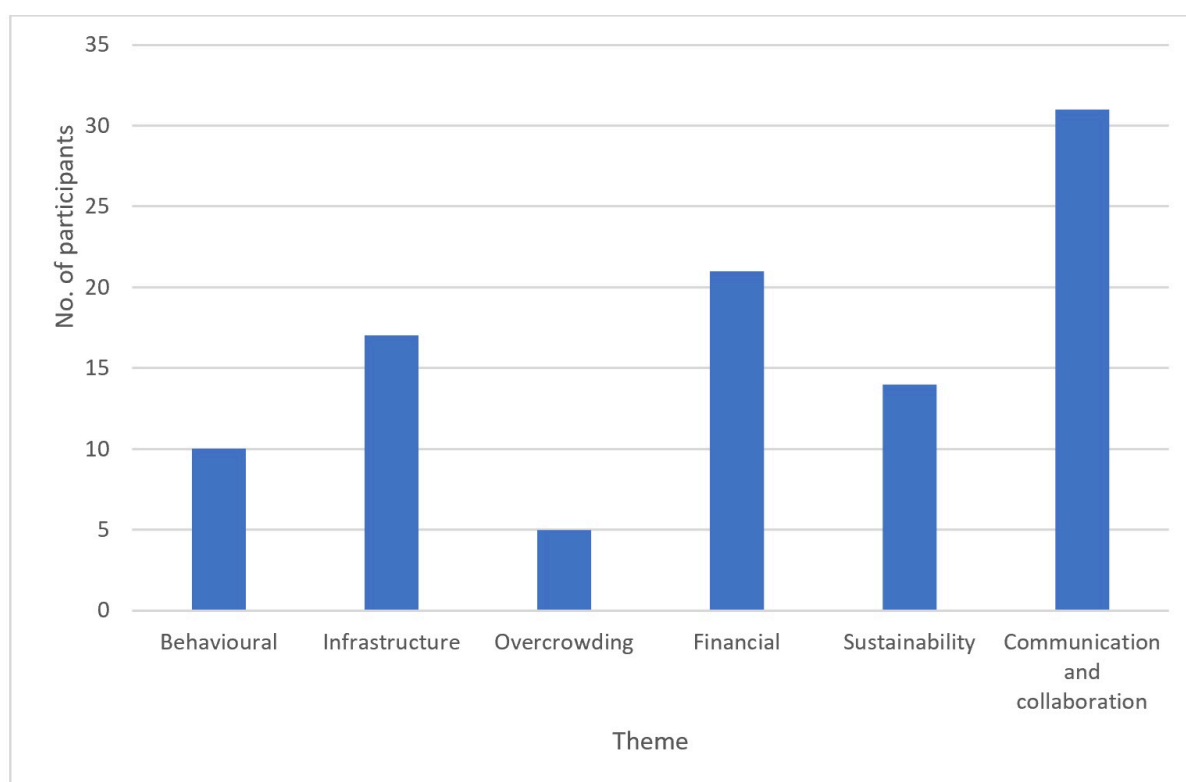


Figure 4: Challenges in addressing sustainable tourism in York

tourists come first. This is best done through enabling people to feel ownership of places and events in the city, through offers for locals such as free entry; exclusive events for locals, eg York children in the school holidays; asking locals what kinds of events/markets/festivals they would like, to avoid the feeling that things are being imposed upon them. (Respondent 44)

Given the comments regarding residents' inclusion previously, respondents felt that sustainable, community-led tourism "has to allow its residents to thrive, be proud of where they live, and want to celebrate it. Look after the people and they will look after York" (Respondent 30). To that end, residents need to be included in conversations, to have a voice in the future of tourism, and for this engagement to be "genuine and not a tick box performative exercise" (Respondent 36).

This ties into the development of a tourism strategy for York that considers community-led initiatives, promotes the potential of community-led tourism rather than "focusing largely on businesses, and the big visitor attractions" (Respondent 34) and "doesn't uphold people and orgs that are

disconnected by distance or apathy to the city" (Respondent 25). One respondent (Respondent 37) pointed out that too few people are interested in governance, citing a lack of trustees, and recognised that many people are unable to engage in development work or community initiatives because they have personal concerns caused by austerity, however they suggested that any strategy developed must be open to collaborations based on equality rather than being dominated by one large social enterprise and be based on communally accepted values. Participants recognised that in order to ensure sustainable community-led tourism, residents and visitors need to be consulted: "Talk to the people - both local and visitors otherwise we will not provide what they want and they will not come in to town - that is both locals and tourists!" (Respondent 42).

#### Infrastructure

Behaviour, overcrowding and infrastructure have been identified elsewhere in this report and were again some of the main challenges. As respondent 18 noted, "at some times of the year (e.g. Advent) there are too many people for the space available" and as much of the overcrowding was seen to be caused by hen and stag parties, anti-social behaviour was also a cause for concern:

ASB from tourists is a huge issue which needs to be tackled - alcohol and drug use connected to the races in particular impacts on the local community. We should take a zero tolerance approach to this and consider banning repeat offenders from the city centre. (Respondent 14)

As such, the city needs an improved infrastructure in terms of traffic (pedestrian and otherwise), waste disposal and recycling, and green spaces. This would remove the stress on resources and enable residents and visitors to enjoy the city as well as making it cleaner. Among the suggestions for ways to do this was to create green corridors in order to move about the city, invest in public transport and cycle lanes, improve local food systems and procurement, and pedestrianise parts of the city, such as Fossgate.

One of the most commonly suggested challenges was improving the public transport system to decrease reliance of cars. Work currently ongoing at the train station was highlighted by one respondent:

I think more could be done regarding eg local sourcing and food miles. The issue of transport applies to visitors themselves as well as what they consume; more could be done to improve public transport; and the missed opportunity to have a bus station or interchange at the railway station is both lamentable and short-sighted. (Respondent 45)

While another pointed out that congestion on the roads prevented a shift to sustainability in any form:

The congested and bridge-constrained road network and continued use / facilitation of private motorised transport prevents any meaningful shift to sustainability – tourism or otherwise. Ban the privately owned cars from the city centre (even within the walls / encirclement), improve the busses and city-licensed taxis, perhaps introduce a disabled-friendly tram network. And please, whatever happens... make sure there are cycle lanes EVERYWHERE. (Respondent 26)

Suggestions for how to approach food waste and recycling were also made by some respondents:

Utilise food waste for local energy production. Ban all new bottles, cups food containers and all packaging that is not biodegradable. Training for solar energy harnessing - panel creation, installation and maintenance. Retrofit all buildings to reduce energy usage. (Respondent 31)

Responses demonstrated that there is an awareness of sustainable practice and there are simple steps the council can take, such as increasing the number of recycling bins in the city centre, to address this.

#### *Wider focus*

Taking a broader focus to tourism rather than focusing on the usual attractions and highlighting York as a location that offers more than “pub-crawl tourism” (Respondent 18) was seen as a way in which tourism could add value, both within the city walls by highlighting the history of the city and creating more innovative performance venues, beyond the city centre by bringing the tourist economy out to the wider area. As Ali Bodley, resident and heritage consultant pointed out, “It’s great for tourism. I don’t doubt that. But there’s not much there for local people. And it doesn’t seep out into the suburbs either. It would be brilliant if the festivals could come out into local shopping areas or local areas and engage people in a very positive, proactive way, drawing on our local history”.

York’s long history and heritage, already identified as a positive, was highlighted as something that could be made more of, with one respondent writing that the focus on imaginary texts like *Harry Potter* “dominates when we have fantastic historic stories to tell” (Respondent 59). *Harry Potter* was referenced several times by both questionnaire respondents and interviewees. Phil Bixby argued that tourism in York “goes beyond *Harry Potter*. It goes beyond the Vikings, and it starts to pick up on histories which not only are personal, but also have a connection with the future”. This was echoed by Paul Jones, owner of HYPHA, who agreed that “there’s a danger that York could become a sort of one trip pony for as far as tourism is concerned. It needs to do more than just kind of repackage the same



heritage. I think it needs to be more inclusive. It needs to have a really thriving mix of people in order to attract a diverse range of, um, tourists in the future". Sustainable tourism in therefore involves environmental and cultural sustainability as well as ensuring the Council, Visit York, private businesses, community organisations and residents work together.

### 3.3 Community wealth building through sustainable tourism

Given York's status as a tourist destination the majority of respondents recognised that tourism in the city would not stop and offered suggestions for how to facilitate sustainable, community-led tourism. They also offered suggestions ways in which tourism could add value to the community in economic and cultural ways (see figure 5).

#### Reinvestment

The need for community inclusion has been discussed elsewhere in this report, but closely linked to this was reinvestment and the need for finances generated by tourist income to be allocated to other sectors of the city:

We need some city wide infrastructure that promotes the funnelling of money decisions to

community and also a policy that means x % of money is kept within a 30 mile radius of the city.  
(Respondent 25)

Making sure money from tourism is invested into independent businesses/the creative community for example, whose interests span the corporate realm and have a vision to reach out to all people  
(Respondent 41)

More broadly, respondents felt that reinvestment could benefit locals if it "Can be used to protect things that local people value" (Respondent 7). Several respondents highlighted areas where they felt reinvestment could be best applied:

There are lots opportunities to expand tourism to other local areas rather than just the city centre. It would be good to see some of the profits from tourism go back to some of the neediest people in York.  
(Respondent 33)

Regarding residents wellbeing - we have one of the most underfunded local government services and health, Police and fire services so if some proceeds of tourism could be fed in to

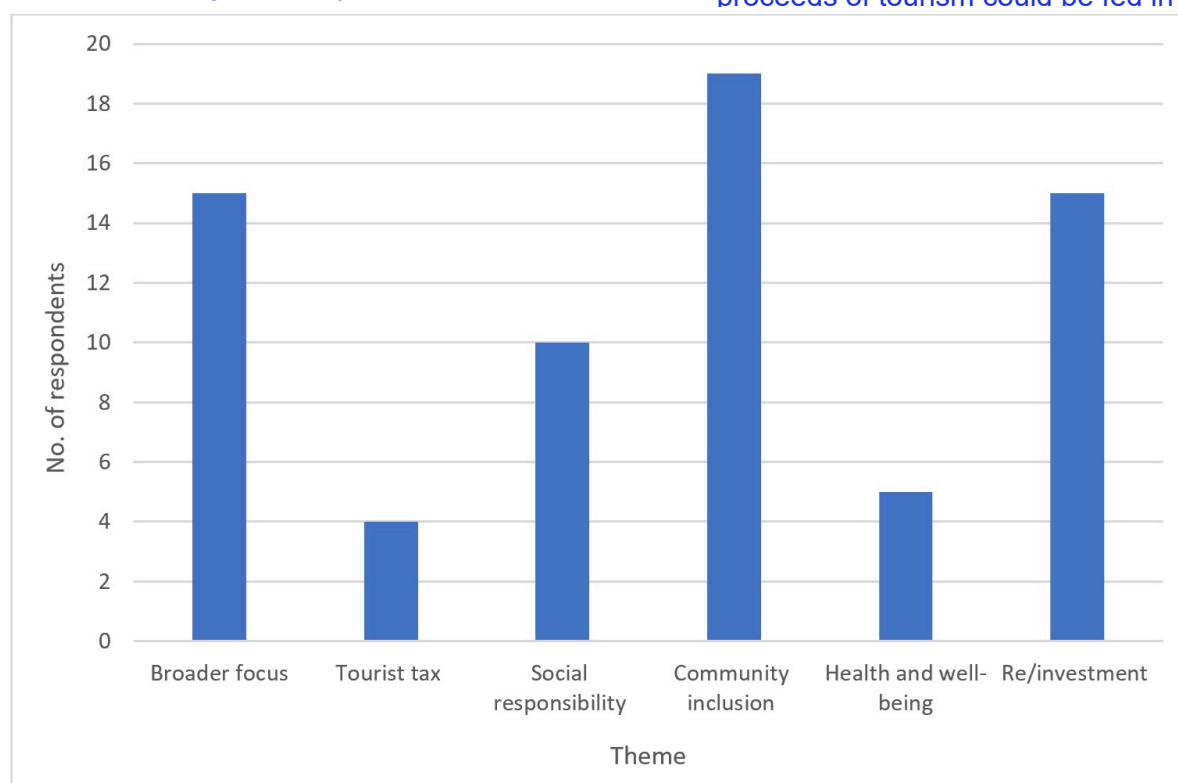


Figure 5: Areas in which tourism could create value in York

these services that would be great - especially as those visiting the city sometimes put extra pressure on the hospital and police resources and street cleaning, specifically linked to a drinking culture. (Respondent 16)

Reinvesting, particularly in the creative community or within a defined geographical area was seen as a way to ensure a sustainable form of community-led tourism: money could be allocated for long-term rather than solely start-up costs, keep businesses growing and ensure the tourist economy remains within the local area. This would have the result of benefiting residents rather than larger corporations who might be based outside the city, and ensuring that a certain amount of wealth remained in York that being extracted to elsewhere.

#### *Tourist tax*

Reinvesting money from spend in the city was not the only suggestion for creating additional wealth. A tourist tax, or visitor levy, is common in many countries. A tax for sustainable tourism was introduced in the Balearic Islands in 2016 in order to protect the environment and invest in the promotion of sustainable and low-season tourism. Following the Covid pandemic Amsterdam, which already applied a tax of 7% on

accommodation costs, began charging a per night charge of €3 per person, and Venice

has also recently implemented a day tax on visitors. While there is some opposition to a tourist tax - Tim Fairhurst, head of strategy at the European Tour Operators Association stated that these "flat-rate tax increases are regressive, disproportionately affecting lower-priced accommodation and the visitors who stay there" (quoted in Buckley, 2019) local and national governments have increasingly felt that they are necessary to improve infrastructure and address additional costs caused by over-tourism. Several research participants suggested that a tourist tax could be implemented in York, partly because tourists use local amenities like bins, roads and public toilets, and should pay a tax to help with their upkeep.

Ali Bodley also highlighted the cuts that have taken place within heritage organisations and suggested that a tourist tax could be a solution:

I don't see why there shouldn't be a tourist tax. Not a massive one but, you know, two pounds on a night's accommodation and no one would even notice. And that could go into replenishing the streets, but also replenishing our heritage. We've got



fabulous museums, and like a lot of the world at the moment they've been depleted of resources through cuts. We also have some stunning collections, collections of national importance. And people need resources to get these out into the community and also for the tourists. So any money raised in this way would be good for tourism, it would be good for the locals, and it would make us proud and prouder of the place that we live in.

lots of archaeologists to the city, could we provide an archaeology festival that is in keeping with our heritage and attracts a different type of tourist. (Respondent 36)

Rather than seeing the tourist tax as a way to prevent visitors to the city, as some critics suggest, a tourist tax in York could be used in ways that would benefit tourists as well as visitors.

Community owned pubs have become increasingly common throughout the UK, and homestays are a key features of community-led tourism in many countries (see chapter four) which keep a large portion of the revenue generated within the community. These were popular suggestions among research participants, including those who attended the community conversation events and developed a manifesto for community wealth building through sustainable tourism (see appendix 1).

#### *Holiday lets and community owned assets*

As discussed previously, some respondents felt that York was a city divided on wealth lines, with the cost of living and entertainment pricing some residents out of being able to shop or socialise in the city. The issue of affordable housing and holiday lets was also raised here, with some respondents again suggesting a tourist tax as a possible solution:

To stop extraction of the tourist pound possibly with introduction of a city visitor tax or civic donation. Create a licenced holiday let strategy with a York booking portal that distributes profit for the good of the community. Enable affordable homes/council tax discount for those working in hospitality/heritage to avert those who support/service Yorks tourists requirements having to live outside of York. (Respondent 38)

Linked to this was the idea that socially responsible tourism can add value, and this is something that York should work on:

Introducing ideas such as Fair BnB rather than Air BnB enables residents to earn money, and create more homes for local residents. Could there be opportunities for community owned hotels, like has been achieved in saving a number of our community pubs? Could there be more access to hiring private and public space that will increase the variety of music and arts events that not only attract residents but also tourists. We attract



## 4. Case studies and best practice

While community-led tourism has predominantly been focused on developing countries, CLT enterprises can be found almost anywhere, “from the creation of a street-crafts district in an urban or rural area to running a guesthouse which belongs to the community, or a cultural performance group” (ESRT 2013, 8). While much of the literature has focused on developing or rural areas, there are nevertheless examples of CBT/CLT and best practice that can be applied to York. This chapter examines some of these.

### 4.1 Brechin community-led tourism pilot project

In 2020 Brechin was one of two towns chosen to feature in a pilot project for community-led tourism by the Scottish Government. A steering group made up of representatives from different elements of the community, such as business owners, the community council, the local council and heritage organisations, was created and support was provided to the community by Social Enterprise Network Scotland and Creetown Initiative.

An action plan was developed by the steering group which was specific to Brechin, taking into account the needs of the community, what the priorities were, what was achievable, who they needed as partners and what resource they required. The action plan contained a clear vision and objectives, an analysis of existing tourist provision and identification of opportunities for development.

The steering group was initially provided with £80,000, as a result of which several key activities took place: planters were placed at key points in the town which were ‘adopted’ by local businesses, ensuring that they would be looked after. They also commissioned a pictish-themed carved stone which told the story of the town and ‘stories in stone’ sandstone carvings that would be placed at key points in the town. In addition existing information panels were refreshed and a ‘pictish trail’ created. The steering group were also able to secure an additional £8,000 of funding to carry out a feasibility

study for the regeneration of Inch Park and the leisure centre.

While the Covid pandemic had an impact on the group’s activities, making it more difficult to meet face-to-face and putting some projects on hold, the pilot has been hailed a success. Upskilling of locals took place, not only for those in the steering group but those elsewhere in the community. Additional employment was secured as apprentices worked on the stonemasonry projects, and local schools were also engaged with, pupils creating stories for the ‘stories in stone’ series. In addition a promotional film was made for the town which was circulated on social media and a renewed sense of belonging and ownership exists among residents.

<https://www.facebook.com/BrechinCommunityLedTourism>

### 4.2 Shivadwar Village

Shivadwar Village is a community in Nepal’s Madi Valley, in the southern buffer zone of [Nepal](#)’s Chitwan National Park. The national park is one of Nepal’s biggest draws as it’s a biodiversity hot spot, home to wild rhinos, tigers and deer. Tourists flocked to the area but Shivadwar saw few of the benefits, and rogue elephants and wild boar from the national park often entered the village, destroying crops and posing a risk to the villagers. In 2015 the village reached out to Nepal’s World Wildlife fund asking for help to stop rogue wildlife from entering the village and to increase employment in the area.

In 2017, a community-based tourism project was developed with WWF-Nepal, the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trading, and Intrepid Travel designed to maximise the positive impacts to the Madi Valley. The village already offered homestays which attracted Nepalese visitors, but found it difficult to attract tourists from further afield. Funding from WWF Nepal provided the opportunity for villagers to upgrade these and include Western toilets and a hot shower, and Intrepid Travel committed to adding a night in Madi Valley to a selection of its Nepal itineraries, opening up the village to foreign visitors. Locals also began to open small shops selling drinks and snacks to travellers and activities programme, including cycling excursions, fishing, cooking and farming with residents, was developed.



Approximately half of the 34 households now run guesthouses featuring upgraded systems, with over 10,000 tourists visiting the village each year. Local employment rates have increased, especially among young people who had left to find employment in places like Kathmandu, and residents have also received training in hospitality, management and cooking. Even those not involved in the homestays have benefited though. New roads have been built, a new community hall has been constructed and electricity has been installed in the village. A new fence was also erected to stop wildlife getting into the village, paid for through income generated by tourists. In addition, the village's women now run their own businesses and generate their own income, leading to an increased sense of empowerment.

<https://www.intrepidtravel.com/adventures/community-tourism-cbt-nepal/>

### 4.3 Chemainus – the world's largest outdoor art gallery

Chemainus is a coastal village of around 5,000 people located on the southern part of Vancouver Island in Canada. The town's economy was built on mining, fishing and forestry but as these industries began failing in the early 1980s and hundreds of people lost their jobs a new source of income was required. The town received a small grant from the provincial government in 1980 to revitalise its main street, followed by a second grant a couple of years later. Resident Karl Schultz came up with the idea to use the money to commission five murals after seeing similar paintings during a trip to Romania. The murals were painted on different locations around the town, telling the story of its history, and led to Chemainus winning a New York Downtown Revitalisation award. By the mid 1980s Chemainus played host to over a quarter of a million tourists per year, and Schultz came up with the idea of creating a mural festival. Residents took part in community meetings and workshops which led to the creation of the Official Community Plan to manage growth, development and tourism in the town.

The Festival of Murals Society, a non-profit, volunteer-run organisation, was established in 1987. The Society is directed by an elected board of directors and functions through revenues generated by sales of copyrighted souvenirs, grants, corporate

sponsors, and generous donations of time and money by volunteers and members. The Festival of Murals takes place each year and features over 70 murals, sculptures, carvings and artwork which can be explored by following the Mural Map.

Over \$350,000 has been invested in the project by private, corporate, federal, provincial and municipal investor and as a result the town has seen around 400,000 visitors a year as well as the establishment of over 200 new small businesses. Employment has also increased as a result, offering a range of hospitality and tourism related industries as well as in construction: a \$4 million, 274-seat theatre attracting 70,000 patrons a year was built along with the Festival Inn accommodation venue.

<https://muraltown.com>

### 4.4 EastSide Tourism

EastSide Tourism is a subset of EastSide Partnership, a local charity working with other community-based organisations, elected representatives, statutory agencies and local businesses to lead the regeneration of east Belfast, Northern Ireland. EastSide Tourism carries out regenerative tourism development work focusing on four main areas, including investing in local people and local businesses, creating experiences unique to area and adopting an entrepreneurial approach based on social innovation principals.

A private company, limited by guarantee, EastSide Tourism was incorporated in 2017 and has led on the EastSide Destination Development Plan 2019-2021 in partnerships with stakeholders from the public, private and third sectors. Following the regeneration of the Connswater Community Greenway, C.S. Lewis Square and EastSide Visitor Centre by EastSide Partnership, EastSide Tourism now manages EastSide Visitor Centre and Templemore Baths as well as supporting and promoting tourism attractions, businesses and products in the EastSide area such as EastSide Arts Festival, Boundary Brewing, Aunt Sandra's and Schomberg House. The initiative also offers tours of and accommodation at the George Best House as well as self-guided walking tours of the East Side and guided walking tours with an EastSide local.

Over 45,000 visitors are estimated to attend the summer arts festival with over 250,000 visitors to the EastSide Visitor Centre, generating income which gets redistributed in the local economy. The wider community has also benefited from the renovation of a derelict building for the EastSide Visitor Centre, construction of the C.S. Lewis visitor centre and the Connswater Community Greenway, 8 tourism and heritage trails and the continued employment of locals

<https://www.eastsidepartnership.com/eastside-tourism>

## 4.5 Nutti Sámi Siida

Nutti Sámi Siida AB is a Sámi tourism company based in the Saarivuoma sameby (an economic association and a specific geographical area) in Jukkasjärvi, Sweden. Owner Nils Torbjörn Nutti, and former owner Carina Pingi, have a strong connection to the reindeer herding and the Sámi lifestyle and the company organises natural and cultural experiences based on Sámi culture. The initial idea for the company came in 1996, when a bad winter meant that reindeer owned by Nils Torbjörn Nutti and Carina Pingi had to be fed in corrals rather than in the woods. As factory made food was expensive, they decided to take visitors to the corral to see the reindeer. They started a cooperation with Icehotel, who sent guests to Nils and Carina, before setting up their own tourist company in 1999.

The company has expanded upon its early activities to offer reindeer encounters, reindeer sled tours, fishing, hiking, a Sámi taster menu and a Sámi storytelling evening. They also hold an annual Sámi márkan Jukkasjärvi event that aims to highlight and recognise the Sámi culture and run an open-air museum, at which guided tours with locals are on offer. Visitors can experience a homestay with Sámi community members, and Nutti Sámi Siida also opened its own accommodation, Reindeer Lodge, in 2010.

The creation of Nutti Sámi Siida has seen a range of positive impacts on the Saarivuoma sameby. All employees have a connection to the Sámi culture and way of life, and the company has been able to train and employ local Sámi. The development of a restaurant, café and shop selling local Sámi products has generated income for the Sámi community, but the company have also been able to increase awareness of Sámi culture:

they have been awarded Sápmi Experience and Sustainable Arctic Destination certification for communicating Sámi values and way of life and for using environmentally, economically and socially responsible practices, and have also been involved in the development of Sámi guidelines for tourism.

<https://nutti.se/>

## 4.6 Best practice

Each of the case studies discussed above feature examples of best practice in ensuring sustainable, community led tourism. While each case is different, there are common themes which should be considered when implementing community led tourism in York.

### *Community inclusion*

First and foremost, the community has to be involved in community led tourism. Steps have been taken over the last twenty years to consult residents, business owners and other stakeholders in York but as this report suggests this has not always been successful. Communities should be sought out in the places they exist to ensure that their voices are heard: while circulating surveys, running drop-in sessions and canvassing on the street are usual forms of community engagement we must also consider the power dynamics at play and ensure we work with trusted leaders from ethnic minority, disabled and LGBT+ and older communities to capture their views, concerns and ideas.

Communities may also be unfamiliar with the ins and outs of the tourism industry – what it involves and who the key stakeholders are. As such, an independent expert in tourism should be part of the initial conversations to ensure communities understand what we mean by tourism, the practicalities and legalities that community led tourism entail, and the implications of developing a CLT approach. Crucially, the language used must be clear – defining what we mean by community, sustainability so that everyone is clear on the ask.

The type and level of community participation in any CLT initiative should be decided and defined by the community. This will include assessing existing capacity, skills and knowledge as well as other social, cultural or environmental commitments or policies already in place at a city, council, regional or national level.

### *Governance*

Community based tourism involves community members but the ways these initiatives can be structured vary. They might be a private company, like Nutti Sámi Siida, a volunteer-run organisation like The Festival of Murals, a Community Interest Company (CIC) like Good Organisation, a charity, a membership organisation or a non-profit organisation. They might be government initiated like, Brechin community tourism, or NGO initiated, like Shivadwar Village.

Regardless of how the approach was devised, CLT is a long-running process and there needs to be a clear governing approach with set roles and responsibilities. No single approach will fit all forms of CLT and the form that CLT in York takes should be discussed among community members and decide upon based on the objectives of the CLT. Whatever framework is adopted, an action plan should be developed with information on trustees or directors, election processes if applicable, accounts management, legal structures and offer transparency on how the community is required. Regular reviews of performance, future challenges and direction should take place and be communicated to community members.

Connections should also be created with other CLT developments which will enable the sharing of knowledge and best practice. Connections with local or national authorities should also be maintained in order to respond to changing government policies or regulatory frameworks.

### *Finance and asset management*

Community led tourism can be done with little financial investment, particularly if the originator is a preexisting private company, but in order to be truly effective funds are required. These don't have to be large amounts in the first instance – Brechin was granted £80,000 and successfully completed several projects, but sources of funding need to be identified. This should include the involvement of the community both in order to increase the sense of local ownership and to make sure the local context is taken into account. Funding could be secured through start-up grants or loans, government funding or international organisations. Alternatively, funding could be secured through the implementation of a tourist tax – a levy which several of our participants referred to. Regardless of how funding is raised, profits

should be reinvested into the community, for example through direct profit-sharing schemes or by sourcing staff, goods and services locally.

Where physical or natural assets are used, equal priority should be given to all to ensure that certain resources aren't favoured over others and their use remains sustainable. Profits raised from the CLT venture could also be reinvested into ensuring environmental sustainability.

### *Manage expectations*

Expectation management is an important part of CLT, both for residents and visitors. As the case studies in this report have demonstrated, CLT is a long process and change will not necessarily be seen overnight. It is possible that some residents will feel the approach has failed or will be dissatisfied with the progress being made. Undertaking regular reviews and communicating those with locals will ensure that progress is highlighted even when it is slow.

Given the issues identified in this report relating to anti-social behaviour and perceptions of York, the production of a visitor guide or code of conduct could go some way towards mitigating this. This code could be placed on the Visit York website and accessed via QR codes placed at key locations around the city. The CLT group should also work closely with Visit York and other businesses in terms of marketing the city, to ensure that its diversity and local stories are highlighted, not simply the Minster or *Harry Potter*. A luxury community led tourism approach could be utilised (see chapter five), drawing on York's history.

## 5. Recommendations

The research carried out for this project identified a range of issues relating to tourism in York. Some of these, such as the need to improve infrastructure to deal with traffic and congestion, are beyond the scope of this project but nevertheless point to changes that are needed in order to ensure tourism benefits the community rather than simply profiting from it. This final chapter recommends actions that could be carried out across the city to address these issues.

### 5.1 Ensure community representation on tourism working groups

A Local Residents Tourism Assembly which contributes to York's strategic approach to the visitor economy via the York Tourism Advisory Board should be created. A Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP) for York was approved in 2023, paving the way for a more coordinated and strategic approach to promoting the tourism sector in the city. However LVEPs primarily focus on inward investment and strategic planning which does not necessarily include residents and local community members. Facilitated community engagement would mark a step change for the management of tourism in the city and has the potential to influence similar ambitions elsewhere. York Tourism Advisory Board has developed a new Tourism Strategy for the city which was focuses on five key priorities, and ensuring community representation will only strengthen this approach.

### 5.2 Develop a national, community-led tourism network

The research provides a solid framework to bring together representatives from like-minded community-led tourism organisations across the UK, acting as conduit for a National Community Led Tourism Network. Although the UK's government LVEP programme is in place, liaising with, working with and learning from other community-led tourism networks will enhance the provision in York and ensure

that community voices are heard locally, regionally and nationally.

### 5.3 Explore the implementation of a tourist tax

It is clear from this research that there are concerns with tourists using (and sometimes abusing) community resources without financially supporting them. This affords an opportunity to build upon the research pertaining to tourism taxation from a community perspective to examine if and how a tourist tax could be implemented in York. This could include voluntary levies as well as formal taxation, noting that primary legislation would be required to permit the latter in England. The UK Government stated on 18 September 2023 that it has no plans to do this but recent parliamentary changes, coupled with cities like Manchester exploring taxation, may alter that.

### 5.4 Consider the purchase and/or use of community owned assets

York has a thriving arts and cultural sector with many potential spaces which could be used to host events. However the increasing cost of rents in the city makes it unaffordable for some residents to develop their own small businesses, events and other activities. Venues like StreetLife's The Hub on Coney Street, which closed in 2023, could be purchased and/or used by the community, which would have the added benefit of reducing the number of empty shopfronts in York's streets.



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## **Appendix 1: Community Wealth Building Through Tourism Manifesto**

# **Residents voice for a shared city that benefits both residents and tourists**

### **1. Community-Owned Event Space**

Civic leaders to facilitate access to community-owned event spaces offering a range of cultural and affordable activities for both residents and tourists.

### **2. Resident-Involved Festivals**

Create opportunities for York's residents to develop and deliver festivals, attracting both locals and visitors.

### **3. Community-Owned Pubs**

Enable residents to purchase and manage community-owned pubs, promoting local ownership over chain establishments.

### **4. Community-Owned Farms**

Encourage residents to purchase and run community-owned farms.  
Promote local produce to the hospitality sector to enhance the use of locally grown products.

### **5. FairBnB Model**

Introduce a model like FairBnB to generate funds for community-led initiatives and mitigate tourism impacts.

### **6. Improved Transport Links**

Establish a community-owned bike hire shop as part of better transport links for both residents and tourists.

### **7. Connect Community with Tourism**

Involve residents in local markets and events aimed at tourists.

### **8. Use of Student Accommodation**

Utilise student accommodations out of term time for co-living and hybrid accommodation.

### **9. Tourism Tax Levy**

Introduce a tax levy ring-fenced to address tourism impacts, allowing residents to influence its allocation.

### **10. Transparency in Property Ownership**

Provide access to information about property ownership in York.

### **11. Citizens Assembly**

Establish a Citizens Assembly to enable residents to vote on city priorities.

### **12. Support Independent Shops**

Foster opportunities for independent shops that attract both visitors and residents.

### **13. Creative Collaboration Spaces**

Create affordable spaces for creative collaboration and artist studios to diversify York's attractions.

### **14. Community-Owned Allotments**

Develop community-owned allotments to provide food for residents and supply the hospitality sector.

### **15. Local Economic Plan**

Ensure residents have a voice in creating a Local Economic Plan that prioritises the planet and the people.

### **16. Promote Local Music and Art Venues to diversity Visitor Attractions**

Promote the smaller and lesser-known community events spaces to develop a richer offering for visitors and tourists.

## **Improving infrastructure, environmental protection, regulatory measures, and enhancing the overall experience for residents and tourists**

### **1. Pride in the City's Appearance**

Enhance green spaces, improve paving, and address closed shop fronts. Provide more benches to support access for older and low mobility residents and visitors.

### **2. Environmental Protection**

Support initiatives to protect the environment, especially against flooding.

### **3. Open Access to Green Spaces**

Ensure open access to York's strays for local resident events.

### **4. Restrict Holiday Lets**

Implement legislation to limit the number of holiday lets per postcode area.

### **5. Sustainable Museum Revenue**

Encourage museums to adopt business-like approaches to increase revenue and ensure accessibility.

### **6. Tax on Empty Shops**

Propose a national or local tax on empty shops to discourage property neglect and landlords only purchasing for investment.

### **7. Diversify York's Image**

Develop communications that highlight York's diverse attractions beyond its heritage.

### **8. Resident Participation in Tourism Strategy**

Ensure residents have a say in shaping York's Tourism Strategy.



**9. Resident Benefits in Cultural Sector**

Offer residents' weekends or a card granting access to York's museums and cultural sector throughout the year.

**10. Promote Local Products**

Increase availability of Yorkshire-produced goods for both residents and visitors.

**11. Public Amenities**

Enhance access to public amenities, including baby changing facilities, disabled access, and all-gender toilets.

**12. Activities for Young Children**

Provide more activities for young children in the city centre.

**13. Peripheral Car Parks**

Develop more car parks on the outskirts of the city.

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