

BOROUGH OF SCARBOROUGH VISITOR ECONOMY STRATEGY & DESTINATION PLAN Draft Oct 2020

Response from Whitby Civic Society

Dear Janet, thank you for the opportunity to respond to the draft strategy.

1. General

Whitby Civic Society agrees with the general principle of increasing the value of tourism and its benefits to local communities and business. We believe SBC is right to highlight the importance of balancing the needs of residents and visitors; the infrastructure of Whitby is already creaking with current visitor numbers. For much of the year the town centre has been a no-go area for many of our residents due to the numbers of visitors and the lack of social distancing. As the draft strategy states, post Covid there is likely to be a continued period of Staycations while confidence in holidaying overseas builds. Whitby needs to be supported in ways to cope with these numbers.

SBC should consider an additional principle of working with residents, local groups and business to help ensure tourism centric development is sympathetic to the needs of the local community. Local people would have knowledge of existing activities and “experiences”, for example civic society walks. Residents can also be tourists in their own town and should be encouraged to access events and improvements even though they may be geared towards visitors, for example walking and cycling routes.

2. Infrastructure and visitor flow

We would welcome actions to better manage the flow of tourists including a review of car parking which the draft strategy mentions is planned for Scarborough. Better park and ride facilities that remove vehicles from the town centre would potentially be transformational and would greatly benefit the conservation areas and public health through reduced air pollution. All year-round park and ride on two sites, east and west of the town with electric buses connecting to the town would be the ideal. Subsidised fares could support people working in the town.

Town centre car parking, for example Back of St Hilda’s and Church Street, should prioritise residents and people of limited mobility. Electric buses, small enough to access most streets, electric taxis and bikes could ensure access to the town centre and to evening entertainment venues, bars and restaurants. Repurposed car parks could have many different uses including street food style venues, open air markets and space for physical activity. These areas are large and allow for greater social distancing for as long as this is required.

Wider pavements encourage a cafe culture though shouldn’t impede access. Advertising boards and other street and pavement clutter should be managed. Take-away food venues can cause heavy congestion; seated eating areas should be encouraged using harbour side areas during the evening.

3. Conservation

Tourism development should consider the needs of Whitby's conservation areas and historic buildings, the reasons why many visitors are attracted to the town in the first place. Current empty buildings include three churches and the old Town Hall. Whitby Pavilion is currently closed with an uncertain future.

Uses for such buildings could include tourist information and sign posting, exhibition and performance space, for developing "experiences" as detailed in the draft strategy, for example a Whitby "Jorvik" experience, and space for creative industries where visitors could observe makers and learn new crafts.

Whitby town centre in normal times is thriving with its mix of shopping and eateries. However, there is a lack of diversity in the kind of shopping available and this should be borne in mind during the planning process. Most towns will need fewer shops in the future as online shopping continues to grow. New, creative uses may have to be found for some of our high street properties.

We agree that the borough should be promoted as a walking and cycling destination with all the public health and environmental benefits that this brings. Cycling / hiking friendly accommodation could be developed through simple criteria, for example availability of safe bike storage. The larger hotels and businesses could be encouraged to offer cycle and electric bike hire.

Views around the harbour and in conservation areas should be protected and enhanced, this could include moving the kiosks on Pier Road, and the "greening up" of the town, for example tree planting and more planters.

4. Training and employment

We agree that steps should be taken to improve the perception and reality of tourism as a career. Although Scarborough has a catering college, we are not aware of any training facilities in Whitby. A satellite hub majoring on fish and coastal cuisine should be considered. We have some great local restaurateurs and therefore no lack of mentors. There are many restaurants and hotels that could get involved in offering students work experience and career advice.

5. Local distinctiveness

Whitby Civic Society agrees that it is essential to maintain and develop the sense of place in each of the borough's destinations and that this helps to appeal to a broader range of visitors. In keeping Whitby special, "Authenticity is important. In a world full of homogenised high streets and mass production, visitors enjoy feeling more in touch with a destination, meeting real people and getting better insights into the places they visit. They need help to find and uncover these elements."

Whitby Yards are the polar opposite of homogenised high streets and yet the condition of many is rapidly deteriorating. No-one appears to be caring for the Yards, partly because no-one lives in them anymore. Much of the housing in the town centre is holiday lets and second homes.

The way in which Battery Parade has been allowed to be developed has destroyed all sense of authenticity and balance between the needs of residents and visitors. The local authority and others should learn from the mistakes made in this important, historic area of the town.

Whitby Civic Society would welcome any opportunity this new strategy might bring to collaborate with SBC to help restore authenticity and local distinctiveness in these areas.

Yours sincerely

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Hon Secretary