

# Report on the Findings of Stakeholder and Public Consultation, February and March 2021

## 1 Introduction

To support the development of the new Make It York Service Level Agreement (“**SLA**”) and Service Contract, the City of York Council (“the **Council**”) committed to consult with key stakeholder groups including:

- York and North Yorkshire Chamber of Commerce (“**YNYCC**”);
- Federation of Small Business (“**FSB**”);
- York Business Improvement District (“**BID**”);
- universities and colleges;
- Institute of Directors (“**IOD**”) and other business networks;
- Local Enterprise Partnerships (“**LEPs**”);
- visitor economy sector;
- retail sector;
- cultural Sector;
- York Science Park; and
- key sector representatives for our growth priorities: Rail, Financial Services & Insurance, Biotech and Life Sciences, Digital and Creative Industries.

In the report to Executive on 11 February 2021 a commitment was made to consult more broadly with businesses and residents over the outline SLA set out in that report.

This report sets out the process undertaken and the findings of those consultations. It then draws together key messages to inform the future SLA with Make It York and its contractual relationship with the Council.

## 2 Process

Three methods were used for the consultation.

Four of our key business networks have been central to our work over the past year through the COVID-19 pandemic. The Council’s Interim Director of Place held detailed interviews at the start of the consultation with YNYCC, IOD, BID and the FSB.

Between 26<sup>th</sup> February 2021 and 11<sup>th</sup> March 2021, a series of structured interviews with twenty representatives of the key stakeholder groups took place. Each interview covered the four areas set out in Appendix A of the February 2021 Executive Report, namely Economic Development, City Centre & Markets, Visitor Economy, and Culture. The interviews also explored more

general reflections on governance, accountability and the consultee's experiences in working with Make It York over the past six years.

An online survey was developed and publicised through newsletters and social media to enable businesses, residents and other interested parties to respond. The survey was open from 18<sup>th</sup> February to 17<sup>th</sup> March 2021, and attracted one hundred and eighty-six responses.

### 3 Results

#### 3.1 General comments – governance, accountability, organisational culture

Interviewees were asked about their experiences of working with Make It York, and to reflect on its relationship with the Council and the city in general. The survey asked for any general comments that respondents had with regard to Make It York and its relationship with the Council.

Most agreed that Make It York has been a success from a commercial perspective, with the markets, events and festivals it has developed delivering for the bottom line of the company. More than half of interviewees suggested that too many of Make It York's staff team are in the Visit York part of the organisation, and that the past six years have seen a big decline in the level of staffing to support other sectors of the economy and services that support residents.

There is a very widespread view that Make It York could be more transparent in its decision making, that its purpose is not clear, and that the confusion over whether people should approach Make It York, the Council or the BID has led to a general disengagement by the wider business community.

Many interviewees had positive comments to make about individual staff members. The Make It York team is recognised as having some good people trying to do their best for the City of York. However there were concerns that the range and focus of services provided appear to prevent those people from delivering effectively.

#### Survey snapshot

*"With any agreement - there needs to be very clear key performance indicators which are clearly defined and measurable to demonstrate the effect of the organisation. These need to be clearly communicated, and measured and reported back to the public in an annual report at least annually."*

The most common demands for the new SLA were that accountability and transparency are increased, that the organisation should be more representative of the full range of businesses in York, and that the balance, and possibly the range, of activities needs to be redressed.

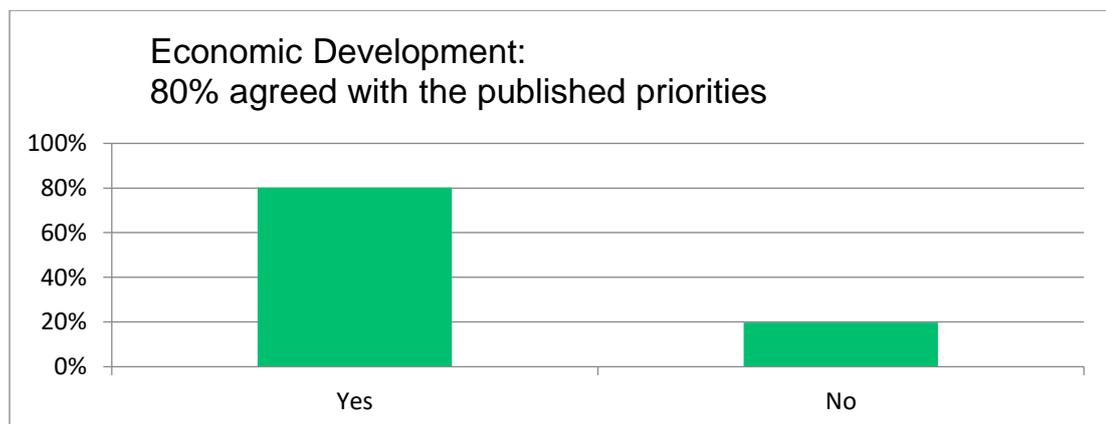
There are concerns that the Board of Make It York is not as in touch with the needs of the business community and the city as it needs to be at this critical time. Interviewees from the culture, visitor economy, bio-economy and retail sectors commented that there is no one with practical experience of running businesses in these sectors on the Board.

Respondents to the online survey produced a full range of views in the general comments section. There was a consistent message that people see value in Make It York, but it is not well understood, is involved in too broad a range of activity, and its quality of delivery is therefore inconsistent. Many highlighted the challenges of the night-time economy, citing the oft repeated view that York is not a family friendly location in the evenings.

There is a consistent message from the survey that the organisation needs to be more open in its decision making, more responsive to the people and businesses it serves, and to communicate its unique offer much more clearly. The annual Make It York conference was cited by many as an example of a good event which helped people to understand what the organisation does and provided good opportunities to meet others and network. This event has not been possible in the pandemic, but would be welcomed once restrictions are lifted. There is clearly a need to do something of a relaunch to reflect the new SLA and reach out to stakeholders.

### 3.2 Economic Development

Both the interviews and the online survey focussed on the four elements of economic development that we have set out for Make It York – Inward Investment, Sector Development, Business Support and Collaboration and Partnerships. In the survey we asked whether these were the right priorities, before going on to explore whether respondents felt there was anything missing from these priorities and what action taken by Make It York would have the biggest benefit.



For those interviewees involved in the detail of local economic development, there were consistent views on Make It York's role in the four areas.

**Inward Investment:** More is needed to produce a joined-up approach both within York and beyond. Businesses and partners in York would like to be more

involved in all aspects of Inward Investment, and there is a consistent view that the Council needs to be leading the agenda. The LEPs pointed towards the future Combined Authority model, highlighting the need for close involvement of the local authority. Business networks feel they have much to contribute in the field but feel they are currently excluded from doing so and wish the Council to be honest brokers. Businesses would like to share their experience of operating in York with others, but do not currently get the opportunity to do that.

There is a lack of openly available material to make the case for investment in York, and no inward investment portal on the Make It York website. Having access to this kind of collateral would benefit many businesses, organisations and other partners.

A broader view of inward investment, encompassing retail and hospitality businesses and the city centre offer, would also be welcomed by many in those sectors. Such work is currently not in Make It York's remit as they have been asked to focus exclusively on high growth sectors.

**Sector Development:** The demise of Science City York following its merger into Make It York was remarked on by many interviewees. That brand, which had become just a small team rather than the force it had been in previous years, was recognised as a focal point for the digital and biotech sectors, and it performed a strong role in supporting informal networking and collaboration. It has not been replaced by a credible sector development offer.

Sector development was agreed as a priority, but is not currently resourced in Make It York. The sector round tables that were run across the city last summer were cited as an example of the kind of work that should be continued. There was also a desire expressed to support more general business networking across the sectors. Business Week, which could play a role in this, was reported to be something of a missed opportunity. There is a lot of goodwill for such events, but they have been seen as focussing too much on income generation rather than an opportunity to bring people together.

**Business Support:** Make It York has developed a strong reputation with some partners and businesses around the support it has offered through the Leeds City Region Growth Hub. Those who have had advice have valued it, and those who work with other businesses, such as the Science Park, have welcomed the ability to refer their clients to Growth Hub support. Other businesses have struggled to get support from the Growth Hub and have concluded that Make It York is not interested in helping them. It is this kind of experience which has led to accusations that Make It York is cliquey and only supports a small set of businesses.

Interviewees with a more detailed relationship with Make It York – for example the LEPs that fund its business support offer and those involved in inward investment – saw the moving of these functions from the Council to Make It York in 2015 as a negative step. While the same team of people are delivering a similar service at Make It York, they are less effective as they are distant from

other key functions such as planning, rates and economic policy. There was a strong view expressed by these interviewees that the full range of economic development functions of Make It York should return to the Council.

The lack of start-up advice at Make It York was touched on in several interviews. At times, there have been members of staff able to respond to start-up queries, but this has not been consistent, and has never been a clear priority in delivery. A similar picture has emerged on skills and training, which is not currently part of Make It York's offer. Businesses would like a coherent offer promoted through a single front door, but are still not finding that at Make It York after six years of delivery.

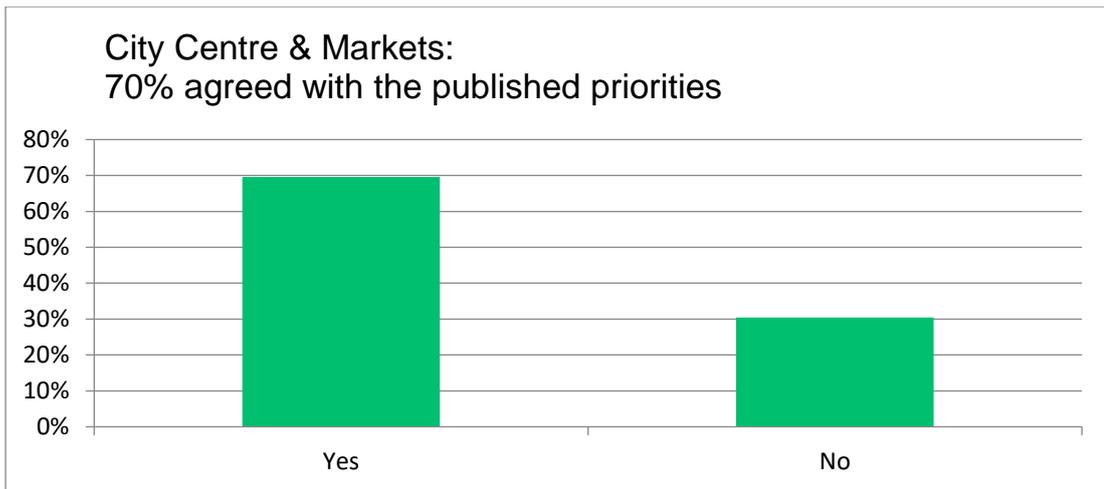
Survey  
snapshot

*"I think there is a massive opportunity within the Business Support role. If we can focus on creating an innovative start up offer this will encourage more business to set up here which in turn will lead to more successful SME's which will lead to more beneficial collaborations and partnerships which will develop into inward investment allowing sector development."*

Inward investment, support for start-ups and work with sectors beyond tourism and hospitality were all commonly cited as key priorities. Strengthening collaboration and building on the sector networks established through the COVID-19 pandemic were highlighted as the main priorities for development, both in interviews and through the online survey.

### **3.3 City Centre & Markets**

For City Centre and Markets, the SLA framework presented three areas: Outdoor Markets, City Centre Vibrancy, and Commercial Events. The survey asked about whether these were the right priorities, whether anything was missing, and what action, taken by Make It York, would have the biggest benefit. The interviews discussed stakeholders' experiences of Make It York's delivery against these three aspects and sought suggestions for how delivery could be improved.



In the online survey, many of the respondents highlighted the inherent tension in running commercial events to generate income for Make It York while trying to make the City Centre a more vibrant and attractive place for residents and for the existing business base. There was recognition that the MIY business model depends on such income to make the organisation viable, but a widespread concern that the balance is not right at present.

The global decline in high streets was cited by many as a key factor affecting vibrancy in York, and an area where Make It York should be more active, seeking to bring new uses to empty spaces. Some would like to see pop-up spaces for new entrepreneurs, others a focus on bringing new high-end brands to York. There is expectation that Make It York will be central in supporting the rejuvenation of our City Centre, with the needs and wishes of residents more strongly understood and incorporated in any changes.

Shambles Market was seen by many respondents as a key part of the city centre, providing a great start for new traders, a key element of the vibrancy aspects of City Centre management, and a distinctive offer for residents and visitors alike. Some respondents pointed to locations outside the city centre where they would like more markets – Acomb most frequently mentioned – and the vibrancy element was also highlighted as something that needs to be considered beyond the City Centre.

A further theme from the survey responses was the development of community events and the expansion of the resident’s festival. Numerous respondents highlighted a desire for a new focus on York residents as a key audience for Make It York. The Ice Trail was often given as an example of an event which is well received.

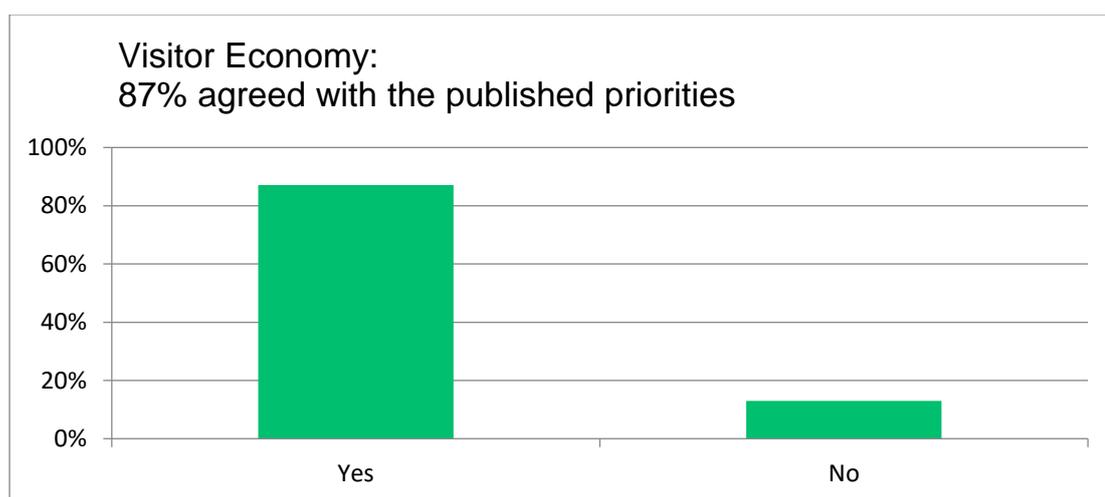
<b>Survey snapshot</b>	<p><i>“MIY must see ultimate success in the context of meeting the needs of the local population and doing that by a positive and supportive relationship with local traders and service providers</i></p>
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In the interviews, while all had views on city centre vibrancy and the importance of markets, detailed comments came predominantly from retailers, the cultural sector and those involved in events. There was acceptance that commercial events such as the Christmas Market are an important part of Make It York's funding. However this was balanced by some frustration at the lack of any clearly expressed benefit to those shops and visitor attractions that face disruption from these events. It was also noted that these sectors do not currently have a voice on the Make It York Board.

The Market Trader's Federation made detailed comments on many aspects of their relationship with Make It York and how that is covered in the SLA. Market Traders would like to be involved in developing the new Outdoor Markets Strategy, and in general seek consultation with them being a clear part of the SLA with respect to Shambles Market. They would also like to work with Make It York and the Council on developing future plans for the Christmas Market, providing their expertise to support the development of a truly sustainable event which gets the balance right between commercialism and providing an enjoyable environment to support trading.

### 3.4 Visitor Economy

For the Visitor Economy, we asked for comments under the three headings of Destination Management Organisation ("**DMO**"), Tourism Sector Development, and Tourism Advisory Board. Again, we asked for survey respondents to comment on that mix of activities, identify anything which had been omitted, and to highlight the one key action for Make It York which would make the biggest difference.



The highest level of support in the survey for the published priorities was for the visitor economy. Many drew attention to the second priority of Tourism Sector development and the objective to improve the tourism sector's performance as an employer, but the most frequent reference in responses was to widespread concerns that too many stag and hen parties have made residents question whether the city centre is safe at the weekend.

For many, there were concerns that York is already very well known as a tourist destination and that any further work to attract visitors would only add to the negative impacts that they bring. These views were not shared by tourism businesses, who expressed views that more effort should be put into promoting York to regional and national visitors, and that more should be done to promote individual businesses and attractions.

Survey  
snapshot

*“Many residents don’t feel welcome in the City Centre at a weekend. It’s all stag and hen groups/tourists. Something needs to be done beyond the Residents Weekend, which is a once a year event in damp January to make us feel more included and not marginalised.”*

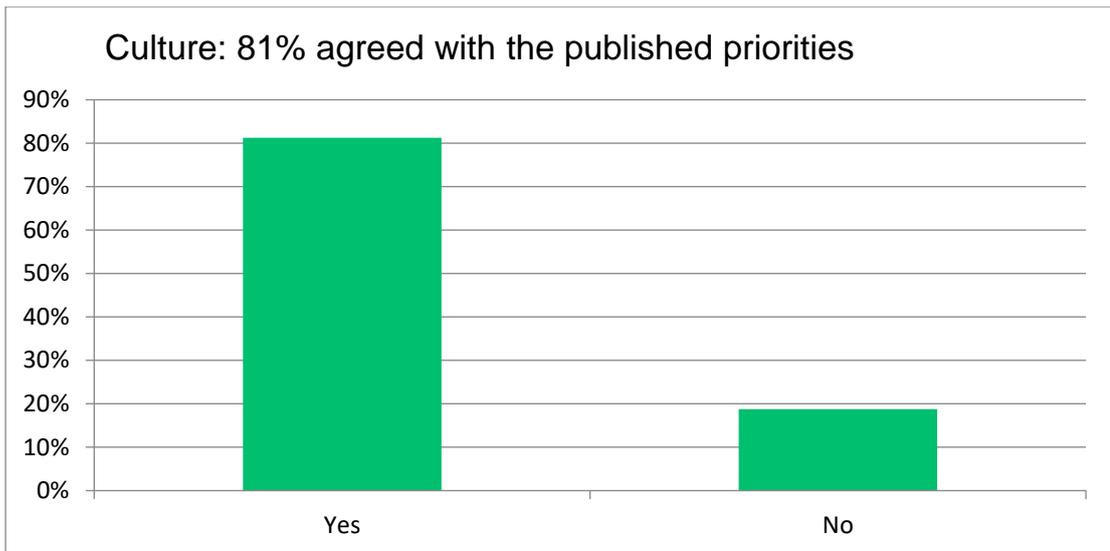
The stags and hens issue, together with drinking culture and rowdy behaviour were contrasted with what would be required to make York more family friendly and safe from Saturday lunchtime onwards at the weekends. This remains a live issue in the minds of the local population and must be addressed over the period of the next SLA.

Among interviewees, opinions were split. For some, Visit York’s inclusion in Make It York was a positive step, helping secure the future of the organisation at a time when it was struggling. For others, Tourism was seen as a sector which did not need further public support. Among retailers, the role of Visit York in attracting more potential customers to the city centre was mentioned several times. Driving up the quality of York’s offer, with an implied increase in the affluence and spending of visitors, was highlighted as a key role for Make It York.

It was noted by several interviewees that, despite the scale of the Visit York team within Make It York and the importance of Tourism to the York economy, there is no representation from the visitor economy, hospitality or tourism on the Make It York Board. It was hoped that this might be addressed in filling any vacancies.

### 3.5 Culture

Under the heading of Culture, the survey and interviews explored the five priorities of Culture Strategy, Collaboration/Partnerships, Events Strategy, UNESCO designation, and Curate a city centre events programme. The survey asked whether these were the right priorities, what might be missing, and what single action from Make It York would make the biggest difference. Interviews explored these same headings, together with experiences of working with Make It York on Cultural issues over the past six years.



Survey respondents focussed on two main themes:

- Promoting and developing Culture is seen as a counterbalance to the stags and hens issue in the city centre, helping to make York city centre more in tune with York residents.
- There are many creative people and businesses in York who would like to feel more involved in the Cultural aspects of Make It York.

The first of these themes also came through strongly in the City Centre and Visitor Economy strands of the survey, however the response under Culture was more positive, highlighting where Make It York might make a difference in this area. Respondee also remarked on opportunities under the Culture banner to build stronger links with communities across York, and to appeal to a wider demographic in the city.

Survey  
snapshot

*“Improve social inclusion and wellbeing through the cultural offer; connect residents (through all ages) to the cultural offer”*

There were many responses from people involved in the creative economy suggesting that stronger collaboration is essential to creating a vibrant cultural offer in the city.

Survey  
snapshot

*“Collaboration with the creatives around York is crucial. There are a lot of people ... who are heavily invested in culture and the arts and wish to play a role in its future for the city”*

In interviews most stakeholders had views on the cultural work of Make It York. The existing small staff team working in this area is highly-thought-of and recognised as bringing a sense of drive and delivery to the work.

Two of the interviewees were involved in cultural activity which is currently beyond the scope of the Make It York offer – namely the York music and food scenes. In both cases, the question of whether we are taking too narrow and high-brow an approach was raised. If culture is to encompass all, perhaps the scope of Make It York's work should be expanded? With regard to the UNESCO designation, those interviewees who were involved in the Guild of Media Arts felt that more needed to be done to support this important work. The Guild itself has had a mixed experience of support from Make It York, while other members of the Cultural sector questioned how well their organisations were represented on the Make It York Board and in the designation. Many strong, world leading organisations are based in York, but involvement in some of the international aspects of cultural work seems to always rely on a handful of people who are not necessarily best placed to promote the city and its institutions.

## **4 Summary of Key Findings**

### **4.1 Board, Governance, Organisational Culture**

There is a widespread sense that Make It York is too insular in its outlook, beginning to lose touch with the communities it was established to support, and an organisational culture which is not as transparent as might be expected for a Company wholly owned by the Council.

There needs to be a much greater sense of accountability at Make It York, with regular reports to residents and businesses, greater collaboration with partners and stakeholders, and many more opportunities for a broader range of people to get involved in the full range of activities that Make It York covers.

There were a number of calls for greater representation from the key sectors of the economy on the Make It York Board. This was specifically raised by retail, tourism, Bio-economy and cultural sector interviewees.

### **4.2 Range of Activity**

Make It York brought together a range of disparate organisations and teams, covering a very broad range of topics. There is a sense that it has struggled to cover this full range adequately, and has prioritised commercial success and Tourism promotion. This has never been the explicit strategy of the organisation, and needs to be reviewed and rebalanced.

#### *4.2.1 Economic Development*

Inward Investment and Business Support activities have suffered from being remote from the Council, where close links with Planning, Rates, economic policy and Elected Members are much more straightforward. All of these are

vital to the work of economic development, and there were calls to bring this work back into the Local Authority.

#### *4.2.2 City Centre and Markets*

The commercial success of Make It York in delivering events such as the Christmas Market is widely recognised as its main achievement. This brings a creative tension in balancing the needs of the organisation with those of the city.

Shambles Market is also seen as a success, but more care needs to be taken in working with the Traders to involve them in decision making and show that their experience is valued and respected.

The City Centre must become again a destination for the people of York, and the challenges of a perception of a growing culture of drinking and rowdiness have to be addressed. That is not a role uniquely for Make It York, but one where a new spirit of collaboration is fully expressed. Council initiatives including Purple Flag and MyCityCentre have a role to play, and the BID is a key stakeholder. Make It York needs to act as the glue that holds all of this together.

#### *4.2.3 Visitor Economy*

Visit York has been funded by the surplus generated by the Christmas Market, and has, until the deep impacts of the Covid pandemic, been insulated against the changes that the internet has brought to tourism. There are many gifted and experienced people in York's Tourism sector who have a vested interest in helping Visit York find a new, more sustainable business model.

#### *4.2.4 Culture*

Make It York needs to embrace its role in Culture from the top of the organisation. It has a strong team in this field, with much goodwill from key sector players, but needs to strengthen its Board with more direct representation of the institutions that are so important to the cultural life of the city.