



Thirsk Regeneration Initiative

**An Action Plan for Thirsk and District – The Next 5 years
2005 – 2010**

Volume 1 – The Action Plan

Prepared for Thirsk Regeneration Initiative

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**A separate document has been prepared for the appendices
to the Action Plan**

See Volume 2

Appendix

- i Full listing of prioritised project ideas
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Executive Summary

Yorkshire Forward and the Countryside Agency launched the Market Towns Initiative (MTI) as a joint pilot programme in 2000. The aim was to test out how a strategic and modest financial intervention could support the regeneration of the region's market towns and their rural hinterland. Twelve participant settlements were selected and Thirsk was included in the second round of six towns. Funding of £340,000 was made available by Yorkshire Forward to support project delivery with the intention that this would be the lever to secure additional match funding for the work in each town. They also financed the MTI Manager for Thirsk for three years.

To drive the process forward a local partnership, Thirsk Regeneration Initiative was established, composed of local, people drawn from the private, public and voluntary sectors. External consultants were appointed to undertake local consultations and produce an Action Plan based upon the consensus vision for Thirsk.

Thirsk Regeneration Initiative Committee (TRI) was established in August 2001 and an MTI Manager for Thirsk was employed from April 2002. The overall MTI programme in Thirsk will run until the end of March 2005.

In 2002 TRI identified the vision for Thirsk as '*Think Thirsk First: First for Living; First for Leisure; First for Livelihood*'. The Action Plan designed to work towards the vision has delivered over 20 major local projects with a similar number of more modest projects supported through the Small Project Fund. Over £660,000 has been levered in to match with the Yorkshire Forward cash and a number of key local community organisations and initiatives have been supported.

For example, The Thirsk Clock received almost £100,000 towards establishing a warm, safe environment for young people to meet in a dedicated building in the Market Place. Thirsk Festival was enabled to purchase a marquee and laptop computer. The Ritz Cinema has been helped to upgrade its seating and the East Thirsk Learning Resource Centre received a support grant of £10,000 to provide a range of training opportunities including computer skills. The Tourist Information Centre was supported in its move to refurbished premises in the Market Place and a 'Forest for Thirsk' was given funding to begin establishing a community woodland.

In successfully delivering the MTI in Thirsk TRI has demonstrated that a community led organisation with a strong committee can build a successful delivery body and in particular that:

- Given an appropriate opportunity, local people can make a difference on the ground by delivering valuable projects based on local consultation;
- A modest amount of financial resource can achieve a disproportionately high level of impact when grass roots engagement is enabled;
- Civic pride can be restored when a 'can do' mentality and approach is demonstrated to positive effect;

- An unelected body can work collaboratively alongside local authorities and jointly enable successful project delivery;
- A suitably constituted and composed body can develop a harmonious working relationship between its own members and its external partners;
- The collective will and performance of such a body is enhanced by strong and effective leadership.

However a three year time frame gives insufficient space within which to complete the work and project ideas raised through local consultations. Accordingly TRI has been undertaking a process to look at a succession strategy beyond March 2005. This has taken the form of large scale public consultations and dissemination of findings coupled with an examination of the role and structure of TRI itself.

The public consultations have confirmed that the original vision for Thirsk remains intact and that there is more work to do to deliver this vision in the future. Revisiting the SWOT analysis produced three years ago highlights that the key areas for attention remain the same. The public consultations in 2004 show a high degree of similarity to the results from those undertaken some three years ago. The key areas for inclusion in this new Action Plan that have been highlighted and prioritised through the recent consultations. The specific project ideas have been grouped by theme heading. The themes include young people, parishes and the rural hinterland, tourism, transport and traffic, the arts, civic pride and the environment.

Specific project work that drew the most attention and support at the public consultations, in priority order, were:

- Long Street Enhancement
- Thirsk Train Station Improvements
- Improvements to the 'Gateways' to Thirsk
- The encouragement of retail expansion in the town
- Creating training and employment opportunities for young people
- Adopting a 'café style' culture to support tourism in the town centre.

There are also a small number of large scale physical project possibilities related to the re-use of redundant buildings.

Overall this Action Plan has attempted to put the emerging project ideas into the wider district, regional and national context by highlighting where these ideas have resonance with other strategies and plans. The role for TRI in the future will be to develop further the project ideas that have emerged and ensure that there is some measure of strategic fit within the bigger picture.

To this end, the TRI Committee have undertaken a facilitated review of their operations and structure. Currently they have decided to continue operating as an unincorporated body but with a recently revised constitution. It may be prudent to review this position in the future in the light of local developments. To help the Partnership in this debate, an outline Business Plan has been drafted as part of this study and should be read as a companion volume to the Action Plan.

The recent local consultations have indicated a strong need for further regeneration work in Thirsk. With TRI as an integral part of the Community Planning framework alongside other renaissance market town partners, there is a clear need to maintain

and develop the role of the Partnership. The challenge for the group will be to put in place resources to ensure that the day to day activity of the Partnership is maintained. Current discussions with Hambleton District Council are exploring how collective support could be provided through a combined implementation and delivery team servicing a number of market towns in the district. TRI themselves are exploring the value of potential private sector sponsorship that may bring an element of independence to the core financial needs of the organisation.

An Action Plan for Thirsk and District – the next 5 years 2005 – 2010

1 Introduction

- 1.1 Yorkshire Forward and the Countryside Agency launched the Market Towns Initiative (MTI) in 2000 and the main aims as described in the operating guidelines¹ were:

To re-establish the Market Town as

- Comprehensive local service centres, filling the gap between village and city
- The focus of properly planned and co-ordinated public transport
- Places that capitalise on their distinctive character, heritage and environment.
- Vibrant and sustainable communities where development for housing, business development and jobs in particular are welcomed because it reinforces the character of the place while meeting the needs of rural society and contributing to the wealth of the region.

- 1.2 A total of 12 towns were identified to participate in the MTI pilot programme and Thirsk was selected as one of six towns to be part of the second round of the Initiative.

- 1.3 With external help, a local Action Plan and portfolio of projects was drafted, based upon extensive local research and consultations with agencies, key stakeholders, local groups and residents. Thirsk Regeneration Initiative Committee (TRI) comprising local residents, business representatives, councillors and local organisations was established to take the Action Plan forward. Yorkshire Forward contributed funding of £340,000 towards project delivery and employed and seconded an MTI Programme Manager to TRI to manage the programme and project delivery on a day to day basis.

- 1.4 MTI was a three year programme that commenced in Thirsk in April 2002 and that will conclude at the end of March 2005. The first MTI Manger for Thirsk came into post in April 2002 and the first Action Plan for Thirsk was completed and approved in May 2002.

- 1.5 The first Action Plan recognised that

“Thirsk and Sowerby and surrounding Parishes have seen a number of initiatives and a range of organisations, established over the past few years. The principle behind the Thirsk Regeneration Initiative Committee and the Action Plan is to build on previous and existing activity to provide a community based and wide ranging approach to revitalising the town.”

- 1.6 The intention is to maintain and build upon the momentum generated through the delivery of MTI and continue to develop that community base and wide ranging approach.

¹ Countryside Agency and Yorkshire Forward ‘Operating Guidelines for Local Partnerships 2001/2002’

- 1.7 TRI has now commissioned work to revisit and update the Action Plan for Thirsk.

The brief required the study to give particular consideration to the following issues:

- To build upon the existing information and work of TRI and produce an updated Action Plan and portfolio of projects.
- To ensure that the organisation is fully aware of the needs of all sectors of the local community.
- To set out a long term vision for Thirsk and the surrounding villages and Parishes.
- Identified projects should be prioritised and include funding and delivery partners in line with the vision.
- Widening of projects to include social and environmental actions as well as meeting economic needs.

- 1.8 Additionally the brief also required the study to investigate and report on the longer-term viability and sustainability of TRI as a local partnership and in particular:

- To determine the value of current work by TRI to the local community.
- Means to strengthen the existing TRI Committee group and its engagement with rural areas and hard to reach groups.
- To examine the existing organisation structure and make any proposals for change in time to be addressed by the forthcoming AGM.

- 1.9 Information to meet the requirements of the brief has been gathered primarily from extensive local consultations through semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, agency and local authority staff and Members, TRI Committee members and local interest groups. Additionally there has been widespread publicity in the local media and through 'TRIBUNE', the organisations own newsletter, coupled with three public consultation sessions. Supporting documentation in the form of the original Action Plan and project monitoring reports has been studied to assess delivery success and provide background information. Information from current and recent studies has also been reviewed and incorporated as supporting information where appropriate and the overall context for future work is provided by prevailing local, regional and national policy and strategy.

- 1.10 This document sets out an updated Action Plan for Thirsk based upon the above consultations and also touches upon the form and structure of TRI itself. However this matter is given more detail in the accompanying outline draft Business Plan that has been compiled to enable TRI to assess its future. The following sections form the body of this Action Plan:

- Background, the MTI Rational and MTI in Thirsk – The story so far;
- Documentation review;
- The changing face of local community planning and market town regeneration;
- Towards a new Action Plan
- THE ACTION PLAN – 'THINK THIRSK FIRST' – The Next Five Years

- 1.11 In general throughout this document the Action Plan refers to actions to be taken in Thirsk and District and where relevant therefore, to include surrounding villages and settlements.

2 Background

MTI Rationale

- 2.1 The rationale behind MTI development was to progress holistic rural regeneration and also to learn from and develop the thinking and practice from previous rural support programmes.
- 2.2 A rationale and set of criteria was developed jointly by the two Agencies to inform the selection of appropriate participant towns. MTI would not be a competitive process and therefore the selection of participating towns would be a joint decision agreed between the two Agencies. As a pilot programme, it was important to include a variety of towns in a range of locations, with different characteristics. The size of a 'market town' was determined as falling between 2,000 and 20,000 population and a wider definition was taken than simply a town with a traditional agricultural market. This would enable a range of learning points to be revealed from the pilot that would inform the roll-out of the market towns programme into mainstream Agency activity that has become known as Renaissance Market Towns (RMT) see section 4.9 below. The eligibility criteria established is shown below
- A core population usually between 2,000 and 20,000 people;
 - Each town would be distinctive in some way;
 - Geographical location was considered and only one town per local authority was envisaged;
 - Topological differences would include towns from deeply rural areas, coastal towns, urban fringe locations, historical and heritage differences and town functionality, but all serving an identifiable rural hinterland;
 - A range of core town population sizes would be included within the agreed parameters;
 - The potential of the town to act as a focus for growth, relieving disadvantage and increasing economic opportunity in Rural Priority Areas;
 - Towns should demonstrate potential for development as hubs for employment, transport, service provision and leisure opportunities;
 - Towns which are not likely to realise their potential without assistance from the initiative;
 - Strong local authority support was a pre-requisite;
 - The ability to contribute information and learning to a 'pilot' programme;
 - Some towns would already have an identifiable local grouping or Partnership that could engage with the MTI process and others would be setting up a new Partnership from scratch.
- 2.3 The criteria were then used as a basis for considering potential pilot towns with local authorities.
- 2.4 Following discussions with Hambleton District Council it was agreed that Thirsk would be one of the six round two pilot towns.

MTI in Thirsk – The story so far

- 2.5 The Thirsk Regeneration Initiative Committee was established in August 2001. It is made up of local people and representatives from County, District and Town Councils and local agencies. Its job was to deliver the MTI Action Plan for Thirsk - 'Think Thirsk First', and complete the implementation of the portfolio of projects within the Plan.
- 2.6 External consultants were appointed in August 2001 to undertake a local Health Check² and using the information gathered produce a draft Action Plan for Thirsk. The Health Check process provided the opportunity to identify the most important issues for local people.
- 2.7 The Healthcheck was intended to provide some basic information on the current position of the town in economic, social and environmental terms. The information was gathered through a series of consultations and public meetings and was used to:
- Assist in the identification of projects for funding
 - Provide a benchmark for identifying changes in key areas over a number of years.
 - Assessing Thirsk in comparison to other market towns regionally and nationally.
- 2.8 The Healthcheck also identified the hinterland of Thirsk, which is its relationship with surrounding parishes and settlements that look to the town as their local service centre.
- 2.9 A themed approach enabled the formation of a number of Focus Groups as sub-groups of the main Committee, that each took a particular topic to develop. The areas tackled were:
- The Town Centre
 - Business, Employment and Training
 - Youth, Community and Leisure
 - Transportation and accessibility
 - Tourism, Heritage and Environment and
 - Hinterland issues (surrounding parishes)
- 2.10 These issues were then drafted into the MTI Action Plan and a portfolio of projects produced. It is recognised that the Action Plan produced within the context of the MTI Pilot did lack vision and a strategic approach that has subsequently been addressed in the Renaissance Market Towns programme operating elsewhere in the district. (see section 4.9 below) The Action Plan provided the context for local regeneration and highlighted the opportunities for change. It specifically included 12 diverse projects, timescales and proposed costs. Ultimately over 20 potential projects were identified. While for a variety of reasons not all the projects were possible or adopted into the

² The Healthcheck process uses an assessment toolkit developed by the Countryside Agency, that looks into the facilities and services available to market town residents and neighbouring villages that are then categorised into social and community, economy, transport and accessibility and environmental factors.

local delivery plan, most were and have been successfully delivered. Table 1 below outlines those major projects.

Table 1 – Thirsk MTI Projects

Project	Description	MTI Value (£000s)	Lead Delivery Body
Thirsk Clock – Youth and Community Venue.	A safe environment for young people to meet.	99	Thirsk Clock
Thirsk Promotional leaflets.	Design and printing of leaflets promoting the area to tourists.	0	TRI
Improved signage.	Highlighting local heritage and providing information for community and visitors.	5	Thirsk Town Council
Thirsk Community Forest – Woodlands project	Support for the establishment of a 'Forest for Thirsk'	10	Community Woodlands Group
Tourist Information Centre	Support for the relocation of the TIC and refurbishment of premises.	24	HDC
Hillside Rural Activities Project and LDEP	The formation of an organisation to acquire and manage a permanent showground.	10 + 15	Borrowby Show and others
Long Street enhancement.	Phase 1 of an improvement scheme for this town gateway.	25	Thirsk Town Council
Property Audit.	A land and buildings audit of Thirsk town Centre.	5	TRI
Small Projects Fund	A fund that has assisted small scale projects in the area – see details at appendix ii	30	TRI
East Thirsk Learning Resource Centre	Support for a newly established centre providing a range of training opportunities including computer skills.	10	East Thirsk Community Association
Thirsk Auction Mart.	Support for a study into the potential to relocate the auction mart.	5	Thirsk Auction Mart Ltd
Christmas Fayre	To create a new Fair that will attract tourists and shoppers to Thirsk	9	Thirsk Christmas Fayre Ltd
Ritz Cinema	Upgrading seating and an extension to the premises to improve facilities	30	Ritz Cinema
Thirsk Festival	Funding support for a part time administrator post and the acquisition of capital items	17 + 15	Thirsk Festival and Rotary Club of Thirsk
Business and Tourism Signage	A study to examine and report on local signage	0	HDC

TRI was also instrumental in securing funding additional to MTI grants to support the premises move for the Community Care Association and in enabling the relocation of the police presence in Thirsk to premises off the Market Place.

2.11 An MTI Manager for Thirsk was employed from April 2002. The post holder was funded and employed by Yorkshire Forward. However, it was very much

an arms length relationship and the TRI Committee had significant day to day control over the work of the MTI Manager.

2.12 In the late summer of 2004, the TRI Committee began to look at a succession strategy for the Thirsk MTI. It recognised a number of key points:

- That the current MTI programme would come to an end in March 2005.
- That the dedicated source of funding provided by Yorkshire Forward to support local MTI projects and local delivery would also come to its conclusion at the same time.
- That the work of regeneration has only just begun in Thirsk and there is more to do.
- The Committee were unsure of the public perceptions of the work they had undertaken to deliver Thirsk MTI.
- The group of people that composed the TRI Committee were working well together and had both accomplished and learned a lot during the MTI process.
- Some groups that had been supported by MTI were now growing and developing without significant support needs from TRI.

2.13 Accordingly TRI in conjunction with Hambleton District Council and Yorkshire Forward designed a consultant brief to help them take their succession ideas forward.

There were four key parts to the study:

- To undertake wide and inclusive local consultation to establish content for a future Action Plan and determine the vision and actions required.
- To provide feedback on the performance of TRI and its delivery of MTI to date
- To review the organisation structure and recommend options for the future in relation to the updated Action Plan
- To understand the future need for the continuation of TRI.

Consultations

2.14 Consultations were undertaken in two forms; face to face or telephone interviews and through open, public events. The public events were well advertised in the local media and via a special TRI Newsletter (TRIfbune) distributed to most households in Thirsk and district.

2.15 Firstly an agreed list of local people and organisations provided by TRI were contacted and, where possible, 1:1 semi-structured interviews conducted. The majority of those contacted were able to make a contribution to the consultations and over 30 people/organisations participated. A small number of those contacted were unable to participate for a variety of reasons.

2.16 Secondly, three public consultation events were staged in the town over two consecutive weekends and included an evening session. These provided an opportunity to review the work of TRI and MTI to date and explore themed project ideas and comment on the emerging proposals for Action Plan content. The events were well supported by partner agency staff and TRI staff and Committee members. While public attendance was below expectations with some 60 people recorded, the quality of debate and input

was high, with participants discussing issues with each other and gathering information from staff on hand. The style of the events also enabled priority actions to be determined.

- 2.17 It is assessed that to a certain extent there is some 'consultation fatigue' in Thirsk that may account for the lower than anticipated participation in the public events. However the value of all the information gathered is high and has been used to compile the project ideas in this Action Plan.

TRI Performance

- 2.18 Through the same series of consultations it has been possible to form a view of how TRI and MTI are perceived locally.
- 2.19 In general it is felt that TRI has delivered important, good quality projects and that it should continue in some form as it has only just begun its work. MTI was seen as an opportunity to put some things right and Thirsk has gained some new measure of status in the eyes of local people and experienced an increase in feelings of civic pride. However it was also noted that Thirsk is a small place and that there are only relatively small numbers of people willing to engage practically in 'civic' activity. Of those who do actively participate in the work of TRI, many perform a number of other civic and community duties.
- 2.20 TRI has demonstrated that it has played some key roles in creating a successful climate for change in Thirsk: The organisation:
- Has successfully levered in other cash to support MTI;
 - Shown that local people can influence and effect change;
 - Has demonstrated how it is possible to feed into the community planning process;
 - Has successfully acted as a facilitating, advocating and lobbying body;
 - Has enabled a measure of community empowerment and demonstrated the benefit of a community development approach;
 - Knows how to fit projects to the criteria of a range of funders and understands the regeneration 'game' and how agencies work;
 - Has made connections and promoted joined up delivery
 - Has provide leadership in striving to achieve the vision for Thirsk
- 2.21 The external value of TRI to the wider community has also been demonstrated. The structure has created the opportunity for and is supportive of new people engaging in community based activity. Having a wide community base enables TRI to act as a local forum for views, ideas and issue that can be passed on to others. TRI geographically covers 'Thirsk and District' which is an area not collectively served by other bodies and ensures that outlying Parishes and settlements are included in discussions and planning for Thirsk. This is particularly important in relation to TRI's role as

part of a more systematic process and a building block of the community plan. However while the organisation has had a measure of success it recognises that it needs to do more to develop wider community engagement and establish stronger mechanisms and structures to undertake this work.

2.22 The good working relationship that has developed with HDC, who view TRI as effective delivery partners, has in turn brought a strong measure of support for TRI. Almost as a by-product, thanks to the personalities that comprise the TRI Committee, it has also enabled HDC to strengthen its private sector links.

2.23 The TRI Management Committee itself has a number of key functional strengths. The group:

- Has gelled as a partnership with a consistent membership that is mutually supportive;
- Has brought new people into an established group as needs and interest has dictated, and enabled them to integrate;
- Has demonstrated the benefit of having a 'paid' officer with good and appropriate skills;
- Members have been prepared to give significant time and energy as volunteers, to direct the work of TRI;
- Membership includes those who have a family tradition in civic/community activity;
- Is well led by an effective chair.

2.24 Within the TRI Management Committee there is also a recognition that they have changed both as individuals and as a team.

- Collectively they now have a good set of skills for the task;
- They have demonstrated the ability of different people to come together with 'no side' and agree to make progress – consensus politics;
- There is recognition that new learning can take place through the delivery of individual projects;
- Different skills are required to work with the private sector compared with community groups;
- Individuals recognise that they have progressed their own learning and skills development through their work with TRI.

Organisation structure and review

2.25 An integral part of this study has been the facilitation of a series of workshop sessions specifically for the members of the TRI Management Committee. The aim has been to review the existing structure, assess the shape,

composition and type of likely future work and discuss options for the future. The process has also enabled the group to review their own performance, the high and the low points and the learning opportunities they have taken from these experiences.

2.26 In Thirsk MTI has reinforced the positive aspects of successful partnership working and in particular TRI has developed a sound working relationship with Thirsk Town Council. There is however an understanding that as an unelected body, building on the need to legitimise the work of TRI and seek methods to ensure wide community support continues to be important.

2.27 In reviewing the existing structure three key points have emerged:

2.27.1 The Focus groups described in appendix iii were useful in the beginning, but most have now become moribund either meeting very infrequently or not at all. This is assessed as being due to them completing the work in hand in relation to delivering MTI projects; and that providing on-going support to these groups by members of the TRI Management Committee was too onerous.

Additionally there was limited external support available to these groups and the funding had primarily an 'economic' focus. Accordingly where Focus groups might have continued there were little or no resources from MTI to support this work.

2.27.2 While there is a desire for the work of TRI to be broad based, in particular, wider than just an economic focus, the way in which TRI fits with other local voluntary/community bodies needs to be understood and its role made clear both within and outside the organisation.

2.27.3 Better external communications are required to ensure that the work of TRI is open and accessible and information widely available about how people become members and how new people join the management group.

2.28 Accordingly it has been agreed that the structure review component will be best described and represented in a draft Business Plan for TRI, which forms a companion document to this Action Plan.

Conclusions

2.29 Thirsk has benefited from the opportunity to be part of the MTI pilot programme. In particular it has enabled a local regeneration partnership to become established, undertake learning and demonstrate the local value of such a body in beginning to deliver change and action on the ground in the context of the wider community planning processes.

2.30 Over 20 significant local projects, and a similar number of smaller scale initiatives, have been enabled and supported by TRI through the MTI process; and the allocation of Yorkshire Forward funding of £340,000 has been levered up to produce in excess of £1m of investment in projects in the town and rural hinterland.

- 2.31 Local consultations have demonstrated that TRI has played a key role in creating a climate of change and in facilitating a number of local organisations to achieve their objectives.
- 2.32 While the measures of success are evident, there is more work to be done by TRI in relation to stronger engagement with the wider community and the dissemination and promotion of its work. There is a need to ensure that appropriate structures and mechanisms are in place to achieve this objective and that the work of the organisation is open and inclusive.

3 Documentation review to place Thirsk in context

3.1 The purpose of this section is to provide some information that sets Thirsk within a wider context to ensure that local action planning has a strategic fit. It should be noted that some documentation is only in draft form at this stage and therefore may be subject to change. The following national, regional and local documents have been reviewed:

- Rural Strategy 2004
- Regional Economic Strategy for Yorkshire and Humber
- Investment Plan for York and North Yorkshire 2004/2009
- Building the New Rural Economy in North Yorkshire: the development of an Action Plan (draft) North Yorkshire County Council
- Market Towns Initiative: An Action Plan for Thirsk - 'Think Thirsk First'
- Thirsk Market Town Initiative Healthcheck
- Community Plan for Hambleton – Hambleton Strategic Partnership
- Economic Development Study (draft) Hambleton District Council
- Town Centre Study (draft) Hambleton District Council
- Market Towns Initiative and Renaissance Market Towns programme – Scrutiny Enquiry 5
- Yorkshire and Humber Market Towns Initiative - Round 1 Assessment
- Thirsk Villages Project
- Housing Needs Survey (draft) Hambleton District Council (noted but not reviewed)

(See appendix iv for documentation references)

Rural Strategy 2004

3.2 The Rural Strategy produced by Defra develops the vision of a living, working, protected and vibrant countryside contained in the Rural White Paper in 2000. It aims to ensure policy and delivery are based upon targeting the greatest need and working in partnership at national, regional and local level over the next three to five years. The Government has identified three priorities:

- **Economic and Social Regeneration** - supporting enterprise across rural England, but targeting greater resources at areas of greatest need.
- **Social Justice for All** - tackling rural social exclusion wherever it occurs and providing fair access to services and opportunities for all rural people.
- **Enhancing the Value of our Countryside** - protecting the natural environment for this and future generations.

The key targets for action are:

- Sustainable development through integrating and balancing environmental, social and economic considerations
- Tackling social exclusion to ensure that all sections of society and all localities participate in and benefit from sustainable development
- Economic and social strategies are consistent with the aim of protecting and enhancing the natural heritage
- The development of an evidence base, particularly at a local level, to inform effective rural policy and delivery

Regional Economic Strategy (RES) for Yorkshire and Humber

3.3 The RES confirms its focus on economic development, employment and business success, but also recognises that these cannot be separated from other key related issues within the region. While delivery on non-economic issues will rest within other strategies it recognises the importance of creating and maintaining strong connections and understanding how these links are made.

3.4 In relation to the Thirsk Action Plan the RES provides clear indications of the reason for these linkages:

The needs of communities and the economy cannot be separated: the whole point of the economy is to benefit the region's people, including those in disadvantaged communities.

In line with the urban and rural white papers, there will be a strong focus on making our towns, cities and villages attractive places in which to live, work and invest through urban and rural renaissance.

Regional Economic Strategy 2003 -2012

3.5 A specific action within Objective 5 of the RES that aims to connect the region's communities to economic opportunity is to support the renaissance of market towns through the creation of a broader and stronger economic base for rural communities.

Investment Plan for York and North Yorkshire 2004/2009

3.6 The Sub-Regional Investment Plan (SRIP) identifies Hambleton as an 'area of opportunity' with the necessary mix to achieve economic growth and increased productivity. The aim is to build upon the economic opportunities of the market towns within the A1/A19 corridor including Thirsk.

3.7 Early financial planning for future investment also indicates a 'notional' allocation within the SRIP to support primarily capital and other economic projects for the market towns within Hambleton District.

(NOTE: The recent decision to defer for the time being any action that might change the current system of democratic representation in the region has brought a far greater degree of confidence and certainty to the forward planning being undertaken by all local authorities.)

Building the New Rural Economy in North Yorkshire: the development of an Action Plan (Draft)

3.8 The Action Plan produced by North Yorkshire County Council sets out ways in which North Yorkshire can diversify its economy to create jobs and focuses on two key sectors:

- ***Food and Farming***

Action areas:
Diversification
Value-Added food
Networks

- ***Leisure and Creativity***

Action areas:
Heritage Landscapes
Outdoor Adventure
Festivals and Events

3.9 These areas have the potential to provide direct and indirect jobs while also underpinning the tourism sector. It also highlights the need to develop managed workspace to support smaller business growth within the area.

3.10 Additionally the Action Plan identifies three cross-cutting themes:

3.11 ***Skills and workforce development – attracting people to address skills shortages as well as retaining graduates:***

This reflects the fact that people with higher level skills typically move away and graduate retention levels are low and suggests the importance of creating good quality jobs. But it may also reflect the need for better skills development within the workforce.

3.12 ***Developing a strong infrastructure for communications – with market towns as focal points for broadband connectivity:***

To compete effectively with urban areas, sparsely populated rural areas need to present a strong, continuing and compelling case to ensure broadband coverage is improved. Market towns are seen as an important focal point to enable this process, but are also well placed to exploit other communications infrastructures as a priority.

3.13 ***Focusing in on and improving the understanding of the function of Market Towns.***

Although the New Rural Economy action planning process has not been focused specifically on market towns, in moving forward there should be a strong relationship with many of the projects (in the Action Plan) recognising that often, market towns will provide an obvious and effective hub for delivery.

The report also highlights the need to give serious attention to sub-regional delivery processes and partnership structures to ensure coherence and achieve impact at County level.

Market Towns Initiative: An Action Plan for Thirsk - 'Think Thirsk First'

Thirsk Market Town Initiative Healthcheck

3.14 Both these documents have been used extensively to provide the background to the work of TRI in delivering the Thirsk MTI and as a framework for the future Action Plan. It is recognised as being important that future work is seen to build on what has been achieved in the past. It brings continuity to the proposed new work programme and endorses the credibility of TRI as a solid local partnership for effective consultation and project delivery.

3.14.1 The relevant key findings from the Healthcheck were:

Economic profile

Unemployment rates for Thirsk are low at 1.3% compared with Hambleton District at 1.5% and the UK as a whole at 3.1%.

Most local businesses have fewer than 25 employees.

There is little development space remaining on the two local industrial parks (Thirsk and Dalton) and few opportunities for employment development in other locations.

Tourism plays an important role in the area.

Physical and environmental assessment

The landscape setting of the town is good.

Thirsk lies at a strategic location both close to the A1 and the A19 and is served by a station that lies on the East Coast main Line.

Many buildings within the historic Market Place contribute to the character and attraction of the area as a whole.

Land Use Issues

There is an identified lack of additional land to accommodate industrial growth or other employment uses and a shortage of property suitable for small businesses.

There is an identified shortage of affordable housing.

The local market held twice weekly attracts 120 – 130 stalls and creates a significant level of visitor attraction.

Community facilities

There are few opportunities to access appropriate vocational training courses as most are run outside the area.

Organisations

Thirsk has a Town Council and there are 27 Parish Councils/Parish Meetings in the surrounding area.

3.14.2 The Healthcheck and Action Plan highlighted the following through a SWOT analysis.

Strengths	Weaknesses
Wide employment base and good level of economically active population.	Mis-match in skills resulting in commuting to other centres but professional staff travelling to Thirsk to companies on industrial estates.
Retail centre provides wide range of goods and services and attracts trade from surrounding area.	Some vacant units in the town centre and general need for environmental improvements/building repair to improve image.
Value of historic town and rural setting is an attraction for visitors.	Inability to retain visitors and their expenditure for extended stay
Strength of community and voluntary effort	Diverse aspirations can cause dilution and conflict of effort.
Local schools and health facilities.	Main services only available in Northallerton.
Good quality of life.	Lack of adequate public transport especially in evenings.
Strong local identity, attractive town and setting.	Traffic congestion, car parking difficulties, poor signage.
Wide hinterland looking to Thirsk for a range of services.	Competing facilities offering alternatives.
Opportunities	Threats
Support for local businesses through creation of workspace and business support systems.	Growth in dormitory nature of town due to good road links.
Improve information and range of attractions for visitors.	Competition from other towns/facilities.
Improvement of community facilities through central drop in facility.	Lack of such facilities can lead to disengagement and anti-social activity.
Improve central area.	Traffic, car parking management.

Community Plan for Hambleton – Hambleton Strategic Partnership

- 3.15 The Hambleton Community Plan is a broad strategic document based upon the things local people have described as being important to them and that aims to improve the quality of life for everyone in the District.
- 3.16 The framework to deliver the plan includes the four Community Investment Prospectus (CIP) groups that were established for Bedale, Easingwold, Northallerton and Stokesley and additionally the Thirsk Regeneration Initiative to complete the representation from the five market towns in the District.
- 3.17 The structure also includes five focus groups that take the lead on the development and implementation of action plans for each thematic priority and they are:
- A prosperous community
 - A vibrant community
 - A sustainable community
 - A safe community
 - A healthy community.
- 3.18 This framework that builds into the Hambleton Strategic Partnership confirms that Thirsk Regeneration Initiative and the CIP groups in the other four towns will be responsible for the development and implementation of action plans within their specific geographical area and as building blocks for the Community Plan.

Economic Development Study (draft) Hambleton District Council

- 3.19 Hambleton District Council has commissioned a district wide Economic Development Study, the purpose of which is to recommend how the Council can plan positively and proactively for economic development through the strategies and policies of the Local Development Framework (LDF). The LDF will set out the planning policies and proposals for the development of the District to 2016.
- 3.20 The Council is keen to understand how it can meet the economic needs of the local community and the needs of the business sector generally and contribute to the competitiveness of the local economy. In planning terms it also needs to ensure an adequate supply of employment land to sustain local economic development over the plan period.
- 3.21 In relation to the planning policy context, the study report highlights a number of relevant issues contained in government Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) and Regional Planning Guidance (RPG) notes.
- 3.22 PPG4 states that small firms in particular find difficulty in being able to afford to build their own premises. Consequently developers who provide suitable premises for small firms are contributing to the expansion of the economy and employment. This is particularly relevant in Hambleton where the majority of the District's firms are micro-businesses with 5 or less employees.

- 3.23 Planning Policy Statement (PPS)12 relates to planning for tourism and leisure within rural areas. It reflects the importance of these two sectors to the rural economy and that they are a significant source of rural employment. However it also highlights the need for sustainable development and the preservation of the character of the countryside, its towns and villages.
- 3.24 RPG12 identifies a strong tradition of self employment and the large number of small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) as strengths of the rural economy stating that such businesses offer the greatest potential for achieving sustainable development in rural areas.
- 3.25 Additionally the guidance recommends that 'pure office' developments should be located within town centres as opposed to out-of-town locations so as not to undermine the vitality of existing town centres.
- 3.26 Turning to the economic context, in relation to employment hotels, catering and tourism are highlighted as sectors that have grown over the last seven to ten years, whereas manufacturing has shown a decline over the same period. Predictions³ show that the growth areas for Hambleton are public services and construction, followed by finance, distribution and manufacturing. Meeting the diversification needs of a decline in agriculture is also highlighted.
- 3.27 The District currently sustains virtually full employment with only 0.9% of Hambleton's working age population claiming Job Seekers Allowance compared with 2.3% for Yorkshire and Humber as a whole (2.2% for Great Britain).
- 3.28 A distinctive feature of the labour market within Hambleton is the high proportion of residents that are self-employed. 13.9% are self-employed compared with 7.4% in Yorkshire and Humber. (8.7% for Great Britain)
- 3.29 There is also a disproportionately high percentage of residents working from home; 14.31% of the resident population in 2001 compared with 6.09% for the region (8.69% in England and Wales). This means that there could be a demand for small business units in the future should these enterprises need to expand.
- 3.30 Business start-up rates are higher in Hambleton as are survival rates, indicating an expanding business base in the District.
- 3.31 In relation to the provision of employment land, the report reveals limitations with regard to Thirsk, identifying only three years supply. There is current known unsatisfied demand in Thirsk, principally because there has been no employment land available for several years and enquiries have built up. Future demand is likely to continue from a mix of uses. Being adjacent to the A19/A1 routes and the proximity of the Dalton Airfield site support this prediction. It is recognised that there is some capacity in the town centre to accommodate additional office space through the refurbishment of existing premises.
- 3.32 The economic study revealed that with regard to local businesses, the majority have no plans to expand or relocate within the next 10 –12 years.

3 Source: Yorkshire Futures – Is the regional intelligence network for the Yorkshire and Humber Region

Accordingly a medium growth scenario is predicted as being consistent with the market and economic analysis that has been undertaken. However the greatest threat to this course of events is a local labour shortage and therefore initiatives and policies to address this eventuality will need to be in place.

- 3.33 The policy recommendations from the study emphasise the importance of the market towns in Hambleton in providing employment opportunities for local residents and that Thirsk primarily serves a local employment demand. Additionally it gives importance to the local enterprise culture and the need to continue to increase business start ups and survival rates. The policy implications of this report have yet to be debated within Hambleton District Council.

Town Centre Study (draft) Hambleton District Council

- 3.34 Hambleton District Council has commissioned a study of its five town centres the purpose of which is to recommend how the Council can plan positively and proactively for retail, leisure, office and other developments in its town centres in order to:
- Maintain and strengthen the role of all its market towns as local service centres and where needed to regenerate them;
 - Ensure the Local Development Framework fully reflects the Government's objective of promoting vital and viable market towns;
 - Ensure the Districts market towns continue to meet the needs of the communities they serve;
 - To ensure the centres of market towns meet their potential for contributing to the economic growth and regeneration of the area.
- 3.35 The report notes that Thirsk is the second largest centre in the District with a good selection of specialist independent retailers and a range of leisure/entertainment facilities. It is a recognised tourist destination and is well placed to benefit from the road network. There are issues with car parking and traffic congestion. Future development may well be limited by the quality of the built heritage.
- 3.36 Analysis in terms of retail is divided into convenience retail (food and drink) and comparison retail (household items and goods). Convenience shopping in Thirsk is primarily local trade but comparison goods, while again serving predominantly a local market, attract some shoppers from outside Hambleton. The importance of local shopping is to prevent leakage of spend by local people outside the town. The proximity of major centres such as York and Darlington attacks this aspiration.
- 3.37 In terms of commercial demand for floor space in Hambleton, this is currently assessed as high, being excess of 40. It includes both convenience and comparison requirements and the demand relates to town centre, edge of centre and out-of-centre locations and to requirements of varying sizes.
- 3.38 In summarising the retail potential in Thirsk the report notes that in relation to convenience shopping the market gap is for a local discount food store. However as there is limited capacity for additional floor space, new retail

opportunities are limited. With regard to comparison shopping Northallerton is seen as the most likely town to develop this potential and the existing provision in all other towns to be adequate.

- 3.39 The report notes the increase in recent years for opportunities for participation in leisure activity. It examines opportunities for expansion in relation to activities including cinema, health and fitness clubs, leisure centres, nightclubs, bars and restaurants, ten-pin bowling, bingo and gambling.
- 3.40 It notes that the only cinema and bingo club in Hambleton are located in Thirsk. It assesses that bingo provision is currently adequate in relation to population size and catchment area. However, the district may be able to accommodate additional cinema facilities.
- 3.41 In relation to leisure facilities and health and fitness clubs, Thirsk is served by good existing local authority provision and one private club. However the report indicates that there could be significant demand for additional private health and fitness facilities and that a national operator currently has an interest in developing a new facility in Thirsk.
- 3.42 The bars and restaurants sector show some potential for development. Some national branded public house/restaurant chains have shown interest in the District including in the smaller centres. In addition there are likely to be requirements from local independent restaurants for premises in most if not all town centres.
- 3.43 There may also be demand for an additional night club facility somewhere within the district, there being only one currently, located in Northallerton.
- 3.44 One area identified as a possible requirement is to provide children's play centres. Similar facilities currently exist on the edge of Darlington town centre and others in the North East.
- 3.45 The need for new office development in Hambleton is analysed. It notes that national planning guidance encourages the location of office use within town centres, but that for some businesses, out of town sites provide added value in terms of a modern image, on-site parking, high quality infrastructure, potential for expansion and lack of development constraints.
- 3.46 Other factors influencing location choice include the range and quality of skills in the local workforce, accessibility for employees and clients and other related businesses.
- 3.47 The report indicates likely future demand for space for financial and professional services businesses within Hambleton town centres and suggests:
- Making provision for floor space within new redevelopment schemes that come forward in existing centres;
 - Ensuring that the use/re-use of accommodation above shops and other commercial uses in town centres is encouraged;
 - Encouraging office use at ground floor level in secondary areas.

- 3.48 In relation to Thirsk it suggests there may be scope for some development through the re-occupation of upper floors as identified in the MTI Action Plan.
- 3.49 The analysis also identifies potential sites for development in each market town. In Thirsk there are only four sites identified, but each may be suitable for retail, leisure and office use. However only one is classified as having 'moderate' development potential, the others categorised as 'poor'.
- 3.50 The policy implications of the report have yet to be debated within Hambleton District Council.

Market Towns Initiative and Renaissance Market Towns programme – Scrutiny Enquiry 5

- 3.51 The Yorkshire and Humber Assembly undertook a scrutiny review of the Market Towns Initiative and Renaissance Market Towns Programme. The overall aim of the review was to consider and compare the effectiveness of the implementation of the Market Towns Initiative and the Renaissance Market Towns Programme and their contribution in achieving the objectives of the Regional Economic Strategy. Thirsk was one of four towns considered in detail by the enquiry
- 3.52 The report makes a number of recommendations and includes Yorkshire Forward's responses in an Action Plan designed to address those recommendations. Many of these are specifically directed at the Renaissance Market Towns programme. The key comments and recommendations of interest to Thirsk are summarised here.
- 3.53 The Scrutiny enquiry highlighted three successful features of the MTI programme generally:
- Provision of a dedicated project officer
 - Building upon an existing robust partnership, whenever one exists and
 - Provision of a small grants scheme.
- 3.54 It also indicated the need for Yorkshire Forward to work with local authorities and other partners to clarify how the work in the Market Towns Initiative towns will be taken forward after the end of their period of funding under the Initiative.
- 3.55 Additionally it suggested the need to clarify and explicitly agree with Local Authorities (officers and elected members) and other partners who will ensure the implementation of the Master Plans and Action Plans and what resources will be available to facilitate implementation.
- 3.56 The report particularly comments on developing local Partnership activity and suggests that they:
- *Are representative of the community and include hard to reach groups and representatives from the hinterland;*
 - *Have a clear remit to work pro-actively with existing structures and organisations, especially those that are likely to have lead responsibilities in the implementation phase;*

- *Are adequately resourced and supported – both locally and by Yorkshire Forward officers, and*
- *Are clear about their role at each stage of planning and delivery.*
(Y & H Assembly Scrutiny report 5 – 3.1.8)

3.57 The importance of local Partnerships is reinforced through the regional learning point identified in the report. It states:

There needs to be a greater understanding of the role of partnerships at a local level and an appreciation of the value partnerships can bring if properly engaged. Where partnerships are an intrinsic part of the programme delivery, full consideration should be given to their role and responsibilities and how the programme engages with existing partnership bodies.

(Y & H Assembly Scrutiny Report 5)

Yorkshire and Humber Market Towns Initiative - Round 1 Assessment

3.58 Yorkshire Forward and the Countryside Agency jointly commissioned an assessment of the first round of the Market Towns Initiative in the region that concluded at the end of March 2004. The purpose of the assessment was to evaluate the progress of the Initiative and identify examples of good practice that could assist in the development of future policy initiatives in rural areas.

3.59 Some of the lessons emerging from this study that may impact on local plans in Thirsk are described below.

- An issues based rather than resource led approach is more effective in addressing real local needs and priorities.
- The identification of a strong and committed chair has particularly enabled effective delivery of the MTI programme.
- The appointment of an appropriately experienced and skilled programme manager capable of delivering the portfolio of local projects with a range of partners.
- Strong local authority support is imperative to successful delivery.
- It is essential to have an understanding of the realistic economic potential for a town if a programme of actions seeks to improve its 'economic' conditions.
- Effective communications at all levels and between all partners is key to understanding and successful programme delivery, as is structured partnership development that ensures a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities.

3.60 The study recognised that the MTI programme is a pilot from which learning is still being derived. Some key points emerging include the importance of MTI as a catalyst for change in a town, building local community capacity, the opportunity to developing a longer term vision and strategy, stronger

community engagement, opportunities to continue the work and the ability to work in partnership with the local authority.

Thirsk Villages Project

- 3.61 The importance of Thirsk and its relationship with its rural hinterland has been a continuing theme of some importance and significance. A project was commissioned by TRI to undertake a series of workshops based in outlying parishes. The purpose of these workshops was to engage surrounding parishes with the work of Thirsk Regeneration Initiative and the wider community planning process (parish plans, the community investment prospectus and local strategic partnerships).
- 3.62 Numbers were lower than anticipated at these sessions (27) with attendance limited to representation from about six out of 27 possible parishes. However those contributing showed enthusiasm for some form of continuing engagement with TRI.
- 3.63 The primary concerns recorded were predominantly local parish issues such as the need for small scale environmental improvements, flood prevention measures, the viability of community buildings and issues over land use planning. In relation to Thirsk the key points were its value in relation to the provision of healthcare facilities, leisure opportunities and as a local transport hub and interchange. For future development suggestions were made regarding service provision for evening visitors and the evening economy beyond that serving tourism needs. Better public transport from outlying areas and transport information was also suggested.

Parish Plans

- 3.64 Linking with the Thirsk Villages Project above it is noted that a Parish Planning process has been undertaken in four villages within the Thirsk hinterland and supported by Yorkshire Rural Community Council. These are Borrowby, Knayton, Thirlby and Hillside. Further parish planning activity may be possible when responsibility for this work transfers to Government Office for Yorkshire and Humber in April 2005 that will enable integration of this work into the wider Community Planning process.

Housing Needs Survey (draft) Hambleton District Council (noted but not reviewed)

- 3.65 A district wide housing needs survey was carried out in the summer of 2004. This has undertaken a sample needs assessment in the five major towns within the district and a comprehensive needs analysis in the rural villages and at parish level. The focus has been to establish requirements for affordable housing across the whole spectrum of need including for elderly people and those experiencing homelessness. The policy implications of this report have yet to be debated within Hambleton District Council.

Conclusions

- 3.66 The nature of the MTI pilot programme in many ways has dictated that each participating market town and partnership has been quite introspective in the delivery of its work. A modest cash sum, limited delivery timescales and the need to develop partnership skills alongside delivery have all contributed to this process. This section serves to highlight two important points for TRI when taking forward its work.
- 3.67 Firstly that the regeneration field is currently in a state of change and flux. There is an increasing government interest on rurality, the rural economy and the quality of rural life and the well being of the countryside. Old agencies will disappear and new national and regional structures will emerge. It is therefore imperative to maintain a watching brief and awareness on these developing matters to ensure that opportunities are recognised and that the broad direction of the organisation is aligned with national and regional strategies and plans.
- 3.68 Secondly at the district and local level, TRI forms part of the community planning framework. Its project delivery work needs to be integrated at this level to ensure that it benefits from district level initiatives, plans and strategies and that Thirsk benefits accordingly. This does not preclude lobbying activity to seek change where this is determined as being valuable to improving the quality of life for the people of Thirsk and District.
- 3.69 Additionally it highlights the need to continue the work that has begun under the MTI programme. Review of the SWOT analysis presented in the first Thirsk Action Plan indicates that a number of key areas evident as 'threats and weaknesses' in 2001 remain as local concerns as evidenced through the current consultation processes. This is not indicative that TRI has failed to address these issues, rather that solutions are long term and often complex.

4 The changing face of local community planning and market town regeneration

Agencies and Strategies

- 4.1 Thirsk MTI was part of a pilot programme to determine how best to give effect to the Government Rural White Paper of 2000 in which the importance of market towns to the rural economy and rural communities was confirmed:

The future - what we want to see

- *Thriving economies in all rural areas which provide good quality employment opportunities and exploit the versatility, entrepreneurial tradition, and, increasingly, local green business potential. A better trained rural workforce. Small rural businesses exploiting ICT and marketing their goods and services well outside their local region.*
- *Market Towns as a focus for growth in areas which need regeneration, and more generally as service centres and hubs for surrounding hinterland, exploiting their potential as attractive places to live, work and spend leisure time.*
- *Regeneration of deprived rural areas (the Rural Priority Areas) through development of a broader economic base and regionally comparable skill levels, employment and business development.*
- *Tourism as an increasingly important business sector as leisure spending on enjoying the countryside and its towns increases. Land based businesses such as forestry and horse enterprises and demand for distinctive rural products and services will be key factors in continued rural prosperity.*

Rural White Paper

Yorkshire Forward

- 4.2 The original MTI pilot programme was a collaboration between Yorkshire Forward and the Countryside Agency in the region. Initially the first six towns were jointly funded but as a consequence of the Rural White Paper and the stronger role given to RDAs, the second six were fully funded by Yorkshire Forward.
- 4.3 As a pilot programme it was intended that it should be a learning opportunity and subsequently that any insights gained would be incorporated into future work with market towns in the region. In 2002 Yorkshire Forward launched its Renaissance Market Towns (RMT) programme. Two other market towns in Hambleton are now participating in the RMT process; they are Bedale and Northallerton.
- 4.4 In relation to funding it is important to note that inclusion as an MTI pilot town (round 2) also brought a dedicated grant fund of £340,000 of Yorkshire Forward support coupled with a fully funded MTI Manager in post for the full duration of the MTI programme. It was always the intention of the MTI programme that it should lever in additional match funding and enable access to these sources.

- 4.5 From 2005 Yorkshire Forward are also changing the way in which the majority of their funding is distributed. A sub regional investment planning process (SRIP) is being introduced through which the majority of any cash used to support market towns will be directed. The focus for Yorkshire Forward investment remains on raising the economic performance of the region and delivering the Regional Economic Strategy. (RES) It is encouraging to note that the North Yorkshire SRIP indicates a significant potential for investment in its market towns over the next 5 years. It is understood that the intention is for the SRIP to operate as a rolling programme.
- 4.6 There is also recognition and understanding that Yorkshire Forward will not be the only source of regeneration funding available to market towns.

The Countryside Agency

- 4.7 Following the publication of the Haskins Report⁴ the role of the Countryside Agency is also changing. The Agency will cease to exist in its current form beyond March 2005. It is understood that the New Countryside Agency will be a small, central body primarily concerned with rural policy development. A small regional presence may be retained. The current work of the Agency will be divided between the Government Offices within the regions and the Regional Development Agencies. The detail of these arrangements is not yet fully available

Elected Regional Assembly

- 4.8 Proposals for a referendum on an elected Regional Assembly for Yorkshire and Humber, has recently been put in abeyance. The uncertainties created within the various tiers of local authorities has now been allayed for the time being and created the opportunities for local partnerships to regain a degree of certainty about local structures and potential working arrangements.

Renaissance Market Towns (RMT)

- 4.9 Thirsk has benefited from the original MTI pilot that has been used to inform the wider roll out of the RMT programme from Yorkshire Forward. There are a number of differences between the programmes but three in particular are significant in the context of action planning for Thirsk.
- The RMT process has a focus on building an infrastructure in participating towns to develop a local Town Team that has ownership of the renaissance process and can drive the initiative forward. This is provided through assembling a team of experts to work with and enable the Town Team to grow and develop their skills and draft suitable delivery and implementation plans.
 - There is a very strong commitment to articulate a clear consensus vision for the town in RMT, to detail an effective strategy to achieve the vision and to develop a Masterplan that drives the action on the ground.

⁴ Rural Delivery Review. A report on the delivery of government policies in rural England. 2003 Christopher Haskins

- Thirdly there is no dedicated pot of money ring fenced to support project development and delivery in each town. Any Yorkshire Forward money for market towns will come in future via the SRIP process.
- 4.10 Within Hambleton, Northallerton and Bedale are currently participating in the RMT process and have benefited from a significant investment in external consultant support. Each of these two market towns is now at the point of completing local delivery plans. Currently Hambleton are exploring the possibility of joining the three participant market towns with some form of collective implementation and delivery support team. It is therefore important to understand how Thirsk fits within the wider community planning framework.

Linking Thirsk to wider community planning

The Community Plan

- 4.11 The objectives of the Hambleton Community Plan / Strategy are as follows: -
- To allow local communities to articulate their aspirations, needs and priorities;
 - To co-ordinate the actions of the Council, and of the public, voluntary and community and private sector organisations that operate locally;
 - To focus and shape existing and future activity of those organisations so that they effectively meet community needs and aspirations.
 - To contribute to the achievement of sustainable development both locally and more widely, with local goals and priorities relating, where appropriate, to regional, national and even global aims.

The Community Plan has four key components:

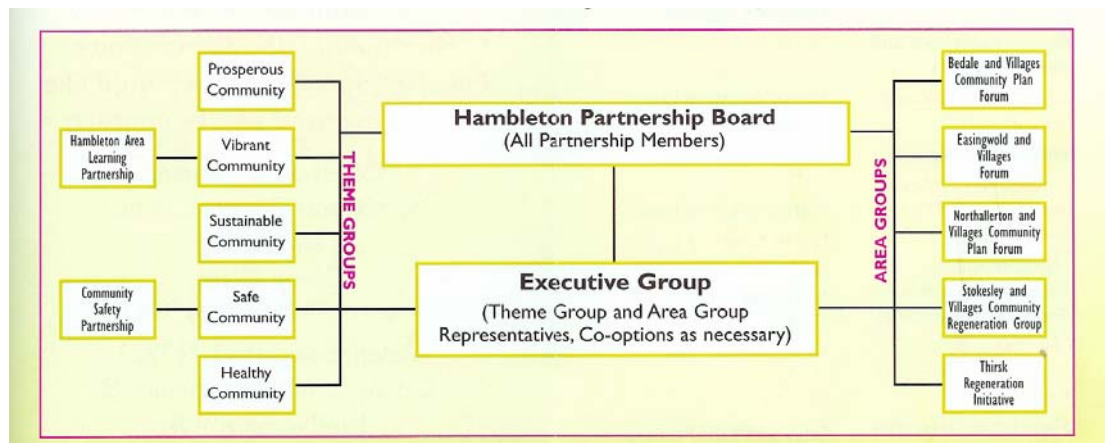
- A long term vision for the area focussing on the outcomes that are to be achieved;
 - An action plan identifying shorter term priorities and activities that will contribute to the achievement of long-term outcomes;
 - A shared commitment to implement the action plan and proposals for doing so;
 - Arrangements for monitoring the implementation of the action plan, and for periodically reviewing the community strategy.
- 4.12 The development of the Hambleton Community Plan is closely linked with the Community Investment Prospectus.

The Community Investment Prospectus (CIP)

- 4.13 The CIP process is an SRB initiative operating within North Yorkshire.
- 4.14 The CIP is a document prepared by the community for the community. It identifies community needs, priorities for action and solutions to community needs for the next 10 years and provides local input into the Community Plan for Hambleton District. In Hambleton District there are 5 CIPs, based around the five market towns of Bedale, Stokesley, Northallerton, Easingwold, Thirsk, and their surrounding areas.

- 4.15 The communities organised themselves into steering groups to develop the CIP. Parish Councils are involved through Parish Plans, or directly through the local steering group. The CIPs include representatives from all sectors of the community including hard to reach groups. In Thirsk no separate CIP group has been established because the introduction of the CIP programme coincided with the formation of the MTI partnership in the town. The TRI group based upon the MTI process therefore performs this role. Additionally the CIP process was used to identify and define the Thirsk hinterland. (See appendix vi as provided by Scott Wilson in the original Action Plan)
- 4.16 The Hambleton Strategic Partnership Executive Group advises on and appraises CIPs and projects submitted for SRB funding in Hambleton. The following diagram shows how the CIP steering (area) groups fit within the Local Strategic Partnership framework.

Hambleton Strategic Partnership structure



Reproduced from Hambleton Strategic Partnership literature

- 4.17 The diagram shows the importance of the area groups representing each of the five market towns in Hambleton District, but also brings together the MTI pilot initiative, the Renaissance Market towns programme and towns who have yet to benefit from formal intervention processes.

The North Yorkshire Strategic Partnership

- 4.18 In the wider context at county level, there is also an evolving community strategy. The North Yorkshire Strategic Partnership was established in 2003 and has recently produced a consultation draft Community Strategy for North Yorkshire - entitled North Yorkshire Together - A strategy for Local Communities that completes a consultation process in December 2004.
- 4.19 The draft strategy has identified five priorities for action:

- Health inequalities across the region based not only on medical intervention but also issues related to lifestyle choices;
- Affordable housing needs will be addressed through new money raised from increased council tax on second homes;

- Crime and Disorder rates and also addressing the fear of crime particularly in relation to older people;
 - Inclusion through transport that will address access to services and opportunities and promote social inclusion;
 - Enhanced broadband services that will provide additional capacity for business users and community groups.
- 4.20 The outcome and conclusions from the consultation on the draft strategy will be available in the spring of 2005.

Conclusions

- 4.21 The MTI pilot has provided Thirsk with the successful opportunity to test out some new ideas in terms of the local delivery of regeneration projects, large-scale public consultation, developing working relationships with local authorities and establishing and running a local partnership.
- 4.22 It is recognised that there are significant differences between MTI and RMT. MTI has worked well with a modest budget and delivered human scale projects through a diverse range of civic and community based partner organisations. RMT has benefited from large scale technical support, but has yet to begin delivery. TRI has the opportunity to build upon its three years of MTI experience and may have the opportunity to share its own good practice with colleagues in RMT participant towns in the district.
- 4.23 Both Thirsk and the other RMT locations will have to work at accessing funding. The changes within Yorkshire Forward to the SRIP process as a rolling programme should mean that as projects that fit their funding criteria are developed, this new route could be exploited. Additionally the challenge for TRI will be to identify and access other sources of funding beyond the RDA.
- 4.24 These may come through the demise of the Countryside Agency (CA) and the formation of the 'New Agency' and the 'Combined Agency'. It will also be important to develop stronger links with the RDA in relation to former CA activity that will rest with them and with GOYH who will also share the former CA workload through Defra.
- 4.25 The opportunity for TRI to work collaboratively with other market towns in the district comes from their key role within the community planning framework. It is also the primary opportunity to demonstrate at both district and county level the benefits of local regeneration partnerships that have the ear of their community and the face validity to provide an effective channel of two way communication between citizen and local authority.
- 4.26 There is also a need and a desire for TRI to work in partnership with the widest possible group of community based organisations.

5 Towards a new Action Plan

- 5.1 In 2002 Thirsk Regeneration Initiative identified the vision for Thirsk as *'Think Thirsk First: First for Living; First for Leisure; First for Livelihood'*. It has now completed almost three years of project delivery through the Market Towns Initiative and proposes that it continues this work. As part of the MTI succession planning work TRI has reviewed the original vision and strategy for Thirsk. It has confirmed through local consultations that it is more than a three year vision and that it is still current at the present time. It is also evident that there is much more still to do and that there is strong public will for the organisation to develop its work further.
- 5.2 The intention remains to re-establish the town as the service centre for the surrounding villages and parishes and as the first port of call for residents of Thirsk and Sowerby.
- 5.3 A re-examination of the original strategy and areas for action shows a continuing and strong alignment with the outcome of current local consultations. These are:
- The need to re-establish the town as a centre for local services serving the surrounding villages and parishes.
 - To provide training places to allow local people and particularly the young to improve their skills and promote an enterprise culture to enable people to find work in the Thirsk area and/or start their own businesses. Additionally to seek ways to link young people to volunteering opportunities that will serve the same developmental purpose.
 - The need to maximise the benefits to the local economy resulting from the town's existing role as a centre for tourism and to encourage longer stays by more visitors. Also to support small businesses in surrounding villages through increased visitor numbers.
 - The need to raise the image of the town through improved promotional activity and environmental improvements including the re-use of vacant property in the town centre and community safety issues.
 - The need to improve access for people from the surrounding areas to key local services within the town centre.
- 5.4 This does not in any way imply that the work undertaken through the MTI process has failed to address the key local issues previously identified. The MTI record on project delivery is clear and strong. Rather the alignment indicates a strong degree of local consistency and that while the process has been started there is clearly more work to be done over time. The work completed through the MTI programme has served to highlight what can be achieved with a modest amount of funding and shows a way forward for the future.
- 5.5 The approach to delivery beyond March 2005 is less clear than was the case with the MTI programme as there is no dedicated grant fund to allocate to project ideas. Accordingly the public consultation information that has been gathered as part of this Action Plan update process has a broader approach

and a longer timescale, as in most cases, project details and funding sources have yet to be confirmed. It was also the intention of TRI that project ideas that were brought forward for the second phase of work should be concerned more broadly with economic, social, environmental and cultural issues.

- 5.6 It also needs to be recognised that the context within which Thirsk will pursue its vision, strategy and action plan has also changed. Whereas MTI was a pilot programme seeking to learn from making strategic financial interventions to support a number of selected towns within the Yorkshire and Humber region, there is now a developing rolling programme (RMT) that will encompass most market towns within the region in due course. It is already evident that Thirsk needs to see and understand its position within the wider context of Hambleton District Council and the Yorkshire and Humber region, and that TRI is but one of a number of component parts of the local community planning framework. Within the District the RMT process is currently being developed in Northallerton and Bedale.

Conclusions

- 5.7 The major benefits and changes demonstrated through successful delivery of the current MTI Action Plan are:
- That given an appropriate opportunity, local people can make a difference on the ground by delivering valuable projects based on local consultation;
 - A modest amount of financial resource can achieve a disproportionately high level of impact when grass roots engagement is enabled;
 - Civic pride can be restored when a 'can do' mentality and approach is demonstrated to positive effect;
 - An unelected body can work collaboratively alongside local authorities and jointly enable successful project delivery;
 - A suitably constituted and composed body can develop a harmonious working relationship between its own members and its external partners;
 - The collective will and performance of such a body is enhanced by strong and effective leadership;
 - A three year time frame gives insufficient space within which to complete the work and project ideas raised through local consultations.
 - Accordingly the following actions are presented as the basis for striving to continue to deliver the vision for Thirsk and which will be championed by TRI.

6 THE ACTION PLAN – ‘THINK THIRSK FIRST’ – The Next Five Years

- 6.1 The full schedule of project ideas that has emerged from the local consultation is given at appendix i. This is presented by theme, listing project ideas in priority order and indicating where possible a potential lead body that could take the idea forward. It is recognised that plans need to remain flexible to ensure that possibilities are exploited when opportunities arise.
- 6.2 Potential project ideas that have emerged from the consultation process have been grouped under themed headings as a way of focussing attention on the key areas of concern. However this should not mean that these ideas are seen in isolation and the achievement of the vision for Thirsk will be delivered more effectively by the joining up of project ideas and actions as appropriate. To enable those links to be made the complete schedule of project ideas highlights potential for cross-cutting actions.
- 6.3 The public consultation exercises also enabled prioritisation of the emerging project ideas within their themed headings, recognising that in the future financial and human resources may be limited. Accordingly project ideas are suggested for those actions given the highest priority rankings at the public consultation events.
- 6.4 The themes, here not listed in any priority order that emerged from the consultations are:
- (A) Young People
 - (B) Parishes and the Rural Hinterland
 - (C) Civic Pride and The Environment
 - (D) The Arts
 - (E) Community Safety
 - (F) Tourism
 - (G) Physical Infrastructure
 - (H) Communications
 - (J) Economic Development
 - (K) Transport and Traffic
 - (L) Access
 - (M) Other Ideas
- 6.5 The priority actions that are evidenced in each theme are set out below and the remainder of issues brought forward through the consultations are included at appendix i within the same themed groups. The intention is that the overall Action Plan will be presented back to the community in some form to determine the overall priority projects for action across all themed areas. However, in future, where opportunities for external support are identified then TRI may bring forward projects for development with partners.

6.6 (A) YOUNG PEOPLE

A1. Create training and employment opportunities for high value and trade skills and ensure access through adequate funding and transport provision to appropriate training.

Aims

To maximise employment opportunities for local young people particularly in the recognised growth sectors within the District which are public sector employment, financial and business services, distribution, hotels and catering as well as growth in the area of farm/agricultural diversification. Additionally there is an identified need specifically for higher skilled technical workers such as welders and platers.

To address the mismatch in the types of jobs being provided and the skills levels of the population.

To attract young, qualified graduates back to work in the area following qualification.

To maximise and develop the local propensity for self employment and support an enterprising culture.

Objectives

Reduce the local level of unemployment in the 16 – 25 age group through provision of appropriate, accessible training and the identification of employment opportunities.

Reduce levels of out commuting and an inflow of labour from outside the District.

Increase the potential for outreach training opportunities delivered in a local setting.

Outcomes

Collaboration between local employers and local agencies working with young people to secure local employment opportunities.

Attracting and drawing high level skilled people back to work in the area and contribute to developing the local economy.

Potential Lead

TRI

Opportunities/threats - Appraisal

The aims of this project idea are consistent with one of the three cross-cutting themes in the Building a new Rural Economy in North Yorkshire draft Action Plan. It also supports two specific actions (improving levels of skills and knowledge) of the Hambleton Community Plan in delivering a 'Prosperous Community'.

A2 Skatepark: Develop the existing skatepark facility for Thirsk based at Carr's Field but also consider options and alternatives.

Aims

To create a safe and usable skatepark with adequate infrastructure, maintenance and security, for all those young people who wish to use the local facility.

To provide a sustainable opportunity for healthy outdoor recreational activity.

Objectives

Addressing the current issue of different segments of the local youth population being confrontational at the existing site and enable free access to those wishing to use the facility.

Outcomes

A skatepark that is user-friendly, safe and stimulating.

Potential Lead

TRI

Opportunities/threats – Appraisal

The inability of agencies and local groups working with young people to bring about a satisfactory and workable reconciliation between different segments of the youth population.

A3. Help young people advocate on their own behalf through their integration into civic and community life through a youth councillor/mentor process to ensure that their voice is heard.

Aims

To ensure that when local matters are being discussed the views of young people are sought, obtained and integrated within the decision-making processes.

To find and sustain mechanisms through which channels of communications are opened and used to elicit and feed back information to this sector of the community.

To explore ways in which young people can play an active role in delivering the vision for Thirsk.

Objectives

Reaching and engaging with the more difficult sectors of the community.

Enabling measures of civic pride to be developed in young people.

Bridging the gap between the younger and other generations.

Outcomes

The creation of opportunities for young people to be represented on the boards and committees of relevant local organisations or to 'shadow' officers and representatives where possible.

Potential Lead

Thirsk Clock

Opportunities/threats – Appraisal

This supports a specific action (involving young people in decisions that affect them) of the Hambleton Community Plan in delivering a 'Vibrant Community'.

6.7 (B) PARISHES AND THE RURAL HINTERLAND

The need to engage more strongly and closely with the surrounding Parishes is identified as a priority for TRI within this Action Plan. It is recognised that this process requires further work and is likely to require the establishment of some infrastructure to enable this aspiration to be met. However this will also contribute to the local community planning process and provide a mechanism for communication to and from the LSP. The work undertaken by the Thirsk Villages project and funded through MTI has made a positive contribution to this aspiration.

B1. Encourage retail expansion in Thirsk to ensure it is the first port of call for local shoppers.

Aims

To encourage more local shopping and increase support and trade for local retailers.

To improve the range and choice of locally available goods and merchandise.

Objectives

Address the leakage of spend outside the retail offer in Thirsk and contribute to a more vibrant town based shopping facility.

Outcomes

Identification of available sites suitable and available for retail expansion within Thirsk.

The encouragement of new retail outlets that compliment existing facilities and offer the range, quality and choice of goods that will attract and retain local shopping patterns.

Potential Lead

HDC

Opportunities/threats - Appraisal

There is a differentiation between convenience shopping and comparison shopping. Convenience items include food, drink and household supplies. Comparison items include carpets, electrical goods, mobile phones, clothing and car spares.

Convenience shopping

Current assessment indicates a good choice in Thirsk in this segment and coupled with limited capacity for new floor space indicates very limited potential for growth. The identified gap is in the discount food store market.

Comparison shopping

There is recognition of the limited selection of comparison shops in Thirsk, but it is assessed that the day to day needs of residents are currently being met. Any development may therefore be limited to small in-fill opportunities and redevelopment of existing provisions. The attraction of smaller independent retailers to both local and visitor populations is also recognised.

- B2. Undertake improvements to public footpaths in the surrounding countryside and create maps and guides for local walks and cycle paths:**
- B3. Develop a more 'joined-up' system of local cycle routes and way markings:**
- B4. Create better access to Thirsk from surrounding areas ('Green Lanes') and reduce reliance on car transport:**

Aims

To enhance existing non-car based access into Thirsk from the surrounding parishes to support the town as the local service centre.

To utilise existing 'green' routes to encourage both local people and visitors to access the town centre facilities

To enhance and promote the links between parishes.

Objectives

The creation of environmentally sustainable physical links between outlying parishes themselves and the town centre

Reduce dependence on car travel

Outcomes

To produce a series of local guides suitable for walkers and cyclists

Potential Lead

Rural Transport Partnership

Opportunities/threats - Appraisal

Building upon the work undertaken by YRCC and the TRI (Hinterland) Focus group to encourage collaboration and co-operation between parishes and their integration into the Thirsk and District Action Planning process and achieve their part of the vision. This supports two specific actions (improving public transport in rural areas and reducing car use) of the Hambleton Community Plan in delivering a 'Prosperous Community'.

Additionally there is a need for more detailed information to understand better the local issues with regard to rural transport planning and undertaking a 'transport study' is assessed as a requirement prior to any specific action being taken.

6.8 (C) CIVIC PRIDE/THE ENVIRONMENT

The importance of continuing environmental improvements to enhance the town for both locals and visitors has been confirmed through the public consultations. This importance is reflected in this Action Plan by ensuring where possible that environmental improvements and sustainability are integrated as a cross cutting theme within the whole document.

C1. Improve and enhance the 'gateways' into Thirsk: seeking opportunities to work with local 'In Bloom' group with a focus on the 2005 event:

C3. Enhance 'Town End' and establish an interesting feature: such as a fountain or public art:

Aims

To enhance the gateway entrances into the town centre of Thirsk that will improve public realm space and create an attractive place to shop, work and enjoy leisure time.

Objectives

Build further on developing civic pride and create an environment within which local people feel justifiably proud of the place in which they live.

Encourage passing tourists to stop and visit the town.

Outcomes

Showing that small enhancement projects requiring relatively modest amounts of investment can be addressed locally and produce significant environmental improvements and encourage wider local participation in similar initiatives.

Potential Lead

TRI

Opportunities/threats – Appraisal

The existence of an active and dedicated 'In Bloom' group in the town, who have already achieved a high degree of success and are willing partners.

C2. Develop the 'Thirsk Forest': give wide publicity to its activities and develop other work such as gardening clubs (schools), tree planting in town:

Aims

To build upon the achievements of the Woodland Group that emerged through the MTI process and ensure that opportunities created are maximised in social, environmental and economic terms

Objectives

Publicise the work of the group to draw in a larger membership from a wider spectrum of the community.

Create opportunities for local people to learn new skills based around growing, harvesting and using timber and timber products

In particular develop links with young people and create a range of practical opportunities for their engagement in the work of the group.

Outcomes

Continuing tree planting on identified sites and exploration and acquisition of new sites for woodland development.

Linking with other environmental groups for the provision of tree planting in other public real spaces

Potential Lead

Thirsk Community Woodlands Group

Opportunities/threats – Appraisal

The existence of an active and dedicated ‘In Bloom’ group in the town, who have already achieved a high degree of success and are willing partners. This supports two specific actions (conserving the natural heritage and working towards sustainability) of the Hambleton Community Plan in delivering a ‘Sustainable Community’.

C4. Involve more young people in ‘Civic’ ideas and developments:

Aims

To integrate more young people into community activity and civic activity in Thirsk and the surrounding parishes.

Objectives

To ensure that the views of young people are heard and incorporated into the local community planning and decision making processes

Outcomes

Creation and support for the will and the opportunity for young people to join community and civic bodies and the provision of levels of encouragement sufficient to sustain their interest and involvement.

Potential Lead

Thirsk Clock

Opportunities/threats – Appraisal

The success of the Thirsk Clock Project in engaging with a significant proportion of young people in the area and their ability to create a supportive environment within which young people can be encouraged to explore these opportunities and develop a real sense of civic involvement.

This supports two specific actions (facilitating community development and improving support for young people of the Hambleton Community Plan in delivering a ‘Vibrant Community’.

The reluctance and lack of confidence of young people to engage and the lack of skills by older people to facilitate effective engagement.

6.9 (D) THE ARTS

D1. Develop an 'Artists Quarter' in Thirsk: in the area of the Ritz Cinema and Courtroom Artspace:

D4 Develop closer working with Rural Arts North Yorkshire (RANY) that could support establishing a regular 'Arts Festival' based on the Art Trail and will link into the Thirsk Festival:

Aims

To work closely with a local partner able to support and contribute to the aspirational vision for the development of an 'Artist's Quarter'

To explore the opportunity to support RANY with phase 2 of their Courthouse Development Project and bring the overall completion of this capital project for the re-use of a grade 2 listed building to a successful conclusion.

RANY have been established for over 10 years and are an arts charity based in Thirsk delivering community arts outreach work across North Yorkshire. They employ 8 staff and provide employment for over 50 freelance creative practitioners on a variety of projects.

The organisation recently secured The Old Courthouse in Thirsk as their base. This is a grade 2 listed building which they wish to convert into an Arts and Media Centre. This additional space will enable the organisation to achieve its planned growth to extend delivery of its arts and creative training programme overall from 30,000 to 50,000 participants over the next three years.

The project benefits will be:

- ***The creation of The Courtroom Artspace, an accessible performance and leisure venue, bringing additional cultural opportunities for both local people and visitors;***
- The restoration of a listed building that is in rapid decline, as arts space in the area of town seen as having potential to develop as an 'Artist's Quarter';
- The provision of a medium sized high quality venue capable of seating up to 50 people and hosting local conferences, events and training.
- Establishing dedicated training facilities for creative studies in design, film, photography, animation and multi media aimed at a wide range of abilities from recent graduates to local school students. Additionally existing community based training and learning opportunities will be expanded.
- The creation of up to seven new jobs coupled with additional opportunities for local freelance arts workers.
- The formation of a community enterprise based in the media studio providing a range of design services and offering career development for new graduate practitioners.
- While the organisation operate across the whole county, development of

this building will bring dedicated and tangible benefits to Thirsk market town.

All necessary permissions and consents are in place for the redevelopment, and detailed delivery plans have been prepared that link to the overall organisation Business Plan.

Budget:

Total project cost	£534,660
Total funding secured to date	£226,000

Phased work programme:

	<i>Start</i>	<i>End</i>	<i>Value</i>
Essential repairs to fabric of building	Oct 04	Dec 04	£45,000
Phase 1a - Courtroom area, entrance, And toilets	Dec 04	April 05	£154,000
Phase 1b – Remainder of ground Floor	April 05	Summer 05	£120,000
Phase 2 – Upper floor areas	Autumn 05	Spring 06	£150,000
	Sub total		£469,000
	VAT (on 80%)		65,660
	Project total		£534,660

Objectives

The further development of an area of the town already benefiting from some arts based interest in the form of RANY and the Ritz Cinema.

The development of employment, training and creative media opportunities and an attraction within Thirsk that further differentiates it from the other major towns within the district.

Outcomes

The public recognition of the wealth of skills, abilities and interest in the Arts and a focus for this activity that could encompass: festivals; artists; craftspeople and makers; retail and infrastructure support.

Seven new jobs and work opportunities for over 50 freelance associates.

Potential Lead

RANY

Opportunities/threats – Appraisal

A strong local organisation that also has a county wide remit, but is able to bring some of those benefits to the town centre of Thirsk, with a demonstrable track record of delivery both in terms of arts based activity and the management of large scale capital works projects.

6.10 (E) COMMUNITY SAFETY

Thirsk is currently designated a 'Beacon Town' under the Countryside Agency Market Towns Initiative in relation to 'Community safety'. A Community Safety Partnership was established in the District in 1999. It now forms one of the theme groups that is part of the Community Planning process that has its own links to the LSP structure. The two items below are included as they emerged from the public consultation process, but are rightly matters for the Community Safety Partnership to explore and develop if they see fit.

- E1. Use CCTV in Millgate car park to cover the play area and skatepark in Carr's Field: to provide safety and protection for users:**
- E2. Information Point/Enquiry Shop to be developed: helping to address crime/fear of crime issues and anti-social behaviour in the streets that has a negative impact on both residents and visitors:**

Potential Lead

Hambleton Community Safety Partnership

6.11 (F) TOURISM

- F1 Adopt a café style culture for pavement seating and enhancing alleyways:**

Aims

To build upon the strong heritage attractions of the town centre and the market place in particular. But also to ensure that the intriguing aspects of the alleyways leading off from the market place are exploited to create 'joining' links from Thirsk town centre to peripheral areas that are the supported to develop.

Objectives

To attract and retain tourists and visitors in the town centre, but also to encourage exploration of peripheral areas outside the town centre that can be easily accessed on foot.

Outcomes

Extension and expansion of small retail opportunities beyond the main market place where rental levels are too high to encourage small retail/business start-ups.

Potential lead

Thirsk Town Council

Opportunities/threats – Appraisal

Work on the feasibility of addressing the issue of the alleyways has been started through the MTI process and has a high degree of local support and interest.

F2 Rationalise main Thirsk Festivals: to share resources and infrastructure:

Aims

With a successful track record, the Thirsk Festival has grown in importance and recognition over recent years. This has provoked others to consider additional local festivals with a variety of themes. A Christmas Festival is planned for the first time in 2004 and local consultations have revealed interest in a 'Literary Festival' and some ideas for a 'Sports Festival'.

Objectives

To bring local festivals under one banner and organisation structure to maximise the benefits and economies of scale, share resources and provide a coherent and joined up approach to local festival organisation, delivery and development. This will include events staged within the rural hinterland.

Outcomes

A recognised 'calendar' of local events that can be promoted and marketed as part of the 'attractions' offer within the overall tourism strategy and action plan.

Potential lead

Thirsk Festival/NYCC

Opportunities/threats – Appraisal

To capitalise on the skills, knowledge and experience of those currently delivery high quality local festivals.

There may be an unwillingness to see all festivals in the hands of a small controlling group and conflicts around ideology, scope, participation and funding distribution.

F3 Ensure that the retail offer and infrastructure (cafes, hotels, attractions etc) is attractive: to 'invite' tourists to come and spend.

Aims

To understand what makes, or will make, Thirsk attractive to tourists and visitors to come to the town, to stay, to spend and to return in the future.

Objectives

To support joint working between local retailers and infrastructure organisations such that existing barriers are reduced or removed and the positive reinforces are identified and exploited.

Outcomes

Higher visitor numbers and increased visitor spend.

Potential lead

Thirsk Town Council/Thirsk Business Association

Opportunities/threats – Appraisal

The newly formed Business Association can become the major force and player in leading this initiative and potentially achieve a high level of credibility and success.

6.12 (G) PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

- G1 Long Street enhancement: to address improved 'gateway' to Thirsk, environmental/public safety issues, vehicle weight issues, car parking – restricted views, the York/Scarborough road roundabout:
The garage site: magnet for anti-social behaviour, blight, eyesore, and poor image of the town at gateway site**

Aims

This is currently the subject of a study by the local authorities and some environmental improvement work is already planned to be funded through the MTI programme. It recorded by far the greatest number of comments during all local consultations and is seen as a priority action requiring collective and concerted efforts from all agencies.

Objectives

Positive action will remove a significant blight from an important gateway into Thirsk and in particular to bring the derelict garage site back into some productive use.

Outcomes

An enhanced gateway into the town that will form part of an overall plan to improve the 'first impression' of visitors and the quality of life for those residents living in the Long Street area.

Potential lead

HDC/Thirsk Town Council

Opportunities/threats – Appraisal

Local consultations are continuing with residents and businesses in the Long Street area with strong interest in addressing the major issues.

There seems to be a complete reluctance by the garage site owner, an absentee landlord, to even discuss options for the site or to engage in any debate with local people regarding plans for the future.

- G2 Address litter issues through raising public awareness in all sectors:**

Aims

To reduce significantly the volume of litter in evidence in public space within the town

Objectives

By linking the need for proper and effective litter disposal to the wider benefits of town enhancement through a programme and process of public awareness raising coupled with the provision of suitable serviced, disposal points for litter.

Outcomes

Improved environmental appearance of public space that increases visitor attraction and improves the local quality of life.

Potential lead

Thirsk Town Council

Opportunities/threats – Appraisal

An area that many people find difficult to take seriously and where the antisocial actions of a few impact significantly on the majority.

- G3 Alleyways project – phase 2: continue to undertake improvements to alleyways and also consider advertising/signposting for businesses located in alleyways – need a uniform system of signage ('A' boards are not an option):**

Aims

To enhance and promote a distinctive feature of Thirsk town centre. Some work is already being undertaken on this through an MTI project.

Objectives

To exploit the potential and capacity to enable the closely drawn market place space to extend and radiate out into the smaller areas of the town, supporting and creating retail/business opportunities and providing pedestrian links with peripheral facilities.

Outcomes

By designing and creating a uniform system of signage for the alleyways, people can be alerted and directed to those facilities existing just off the market place.

Potential lead

Thirsk town Council

Opportunities/threats – Appraisal

An existing area of work that has begun the process.

- G4 Auction Mart relocation: follow progress and ensure support as required and maintain an interest in the vacated site and its future development:**

Aims

To provide support as required to the Auction Mart Company to ensure its relocation to the new site is smooth and effective.

To ensure that the local farming community is included in discussions and community planning in relation to Thirsk and its rural hinterland.

Objectives

Maintaining a watching brief to ensure that the fullest range of opportunities beyond the simple provision of a local livestock market are explored and developed at the new site as required.

Ensuring that the development of the old site, likely to be for residential development, maximises opportunities for wider community benefit. This may include support for a proportion of 'affordable housing' within any residential

development and any Section 106 planning opportunities to meet known community facility.

Outcomes

The establishment of a new auction mart site that continues to see Thirsk as a major centre for livestock buying and selling coupled with suitable diversification opportunities and projects.

Potential lead

Thirsk Farmer's Auction Mart Ltd.

Opportunities/threats – Appraisal

This is a large scale capital project and therefore has the potential for difficulties in relation to financing and developer intransigence.

G5 Establish local affordable housing needs and specifically the needs of young people: working with the Hambleton Rural Housing Enabler:

Aims

To ensure some local supply of affordable housing for young people.

Objectives

The creation and support of an opportunity to enable those young people that wish to consider some form of property rental or purchase are enabled to do so.

The involvement of young people in the discussions and design of suitable property at the planning stages.

Outcomes

A local affordable housing stock.

Potential lead

Hambleton Rural Housing Enabler

Opportunities/threats – Appraisal

A dedicated officer based at HDC to take the initiative forward.

An inability to identify suitable sites and opportunities or suitable and willing Registered Social Landlord partners,

G6 Potential new uses for the redundant police station building: Community Resource Centre:

Aims

To secure the former police station building, that sits within the potential area for an 'Artist's Quarter' as some form of community resource.

To build an asset base for a local organisation that could be the basis for income generation as well as the creation and provision of letting space.

The former police station building situated in Westgate, Sowerby, Thirsk has very recently come to the market. Agents are seeking informal tenders to secure the building, a former Victorian residence deemed suitable for a variety of uses, subject to planning consent. The building currently generally offers a number of small office spaces (9) that in total amounts to some 120 square meters, with an addition adjacent 20 square meters and some outside and yard space that may be suitable for parking.

TRI have agreed to progress this to the informal tender stage. Preliminary enquiries have revealed that other community bases organisations are not thought to be pursuing this opportunity independently. TRI may also explore the option to proceed on a joint venture basis if a commercial partner can be found.

The guide price is stated as £300,000
Estimated refurbishment costs in line with proposed uses are estimated at £200,000.

Limited current discussions in relation to the potential for re-use have considered three options:

1. Community Group use

RANY: An opportunity to extend their space currently being developed on the adjoining Courthouse building to provide artist's studios.

The Thirsk Clock: An opportunity to move into a building with more space and opportunities for a wider range of activities.

2. As a Community Resource Centre

Primarily to create office accommodation for local community groups to use as a base for their work and an opportunity to bring some voluntary and community groups together under one roof to share resources.

3. As office accommodation for let to the private sector

The primary motivation will be to maximise revenue generation for TRI and support their core activity

Objectives

Securing a building that could have a strategic fit within overall town centre planning.

Exploiting a rare opportunity to secure a physical asset.

Outcomes

Developing community (office) space that would have the benefit of bringing a range of community groups under one roof to share space, resources and communications.

It may alternatively be seen as an opportunity to develop commercial office space that will secure an asset for TRI and bring an income stream.

Item J2 below also suggests potential as an 'enterprise centre' to stimulate business growth. More specific enterprise support for artists and associated work is already included in the Courthouse proposals above under D1 and 4.

Potential lead

TRI

Opportunities/threats – Appraisal

TRI has no cash of its own to bid for any physical asset and the Management Group are uncertain about the organisational implications of such a move at this time.

There will be few opportunities for community organisations to acquire such premises in the town centre.

National planning guidance encourages town centre based office expansion. Current studies indicate some likely demand for office space for financial and professional services in town centres within the District and in Thirsk there are relatively few town centre sites currently identified that could meet this demand.

6.13 (H) COMMUNICATIONS

H1 Develop a local ‘user friendly’ web site for Thirsk and District: to include the parishes:

Note: other sites already exist such as (<http://www.thirskonline.co.uk/>)

Aims

To address the need to ensure that the widest possible audience, both local and visitor, can access and act upon information about services, events, attractions and other activities available in the Thirsk and district location.

Objectives

The effective promotion of all locally available facilities that will ensure people are encouraged to ‘Think Thirsk First’.

Outcomes

Working with existing Thirsk based web sites, the creation of a Thirsk portal that will be the web entry point for local information and the regular update and maintenance of this site.

Potential lead

TRI

Opportunities/threats – Appraisal

The current existence of some good information and local web sites that can be developed and enhanced.

H2 Making links with and understanding the needs of local people with a range of disabilities:

Aims

To ensure that all sectors of the local community and the surrounding parishes are enabled to contribute to and benefit from local activities,

planning and delivery of services with a particular focus on the needs of those people with a disability.

Objectives

Integration of all sectors of the local community into local activities.

Outcomes

Demonstrable integration.

Potential lead

Community Care Association

Opportunities/threats – Appraisal

The recognition that this is an important area of activity and consultations have confirmed that there is strong interest in integrating the needs of people with disabilities into local planning debate.

6.14 (J) ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

J1 Support and promote the creation of social enterprises and ideas:

Aims

To build upon the existing local enterprise culture and enable exploration of social enterprise opportunities with the potential for business start ups. Also to encourage existing and any new community organisations to think about being more enterprising and understanding needs for some revenue generation.

Objectives

To produce a revenue stream that will support further community based regeneration and meet local service needs.

Outcomes

The formation of a number of community based businesses that are sustainable and produce added value within the local social economy.

Potential lead

TRI

Opportunities/threats – Appraisal

Sustainable social enterprises are difficult to achieve, and often require some form of subsidy at least in their early days.

J2 Re-use of former police station as artists studio space: Artist's Quarter links – working with RANY on skills development ideas such as web design, graphics design, skills training for new small businesses, enterprise and self-employment:

Aims

To create a building in which there are opportunities for community enterprise and managed workspace that could be the local hub for support to new business start ups.

Objectives

The nurturing of an enterprising culture and through gathering support and expertise in one place alongside potential workspace, creating a one-stop enterprise shop for Thirsk and district.

Outcomes

A local enterprise centre

Potential lead

TRI

Opportunities/threats – Appraisal

The inability to secure funding to purchase and refurbish the building.

J3 Address the needs of the farming community; diversification:**Aims**

To ensure a closer working link with the local farming community as an important and integral part of the local economy.

Objectives

Give support to the farming community particularly in relation to aspirations for diversification and to ensure that new ideas are coherent within local planning programmes.

Outcomes

As a minimum a mechanism through which to talk with and support the farming community.

Potential lead

Business Link York and North Yorkshire

Opportunities/threats – Appraisal

Difficulties in engaging with the farming community through an inability to find a convenient forum, time and place. The new auction mart may provide some opportunities in this regard.

J4 Assess the need to provide training and higher value wage job, especially for young people: and make links with local employers to assess skills gaps:**Aims**

To address the actual skills gaps between the needs of local employers and the ability of local people to apply successfully to fill these positions.

Objectives

A reduction in the need for in migration of labour from outside the immediate Thirsk/Hambleton catchment areas and to ensure that higher quality, higher value employment is matched with the availability of local skills.

Outcomes

More local people in better local jobs and a reduction in the requirement for local employers to seek staff from outside the immediate area.
The retention of revenue spend within the area.

Potential lead

TRI/Darlington College

Opportunities/threats – Appraisal

The inability of training providers to create economically viable local learning opportunities, because of distance and small numbers.

6.15 (K) TRANSPORT AND TRAFFIC**K1 Thirsk Train Station****Aims**

To address a number of key issues arising from the consultation exercise in relation to:

Train running and connecting services
Station infrastructure

Objectives

Improvements to the overall levels of service by train into and out of the station and improved usage through ensuring better connections by bus into and out of the station and connecting train services.
Infrastructure improvements to provide better access and facilities at the station for those with a disability and better local information for all

Outputs

Increased passenger footfall through the station and a reduction in car usage where the train service provides a viable alternative.

Potential lead

Rural Transport Partnership

Opportunities/threats – Appraisal

An inability to convince Network Rail that expenditure is warranted in relation to the potential for increases in passenger numbers.

K2 Traffic issues

Aims

To address issues relating to the volume of traffic, and in particular, heavy goods vehicles using the town centre/Market Place as a through route. A traffic study is the first action required to address this issue and this matter is in hand through NYCC

Potential lead

NYCC

Opportunities/threats – Appraisal

Outcome of transport study awaited

K3 Bus issues

Aims

To address issues relating to the provision and arrangements for bus transport into and out of Thirsk town centre and services and connections to outlying parishes.

Objectives

The effective transportation of people using Thirsk as a service centre who have no access to private motor transport or who decide to travel into Thirsk by public transport.

Outputs

Increased usage of bus transportation radiating from Thirsk Market Place.

Potential lead

North Yorkshire County Council

Opportunities/threats – Appraisal

The inability of bus operating companies to justify an increase in service levels without clear potential for increased revenue through higher passenger numbers.

The local transport plan is likely to be published by NYCC early in 2005.

K4 Build a new road from Carlton Miniott (close to the Red House) to the Topcliffe Road: Build a slip road on the A168/Topcliffe Road junction to take traffic north – A19/A170

Opportunities/threats – Appraisal

This idea has been set aside at this stage because it is very unlikely that it can be studied, agreed, funded or progressed at this time. However it remains recorded as a local aspiration and may form part of lobbying activity for TRI in the future.

6.16 (L) ACCESS

L1 Yorkshire stone paving in Market Place; difficult for wheelchair users: better crossing point where Finkle Street enters Market Place.

Aims

To make access and movement around the central area of Thirsk and Market Place easier for wheelchair users.

Objectives

Ensuring that all the services and facilities located in the town centre are open, available and accessible to disabled people and in particular those whose movement is restricted through wheelchair use

Outputs

Making a contribution to ensuring that nobody is excluded from access to the town centre and has reasonable freedom of movement within this area.

Potential lead

Thirsk Town Council

Opportunities/threats – Appraisal

As this will be deemed a highways matter, the support and engagement of NYCC is critical to success.

6.17 Conclusions

- 6.18 There are clear differences emerging from the current round of consultations in comparison to the exercise conducted some three years ago. At that time there were a number of local projects that had been in development for some time and the advent of MTI with a dedicated financial resource was the opportunity to progress some of these ideas. This is the nature of funding led initiatives.
- 6.19 Without that dedicated financial resource and with the need to become more strategic, coupled with TRIs own desire to become more holistic in its work, the project ideas that have emerged through this process at this stage, still require more work to develop details and specific ideas.
- 6.20 In some ways this will now be an easier task, as there is no finite timescale within which to spend and deliver projects. However it will also be a more difficult task in that details do still need to be worked up and project funding secured.
- 6.21 Where emerging project ideas have specific links to local, regional and national strategies and plans, these have been highlighted above to enable the appropriate connections to be made. Recognition of these linkages and

alignment with these strategies and plans is thought to be the most likely route and opportunity to access project delivery funding.

- 6.22 One key ingredient for future success, identified through local public consultations, directly from the TRI Partnership group itself and confirmed in both the Market Towns Initiative and Renaissance Market Towns programme – Scrutiny Enquiry (5) and the Yorkshire and Humber Market Towns Initiative – Round 1 Assessment, is the need for a dedicated full time officer to undertake the day to day work on behalf of the Partnership. This post seems all the more imperative with the pressing need to develop project ideas into deliverables within the Action Plan and to work closely with other delivery partners.

Appendix

Appendices to the Action Plan are contained in a separate document – Volume 2

Appendix

- i Full listing of prioritised project ideas
- ii Small projects fund
- iii Focus groups
- iv Documentation references
- v Consultations
- vi Hinterland Map (Scott Wilson)