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# PUTTING THE WOW! INTO WHEELGATE

**Delivery, Impact, and Learnings Report**



**YORK & NORTH YORKSHIRE**  
COMBINED AUTHORITY

**DAVID SKAITH MAYOR**

**THE GOOD COMPANY**



BRANDS PEOPLE PLACES



**Circular**  
Malton & Norton

Est. 1841

**YORK ST JOHN UNIVERSITY**

Institute for Social Justice  
York St John University

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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In less than six months, a bold initiative has reignited local pride and shopper enthusiasm for Wheelgate, Malton's original but long-struggling high street. Through the WOW! Wheelgate project, what was once viewed with indifference, is now being rediscovered and celebrated, with a 60% uplift in positive shopper sentiment. Planters burst with colour (and footwear!), bollards are wrapped in bright designs, and festoon lighting adds warmth and charm throughout the year. The street feels alive again, a place with purpose, personality, and potential.

WOW! Wheelgate is a community-led initiative designed to revitalise Wheelgate, Malton, North Yorkshire. Supported by David Skaith, Mayor of York and North Yorkshire, and part-funded by the York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority's Mayoral Vibrant and Sustainable High Streets Fund, the project has been managed by Circular Malton and Norton (CMN) CIC, a community-interest company deeply embedded in local networks and committed to circular economy principles.

Research-driven planning, extensive community consultation (with over 340 participants), and strong stakeholder collaboration informed every stage. The project's interventions included the creation of a distinctive Wheelgate brand, a 'Passport' loyalty card and shop map to encourage cross-visiting, a pop-up shop providing rent-free space and mentoring for new businesses, and a suite of physical improvements such as planters, decorated bollards, seating, festoon lighting, and signage.

Although the activities were carefully sequenced to minimise disruption and align with other town events, several were delivered later in the year due to the need for detailed project management and coordination. As a result, shopper research conducted after five months captured responses before all elements had fully bedded in, making the strong positive feedback even more striking. Those noticing change reported they now visit Wheelgate much more often (5%) or a little more often (36%).

The project has exceeded its outputs, delivered on budget, and reinvested over 80% of its funding directly into the local economy. For example, by procuring street furniture from a local manufacturer. Legacy elements

such as decorative seating, planters and signage remain in place, forming the foundation of a more welcoming environment. Early 2026 will see the continuation of the pop-up shop for a final two months and a second print run of the Passport card to meet new retailer demand.

WOW! Wheelgate also demonstrates broader potential. The experience gained has informed a model for high street transformation now being shared across North Yorkshire. Future opportunities include establishing a permanent retail incubator hub, enabling up to three emerging businesses to test their concepts, supported by peer learning and business mentorship. This could provide a pipeline of tenants for commercial landlords while positioning Wheelgate as a destination for something ever-changing and exciting.

Challenges such as traffic, parking, and the limited capacity of a small delivery team have informed key learnings. The project highlights the importance of dedicated, local project management and the development of a robust business network to ensure long-term success.

In summary, WOW! Wheelgate has delivered tangible, evidence-led change for Malton's high street – re-energising its economy, enhancing its sense of place, and inspiring a community to believe once more in the power and potential of its high street.

This Delivery, Impact and Learnings Report captures how the transformation happened, tracing the journey from shared ambition to real-world change. It reveals the power of community-led regeneration, the practical steps behind visible results, and the insights now shaping future efforts across North Yorkshire. More than a record of delivery, it's an invitation to others: to see what's possible when creativity, collaboration, and care for place come together. To this end, the report is accompanied by a 'How might you' briefing document, providing experiential advice and often unreported avenues for other community groups and organisations seeking to deliver similar projects in their area.

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# 1.0 PROJECT OVERVIEW

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WOW! Wheelgate is a community-driven initiative funded by the Vibrant and Sustainable High Streets Fund, which was launched through the £27 million Mayoral Challenge Fund, aiming to reinvigorate high streets across York and North Yorkshire as economic and community thriving centres. WOW! Wheelgate focused on enhancing the vibrancy and prosperity of Wheelgate Street in Malton. Managed by Circular Malton and Norton CIC (CMN), and hosted at their hub on Wheelgate, the project integrates research, stakeholder engagement, and practical interventions such as the Passport loyalty scheme, rent-free pop-up shops, and making the street a more inviting place for people to work and visit. The project team includes representatives from local businesses, the Town Council, The Institute for Social Justice at York St John University, major landowners (Fitzwilliam Estate), and an award-winning creative consultancy (The Good Company). This report was written by Dr Owen Powell and Dr Vicki Pugh from York St John University, and Circular Malton & Norton CIC Director, Sue Jefferson.

## 1.1 Key Deliverable: Evidence-based Impact

From its inception, the project sought to evaluate and demonstrate the extrinsic and intrinsic benefits of its activities and interventions, which were developed with stakeholder feedback. Therefore, along with ongoing, ad hoc, engagement with local businesses, community members, and visitors, the project's impact has been evidenced through comparative surveys. The first survey, conducted in July 2025, collected a baseline of data on local stakeholders in relation to the high street. A second survey was carried out in December 2025 to assess and evidence the impact of WOW! Wheelgate's six-month intervention. Further rounds of research in 2026 are being considered. Key themes for the impact survey include consumer attitudes and behaviours, range and quality of shops, the appearance of the high street and intervention concepts.

## 1.2 Context

Malton is widely recognised as Yorkshire's 'food capital'. However, Wheelgate, the original high street, has long been overlooked relative to the busier and browsing marketplace. This project foregrounds Wheelgate's everyday, inclusive identity. In the original bid, it was deemed significant that the level of closures in Wheelgate is escalating. Of the 43 units, 4 have been long term closed, 6 closed within the last year and 2 more closed during the application process. With pressures on business rates and national insurance for staff costs, such an intervention was deemed critical now, before the closures become too many to offer a meaningful transformational image. Before the WOW! Wheelgate project, local Facebook comments referring specifically to Wheelgate included "another one gone", "why the hell would people want to live here?", "there's no nightlife, no clothes shops and now it looks like no banks", "room for another charity shop", "the high street's looking derelict... look at how poor all the buildings are".



## 2.0 PROJECT ACTIVITIES

### 2.1 Community Engagement and Market Research

To support the project's development, the team commissioned PCP Market Research to gather voices and establish a clear baseline for measuring future impact. These insights informed the delivery of a constructive communication strategy designed to guide engagement and decision-making throughout the project.

#### 2.1.1 Key Features

Independent market research was conducted in July 2025 and repeated in December 2025 to assess changes in public attitudes, behaviours, and perceptions of Wheelgate. The second round of research reused a set of identical questions to measure shifts over time and introduced new items covering the visibility and appeal of interventions already underway (Map, Passport, Pop-up, Planters/seating, Lighting) as well as future ideas and a general accessibility question. Where physical elements were not yet visible on-street, visual mock-ups were used to elicit informed responses. A further round in January 2026 may be commissioned if December findings are materially affected by installation delays such as signage and seasonal conditions.

## Survey 1

Between Saturday, the 12<sup>th</sup> of July and Thursday, the 31<sup>st</sup> of July, survey responses were collected from residents of, and visitors to, Malton and Norton. The survey was carried out through face-to-face street interviews and online. There were 8 days of face-to-face interviewing, between Saturday, the 12<sup>th</sup> of July and Monday, the 28<sup>th</sup> of July. Locations for street interviewing included: Wheelgate in Malton, Linton’s car park in Malton, and Commercial Street in Norton. An online version of the same survey was also published, this was advertised via letters, leaflets, online, and the local Gazette & Herald newspaper. In total, 343 responses were received. Overall, the consensus from both residents and visitors was that implementing change in Wheelgate would be greatly welcomed. The key areas for improvement are attracting more, better, or a greater variety of shops, filling the empty shops, addressing the traffic and parking-related issues, improving the appearance of the street, and making it more pedestrian-friendly. These issues are felt to be more of a priority than the proposed concepts for the signage, yet the proposed activities were much better received. The learnings from the themes tested with the signage, strongly suggested to stay true to what makes Wheelgate good already and not to try and make it something it is not.

Verbatim comments for reasons why implementing a “Wheelgate Passport” appealed most are shown below. Respondents feel it would be effective particularly with encouraging the local people to shop locally.

- Because it would encourage locals to stick to the same shops and not go elsewhere. Most people like some kind of a deal.
- I can see regular benefit from this item. Most of the others are 'one offs' or once to be seen only.
- Cost of living is going up and up. Would be nice for loyalty to be recognized.
- Discounts will encourage shoppers.
- It doesn't inhibit the free movement of people or traffic and doesn't make it harder to access Malton (as, for example, pedestrianisation or street parties would).
- It would encourage me to shop locally.
- It encourages people to spend money and return again.
- Encourages you to go back to the regular shops. Doesn't disrupt current life. A community pulling together to help customers in the current financial state.
- Would encourage locals to shop local.
- It encourages people to keep coming back.
- Something to give back and encourage shoppers.

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## Survey 2

The second round of research into Wheelgate’s high street experience gathered 108 responses between 4<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> December 2025, predominantly via face-to-face interviews (71), supplemented by online participation. Respondents were largely local: 71% from Malton, 16% from Norton, and most were aged 45+.

Almost all (97%) regularly use Malton/Norton's shops, cafes and services, and 98% had visited Wheelgate in December, ensuring first-hand experience of recent improvements.

Across every measure – quality, value, range of items, range of shops, ambience, and overall rating – Wheelgate performed significantly better in December than in July 2025. Notably, ratings for Wheelgate overall improved +60% from 34% to 55% “good/very good” and ambience/atmosphere ratings improved from 25% to 43% “good/very good”.

However, awareness of changes remains low. Despite improved sentiment, only 37% of respondents noticed any changes (excluding festive décor), with 50% noticing none. When prompted, the bollard signage (48%) and pop-up shop (43%) were the most recognised initiatives (they were the only visible initiatives at the time of research)

Among those who noticed changes, 5% would visit a lot more often, 36% would visit a little more often, 51% said it made no difference to visiting. Overall, only 15% both noticed changes and felt more likely to visit as a result, indicating that improvements are valued but not yet strongly aware so not yet strongly influencing behaviour.

When shown images, respondents were positive about all seven initiatives. Top-rated initiatives included the new string of lights (67% like), seating & planters (67% like), pop-up shop (65% like), bollard signage (59% like), passport loyalty card (53% like) – with many wanting more shops to join. Participants were still positive about the lowest-rated initiative, street banners (51% like).

Wheelgate’s accessibility was rated relatively high (mean 3.7/5), but issues such as heavy traffic, narrow pavements, street clutter and slippery surfaces were frequently raised.



Future preferences included an annual street festival (44%), heritage trail (41%), zebra crossing and empty shop displays (36%+), pop-up rotation every 3 months (34%). When forced to choose one, pedestrianisation was the top single preference at 17%.

With respect to drivers of future visitation, demand for a better range of shops was the top request. Other high-priority initiatives included having facilities for pedestrians improved (safer crossings, wider pavements, and reduced traffic), empty units being filled, and shopfronts improved. Participants also indicated that the ambience should continue to be enhanced with colour, seating, greenery, and lighting.

The strategic implications of the second round of research are as follows.

While improvements are working, they are not being seen. This was unsurprising given the timing of the research, with many of the physical, visible initiatives not being in place until the week of the research or after. Thus, perceptions are up, but awareness is low. More time, plus stronger communication and place-branding efforts are needed to reinforce that change is happening.

The focus should be on high-impact public priorities. As such, investment should centre on events (annual festival), cultural assets (heritage trail), pedestrian

safety and comfort, the retail mix/tenant strategy and filling empty units, continued enhancements to ambience (lights, greenery, seating). While not universally supported, a thoughtful and effective pedestrianisation strategy was the most desired single future initiative, with strong qualitative support when accessibility is addressed.

In summary, the December findings show measurable uplift in how local people view Wheelgate, demonstrating that interventions are directionally correct. However, impact is constrained by limited visibility and slower behavioural change. By extending awareness, doubling down on communication, accelerating improvements to the street environment, enhancing shop variety, and developing a long-term vision for pedestrianisation, the WOW! Wheelgate project team can unlock significantly greater footfall, vibrancy, and economic resilience for the high street.

### 2.1.2 Lessons Learned

- Take the public with you: share intent, listen actively to know what is important, demonstrate changes based on feedback.
- Blend qualitative conversation with quantitative survey instruments to triangulate insights.
- Leverage key findings to support decision-making and promote the project.

## 2.2 Creating the Project Identity and Communication Strategy

### 2.2.1 Key Features

Built into the project was an iterative communication strategy with key (but different) audiences and communication channels in mind. This includes online, in-person, long and short-term opportunities for giving information and gathering feedback.

The below outlines three key audiences and the applied communication channels:

- a. **Wheelgate businesses:** Communication began with early door-to-door visits, followed by email and in-person updates on survey findings, project plans, participation decisions, opportunities for input, and final outcomes. Much of this work is 'invisible' to the public – relying on consistent relationship building.
- b. **The public (shoppers, visitors, wider town residents):** Social media was used to share information, raise awareness, gather feedback and promote new initiatives, generating over 121 comments and additional survey responses. The Circular Malton website and local posters also supported ongoing engagement.
- c. **Stakeholders (project team, funders, councillors, partners):** Updates were delivered through written briefings and presentations, both online and at the Circular Malton Hub. The core team also held a WhatsApp group for flexible, fast communication.

Press and media were utilised via press releases, recorded radio interviews. Using a mix of images, videos and stories across different media—while staying consistent with core messages – this helps generate positive buzz and encourages people to talk about the project. References to the Mayor and funding support, in line with funding agreement contract and guidelines, was important.

A key example of this iterative communications strategy in action is the development of a strong, grounded project identity. The brand-building of WOW! Wheelgate demonstrates how co-creation and continuous feedback shaped that identity.

*“Don’t try to be something that we’re not as a street... celebrate what it was, which was for everyone every day...”*

Creative consultant, Chris Sands (Director of The Good Company), was appointed to provide specialist expertise in community-led regeneration and creative placemaking. His involvement ensured that the project benefited from innovative approaches and best practices in fostering local identity and participation.

### 2.2.2 Making it happen

*“We’ve gone for something different...instead of products, it’s people’s feet and shoes...you can demonstrate it’s for everybody.” (Sue Jefferson, interview with YSJ)*

Essential to the delivery of the project was stakeholder-led, authentic identity making. Evidenced through early surveys and public consultations, there was a sense that Wheelgate’s identity as the ‘original high street’ had been overshadowed by shop closures, high traffic and a loss of excitement about what could be found there. It was therefore essential that the funded activities revived an identity for Wheelgate that felt authentic to the businesses that operate there and tell a new story about the high-street that would invite new and current visitors to explore more.

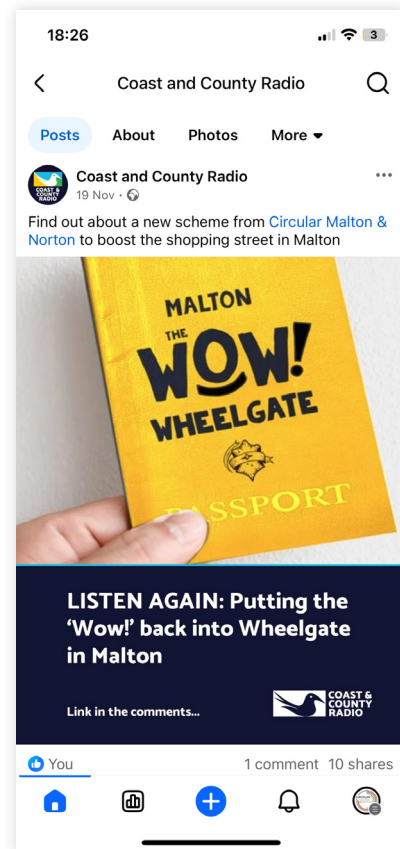
Facilitated by the core project team, local stakeholders were invited to the Circular Malton and Norton Hub to learn about the Vibrant and Sustainable High Streets initiative and provide feedback on identity concepts, designs and creative outputs through both in-person and online channels.

Sessions were held after 5 p.m. to support business owners’ attendance and offered space for participants to share ideas, raise concerns and help shape the project collaboratively. Physical feedback forms were provided, and an online invitation via Facebook enabled wider community input. This multi-channel approach ensured broad participation and a diverse range of perspectives.

Consultations encouraged attendees to articulate their ambitions for the high street and reflect on what makes it distinctive. Stories and overlooked characteristics often prompted a collective ‘wow’, and the idea of using shoes in visual outputs was seen to represent inclusivity and exploration – wellies trainers, heels, even dog paws for all ages, abilities and users of the street.

Creative consultant Chris Sands then developed bold, playful branding concepts, later applied to high street banners and complementary materials such as a ‘passport’ and map. These early designs were presented at an open consultation in August/ September 2025, where feedback focused on refining the ‘WOW’ messaging to avoid overclaiming, leading to phrasing such as “Putting the wow into Wheelgate”.

At every stage, business and public input was central to building a sustainable high-street identity, ensuring that activities and aesthetics aligned with the people who will continue to shape and occupy the area long after the project concludes.



### BRAND STYLE 1



FEET - BECAUSE IT REPRESENTS EVERYONE

### BRAND STYLE 2



### HANGING 'BASKETS' - TIE IN WITH THE SHOES THEME





### 2.2.3 Lessons Learned

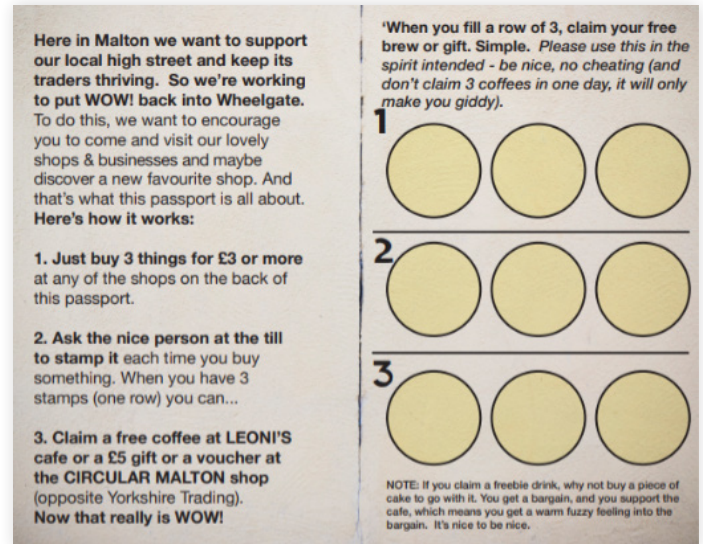
- Transformation means being bold to elicit a re-appraisal from shoppers. But plan communication carefully so the right messages reach the right people at the right time, avoiding overload and ensuring stakeholders are briefed before anything goes public.
- Be open to ideas from others, step outside your own comfort zone but look for multiple strong positive instant reactions. This means monitoring public and social-media responses and anticipating potential concerns in advance. Use positive content to pre-empt negativity, and avoid replying to negative comments unless absolutely necessary to prevent escalation.
- Always be grounded in truth and what creates pride – we sought shoppers' response on what was liked already and responses from businesses on what "Wow" they offered their customers, the map captured and communicated this.

## 2.3 The Map and Passport Loyalty Card

### 2.3.1 Key Features

*"The two most popular [ideas] were a kind of a loyalty card for the whole street and a pop-up shop." (Sue Jefferson, interview with YSJ)*

Taking inspiration from similar schemes associated with Totally Locally, and a particularly successful scheme in Driffield, one of the flagship activities of WOW! Wheelgate is the introduction of a map of businesses along Wheelgate (countering the belief "there is nothing here") along with a loyalty card 'passport' enabling the collection of stamps from participating businesses that can be redeemed for specific rewards. Business engagement was key to the development and delivery of this activity, in terms of its design, development, and implementation. Both components were informed by public research, which highlighted a desire for browsing opportunities and better visibility of what the street offers.

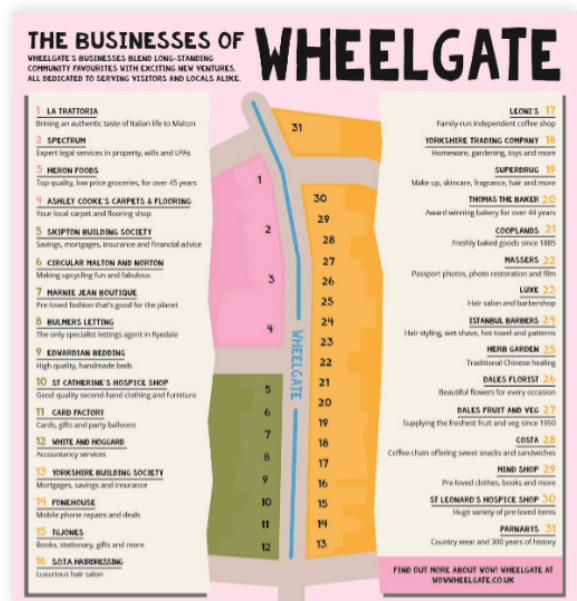
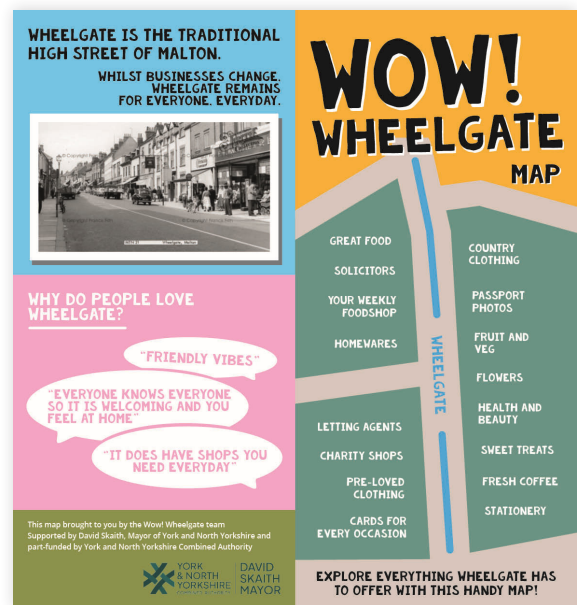


The map was designed to raise awareness of the diversity of businesses on Wheelgate, using creative “WOW” descriptors and historical imagery to celebrate the street’s heritage and character. The Passport loyalty card was designed to encourage shoppers to visit multiple businesses, requiring three purchases of £3 or more from different shops to qualify for a reward (e.g., free coffee or a £5 gift voucher). A strategic decision was made to minimise effort involved for customers, i.e. three stamps for a reward.

### 2.3.2 Making it Happen

*“We all use loyalty cards, but with a limited budget that could not overspend, a complexity of multiple businesses, some independents and some chains, their own policies, and several staff in each place. What was key was thinking it through in practical terms through the lens of a customer, an inexperienced staff member in a busy shop, a reward claim and a tracking format as well as risk considerations and mitigation. Then overlaying with our WOW-style of wording and repeating the process.” (Sue Jefferson, interview with YSJ)*

A first print run of 1,000 Passports was distributed across participating stores, together with Wow! designed self-inking stamps. This was calculated so excessive redemption could be met in the budget allowance (recalling the historic Hoover offer fiasco) and was presented as a limited-edition loyalty card.





Yorkshire Trading reported near sell-through within two days, and redemptions at the café were slow to build but now steady, consistent with loyalty scheme mechanics. One shop reported lack of interest in take up by the customers, so this concept may be shop style dependent ie for everyday/ everyone and not premium.

Anecdotal feedback has been positive. Specific feedback captured in the Hub's comments book indicates that the 'Passport' prompted shoppers to explore shops they had not previously visited, occasional customers of the cafe becoming more frequent, evidencing early behaviour change.

To ensure effective execution by staff across businesses, FAQs and stamp procedures were briefed to participating retailers, and a redemption workflow was agreed with the café. Risks around misuse (e.g., multiple purchases in one shop) were mitigated through wording and design iteration. This level of preparation has been critical to success, and, to date, the positive response shows the rigour was well worth it.

Following Combined Authority agreement to reimburse costs on estimate-based claims for redemptions falling after the funding period, a second print run is planned to include additional businesses who subsequently approached the Wow Wheelgate team to join the scheme – further endorsement for its positive impact.

### 2.3.3 Lessons Learned

*“Having business owners on the street is key” (Sue Jefferson, interview with YSJ)*

- Managing unknown redemption rates within budget via limited initial print run.
- Coordinating business participation and ensuring simplicity for both retailers and customers.
- Aligning with other town-wide activities to avoid confusion, too much noise whilst maintaining coherence.

## 2.4 The Pop-up Shop

### 2.4.1 Key Features

The pop-up shop concept was developed in response to public feedback and the challenge of empty shops – around one in four vacant, with this number growing over the next year. The hypothesis of the high risk of commitment to a lease, the lack of business knowledge around the marketing Ps, cash flow, etc. preventing new businesses establishing themselves on Wheelgate, led to a desire to create a “try before you buy” concept, but with business wraparound support. The “try-before-you-buy” was negotiated between key stakeholders to include three months rent-free, business rates relief support, and fair-use utilities. The landowner, Fitzwilliam Estate, was part of the project team from the outset and stepped forward to offer suitable premises, obtaining Board-level approval to do so. Ongoing business support provision was established through Enterprise Cube, York & North Yorkshire Growth Hub, a local accountant, and mentoring from other Wheelgate businesses. The selection process involved competition-based selection with documented terms, panel composition, and challenge-proof scoring rationale. The final selection decision was made on the stage of business readiness for potential pop-up tenants.



### 2.4.2 Making it Happen

*“We put together a package of wraparound support... mentoring, business advice, and even fixtures from our warehouse.” (Sue Jefferson, interview with YSJ)*

For this activity, progress was predicated on successfully navigating legal and governance processes. The project team walked through requirements through the lens of a pop up trialist, a landlord and a business support coordinator. Risks were captured and mitigations put in place.

Legal arrangements required a Tenancy at Will Agreement, supported by a Schedule of Condition (photo record), and a tailored Memorandum of Understanding between WOW! Wheelgate and the business setting out inclusions/exclusions and expectations during the three-month term. An intruder alarm was installed due to stock value; a portable unit was chosen so it can be removed after the term.

The decision-making panel of four was comprised of individuals from the wider WOW! project team, an independent business entrepreneur, and commercial landlord.



Delays arose from closure of the previous tenancy and the need to sequence repairs correctly post-legal completion. Likewise, signage has been delayed so interim solutions put in place.

As a result of the appeal of the pop-up concept when discussed with the business network, an independent art/ceramics pop-up hosted by a private Wheelgate landlord opened for a limited December run. This experience has prompted an interest in finding an opportunity to have a Wheelgate presence showcasing different artists and workshops for the community.

The offer of wrap-around business support was extended to both the WOW! Wheelgate runner-up as well as the additional pop-up across the street.

It was reported by business advisors in the YNY region that this was the best pop-up opportunity going. The quality of and visibility of the competition, saw the CMN project team invited to be a speaker and panellist expert not only for the YNY Growth Hub-funded pop-up webinar series, and a judge for local business pitching experiences/ training.

*“10-days in and I have achieved more and learnt more than in the last 2 years” (WOW! Wheelgate Pop-up Competition Winner)*

Subject to funding contribution, there has emerged the future potential to use the premises ongoing to become an incubator hub, hosting up to three pop-up businesses at any one time, bringing further interest to Wheelgate through the idea that there is always something new and different to discover. This multi-user pop-up model has the commercial potential for mutual support between the users and the development of a pipeline of new retail businesses that may then be positioned to take up leases with confidence.

### 2.4.3 Lessons Learned

- a. Do not underestimate the complexity and time investment required – developing a fair competition, selection, legal agreements and preparation pre-entry, handover keys and set up, optimisation whilst in situ, along with planning end outcome and next steps.
- b. The Marketing Mix (Product, Price, Place, Promotion) is fundamental to success, ensuring these are understood by the business and addressed before opening is essential.
- c. Business support must be appropriate for the business involved and their existing knowledge – the project manager must stay close, listen to the desired outcomes of the pop-up recipient and steer relevant support .

## 2.5 The Planters, Seating, Banners & Lighting

### 2.5.1 Key Features

A series of physical interventions were developed in line with the identity-driven designs. The interventions were subject to and reshaped by challenges, both physical (infrastructure) and policy-based.

The original concept of lamppost banners which would hang at building height demanded adjustment (see below Making it Happen section). This resulted in an innovative approach, creating signage that wrapped around the bollards lining the pavement on one side of the street. Social media tiles were also created to be shared digitally, with an interactive screen showcasing the tiles in the window of the Circular Malton and Norton hub.

Licensing for the placement of six new planters and four public seats/benches was obtained, commissioned from a local maker using sustainable timber with 25-year life and replaceable slats.

Street lighting was upgraded, with seasonal strings replaced with permanent bulbs, now on year-round (consistent with Malton's popular Marketplace lighting).

### 2.5.3 Making it Happen

An unexpected issue occurred in planning for standard banners to feature on 4 lampposts (the total number in Wheelgate), procured through a signage specialist for production and installation; the relevant street lighting department of North Yorkshire Council (NYC) has advised that no such banners can be installed without first conducting structural assessment testing for additional loads at a cost to this project of £1,500 and in addition as this must take place with traffic management actions, this would not be possible before 31 December.



With the risk that no visual expression of WOW! Wheelgate might appear, one member proposed signage on the bollards lining the pavement on one side of the street. Mock-ups were to test they would endure weather and ensure they did not cause any damage to the underlying paintwork. This was an untried format, agreed by the project team and installed by the team themselves. The feedback has been spontaneous and positive. It would be significantly enhanced with hanging banners however, in the interim, the proposal is to add these banners to the empty shop windows.

With Malton Town Council (MTC) and Malton in Bloom represented, the project team followed the energy around the table. Ideas for the planters and seating were taken on and the various approvals sought (MTC councillors, NYC highways). Highways were very supportive of the intent and identified several safe locations for seats and planters, issuing a street furniture licence accordingly.

Commissioning a local maker/woodworker was the preferred option. However, this had unexpected capacity constraints and put pressure on delivery times, impacting the follow-on stages (painting, installing, planting up). The CMN volunteers stepped forward and invested significant personal time to robustly paint the furniture, so it holds up to the rigours of street life. Observed by project leads, within minutes of their installation, they were in use by shoppers – resting, chatting and sorting their shopping items.

*“It’s great. (Sitting here) gives me a different perspective” (Wheelgate shopper)*

At time of writing, winter planting is underway. This will be followed by a town-wide call out for discarded wellies and boots, which will be brightly painted and incorporated into the planters, linking the theme of the banners. Malton in Bloom will assume ongoing stewardship of the planters’ maintenance. Plaques from the Mayor’s office are on order so they can be attached and recognised as the source of funding.

## 2.5.2 Lessons Learned

- Local procurement supports the place-based economy and longevity, but requires due diligence on resources, contingencies, firm deadlines and written contracts to manage small-business capacity constraints when project timelines are finite
- Volunteer mobilisation (Council operatives and community volunteers) accelerates installation; document “before/after” images for evaluation.
- Have a Plan B and C to enable creative and flexible responses to challenges – like replacing banners with bollard wraps!





## 2.6 Emergent and Future Ideas

Building on the success of the current project, the following initiatives represent the emergent forward plans designed to deepen community impact and scale circular economy practices in the region:

- **Traffic Easing and Pedestrianisation:** We will continue to explore and advocate for various levels of traffic reduction and pedestrian-friendly zones, working in alignment with the Town Investment Plan development and local authority partners.
- **Permanent “Pop-Up” & Retail Learning Space:** Based on the clear benefits brought to the community by temporary initiatives, we plan to evolve the “Pop-Up” concept into a permanent Retail Learning Space. This space will serve as a hub for skill-sharing, artisan makers, and independent business development.
- **Town-Wide Loyalty Card extension:** Following the pilot in Wheelgate, we will test the optimum concept for a “Passport” loyalty card. This will involve scaling to additional businesses and exploring a town-wide model for Malton, or a joint initiative for Malton and Norton, incorporating all key learnings from the initial phase.
- **Mainstream Reuse and Repair Centre:** A core priority is to expand the services and offers at the Circular Hub. Our goal is to establish it as a mainstream Reuse and Repair centre, moving circular practices from the “fringe” into the everyday life of the community

These are being continually explored, including through ongoing survey and research activity. It is important the ideas remain led by shopper preferences. Furthermore, having met other town teams across North Yorkshire and beyond, absorbing their ideas and learnings, a three-year programme is being developed by this project team for both private and public funding consideration.

Other activities, beyond the scope of this round of funding, include a town mural, Spring planting campaign preceded by a January community “wellies call-out”, a street carnival or long table picnic.

Also, in updating businesses and organisations on the project and activities, there was a realisation that interventions may have unintended consequences for some of our community. For example, new street furniture may surprise visually impaired people and lead to a lack in confidence when visiting Wheelgate. An accessibility pilot has been discussed with Sight Support Ryedale: an exciting trial using AI-enabled smart glasses to enhance independent navigation and access to Wheelgate’s amenities for visually impaired residents, coupled with business-facing training (e.g., blindfolded walk on Wheelgate guided by an AI glasses user). This was proposed in the latter part of this project as one of the high street improvement activities, but the mayoral fund team chose not to see it included. The project team and other stakeholders remain keen to see this pioneering step realised and put another ‘WOW’ into Wheelgate and will seek to support it through private business sponsorship.

This inclusive mindset has prompted CMN to explore leading a town-wide accessibility audit, with the ambition of positioning Malton and Norton as a leading example of an accessible market town.

## 3.0 FUNDING, MONITORING, AND OUTPUTS

The funding bid was for a total of £39,746 of grant funding from York & North Yorkshire Combined Authority’s Vibrant and Sustainable High Streets Fund.

Key elements covered:

- Business engagement resource £8,534
- Contribution to Hub project base £4,800
- Activities £13,412
- Research £6,000
- External expertise with other town knowledge, design, and reporting £7,000

In-kind support came from CMN in the form of project management, use of both their hub and workshop as spaces for project meetings, business engagement and street furniture preparation, as well as website hosting and communication delivery. Fitzwilliam Estate provided Wheelgate premises improvements, access and three months’ rent and utilities-free for the pop-up location and operational cooperation.

Administration was under retrospective (arrears) payment terms, so cash flow management has been critical. All claims required invoice evidence and matching bank statement entries. CMN is VAT registered, meaning figures are net of VAT. With Combined Authority agreement, claims for December activity payments made after their 4<sup>th</sup> December deadline and exceptional items (e.g., redemptions for the passport, banner installation delayed by third-party requirements) will be processed in January

Monthly meetings were held with the monitoring officer, comprehensive update reports completed over the period, branding guidelines followed across all public-facing materials in line with the grant funding agreement, and an evaluation paper will be submitted

An overview of key project outputs is provided in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Project deliverables

Deliverable	Target	Actual
Delivery of events and formation of business network	4	8
Delivery of events attracting people to Wheelgate	4	4
Activities delivered by community groups attracting people to Wheelgate	3	7
Empty premises repurposed or potential new tenant underway	1	2
Uplift in people voicing perceived improvement	20%	60%
Pilot model of regional replicable model	1	1

# 4.0 PEOPLE, BUSINESSES, AND ORGANISATIONS

*“We let the ideas flow and then we assess them based on practicalities and costs... thinking through the lens of the shopper experience.”*

It takes a surprising number of people to make a project like WOW! Wheelgate happen. A strong recommendation is to ensure inclusion of people from outside the town, to bring fresh ideas about what has been successful elsewhere, and are unhindered by local limitations. Tables 2 and 3 identify key individuals involved, along with their organisational affiliations and contributions.

**Table 2:** Key individuals

Stakeholder Group	Name/Role	Organisation	Roles & Responsibility
<b>Core Delivery Team (Circular Malton)</b>	Sue Jefferson	Circular Malton & Norton	Strategic & financial oversight Project lead/co-ordinator Project fund monitoring and accountability
	Andrew Riley	Circular Malton & Norton	Project support
	Anna Rundell	Circular Malton & Norton	Business engagement and project support
	Chris Sands	Freelancer – The Good Company / Totally Locally	Project team member – knowledge from other towns, creative design and delivery Alignment with Totally Locally activity
<b>Project Team / Steering Group</b>	Rebecca Wilkin	Head of estate, Malton for Fitzwilliam Estate	Project team member Pop-up shop readiness & contracting Access to Wheelgate properties Alignment with Visit Malton strategy
	Dom Nesbitt	Local Wheelgate Business owner, Leoni’s coffee shop	Project team member Validation of activities; passport redemption
	Gail Cook	Clerk to Malton Town Council	Project team member Street furniture procurement and installation Signage feasibility MTC approvals
	Dr Vicki Pugh	Institute for Social Justice, York St John	Project team member Report delivery
	Dr Owen Powell	York Business School	Project team member Report delivery

**Table 3:** Wider delivery partners

<b>Individuals / Groups</b>	CMN volunteers Malton Town Council staff Malton in Bloom	YNY Growth Hub Advisors Enterprise Cube Hardcastle France accountants
<b>Wheelgate Businesses</b>	Yorkshire Trading Dales Fruit & Veg Dales Florists Parnaby's Thomas the Baker Marnie Jean Boutique Spectrum solicitors	Massers photo shop Superdrug Luxe hairdressers TG Jones Simon Robertson Scoops
<b>Suppliers</b>	Switched Solutions Derventio Alarms Sight Support Ryedale Environmental Art Big Boolies	BHW In Print Blue Raptor Malton in Bloom PCP Market Research Handy Mag Gazette & Herald



## 5.0 SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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WOW! Wheelgate has shown how much can be achieved when a community comes together with shared purpose, creative thinking, and practical action. In a short space of time, it has transformed perceptions of a struggling high street, inspired local pride, and created a stronger platform for future growth. The programme has demonstrated that small-scale, locally managed projects can have a wide-reaching effect; building confidence, re-energising local enterprise, and sparking new ideas for how towns can evolve.

The delivery process has also revealed much about what makes high street regeneration succeed in practice. Working collaboratively across public, private, and voluntary sectors takes patience as well as passion. At times, procedures and permissions slowed progress; however, these experiences have provided valuable insights into how future projects can be made smoother and more resilient. With better alignment and clearer pathways, there is real scope to speed up delivery without losing the care and quality that characterised WOW! Wheelgate.

Engaging local businesses and landlords has been one of the project's most rewarding aspects. Many have embraced new ways of working, through the Pop-up shop, cross-promotion with the Passport loyalty card, and growing enthusiasm for collective marketing. Others, especially smaller owner-managed traders, have found it harder to participate fully, largely due to time pressures. Continued personal outreach, flexible communication and practical support will help sustain this momentum.

The challenges of traffic and limited parking remain well-recognised community concerns. These issues affect not only convenience, but also how welcoming and safe the street feels. While some solutions lie beyond the scope of this project, ongoing conversations within the Town Investment Plan process offer opportunities to consider options such as safer

crossings, calmer traffic flow, and more visitor-friendly parking arrangements. Addressing these factors holistically would make it easier for people to linger, browse, and enjoy everything Wheelgate offers.

Lessons learned about project delivery have been equally valuable. Even everyday tasks, such as installing street furniture, required more coordination than expected, particularly when navigating multiple approval routes. The experience has reinforced the importance of generous timelines, clear responsibilities, and consistent liaison with local authorities. The goodwill shown by all partners, including council teams, funders, and community volunteers, has been vital in keeping progress on track.

The project's inclusive spirit has also inspired new thinking. Collaboration with groups such as Sight Support Ryedale has brought accessibility to the foreground, highlighting the benefits of designing environments that work for everyone. Innovations like the concept of a "talking map" or digitally supported wayfinding could help Wheelgate lead the way in inclusive placemaking – a theme that could extend across the wider town in future initiatives.

Looking ahead, there is collective confidence that Wheelgate's story does not end here. The project's energy, creativity, and evidence base can serve as a springboard for further partnership, funding, and local enterprise. A continuation of the business network, coupled with dedicated project leadership, would help build on what has been achieved and ensure ideas continue to turn into action.



### Key recommendations:

- Continue sharing project results and stories to inspire others, supported by our “How Might You” guide (designed by Chris Sands, The Good Company) and local case studies.
- Explore opportunities through the Town Investment Plan to improve accessibility, parking and traffic safety, with a focus on visitor experience.
- Strengthen coordination across departments with a single senior contact to help streamline permissions and communication.
- Support small businesses with practical mentoring and consider developing the pop-up space into a permanent retail incubator.
- Sustain local procurement wherever possible, ensuring community investment continues to benefit the regional economy.
- Build inclusivity into future projects, using Wheelgate as a pilot for new approaches to accessibility and equal participation.

In summary, WOW! Wheelgate has achieved far more than a set of physical changes. It has built confidence, brought people together, and created a credible framework for future renewal. While a few structural and logistical challenges remain, they are matched and outweighed by the partnership, optimism and learning that have emerged. Wheelgate stands as a living example of how place, pride, and people can come together to create lasting positive change.

*“High streets are constantly changing, but they have, and always will be, hubs for our communities. That’s why I’m backing community led projects with my Vibrant and Sustainable High Street Fund. Like Putting the Wow into Wheelgate, which is enticing more shoppers into Malton while showcasing the up-and-coming independent businesses that make our high streets so special.” – David Skaith, Mayor of York and North Yorkshire*

# A NO NONSENSE GUIDE TO

# PUTTING THE **WOW!** INTO YOUR COMMUNITY PROJECT

A quick guide to help you take action, work with local people, and make funding work for you. Based on lessons learnt on the WOW! Wheelgate project. You don't need to be an expert. You just need to start.

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## GETTING THE FOUNDATIONS RIGHT

### START WITH PEOPLE, NOT PAPERWORK

#### **FOLLOW THE ENERGY**

If people are showing up, helping out, or backing an idea, that's where to focus. The energy is already there, so don't force things that aren't ready.

#### **BE OPEN AND HONEST**

Explain what you're doing, why decisions are made, and if plans change share why. Trust is everything.

#### **RELATIONSHIPS MATTER MOST**

Being decent, reliable, and easy to work with will take you further than any committees and job titles will ever do.

#### **THINK ABOUT EVERYONE**

Make sure your project works for different ages, abilities, and backgrounds. Link up with groups who already support local people in each of these groups. They are the experts, and their input will be invaluable.

## FUNDING: THE BASICS (NO JARGON)

### FUNDING CAN FEEL DAUNTING. IT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE.

**Look at local council plans and community funding pots**, see if it fits what you are trying to do. Don't try and force your project to fit a fund that isn't relevant. Funders will see through it.

**Talk to council officers, business advisers, or community workers early**, they are usually happy to give advice at the start.

**Make sure your idea fits with what they want to support.**

**Check how and when you'll be paid** (upfront or paid back later).  
Cash flow is important!

**Keep every receipt** and invoice from day one

**Check VAT rules early to avoid last-minute stress.** Are you VAT registered or not? Make sure you tell the funder from the start. Are the things you are buying and services you are contracting VAT-able or VAT free? Make sure you check each one to avoid stress later.

**Budget for someone to run the project properly** (ie: a paid person) – goodwill alone won't carry it!

### **TOP TIP:**

**If you say “community voice matters”, make sure your project reflects the need of the community** in the first place, and can actually change based on what people say as the project is ongoing.

## **BEFORE YOU APPLY FOR FUNDING - QUICK CHECKLIST**

**Do you understand where ALL the money will go?**

**Do you know who is running the project** day-to-day?

**Are your ideas truly rooted in the place and its people** (not just something you would 'like to do')?

**Have you avoided locking yourself into too much detail too early?** Keep it loose so there is some flexibility in deliverables.

**Do you have someone who understands licenses and permissions?**

**Are you using local suppliers** – and do you have a plan if there is a delay? (Small businesses often have only one or two staff, and things happen. Make sure you have a back up plan).



## **MAKING IT HAPPEN AND KEEPING IT GOING**

**Once you get the funding – don't dither, crack on.**

Don't overthink, it's all about doing now.

### **GET SOME QUICK WINS EARLY**

They build belief, show progress, and prove money is being spent locally. Choose the easiest bits with the biggest impact first.

### **KEEP THE LONG-TERM PICTURE IN VIEW**

Help people see how today's actions lead to a better high street tomorrow – and make sure that vision is shared 'This is what we are aiming for' will help people see the bigger picture happening through the smaller steps.

### **BRING THE RIGHT PEOPLE IN AT THE RIGHT TIME.**

Be clear about what help you need. Someone always knows someone.

### **KEEP THINGS MOVING**

Invite people in, but don't get stuck waiting for them. Momentum matters.

### **STAY FRIENDLY WITH FUNDERS**

Keep them updated and ask questions when you need to know something. Most want you to succeed.

### **DON'T JUST RELY ON GOODWILL**

Use simple contracts. Send invoices on time. Ask suppliers to do the same. It makes everything go smoothly.



## QUICK WINS THAT REALLY WORKED

These are simple things that made a big difference in WOW! Wheelgate:

**A strong, vibrant brand and message that runs through everything.**

Consistency matters. Don't scrimp on this; people need to see that you are serious.

**A loyalty card encouraging people to visit more than one shop** with a very low threshold before being able to claim. We did a £3 purchase needed for one stamp, three stamps to claim a coffee or a voucher. Easy to do, quick reward, and no complicated rules.

**A simple street map showing hidden gems and local stories.** People love a map.

**Fast visual changes:** We put up posters, wrapped bollards, made planters and put up banners, gave out stickers. Everything on brand.

**Getting local media involved early** - share the vision, share updates and share successes. If you have anyone who can write press releases, the local papers will love you. They will often just print what you send. We found that local papers still had a great impact on getting our message over. Engage with local social media groups. Local facebook groups got our message out quickly to the right audience.

**Visiting businesses one-to-one** and leaving clear notes and deadlines for inclusion on promotional material. Also keeping them updated periodically so they could feel part of the project.

**Doing simple surveys** before and after to show what's changed. Your team's hard work can be evidenced.



## **DELIVERING THE PROJECT (THE MESSY BIT)**

### **WHEN YOU INVOLVE LOTS OF PEOPLE, YOU'LL GET LOTS OF IDEAS.**

Most won't happen – and that's OK. Be open to really good ideas, but stay focused, and make sure anything new fits within your vision.

### **FOLLOW THE ENERGY**

**Focus on where people are actually turning up and helping**, don't waste time trying to bring everybody along from the start. If they see it working they will join in at some point.

### **BE FAIR AND CLEAR**

#### **ASK:**

**How are decisions being made?**

**Who benefits from this?**

**Is it worth changing direction** based on feedback?

### **BALANCE STRUCTURE WITH FLEXIBILITY**

**You've promised certain things in your funding bid** – but real life will shift plans. Adapt where it makes sense and document why you shifted.

### **LEADERSHIP MATTERS**

**Listening is vital**, but someone still has to decide and get things done.

### **DON'T BE AFRAID TO JUST GET ON WITH IT**

**Show impact**, explain clearly, and trust your judgement.

Most funders care about positive, inclusive change, and that's done best by not getting tied up in red tape and long decision making.

**IN SUMMARY:**

**START SMALL, BUT THINK BIG**

**KEEP THINGS SIMPLE & VISIBLE**

**PAY FOR COORDINATION -  
IT'S NOT A 'NICE-TO-HAVE'**

**SHARE WHAT YOU LEARN  
SO OTHERS CAN DO IT TOO**

**MOMENTUM BEATS PERFECTION  
- EVERY TIME!**



**BEST FOOT FORWARD AND ALL THAT....**



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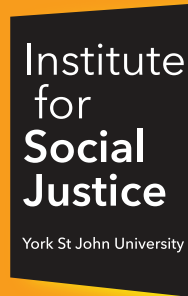
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