



Plans for an urban village at The Seam

# Be more Barnsley?

Alex Bell explores whether Barnsley, billed as 'the place of possibilities' in its 2030 strategy, is on track to meet its high ambitions

**"I**'ve never been as optimistic for the future of the borough and the town as I am now."

Sir Steve Houghton isn't reflecting on the quarter of a century he's been the leader of Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council. He is looking forward, he tells *Insider*, and he likes what he sees.

"The opportunities that are coming to Barnsley now, and it's been a long time in the making let's not kid ourselves, are vast," he says. "For years it always felt like two steps forward and three steps back. Now, it's completely the reverse."

"We've got large employment being created, more jobs than we've had for years, our reputation nationally, I'd like to think, is good and we have plans for 28,000 homes."

## Key ambitions of Barnsley 2030

Healthy Barnsley, Growing Barnsley, Learning Barnsley and Sustainable Barnsley are the four pillars and foundations that knit together the vision for 2030.

Put simply the council 'wants everyone to have a good life'. But as those with experience of tackling and implementing

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**Sir Steve Houghton**  
Barnsley Council leader

town centre visions know, the quest for true growth that touches all of a borough's population is far from simple.

If one was to judge how Barnsley is faring, you start by reviewing the evidence. To coin it as a place transformed in recent years, you wouldn't be far off the mark.

Junctions 36 and 37 of the M1 are becoming business powerhouses, the town centre is bucking the trend and job creation is aplenty throughout the borough.

There's more to come though, according to the Labour councillor, who is also chair of the Barnsley 2030 Board.

"There's been private sector investment over the past ten years," he says, "of around £170m at junction 36, £80m at junction 37 and £28m in Goldthorpe. That's just the start, we can expand it even further."

The key to the successes so far?

"It's having a long-term strategy for growth in the borough," says Houghton. "We have laid the ground out over time to be in a position to deliver growth."

"A lot of places talk about growth but haven't got the infrastructure or plans in place to make it happen."

Houghton adds: "A really good example that shows how we have been ready to do development, but to do it in a sustainable way and a quality way, is the Evri plant at junction 36."

"The average wage at that plant is over £30k a year. There's a raft of different jobs and it is just what Barnsley needs and there's much more to it than 'just a facility' as Evri is creating 80 per cent local labour."

## 5.5 million visitors

It's not just the motorways where investment plans lie. Barnsley town centre has and continues to buck the national high streets trend. Over the past year 5.5 million visitors have set foot in and around Barnsley's revitalised town centre.

"The spend in the town centre has been over £200m," Houghton tells *Insider*.

"The Glassworks, new shopping, retail, leisure, a new 13-screen cinema. It's a place transformed and is pulling in people from Leeds, Sheffield, Manchester and beyond."

Barnsley also boasts digital business district The Seam – currently home to two digital media centres and Barnsley College's SciTech building. And plans are afoot to add an urban village to the area.

"It's an opportunity to build on the two digital centres we already have in the town centre, and to expand that," says Houghton.

In addition recent plans for the area include low-carbon housing development, a multi-storey car park with 40 electric vehicle charging points and an active travel hub for cyclists and walkers.

"We're developing a big investment in our principle towns and wider communities too," Houghton is quick to add. "There will be £30m of investment in the smaller town centres around the borough so we can give them a new future, reconstruct them physically and link them to business parks so we can create job opportunities in our smaller towns."

## You can't just talk

"We don't just talk a good game," says Houghton. "Our plan is not just about the town centre and motorways. Yes, we are identifying land for future development and making capacity for 28,000 houses and 21,000 jobs. But an even longer-term strategy is improving education and skills in the borough. We transformed all our secondary schools through the previous government's Building Schools for the Future programme, and by using our own money. The result is that all of our secondary stock is as good as anything in the country. And GCSE results have transformed too."

"The big push from here on in is not just to carry on creating more jobs, but creating better jobs."

Junction 37, junction 36 and Goldthorpe are the three big development sites at play. "That is where a lot of our job creation is going to be," Houghton says. "It's important to mention that we are very pro-business in Barnsley and that Enterprising Barnsley is one of the country's leading business support units. The work it does is fantastic and we are expecting more businesses to move here and grow."

## Relocating for growth

When Andel, a manufacturer with clients including the NHS, Ministry of Defence, Home Office and DEFRA, decided to relocate from Huddersfield, its first choice was Barnsley. More specifically, a new manufacturing unit in Dodworth, close to junction 37 of the M1.

The worldwide exporter with other customers including The Pentagon and Hong Kong International Airport, has been making leak detection panels, BundGuard dewatering pump systems and bespoke control systems for special projects. – it now boasts a workforce of almost 70 people.

According to Andel commercial director Mark Harris, production efficiency has since motored for a handful of reasons.

"We wanted a modern premises, to be within ten miles of a major motorway and 30 to 40 minutes away from a major city," says Harris.

"This was for recruitment purposes and to also be near top UK universities. Dodworth, around junctions 36 and 37

of the M1, has ticked all the boxes and is close enough to both Sheffield and Leeds."

Andel, also responsible for oil storage, fuel maintenance, sampling and inspections at more than 50 per cent of all NHS trusts in England, had 40 employees on its books when it moved from Marsden to Dodworth.

Fifteen of the manufacturer's 27 recent hires also come from the Barnsley area.

Harris adds: "What the move has done is enable us to come out of Covid on an upward spiral. The assistance of Barnsley Council's economic development team has been remarkable too."

"In every respect it has been the right move as being here is assisting our expansion."

"Barnsley is able to match our demands and aspirations. Had we stayed in Marsden we wouldn't have been able to recruit sufficiently. Visitors have also told us that it's almost like coming to a different business, a more modern company."



The Glassworks, in a series of pictures below, is attracting visitors to Barnsley





Steve Birks

## From Peaky to Pokémon

Established in Sheffield in 1986, GB eye took new premises with support from Enterprising Barnsley – having identified the area as a superior location for distribution.

Over the coming months the company intends to recruit a further 35 people in sales, ecommerce and manufacturing.

GB eye, now part of the Aysse Corp Group, has recorded double-digit sales to retail growth since adding a 78,000 sq ft purpose-built manufacturing and distribution unit to operations.

Think posters, prints, tableware, clothing and collectables, *Peaky Blinders* to Pokémon, *Rick and Morty* to the Rolling Stones – and there's an indication of what this designer, manufacturer and distributor does.

GB eye managing director Steven Birks tells *Insider*: "Since moving to Barnsley our sales to retail have increased by double-digit growth. We've created ten to 15 new jobs in sales, marketing and distribution and now employ 60 on site.

"Our stock capacity has dramatically increased due to the new site, meaning we are less reliant on inbound stock from Asia. I would certainly recommend Barnsley as a place to do business due to two key reasons. The significant support from Barnsley Council and the business support team, and secondly most of our new staff have come from the local area."

## Towns and villages

Barnsley's 'Principal Towns and Local Village Centres' investment programme is an estimated £35m project to improve local economies around the borough and help high streets thrive.

More than £5m has already been committed into Cudworth, Goldthorpe, Hoyland, Penistone, Royston and Wombwell and ten Local Centres to help them thrive. This includes more than 500 local shop-front transformations, as well as community art projects and new public spaces created. A second phase has been approved for individual town investment plans as well as a borough-wide plan for key local projects.

### Works will include:

- Mini business centres, including business support
- Repurposing key buildings and land
- Transport improvements, including active travel routes
- Cultural celebrations, as well as participation in cultural events and projects
- Employability support to help people to get into work
- Development of open and welcoming public and green spaces
- Development of amenities and facilities for community use
- Digital connectivity projects to tackle digital exclusion and build skills
- Investment in low carbon and sustainability improvements

