



HAMBLETON DISTRICT COUNCIL

GROWING in stature

How Hambleton is shaping and
guiding the area's success story





Shaping the district

It's one of the smallest district councils but Hambleton has evolved into a local authority

Austin Macauley reports

Back in 2013, Hambleton's economy was dealt a double blow – the closure of Northallerton Prison and the Rural Payments Agency. Together they amounted to a loss of more than 500 jobs in the district's largest town of Northallerton, leaving two major sites empty.

'In most small market towns it would have a catastrophic effect on the town,' says the council's chief executive Justin Ives. 'But it didn't in Northallerton.'

North Yorkshire's county town is blessed with an affluent population, which helped to soften the blow. But equally, if not more important, was the council's quick action to take hold of the situation.

Leader Cllr Mark Robson contacted local MP William Hague and they worked together to ensure the Ministry of Justice didn't market the site until a masterplan was in place. Two years later the council bought the site and paved the way for Treadmills, a major mixed-use development in the heart of the town.

Similarly, negotiations ensured the former Rural Payments Agency premises were given a new lease of life as the headquarters for North Yorkshire Police.

When a cottage hospital in the middle of Thirsk closed, the council intervened to ensure the site was retained for the community by purchasing it and gifting it to a local hospice.

'It's about placeshaping,' says Justin. 'As local authorities we have a role in shaping our areas. This council has embraced that and is shaping the economy, housing and development.'

Hambleton, largely rural and situated in the middle of North Yorkshire, has had a strong financial base since the early 1990s when housing stock was transferred to a social landlord and the council kept the proceeds.

But like all councils it has seen funding reduced, losing 60% of Government grant over the last decade.

'The difference in Hambleton is we have come up with ideas and strategies to mitigate that and they have worked to plug the hole in funding,' Justin explains. 'By next year or the year after we hope to be self-sufficient and able to rely on locally generated income instead.'

i Hambleton facts

- Hambleton is one of the smallest districts in terms of population (90,000) but among the largest in area (*more than 500 square miles*)
- Situated in the Vale of York, its stunning landscape includes the Howardian Hills, an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
- The district is a hub for food manufacturing with dozens of companies, large and small, including famous names such as Yorkshire Provender, Heck and Mason's Gin
- Hambleton's employment rate of 84.1% is one of the highest in the country
- The local economy is worth £1.54bn

Taking the initiative

The council has worked hard to develop investment strategies that enhance local services, generate new income streams and pave the way for private sector growth. For example, its Vibrant Market Towns programme is enabling the district's five towns to thrive by engaging employers and enabling them to take the lead.

The council has invested in leisure centres – including the

first local authority run facility that's open 24/7 – and is looking at building the district's first crematorium.

It has also secured funding from the local enterprise partnership (LEP) and Government for a number of key infrastructure schemes.

'In the last six years we will have had in excess of £15m from the LEP,' Cllr Robson explains. 'It's because we have shovel-ready schemes. It's about the local authority putting schemes forward that can be delivered. If we say we will deliver to a timescale, we will – that's important for the LEP.'

Among those schemes is a new road bridge at Dalton Industrial Estate, a major employment site that is home to businesses including Severfield plc, the UK's largest structural steel specialist whose projects include The Shard and the London Stadium.

It had seen major flooding over a number of years, putting the site's potential for growth under threat. The council drew together public and private stakeholders and a solution was found and funded, primarily through a new business improvement district and the LEP. The £4.1m bridge opened in 2019.

'It's a fantastic example of how working together can solve these problems,' says Lindsay Ross, director of neighbouring Dalton New Bridge Estate – a new development made possible by the improvements.

'Hambleton have tried to understand businesses better. This is the secret of it – they are an open council, they comply with all the rules in terms of planning but when you are trying to float ideas about investment or employment there's an openness to help us if they can. They take a co-operative view. That's why the bridge is there.'

'The bridge is a credit to them – they employed a project officer to facilitate the bridge and bring people together who



Hambleton – a place to grow

Enter the district of Hambleton and you'll be greeted with signs emblazoned with 'A Place to Grow.'

It's the name of the council's current council plan, its economic strategy and is also a key slogan in promoting Hambleton to the wider world.

Its roots can be traced back to when chief executive Justin Ives joined the council and Cllr Mark Robson became leader.

'Instead of being a council that looked after what it had it changed to being a progressive council that wanted to do a lot more for residents, business and visitors,' Justin explains.

'That's when we came up with 'A Place to Grow'. Everything has been about growth since then – whether it's housing, the

economy or tourism.' The latter has increasingly become a key focus. While the district is a highly successful place, the name Hambleton tends to have a lower profile than the towns it covers, such as Thirsk and Northallerton.

But by helping towns to stage more events, celebrate their heritage and stunning locations and build on their strengths, the council hopes to create a stronger Hambleton 'brand'.

That will enable it to make the most of the social and economic impact of everything from the district's James Herriott connections to the worldwide exposure it gains through cycling via the Tour de Yorkshire and the UCI Road World Championships.



al authority that thinks big.

would fund it and use it.' While flooding problems haven't gone away and there have been some teething problems with the bridge, the important thing is both the district and county councils have committed to resolving any issues, he says.

The council's evolution as a placeshaper has gone hand in hand with greater investment in staff. For example, it retained its business and economy team when others were cutting back, the planning service is being expanded and modernised and performance coaching has been introduced with a number of staff going through masters degrees in management development.

'This isn't about having tonnes of money, this is about having vision – anybody can do this,' says Justin. 'It's about a can-do attitude. The management team have it, the political leadership have it. That's what you need.'

Building a proactive council



Cllr Mark Robson
leader of Hambleton
District Council

This authority was set up in a very good financial position through the sale of housing stock to a housing association a number of years ago.

But we have still had to make the most of the advantages that's given us. It would be very easy to just tick along.

We are a small local authority serving around 90,000 people and that allows us to be flexible with councillors and officers working closely together.

As a council we seize opportunities and are ambitious in what we want to deliver, we make decisions and move quickly – and that's what businesses and residents want to see. It creates a

more dynamic environment where officers and members are looking for new opportunities, or ways to help overcome challenges, all the time.

I believe we look outside the box of what a lot of local authorities would do to see what we could do better. And rather than waiting for someone to say, 'can you do this?', we try to be forward thinking and say, 'can we do this?'

You can see that approach in action in the way we've dealt with the closure of Northallerton Prison to create the Treadmills development. The same goes for the way we intervened to find a solution to flooding that would otherwise have threatened the

future of an important employment site.

It's the same in the services we provide. For example, we're not just retaining our leisure centres, we're investing in them – becoming the first local authority to provide a leisure centre with 24/7 access.

As a result of all this, staff stay here because it's exciting. It's challenging them, making their CVs look good! The most rewarding aspect of being leader is I can see the impact we're having and point to our success stories.

We have a really good time while delivering for, and looking after, our residents and businesses.

ema

ma
owing

sign

Vibrant outlook

We have seen an increase in footfall in our market towns – bucking the national trend. They are still vibrant towns.’ The council is just over halfway through the initial five-year phase of its Vibrant Market Towns (VMT) investment programme and Helen Kemp, director of economy and planning, says the benefits can be seen across Hambleton.

Indeed four of the district’s five towns received special mentions in the Great British High Street Awards in 2018.

Bedale, Easingwold, Northallerton, Stokesley & Great Ayton and Thirsk account for 45% of the population and are crucial to the local economy.

In 2017 the council adopted a fresh approach that’s essentially about working with businesses and other partners such as the local enterprise partnership and town councils to develop tailored solutions that meet local needs and drive prosperity.

‘The market towns have similarities but each has unique challenges and there will be things that will only work for them,’ Helen explains. ‘Vibrant Market Towns is about talking to businesses, understanding their needs and helping them to grow.’

VMT identified each town’s strengths and weaknesses together with ‘unique project plans’. Alongside that it set out a series of common actions around key priorities such as better digital engagement, developing a visitor experience and improving the public realm.

What started as a time-limited initiative is now a permanent fixture with two full-time staff focused on the needs of market towns. It has enabled the council to accelerate efforts to work with employers to develop a more resilient and diverse economy.

The council and businesses are working hand in hand to ensure Hambleton’s market towns evolve and thrive

Over the last three years it has helped to set up five business networks, including a business improvement district in Hambleton’s largest town, Northallerton.

It’s enabled businesses to take the lead, for example in supporting major events such as the Tour de Yorkshire, running training sessions, developing town branding – and a more consistent online presence – to help promote what’s on offer, and undertaking projects funded by VMT grants.

The thinking behind VMT has been influenced by high street success stories elsewhere, such as in nearby York and Yarm. But it’s since developed into a testbed for local ideas – such as a town trail in Stokesley and design guide for Northallerton and improved signage in Bedale – that can be shared with fellow Hambleton towns.

In Easingwold a business-sponsored town map is now displayed in the market place and the council and Wold Class Business Network have published a welcome pack for new residents. ‘In the team we all have experience of working elsewhere previously and most of us have worked in the private sector,’ says Helen. ‘We understand the issues they are facing,

such as cash flow and how it can affect business. It’s about being there and listening to them.’

As well as providing a range of business support, managed workspaces and industrial estates, the council plays a leading role in promoting ‘the heart of Hambleton’s towns’ – their markets. Some 50,000 leaflets have been produced and distributed across more than 200 popular tourist locations within an hour’s drive of the district.

The combination of so many activities and initiatives has paid dividends in the shape of rising footfall and lower than average shop closures. Success breeds success and in the last year Northallerton has been shortlisted for the potential to access significant funding from the Future High Street Fund. Historic England’s High Streets Heritage Action Zones programme has also part-funded a £773,000 investment planned for Northallerton. The latter will focus on improving shop frontages, creating a heritage trail and a feasibility study to bring more town centre living by utilising unused upper floors above shops.

‘It’s a really ambitious, supportive, business-friendly council,’ says Hannah Heinemann, who is head of commercial and programme management.



Investing in a self-sufficient future

Through a new commercialisation strategy, the initiative of Louise Branford-White, director of finance and commercial, the council is bringing forward everything from more efficient and effective ways of working to generating increased and new income. It’s taking a view of commercialisation that reflects the principle of ‘profit with a purpose’. What this means on the ground is the council is seeking out opportunities that deliver services and outcomes for its residents and business communities, delivering on its priorities, while also generating an income. This income in turn supports council services.

‘We’re not risk averse, we have a realistic understanding of

what we are trying to achieve,’ says Gary Nelson, director of law and governance. ‘Members recognise that if you’re going to try challenging things, be innovative and go into the market you may not have 100% success every time. That’s the nature of being commercially minded.’

The council is already leading on the delivery of key regeneration and economic development projects, which will also see a return. A further area that the team is working on is the potential of green energy production.

‘We are keen to explore the potential of green energy production and are currently talking to several parties to explore opportunities,’ says Louise.

‘There’s an appetite to take considered risks. We don’t shy away from things. We’re unusual for a rural district in terms of the amount of projects we have – and we have more in the pipeline. The benefits of being in a small council is the sharing and communication. It’s easier to get a decision.’

She adds: ‘People like giving us funding because they know we will deliver. We do what we say we will do.’

Perhaps the most impactful aspect of VMT is the way in which it has begun to influence other developments in and around the towns. It’s become a vital tool to engage businesses and investors around issues that are fundamental to the future success and sustainability of Hambleton, such as infrastructure improvements, housing developments, better parking facilities and major projects like the Treadmills development in Northallerton.

Going for gold

The district is leading and shaping growth by investing in exemplary business support and planning services



One of the council's key priorities is to drive economic vitality by building on the district's reputation 'as an easy place to do business'. It already provides a wide range of business support, from advice on grants and running awards to promoting opportunities for firms to network and expand. But the backbone to any area's success in guiding sustainable growth is the local authority's planning service.

Members have committed to invest in planning and a new chief planning officer joined the team in February.

'We're aiming for the gold standard – to be the best planning service,' says Helen Kemp, director of economy and planning.

'We're redesigning the process for the customer journey and are putting a new IT system in place to support that. Developers and agents want more commercial awareness in planning and we're working to improve on that.'

Hambleton already has more than nine years of housing supply along with a pipeline of employment sites and a new Local Plan was submitted in March.

Key growth areas include major housing schemes in Northallerton and Sowerby (see page 7) and Leeming Bar Business Park, a fast-growing 30.5ha employment site off the A1(M) that's already home to firms including Heck, Mason's Gin, Yorkshire Provender and soft drinks maker Cawingredients. There are also vital infrastructure schemes to support housing development such as the North Northallerton Link Road Bridge, which will enable the expansion of the town and improve connectivity, and the £6.5m Sowerby Gateway Junction.

Then there is the 27ha Dalton New Bridge commercial and industrial site next to the existing Dalton Industrial Estate, which is filling up quickly and creating hundreds of jobs in the process.

Building a 'best in class' planning service, as deputy chief executive Mick Jewitt describes it, that's 'about adding value rather than just being regulatory' will be essential for the district to make the most of these opportunities. In the meantime, work continues on enhancing the council's business-friendly image.

Doing it justice

Northallerton's former prison is making way for a major development. It's a bold step for the council and a game-changer for the town

Described as a 'once in a multi-generation opportunity', Treadmills is set to transform North Yorkshire's county town of Northallerton.

The £17m development will include shops, an upmarket cinema, restaurants, cafés, homes and a tech hub – all located on the site of England's first purpose-built prison.

After the prison closed in 2013, Hambleton District Council put a masterplan in place following a major community consultation and then bought the site from the Ministry of Justice in 2015. In 2017 it launched a joint venture – Central Northallerton Development Company – with developer Wykeland Properties and the Treadmills scheme was born.

The name relates to the fact that the prison is infamous for once housing treadmills that were used to punish inmates. But there are also physical reminders of the past in the shape of 18th century listed buildings that will take on an altogether different purpose.

All in all, it will create a unique development and a new focal point for the town in the shape of a civic square.

Work on the first phase is underway and Lidl, Iceland and cinema operator Everyman have already been confirmed as 'inmates'.

Treadmills will also provide a new base for technology incubator the Centre for Digital Innovation (C4DI), an

organisation that helps tech companies grow and traditional businesses innovate. It will include co-working spaces for digital start-ups and growing firms and follow C4DI's success in Hull where it has created one of the UK's fastest-growing digital hubs. One of the first projects will focus on agritech.

Deputy chief executive Mick Jewitt describes it as a 'transformational scheme' that demonstrates the council's placemaking role and vision.

'It's a historical site in the centre of a small, affluent market town. It's an opportunity to widen its offer and strengthen the town as a whole. We will make a return but the big benefit for us is the long-term impact on the town.'

Treadmills will play a key role in creating the environment needed for Hambleton to retain more of its young people and create a destination for all ages. It will complement the high street offer and be integrated via a £1.2m improvement scheme for a pedestrian link funded by the local enterprise partnership through the Government's Local Growth Fund.

'This scheme has been designed to extend and enhance the town centre and bring new vibrancy to Northallerton, including through a stronger and more dynamic evening economy,' says Jonathan Stubbs, development director at Wykeland Properties.

'It will also create a new, high-quality destination and public space, strongly linked to the commercial heart of the town.'

ADAPTING TO THE CORONAVIRUS CRISIS

The COVID-19 crisis has brought unprecedented challenges for local government and Hambleton District Council has sought to minimise disruption to the local economy.

That has included ensuring businesses get the financial support they need as quickly as possible.

By mid-April the council had paid out £23.9m in grants using emergency government funding with 2,094 eligible firms receiving help. That equates to distributing 77% of the district's total grant funding in the space of just a few weeks.

'I know these grants are much needed in our

business community who've been hit hard by the COVID-19 crisis,' says council leader Cllr Mark Robson.

Planning is already underway for a package of virtual events, workshops and online programmes all aimed at supporting the businesses community in moving on from the Coronavirus crisis and helping firms to continue to grow and thrive in the future.

The council's response has also been focused on ensuring the local planning service – key to economic growth – adapts to changing circumstances. With planning committee meetings

cancelled to comply with Government guidelines around social distancing, the council has set up a virtual consultative panel involving officers and members.

At its first meeting via video conferencing it agreed latest applications could be dealt with at officer level. Following a virtual meeting of full council, officers will have delegated powers moving forward.

'It shows we are well placed to respond with a new way of working during these unprecedented circumstances,' says planning portfolio holder Cllr David Webster.



At your leisure

Protecting a community asset

A former hospital is to be transformed into a hospice and community hub thanks to the council's intervention

When a cottage hospital in the heart of Thirsk closed in 2015 there were fears it would be sold off to housing developers.

Lambert Memorial Hospital was built and bequeathed to the town in the late 19th century and a campaign soon started to ensure it wasn't lost as a community facility forever.

The council stepped in and negotiated with NHS Property Services to purchase the site in 2018.

During a public consultation in 2019 the vast majority of residents backed council proposals for the district's first-ever dedicated hospice, providing palliative and respite care.

Since then the council has agreed to gift the building to Herriot Hospice so it can take the plans forward.

It will create a four-bed inpatient unit for the terminally ill, bereavement counselling rooms, a bereavement education centre, a café and a community hub facility – backed by £90,000 from the council – with meeting space and IT facilities.

Herriot Hospice specialises in providing care at home and the new hospice will enable it to provide a wider range of services.

A rural district in the middle of North Yorkshire probably isn't the kind of place you'd expect to find the first-ever local authority leisure centre to open 24/7.

It sums up both Hambleton District Council's commercial awareness and its understanding of the critical role it can play in health and wellbeing.

Following £2.7m of investment, Northallerton Leisure Centre is now open 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

'We could see a demand for this,' chief executive Justin Ives explains. 'We have the police and fire headquarters in Northallerton as well as a hospital. So the reason 24/7 access works is because we have a lot of public sector workers that work shifts.'

'We've now got a gym that's as good as any in the country.'

Its revamp is part of a major programme of investment that will see similar sums improve leisure centres in Thirsk and Sowerby and a further £700,000 in Stokesley, with improvements also planned for its centre in Bedale.

The secondary school in Easingwold is run by an academy and the council has provided £650,000 to develop a sports hall and all-weather 3G pitch to complement the local independent Galtres Centre. All of the council's Zest leisure centres are Quest accredited – Sport England's benchmark for quality – and Hambleton is the top performing local authority operating up to 10 centres in the UK, says Steve Lister, director of leisure and communities.

Having state-of-the-art facilities is a win-win for the district. The local clinical commissioning group is using the leisure centres to provide health and wellbeing programmes – providing additional income for the council while boosting the quality of life for local people.

A programme of investment is ensuring Hambleton has modern leisure facilities to rival major cities

That approach is now being stepped up with the creation of two sports villages, Steve explains.

Sowerby Sports Village will see a multitude of leisure facilities built on a 11ha remediated brownfield site to complement a major housing development. Surrounded by attractive green space, it's hoped the Village will enable local football, rugby, hockey and running clubs to develop and expand.

Similarly, Northallerton Sports Village will be an integral part of a major housing development planned for the north of the town.

But it's not all about shiny new facilities in Hambleton's towns.

'We have really good core provision but we have to also make sure we are taking things out to the community because this is a rural area and not everyone can access what's in the towns,' explains Steve.

'That's why we run initiatives across lots of different community locations such as Primetime, activities for older people living in villages that are designed to use sport and exercise to reduce social isolation.'

Spreading the benefits



Major schemes are creating hundreds of new homes in the district while paving the way for a host of other facilities

Over the coming years, a number of major developments will bring much-needed new homes to Hambleton. But these once-in-a-generation schemes are also being used to bring a range of other benefits, from transport improvements to local jobs. A prime example is the masterplan for North Northallerton, which is delivering 900 homes, employment space, a neighbourhood shopping centre, primary school and community facilities.

On the outskirts of Thirsk, the Sowerby Gateway project will also see around 900 homes built together with a range of amenities. A new road junction has already been completed and a primary school opened last September.

Both are accompanied by sports villages and will also see a construction skills village set up to give local people the chance to learn a range of building skills on live projects.

Based on a similar initiative in Scarborough, the skills village will offer courses and apprenticeships and is being backed by £125,000 from the council.

'This is a very exciting project for Hambleton – presenting a new opportunity for both young people and individuals wishing to retrain for skilled, well paid jobs and retaining them in the



district,' says Cllr Peter Wilkinson, deputy leader and portfolio holder for economic development and finance.

'It supports the council's priority of driving economic vitality, specifically creating opportunities for young people to develop in-demand employment skills and contribute to reducing the skill gap in the construction sector.

'We will be working with housing developers, builders and education partners, and several have already expressed support for the project.'

One of Hambleton's biggest challenges is housing affordability with the average home costing almost £240,000, above the national figure, while the average salary is less than £19,000.

The council has sought to address the issue by loaning funds

to Broadacres Housing Association so that it can build homes for affordable rent and shared ownership plus a small proportion for outright sale.

Gail Teasdale, Broadacres' chief executive, describes it as a win-win situation.

'The terms of the loan made sense to us financially and as the council can borrow at a lower rate than us it means they make a return which can be invested in local services like leisure centres,' she explains.

'We have used the money to invest in new affordable homes.'

The social landlord is now two years into a five-year programme that will see 1,250 new homes built across the district – enabling local people on lower incomes to stay in Hambleton and live in high quality properties.

Respecting local needs

It is hoped that work will begin this year on a new crematorium that will both meet local demand for an essential service while respecting the area's past.

With the nearest facilities many miles away outside the district, residents currently have to travel some distance – often enduring a considerable wait for appointments – at what is already a difficult time.

Hambleton District Council is therefore intending to invest in a state-of-the-art facility at Skipton-on-Swale outside Thirsk that will open towards the end of 2021.

Built to the highest environmental standards, the crematorium will be based on a former airfield that housed Royal Canadian Air Force bomber squadrons during the Second World War.

A new council-built crematorium will create a much-needed facility and a unique asset for the district

Along with a function room for wakes, a native woodland area and wildflower meadows, the facility will feature a memorial garden with 98 maple trees – one for each of the bomber crews

lost during the conflict. The council is working with a specialist company to ensure the new crematorium is of the highest possible standard.

'There is a proven need for a crematorium in this area to serve the needs of the people within this community who are currently unserved by any other crematorium within a 40-minute drive time,' says council leader Cllr Mark Robson. 'By building the crematorium the council will be able to provide an essential service to the residents of Hambleton and the wider area.'

'When completed, the new crematorium will offer state-of-the-art facilities combined with more traditional aspects. With fewer than 60 new crematoria built in the UK over the past 35 years, this will be an important local asset for the district – something not already here and something really quite special.'

Hambleton in numbers



The district of Hambleton covers an area of more than **500 square miles**



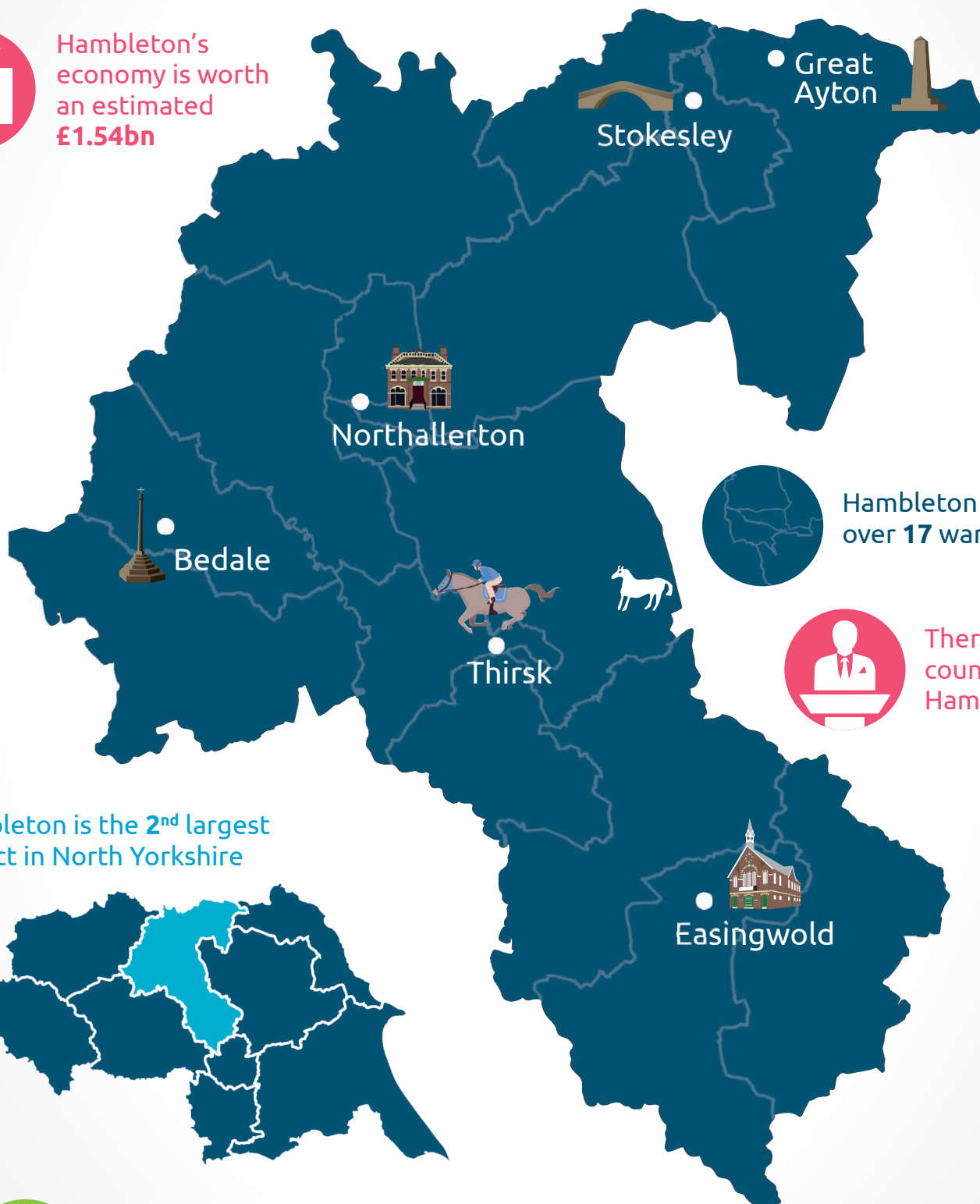
Hambleton's population is **90,000**



There are **5360** businesses across the Hambleton district



Hambleton's economy is worth an estimated **£1.54bn**



Hambleton is split over **17** ward areas



There are **28** councillors in Hambleton

Hambleton is the **2nd** largest district in North Yorkshire



Between April and December 2019, **£1,029,906** had been secured in funding by Hambleton District Council's Business and Economy Team to help local businesses



42% of houses in Hambleton are detached