

Doncaster

'35 : A Manifesto for A Winning City



Foreword

Doncaster achieved city status in 2022. It has a proud past and the potential for a prosperous future too. We have innovative and forward-thinking businesses, alongside talented and dynamic workers. We define ourselves by what we can do, rather than by what we cannot. Doncaster is our city, and we are unashamedly proud of it.

Of course, all of us want the best for the people, things, and places we are passionate about. Doncaster has achieved much in the last two decades, attracting inward investors and delivering big transformational projects. These have changed not only the skyline, but also the complexion of our economy. It's because we care deeply about our city that we are impatient for it to aim even higher. The world is changing faster than ever before and yet the current pace of change is the slowest it will ever be. We want our city to not only keep pace, but to set it. It is hopefully a statement of the blindingly obvious, but we will not achieve this aim without a strong private sector and a business environment that is conducive to economic growth.

Our city's economy is more diverse, more resilient, and more successful than it was twenty years ago, and there are many opportunities in front of us. However, like many places, it has faced headwinds in recent years too, including the pandemic, subsequent recession, and market trends that have embattled our city centre.

Doncaster's strategic partnership, known as 'Team Doncaster', has typically demonstrated resilience and tenacity in the face of all this. Indeed, that 'Yorkshire grit' has characterised Doncaster when the city is at its very best, whether in responding to floods, opening a University Technical College, or fighting to reboot South Yorkshire's international airport. As leaders of Doncaster's business community, we believe it is incumbent on us to not just stand

shoulder-to-shoulder with our public sector partners on these (and other) issues, but to also demonstrate thought leadership and venture our own ideas about where the city goes next. In business, we know we cannot afford to dine out on past glories and that you are only as good as your next order. We also passionately believe that business is a force for good and know that local employers can help our 'Team Doncaster' partners with their ambitions for Doncaster's residents and communities.

Which brings us to this document: *Doncaster '35: A Manifesto for a Winning City*. We believe wholeheartedly in our city and South Yorkshire but are not afraid to talk plainly about its shortcomings or challenges. One of the Chamber's primary roles is to act as a critical friend to the region's politicians and public sector leaders. Good friends are honest with each other, and we will lay bare in this document the issues that frustrate our business community. We will not write off Doncaster's biggest challenges as perception issues and will be frank about the issues of the day. To be clear, these challenges include: the tired state of our city centre; persistent skills gaps; institutions that very sincerely talk the talk when it comes to collaborating with the private sector but do not consistently walk the walk; and a transport infrastructure that, sometimes, is neither as unique nor as fit for purpose as it says on the tin.

That said, we will only cite a problem if we can offer a corresponding solution. Similarly, we will not ask other partners to intervene without

also committing to doing some heavy lifting of our own and highlighting where the private sector can play a leading role in maximising Doncaster's potential. Setting homework for our politicians and our public sector partners is necessary but not sufficient. That's why this plan will also set out the Chamber's role in creating the best possible environment for Doncaster's employers and employees.

Doncaster '35 has been shaped by our member community and developed in plain sight of our strategic partners. It is characterised not only by ambition, but also by credibility and pragmatism. We appreciate the tight spending constraints faced by the public sector, our city's

systemic challenges, and market forces; but there is nothing in this document that we do not think is affordable or winnable.

Likewise, we do not seek to position Doncaster as the new Birmingham, Leeds, or Manchester. Doncaster should, of course, seek to harness best practice from elsewhere, but it should fundamentally be built in its own confident image. Not that of somewhere else.

Now is the time for Doncaster to shake off its town mentality, set the city standard, and play a full role in maximising South Yorkshire's enormous potential.

Dan Fell, CEO of Doncaster Chamber



Our Vision

for Doncaster is that, in just ten years' time, it will be seen – both within and without – as a winning city that is vibrant, dynamic and at the bleeding edge of developing trends.

It will be a place that has taken control of its own economic destiny. This will be achieved via an exemplary partnership (between the public, private, and voluntary sectors) that sees us pulling together in the same direction, by ensuring that we have got a seat at the table when it comes to national policymaking, and by drawing upon the characteristic grit and determination of our business community. In short, we want Doncaster to serve as the gold standard for what small, modern cities with an industrial heritage will look like in the year 2035.

If you lead or work for a locally-based businesses, this will be an environment wherein you can truly thrive and prosper. Of course, the Chamber will be right behind you with broad-ranging support and networking opportunities. But the city itself will also benefit from improved transport network that enables you to easily connect with clients and partners from across the country, as well as those on your doorstep. It will be a place where you will have access to the best and brightest talent, courtesy of a dynamic skills system and best in class careers services. And where you can rest assured that your voice – even when offering constructive criticism – will always be heard by those with the power to enact change.

If you are an inward investor, our city will welcome you with open arms. You will be supported by a united 'Team Doncaster' — operating within a joined-up South Yorkshire — that you know has your back and will fight for your interests.

Our city will also be a place where government works hand in glove with industry for the mutual benefit of all. For example, we've been specific in this manifesto about how we can contribute to a national strategy on maximising the benefits from the green transition; something which can be achieved by growing our sustainable aviation and green hydrogen clusters and by being innovative in our use of public green spaces.

Doncaster will also be somewhere our colleagues in the local and regional authorities can rely on the can-do spirit of a business community keen to help them realise their ambitions. A forward-thinking place that the UK Government (of whatever stripe) will be excited to collaborate with, as it comes to them with proactive ideas and a willingness to embrace the new.

For our residents, it will be a place that they feel proud to call home. Where the younger generation no longer feels that it must leave to achieve, where opportunity is rife, and where people are eager to live, work and spend their leisure time.

Getting to that point calls for great ambition, and that is where Doncaster '35 comes in. It sets out the top priorities for our city's next decade and how to deliver them. For each of our four areas of focus, we are calling for bold leadership from our strategic partners but are also committing to be part of the solution ourselves.

We hope that you share our appetite for this optimistic future and are as energised by these ideas as we are.



Why now?

Our motivation to publish now is, first and foremost, in response to demand from the business community for big improvements here in Doncaster. Whether they are voicing concern about the decline of our urban core, expressing dissatisfaction over the state of transport networks, or questioning if we are doing enough to attract and retain sought-after talent; firms have a vested interest in seeing this city maximise its potential and want it, as well as our region, to succeed. We believe that the private sector can, and indeed will, roll up its own sleeves to lead the change it desires. This manifesto sets out exactly how we intend to do that.

Doncaster has improved enormously over the last 20 years, owing to close partnership working, distributed leadership and shared ambition. This instils us with confidence that the next 10 will be just as transformative. Today, we judge our city by the standards of 2024, not of 2004. We understand the fiscal and strategic challenges faced by our partners in local government and the public sector, and we want our manifesto to help them in their endeavours.

There are currently several 'live' strategies to grow the economies of Doncaster and South Yorkshire. These forward-thinking plans, created by different public sector organisations and partners over the years, contain laudable sentiments and strong ambitions that we can all rally behind. But we believe it's also important for the business community to make its own voice heard on these

matters and articulate what it wants from its local economic environment. Firms on the ground are acutely aware of the challenges facing Doncaster today but, in many cases, they can also offer the solutions. That's why we decided to put together this manifesto and give those ideas a prominent platform.

The last few years have been eventful. We've had uplifting triumphs, such as finally securing city status, getting the green light for a second University Technical College (UTC) and attracting major investors like Hybrid Air Vehicles into the region. But we've also had some dispiriting setbacks, like the near miss with our bid to become the home of Great British Rail, being rejected for new hospital funding, and the frustrating loss of the former HS2 College. Elsewhere, there have been the assorted highs and lows of the campaign to



reboot Doncaster Sheffield Airport — an epic saga that is, by now, familiar to everyone. Our ambition is for this manifesto to keep things on the right track, sustain the positive momentum of more recent months, and ensure that our city does not begin to plateau.

At the time of publication, a general election is just weeks away and, with it, the potential for major changes of national policy direction. Closer to home, there will also be council elections in 2025. *Doncaster '35: A Manifesto for a Winning City* ensures that that whoever comes into power, locally or nationally, is appraised of the priorities of Doncaster's business communities. Not only that, but it will help them understand that the Chamber, and those we represent, are willing and able to assist with the shared aim of growing our economy and making this city a great place to do business.

To ensure that it is truly representative of that community, extensive consultation has gone into the creation of this document. Informed by a series of one-to-one interviews — with bellwether stakeholders, SME business owners and industry heavyweights — as well as roundtable discussions, surveys and considerable desk research, it authentically captures their unvarnished opinions, their outside-the-box thinking, and their appetite for a more prosperous Doncaster.

What's at Stake

Where are we now?

Economy

- In 2022, the rate at which Doncaster created new businesses was the highest of any northern English city, and the **6th highest in the entire UK** (Centre for Cities, ONS 2023, Business Demography, 2022 data; ONS 2023, Population estimates, 2021 and 2022 data)
- Doncaster's output per filled job is **75% that of the national average**, restricting the potential of our economy (ONS GVA per filled job, by selected Built Up Areas and Localities, March 2024)

City Centre

- Early findings from the **2024 South Yorkshire Town and City Centre Survey** identify cleanliness and safety as top business priorities for improving the region's urban cores
- Only 27%** of Doncaster city centre's footfall is generated by those living outside of the city, compared to a **UK average for cities of 39%**
- According to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, **the crime rate for Doncaster Town (195.7 per 1,000 inhabitants is close to double the average of England (92.8 per 1,000 inhabitants))** (Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities-Doncaster Local Data Profile, March 2024).

Workforce

- Just 44%** of Doncaster residents have a **higher-level academic or vocational qualification**, compared to a national average of **56%** (ONS Annual Population Survey, 2023)
- 40%** of South Yorkshire businesses want to play a **greater role in supporting careers provision** in schools and colleges (South Yorkshire Skills Accelerator Survey, 2023)

Transport

- Road traffic in Doncaster has **increased by 13.6% over the past decade — 66% higher than the national average rate (8.2%)** (Road Traffic Statistics, Department for Transport, 2023)
- 130,000 people** are projected to live within **5 kilometres of Doncaster's centre** by 2025, served by around **700 bus stops**. By contrast, Sheffield is projected to have **346,000 people** living within the same radius, with over **1,800 bus stops** and **67 tram stops** (Tom Forth's Population Around A Point tool: www.tomforth.co.uk/circlepopulations/)

Strategic Institutions and Partnerships

- Yorkshire and the Humber** receives levels of public investment that are far **below the UK average**. In 2022/23, total public expenditure was **£11,855 per head — 6% below** the national average
- Meanwhile, capital expenditure, at **£963 per head**, was **26% below** and the second lowest of all UK regions and nations. (HM Treasury, Country and regional analysis, 2022)
- South Yorkshire** receives a **disproportionately low share of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)**. In 2021, for instance, FDI in South Yorkshire totalled **£13.6 billion — just 0.7% of the UK total** (Experimental UK subnational estimates: October 2022)



The Opportunity

Economic Output

- £1.34 billion** — That's how much bigger our economy would be today if the value of output produced by **Doncaster's workers equalled England's average***
- 2,800** — The number of **additional businesses Doncaster would have** if business density were to match the UK average (ONS business counts, ONS population estimates, 2021)

City Centre

- The opening of **Sheffield's Peace Gardens** and other public space improvements was estimated to **increase shopping visits by 35%** (Build Back Better High Streets, DLUHC 2021)
- Likewise, urban design improvements in Coventry — including with the **streetscape, signage, public art and civic square** — have **increased footfall by 25% on Saturdays**. (OPEN Public Realm Toolkit)
- 52% of South Yorkshire businesses** see their city centre as being important to **fulfilling their own ambitions**, while **82%** see it as being important to **attracting new investors into the region** (early results from the South Yorkshire Town and City Centre Survey, 2024)

Workforce

- 33,300 extra people** would be qualified to **NVQ Level 4 or above** if Doncaster's population were at parity with the rest of the country when it comes to skills. (ONS Annual Population Survey, Jan 2023-Dec, 2023)
- If **40% of Doncaster's businesses** converted their willingness to engage into action, over **4,000 of them would be playing a greater role** in supporting careers provision in schools and colleges (South Yorkshire Skills Accelerator Survey, 2022 — Share based on regional aggregate)

Transport

- The development of **GatewayEast**, underpinned by a functioning airport, could **create over 35,000 additional jobs**, with potential to **generate around £1.6bn in economic output each year over the next three decades** (GatewayEast Economic Blueprint)
- Doubling transport investment** in cities raises productivity and increases wages between **1.1 and 1.8 percent** (Centre for Cities)

Strategic Institutions and Partnerships

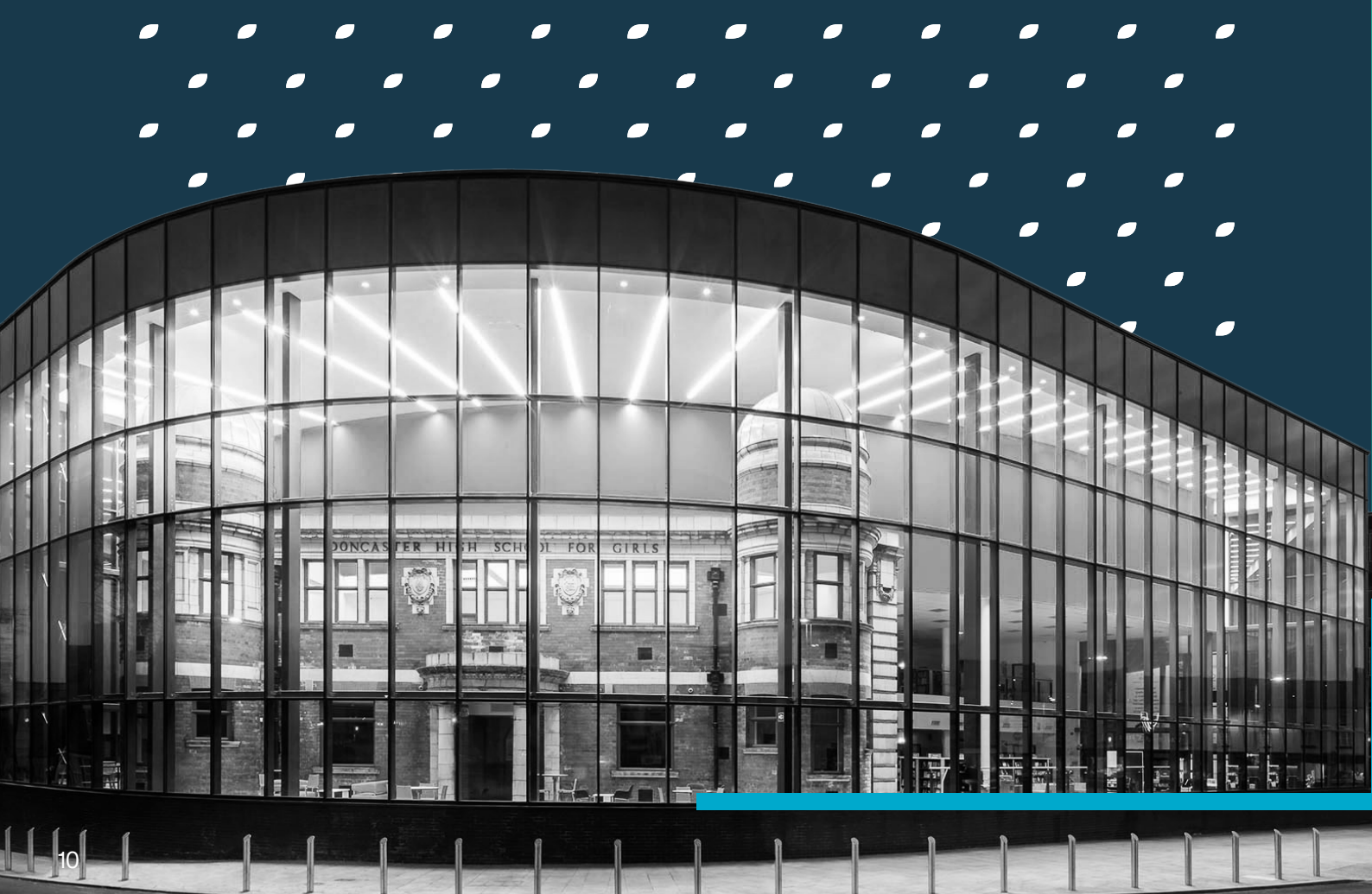
- Higher education institutions** contributed **£5bn** in gross value added to the **economy of Yorkshire and the Humber** in 2021/22 (London Economics, 2023)
- South Yorkshire** already has a **strong record of winning Innovate UK funding** — receiving **£206 per head** of population between 2018/19 and 2022/23 — showing that there is potential for even greater investment if Doncaster can **increase the strength of its partnerships** and its links to government (South Yorkshire Plan For Growth: Economic Analysis)

* Based on productivity uplift of £10.1k, applied to the total number of employee jobs (2022). Assumes total number of filled jobs unchanged by uplift; England productivity average also unchanged.

City Centre '35

A thriving, safe, and beautiful space that supports how people aspire to live and work in the future.

Doncaster's city centre is poised for a dramatic shift. By 2035, it will have transformed from a declining hub for mass-market retail, with long-standing social challenges, into a prosperous, exciting showcase of innovation and regeneration in high street spaces. It will be a vibrant hub for young talent, boasting a new higher education offer. Redeveloped commercial spaces will incubate winning companies. It will be on the national map as a host of popular events for music, culture, and the arts, drawing in visitors from far and wide. And our green spaces — both big and small — will form a new connected urban park to support the wellbeing of the increased city centre population, while also hosting activities and exhibitions.



Where are we now?

Doncastrians know the city centre as the diamond-shaped space that is bounded to the west by the East Coast Mainline, to the north by the A630, to the south by the A18, and to the east by the Town Field green space.

It is home to a mix of shops and food and drink outlets, as well as to the Frenchgate Centre, the markets and Doncaster College. Not to mention, it also boasts many civic buildings — including the modern base for City of Doncaster Council — cultural venues — like the CAST theatre and the new Doncaster Gallery, Library, and Museum (DGLAM) — and small clusters of commercial and residential buildings. Meanwhile, it must be noted that work is ongoing to redevelop both the Corn Exchange and St. James' Baths, which will surely be anchor attractions for the city centre in the years to come along with now established venues like the Wool Market.

In this mix are some strong assets to build from. Yet even so, as of 2024, the city centre is at a critical juncture. Businesses perceive a lack of vibrancy, while also expressing concerns about personal safety and the anti-social behaviour they encounter on the streets. They see a declining retail offer with many vacant units and see too many areas in physical decline (alongside the good examples of renewal).

Businesses see this as a major obstacle to the city's growth and development, impacting Doncaster's image and its ability to attract investment and talent. These concerns are balanced by a strong sense of opportunity. Businesses want to be proud of their city and its centre, and are impatient for an inclusive regeneration plan that reflects the changing ways people interact with urban cores.

Where are we headed?

The decline in city centre economic vibrancy and the public realm is not unique to Doncaster. The vacancy rates of commercial premises are close to the national average. Across the UK, large-scale, mass-market, high-street retail has been in retreat for decades, as changing consumer tastes, business models and technology have drawn customers away. Indeed, many cities are actively thinking through how their central spaces can be regenerated.

Businesses want to get things moving with a push for improved cleanliness and safety, and better access. They know that the public spending environment is tight — but also that entrepreneurial approaches can overcome resource constraints. They know that, to be successful, any plan to transform the centre longer-term must move beyond a retail focus to embrace a more diverse and higher quality offer of residential, business, education, leisure, public services, and hospitality venues. Doncaster has one of the highest rates of business creation in the UK — the top-rated northern English city in 2022 — and there is an opportunity to build on this dynamism with a new accommodation offer for start-ups.

Attracting and retaining talent is key to business success. A more liveable city is necessary to achieving that, and a new higher education offer would make a major contribution to vibrancy and footfall. There is already valuable collaboration between the City of Doncaster Council, Sheffield Hallam University and Doncaster College that could serve as a foundation for this, and businesses stand ready to work with any interested parties.

Meanwhile, the work of the City Centre Board to refresh the vision for the urban core is welcome, and there is an opportunity to use monies from public sources — such as the Stronger Town Fund — to crowd in private investment. Yet for too many businesses with a stake in Doncaster's future think the various visioning, design, and master-planning exercises have felt distant, piecemeal, and driven by public-sector funding processes, rather than routed in its entrepreneurial and pioneering spirit.

How do we get to our 2035 Vision for the City Centre?

Our top priorities for the next decade are to:

- 1 Create a safe, clean, and accessible city centre
- 2 Update the offer for businesses, residents and visitors
- 3 Innovate in the use of green spaces and the built environment.

We Will Need To...

Draw on private-sector leadership:

Providing the vision, investment, and visible support for a transformed centre

Take more risks:

Accepting that, to thrive on new uses, local government may need to purchase and renovate redundant properties, and for a time the city will experience some major disruptions as infrastructure is modernised

Face the future with confidence:

Doncaster has a track record of pulling off major projects and reinventing itself, as evidenced by the CAST theatre, the University Technical College, and recent improvements to the railway station forecourt

Seek forgiveness, not permission from others:

Business and public sector partners must plough ahead together with the changes they want to see, and not wait on the latest plan or funding pot from Whitehall.

Did You Know?

Only 5% of footfall is generated from residents of the centre, compared to a UK average of 8%,

and 12% for Sheffield (Centre for Cities, taken from daily averages, March 2022)

When streets are regenerated to boost walking, there is a corresponding impact on turnover, property values and rental yields. For well-designed projects, sales can increase by 30% or more when footfall is boosted. (Living Streets, The Pedestrian Pound, 2018).



Delivering Our 2035 Vision for Doncaster City Centre

We Will

Create a safe, clean and accessible city centre

Update the offer for businesses, residents, and visitors

Innovate in the use of green spaces and the built environment

Our asks of public-sector partners

Lead a high-profile push to address hygiene factors like safety and cleanliness, accepting that the long-standing approach of using Public Safety Protection Orders has not yet made a visible impact on anti-social behaviour.

Improve pedestrian access to the city centre from the Waterfront development site, Doncaster College, and The Minster. Without a bold, long-term infrastructure solution, the A630 will continue to cut off the centre from major sources of footfall and undermine regeneration efforts along the banks of the Don.

Where necessary, buy and re-develop vacant buildings to bring to market as: high-quality housing for young professionals; incubator spaces for new businesses in the logistics, sustainable aviation, and creative industries; and urban technology hubs for the city's fast-growing cyber, AI and IT companies ('Silicon Don').

Work more closely with the private sector to strengthen existing efforts to land a new higher education offer, and secure investment in new venues to host more high-profile events in music, culture, and the arts.

Deliver a new public services hub that includes some NHS facilities relocated from Doncaster Royal Infirmary.

Work with the business community to organise more and bigger events and festivals that attract visitors and showcase Doncaster's cultural offerings.

Use licencing powers to create '24-hour quarters' for retail and entertainment that cater to the city centre's new residents, workers and students.

Launch a high-profile and public competition for architectural visioning of central Doncaster's streetscapes and greenscapes to support the work of the City Centre Strategy Board. This would include a new urban park scheme for the city's green spaces, which could host outdoor activities and exhibitions and serve as high-quality places for residents to meet or relax.

Doncaster Chamber and Business Community Offer

We will work with our Team Doncaster and media partners to inspire and develop regular 'Keep Doncaster Tidy' volunteering days. We will encourage businesses to work alongside our public sector partners to keep our urban core presentable and to send a strong signal that businesses are invested in making our city centre a success.

We will use our convening power to connect businesses to the ongoing visioning and master-planning efforts of the City Centre Strategy Board and City of Doncaster Council. We will work with our partners to ensure that business needs are at the heart of a reimagined city centre and that the business community understands and supports the vision for our urban core.

We will celebrate success by introducing a new "City Centre Champion" at our annual Business Awards, voted for by the business community. Through this, we will recognise an individual or organisation that has contributed significantly to Doncaster city centre.

Transport '35

Home to a thriving international airport, providers of cutting-edge transport tech, secure in our status as a national hub for strategic rail and road networks, and with easier journeys across the city.

By 2035, our revitalised airport will foster global connections that propel business and event-based tourism to new heights. We will host international carriers and innovative new aircraft, made locally, that are at the bleeding edge of sustainable aviation. Our national road and rail connections will continue to underpin our fast-growing logistics sector. The benefits of these outward connections will be multiplied by stronger local links. New connectivity between the airport and city centre will catalyse the development of emerging education and innovation quarters. Enhanced rail services on the East Coast Main Line will boost the local economy. And Doncaster will be connected to a larger system of integrated public transport for the region that extends tram services beyond Sheffield to Doncaster and our South Yorkshire neighbours.



Where are we now?

In 2024, Doncaster's transport links and location at England's centre make us a nationally significant hub for logistics, distribution, and rail. We sit at the confluence of major trunk road — such as the A1(M), M18 and M62 — and are connected to the Transpennine and East Coast Mainline railways and, with regular, direct passenger services to London taking less than two hours. Looking ahead to the very near future, the imminent 2025 expansion of the multimodal rail freight terminal at iPort will further reinforce our competitive edge.

Yet we know not to be complacent. Doncaster has missed out on recent supply-chain opportunities, with the axing or delay of major rail projects like HS2. Elsewhere, road congestion continues to hinder our productivity, and we don't yet have a notable electric bus fleet, despite our topography being well-suited for it. The location for Great British Railways was awarded to Derby, despite a strong campaign from our city, and the withdrawal of regular passenger services from South Yorkshire to Manchester Airport — compounded by the shock closure of Doncaster Sheffield Airport by its owners — has threatened to undermine our international connectivity. We should remember that whilst our outward-facing transport infrastructure is strong, it is certainly not unique within the UK.

However, the successful cross-community effort by business, local government, and the public to save DSA shows what we can achieve when we are clear-eyed about our economic interests and willing to fight for them. With that said, our future success depends on us channeling this collective energy into further improving our global, national, and local transport links.

Where are we headed?

The world won't stay still over the next decade, and neither can we. Doncaster will face new competition from modernised ports elsewhere in the UK that could threaten our role as a distribution hub for internationally-traded goods.

Traffic congestion on key motorways and under-investment in the national rail network could hinder efficient logistics and sustainable, events-based tourism at venues such as CAST, Yorkshire Wildlife Park, and Doncaster Racecourse. And the revitalisation of Doncaster's centre will depend on targeted investments to improve cross-city flows of people and traffic; and greatly enhanced public transport that connects people to jobs.



How do we get to our 2035 Vision for the Transport?

Our top priorities for the next decade are to:

- 1 Increase the number and value of our global transport links
- 2 Develop Doncaster as a centre of excellence for transport-related industries and low carbon mobility
- 3 Secure more wins from investment in local and UK-wide network.

We Will Need To...

Draw on private-sector leadership:

To proactively seek out and influence investors in our infrastructure, defining need and demonstrating business demand

Take more risks:

In order for local and regional government to pursue the new airport rail link and tram extensions, despite the difficult history of delivering such projects elsewhere in the UK

Face the future with confidence:

Doncaster is an important node in the UK's transport system. Investing here is not a handout, it's a one-way bet on economic success

Seek forgiveness, not permission from others:

It was our public sector partners and the business community 'doing it for ourselves' that ultimately secured our airport's future as a base for aviation. We will need to keep this up as we reopen it and maximise its economic potential.

Did You Know?

- 1 Airports typically create between **500 and 1,500 direct jobs per million passengers** handled each year, with multipliers for indirect/induced employment in the wider economy of up to 3 (Department for Transport, Developing a Framework for the Local Economic Impact of Airports, 2020)
- 1 The **quality of airport facilities** is the **most important factor** determining where global firms want to **set up their headquarters** (Why and Where Do Headquarters Move, Strauss-Kahn V & Vives X, 2006)
- 1 Only **12% of South Yorkshire businesses agree that public transport meets their business needs**, while 21% agree that the rail network meets their needs, and 36% agree that existing road infrastructure meets their needs (South Yorkshire Infrastructure Survey, 2023)

Delivering Our 2035 Vision for Transport

Priority	Our asks of public-sector partners	Delivering our 2035 Vision for Transport
Increase the number and value of our global transport links	<p>Work with private sector partners to secure major international air cargo and passenger carriers at our reopened airport.</p> <p>Use planning powers and place-marketing leadership to develop the South Yorkshire Airport City scheme. This will serve as a base for innovative new aircraft at the cutting edge of sustainable aviation, building on the recent success in securing Hybrid Air Vehicles at Carcroft Common.</p>	<p>The Chamber will be among the most enthusiastic champions for our reopened airport. We will help to provide evidence of demand for business connectivity, support route-development activities, lobby for infrastructure investment (including a new railway station), and work with partners to promote the airport and its adjacent sites as one of our flagship investment sites.</p>
Develop Doncaster as a centre of excellence for transport related industries and low carbon mobility	<p>Work with the private sector to secure more road infrastructure funding and improvements aligned with Doncaster's economic development needs. Our local and regional political leaderships can draw on past successful campaigns, such as securing Regional Growth Fund funding for the Great Yorkshire Way from the M18.</p> <p>Work to retain and improve rail services on the East Coast Main Line and Transpennine route, maximise the impact of iPort expansion and establish connectivity to the reopened airport, ensuring the benefits reach surrounding businesses.</p>	<p>The Chamber will use its employer leadership role to support sustainable transport companies in meeting their workforce recruitment and development needs.</p> <p>We will work with businesses and our public sector partners to further develop Doncaster as a centre of excellence for transport-related industries, including those at the cutting edge of low carbon transportation. We will influence skills supply via our Local Skill Improvement Plan, enable commercial opportunities and interaction with adjacent sectors via our events programme, and bring like-minded businesses together to share best practice.</p>
Secure more wins from investment in local and UK-wide networks	<p>Improve infrastructure and services to link the airport to the city centre, as well as to connect future event spaces, emerging education, and innovation quarters to our international gateway.</p> <p>Invest in the density of our public transport networks and services to connect people to jobs and Doncaster to a larger system of integrated public transport for South Yorkshire.</p>	<p>The Chamber will work with businesses to demonstrate demand and advocate for Doncaster's priorities in road, rail, and active travel schemes. We will work with existing regional forums and, when needed, introduce new Doncaster-specific ones to better understand and lobby for the transport investment and improvements coveted by businesses of all sectors.</p>



Workforce '35

An economy that has the people and skills it needs for the business opportunities of the 2030s, underpinned by a model for careers advice that other cities follow.

By 2035, a new or expanded higher education offer — aligned with our booming sectors — will equip young people for success. Policymakers will speak of 'The Doncaster Model', which will become a byword for effective cooperation between businesses and educators. There will be more business representation in education governance roles, supporting a more agile and demand-led system. Schools, colleges, and businesses will fund joint teaching and industry appointments. Young people will know the opportunities on offer from the range of different routes into the jobs market, including through vocational and technical qualifications. The quality and availability of careers advice will be high and consistent, upheld by regulators, and supported by national and local funding. It will work with a mature system of employer-led skills planning for South Yorkshire that identifies workforce needs in growth areas of the economy.



Where are we headed?

In 2024, UK universities are grappling with a funding squeeze. Government grants haven't kept pace with inflation, tuition fees are capped despite rising costs, and research funding is tight. This has forced some to rely heavily on international student income, which can be volatile and is currently in decline. However, despite the current funding challenges, the potential long-term benefits of establishing a higher education provider in Doncaster vastly outweigh the risks. It will attract talented minds, foster innovation, and be a new economic driver for the city.

Responsibility for Careers Education, Information, Advice, and Guidance (CEIAG) passed to Doncaster's schools and colleges in 2012. And in 2015 the Careers and Enterprise Company (CEC) was set up to improve careers education across England. In its report on the state of CEIAG in June 2023, the Education Select Committee highlighted concerns that are shared by many in the business community. Schools often meet only half of national 'Gatsby Benchmarks' for the provision of advice, with limited employer contact and inconsistent resourcing. While colleges excel in work-related learning, overall careers guidance remains patchy, holding back human and business potential. It is a matter for national policy makers not local stakeholders, but business would like to see Ofsted get much tougher on careers and make CEIAG much more prominent in its overall assessment of schools.

Where are we now?

With each passing year, Doncaster generates more and more of its output from activities powered by talent with higher-level skills or qualifications. This is true of our stalwart sectors, like manufacturing, rail, construction, and logistics

And you can see it in the growth of companies across emerging sectors as well, like AI, digital, IT services and the creative sector. We have promising, fast-growing clusters of companies that will contribute significantly to the UK's Net Zero transition in sustainable aviation and green hydrogen. But, whilst Doncaster College has a discreet and highly regarded Higher Education offer, Doncaster lacks a major higher education facility that is explicitly aligned with the future development of these economic assets.

Our businesses are concerned about the quality of careers advice students receive in schools and colleges. These are shared by their peers elsewhere in the UK. Doncaster can lead reform, as it did with its pioneering work on the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) 'Trailblazer' pilot for South Yorkshire, which influenced the national rollout.



How do we get to our 2035 Vision for the Workforce?

Our top priorities for the next decade are to:

- 1 **Develop Doncaster as a centre of excellence for transport-related industries and low carbon mobility**
- 2 **Enhance the quality and sustainability of careers advice and guidance available to young people, through closer collaboration between education and industry**
- 3 **Deliver more private sector representation in governance roles at schools and colleges for more agile and demand-led provision of courses and curricula.**

We Will Need To...

Draw on private-sector leadership:

Initiating conversations with higher education facilities, providing direct support for careers advice

Take more risks:

Innovative programmes like joint teaching appointments break the mould of existing frameworks and will require some trial-and-error learning from both employers from education providers

Face the future with confidence:

Doncaster has a track record of innovation in the employment-education space, from pioneering the English Local Skills Improvement Plan concept, to campaigning for (and growing) University Technical College provision

Seek forgiveness, not permission from others:

Previous experience shows that concepts pioneered for our city are adopted elsewhere and can influence national policy. We don't need to wait for Whitehall.

Did You Know?

- According to **Speaker for Schools**, for each additional type of work experience done, **future annual earnings increase by £1,088** (based on the results of a recent YouGov survey of 2,098 18-30-year-olds)
- Studies have shown **an increase of up to 20% in wages** can be **attributed to careers interventions in schools** (Employer engagement in education: Insights from international evidence for effective practice and future research, Education Endowment Foundation, January 2018)
- According to the CEC**, the highest quality careers provision (achieving all eight Gatsby Benchmarks) **reduces the likelihood of young people being not being in employment, education, or training (NEET) by 8%**.

Delivering Our 2035 Vision for Doncaster's Workforce

Priority	Our asks of public-sector partners	Doncaster Chamber and Business Community Offer
Develop Doncaster's talent pipeline by expanding access to higher education, whether through a new university or alternative models of delivery	Building on the work of the existing University City campaign, and with greater private sector involvement, progress exploratory talks with UK and overseas universities. Draw on the lessons of the successful drive to secure the future of the airport.	The Chamber will work with Doncaster University City partners and others interested in promoting Higher Education in Doncaster to develop a university campus or equivalent for the city. We will convene meetings and workshops to bring together businesses, local government, regional government, and representatives from universities and other educational establishments. Here, we will explore potential collaboration and crystallise the higher skills requirements of our growth sectors.
Enhance the quality and sustainability of careers advice and guidance available to young people through closer collaboration between education and industry	Put in place a long-term plan and funding commitment at the regional or national level that underpins co-investment in joint teaching appointments, where industry professionals work directly with educators. Fund the administration and delivery of a business mentoring programme to connect experienced professionals with students, so that the former can provide guidance and career advice.	We will lobby government and education regulators to move from the current voluntary standards for careers advice and guidance (in schools and colleges) to mandatory standards.
Deliver more private sector representation and involvement in governance roles at schools, colleges and youth-centred charities, for more agile and demand-led provision of courses and curricula	Target recruitment of representatives with specific industry expertise relevant to Doncaster's growth sectors. Develop an orientation scheme for new private sector board members to familiarise them with the educational system, curriculum development processes, and ethical considerations.	We will demonstrate to businesses the variety of ways they can contribute to improving education and skills in Doncaster. We will create a directory of companies willing to act in governance roles, to support careers activities, and to co-employ trainers in collaboration with providers.

Strategic Institutions and Partnerships '35

A city that wins the transformative investments in its economy, promoted by friends in high places.

By 2035, Doncaster will be spoken of by its peers as the 'winning city' that knows how to set ambitious targets, develop new infrastructure, and then mobilise effectively to secure investment. These wins will be underpinned by more constructive partnerships with national government but also within the city and South Yorkshire; 'Team South Yorkshire' will be feted as much as 'Team Doncaster'. Business will play an active role delivering not just the region's economic ambitions, but plans in relation to health, decarbonisation, and social mobility too. There will be a sophisticated ambassadorial programme in place to cultivate influential 'Doncaster Champions' with links to the city. These friends in high places will advocate for Doncaster, attract high-value investors from the private sector and build long-term partnerships with them. They will also help Doncaster to win more public-sector competitions for investment and strongly advocate for more direct funding without the need to compete with other localities. Their advocacy will rest on strong foundations, with investment-ready schemes developed proactively, rather than waiting to be invited. And, finally, there will be a revamped quality-of-life and visitor offer that strengthens Doncaster's image with outsiders, built on an aspirational housing, cultural and hospitality scene.



Where are we now?

'Team Doncaster' — the city's working partnership of business, civic leaders, and local government — has a strong record to build on. It's been the driving force behind many of our recent wins. 'Team Doncaster', of which the Chamber is proud to be a founding father, brought us our city status, secured the future of our airport with our South Yorkshire partners, opened one University Technical College (with a second to launch in 2025), and worked hard to welcome outside investors and new employers. Furthermore, through the government's 'Stronger Towns' package in 2019, Doncaster also managed to secure £25 million (with a comparable amount being secured for Stainforth), which was then used to pump prime regeneration. The spending of this money is now overseen by the Towns Deal Board, a group that is comprised of both public and private sector partners.

However, set against this are the ones that got away. For instance, our bid to be named the new HQ of Great British Railways was rejected, as was our bid for a new hospital. Then there was also 'Donnywood' and the long-mooted PGA golf course that never materialised. At its core, Doncaster is an entrepreneurial city and for some schemes to fail is inevitable and not an inherently bad thing. But there's a nagging concern among businesses that Doncaster's pipeline of live propositions is not as big — or possibly as well socialised — as it has been in the past; there is also concern that 'Team Doncaster' is better at authoring strategies than it is implementing them. Along with towns and cities across the wider Yorkshire and Humber region, we receive much less public capital spending per head than the UK average and are among the lowest in the country in this respect.

Where are we headed?

Businesses want to see 'Team Doncaster' focus on building up the strategic assets and institutions that will strengthen its economy. This entails everything from landing a major new (or expanded) higher education offer to reimagining the city centre; maximising the opportunities of our development sites, improving local and regional transport

connectivity and deepening the pool of available capital for our businesses to grow.

To do this, we'll need to improve how we work together. Businesses see public authorities, sometimes being at odds with each other and engaging in territorialism, as they initiate or promote projects. Economic development, business support and skills ecosystems remain extraordinarily complex with far too much duplication — and therefore waste — within the system whilst other functions, essential to economic growth, such as planning feel perennially under-resourced. Partnerships across South Yorkshire are undoubtedly better than they were just a small number of years ago. This is a good thing but should be seen as a hygiene factor rather than a cause of celebration. The compact that exists between businesses and places can also sometimes feel one-sided. The ask of businesses in Doncaster's recent Climate Crisis and Fairness and Wellbeing Commissions was overt, the offer to our business communities less so. The red carpet that is, quite rightly, rolled out to major investors, sometimes feels a little less plush for indigenous businesses seeking to engage on issues such as business crime, business rates or procurement. Doncaster and South Yorkshire often excel at business friendliness, but the experience is not yet normalised for our SME communities. A consistent high bar for all interactions with employers must be part of the forward plan.

We will need to build new partnerships with influential decision-makers in government and the private sector, extending the concept of 'Team Doncaster' from 'those in Doncaster' to 'those for Doncaster'. And just as universities routinely leverage the power of their far-flung alumni to fund programmes, promote the brand and act as mentors and ambassadors, we too will draw upon our city's alumni to promote Doncaster to national and global audiences.

Meanwhile, there is also an opportunity for businesses to work more closely with the health sector to improve productivity, bring down absenteeism and improve employee wellbeing. Businesses can help with 'Team Doncaster' aims beyond economic development.

How do we get

to our 2035 Vision for the Strategic Institutions and Partnerships?

Our top priorities for the next decade are to:

- 1 Put new momentum into Team Doncaster with ambitious targets to deliver strategic assets
- 2 Deliver a 'Doncaster Champions' ambassadorial programme
- 3 Develop and maintain a programme of proactive advocacy with UK government agencies and institutional investors; fronted by businesses and Champions for the high priority areas of business finance, education, and transport infrastructure

We Will Need To...

Draw on private-sector leadership:

Running the Doncaster Champions programme and making the case for the city's investment priorities through private sector contacts and platforms

Take more risks:

Investing in place marketing involves spending money — both public and private — on activities with highly uncertain payoffs, and sometimes political, risk. Experience suggests that Team Doncaster will need to resist calls to divert this investment to satisfy more immediate pressures

Face the future with confidence:

Doncaster has confounded sceptics before — the successful advocacy campaigns to save the airport and establish the UTCs were thought by many in the media and public to be long shots at first

Seek forgiveness, not permission from others:

A revamped advocacy programme will not be confined to national and regional government but will instead put a new emphasis on approaching institutional investors in the private sector.



Did You Know?

- According to the UK Innovation Survey (2021) South Yorkshire is the second highest rated sub-region in the UK for the number of innovation active businesses, and well above the national average (57.5% of businesses vs 44.9% for the UK)
- Higher education institutions supported the employment of 63,700 people across Yorkshire and the Humber in 2021/22 (London Economics, 2023)

Delivering Our 2035 Vision for Strategic Institutions and Partnerships

Priority	Our asks of public-sector partners	Doncaster Chamber and Business Community Offer
Put new momentum into Team Doncaster with ambitious targets to deliver strategic assets	<p>Engage constructively with the Chamber-led 'Meet The Council' event programme; welcoming business perspectives into the development of new investment projects.</p> <p>Continue to fund efforts to deliver a new higher education campus within the city centre, using planning powers and place-marketing leadership to secure high-value employment opportunities at key development sites. These will include GatewayEast, Doncaster North, and Unity Yorkshire.</p> <p>Invest in initiatives that seek to establish networks of venture capital, angel, and business loan providers as strategic assets for the city; building on the work of Finance For Enterprise and others.</p>	<p>We will introduce new 'Meet The Council' events to improve the dialogue between the City of Doncaster Council and the business community. We will provide a platform at these events for the City of Doncaster Council to update on headline projects, for Cabinet Members and senior officers alike to take questions from the business community, and for Team Doncaster partners to showcase the various place-based projects that businesses might get involved with.</p> <p>We will work with partners to ensure Doncaster has a longlist of 'oven ready' investable propositions worked up so that Doncaster can maximise opportunistic funding opportunities, whilst also developing a longer-term strategic pitch to Government for investment and collaboration.</p>
Deliver a 'Doncaster Champions' ambassadorial programme	Provide long-term funding, administrative support, and opportunities for ambassadorial activity.	We will work with partners to identify, recruit, and support city alumni in senior private sector positions to act as Doncaster Champions. We will identify businesspeople who might apply for Public Appointments and those willing to support local activities and organisations.
Develop and maintain a programme of proactive advocacy with UK government agencies and institutional investors; fronted by businesses and Champions for the high priority areas of business finance, education, and transport infrastructure	Work with private sector partners to align advocacy efforts — including through a shared investment prospectus that identifies priority targets, develops common talking points and messages for external investors. Engage with a Chamber-led event programme that brings the business community and public sector partners together on a regular basis to discuss major projects.	With our Chamber colleagues across the South Yorkshire and British Chambers of Commerce networks, we will lead a programme of outreach to national-level decision makers in government. This will be based around hosting regular delegations to Doncaster and promoting events to connect with them in situ (such as in Whitehall, Parliament and the City of London). We will support businesses to participate in or host inbound and outbound delegations.

What Businesses Say

Sarah Naylor, Head of Commercial and Dispute Resolution at Switalskis Solicitors:

'The future envisioned by Doncaster '35 is one in which businesses are not only flourishing, but actively driving the changes they want to see and making our city a better place in the process. It's a refreshingly optimistic take on where we are going to be in a decade's time.'

Tariq Shah, CEO of Vigo Group:

'If Doncaster is to truly maximise its potential and rival other places around the UK, then it's imperative that we have a healthy and vibrant urban core. Businesses know this and so too do our residents. Rejuvenating our city centre must therefore be a top priority, driven by a bold vision for the high street that is prosperous, exciting and, most importantly of all, heading towards a brighter future.'

Gemma Peebles, Principal of Harrison College:

'The education system cannot be viewed in a silo and it's imperative that schools, colleges, and other providers are working closely with the business community to ensure that our young people are getting set up for prosperous futures. If we can foster this greater sense of collaboration between education and industry, then we can really make a positive impact.'

Mark Taylor, Founder and CEO of Automated Analytics:

'We need to be brave and ambitious when thinking about what the next decade holds for our city. If we get this right, then Doncaster can be leading the charge in emerging sectors like AI, cyber and digital, eventually becoming synonymous with those fields.'

Mark Chadwick, Owner of Stadium Garage and #SaveDSA Campaigner:

'It's great to see that DSA features so prominently in this manifesto. The support that has been shown for this project by the general public and businesses has been amazing. The plans for our airport go far beyond just a trip abroad: with cargo, green aviation, and other initiatives that will boost our economy and employment prospects for years to come.'

Lindsay James, Director of Active Fusion:

'Any vision for where Doncaster is going to be in the next ten years must also consider its younger population. They represent that future, after all. With that said, we need to have great ambitions for how we can nurture the next generation.'

Victoria Snowden, Director at Anthony Snowden Architect:

'There are lots of interesting ideas at the moment for how we can reboot Doncaster City Centre, including ways in which we can better utilise green spaces, address safety concerns, improve its cleanliness, transform the high street and generally make it make it better a place to live, work and spend leisure time.'

Robert Leggott, Chief Executive Officer at Togel Contractors:

'Having risen from a low base to heights unthinkable in the '70s, '80s & '90s, we now have a City to be proud of. The foundations have been laid for further opportunity, growth and developments [that businesses must] embrace.'

Jim Carley, Managing Director of Carley Consult:

'While it is vital that we take control of our own economic destiny, not all of the changes that we want to see can be enacted at a local level. That's why we need to make sure that Doncaster has a seat at the table nationally, through outreach to government decision-makers and vociferous advocacy campaigns. Doncaster's voice needs to be heard far.'

Tom Grundy, Chief Executive Officer at Hybrid Air Vehicles:

'As pioneers of zero-emission aircrafts, it's encouraging to see that a more sustainable future for aviation is such a big part of the vision for Doncaster's future. If we can seize the opportunities that are in front of us here, then we can really put this city on the map.'

Jill Wood, Managing Director at Signum Facilities Management:

'There are a lot of important points in here about preparing the workforce of tomorrow, and this is one area where I believe it's vital that businesses roll up their sleeves and get involved. Greater private sector representation in education governance roles could be a real game-changer, driving innovation and better aligning education with industry needs.'

So Him Fong, Managing Director of King Asia Foods:

'As the past few years have shown, whenever we pull together in service of a common goal we can accomplish some truly amazing things for our city. Doncaster '35 has plenty of ideas for what our next big win could be if we continue to show that united front.'

Show Your Support

The creation of Doncaster '35: A Manifesto for a Winning City was only possible with the enthusiastic participation of the many business leaders who fed into it. Their insights are at the very core of the document, and we would like to thank them for their invaluable support.

This publication is not the end, but rather the start of an ongoing campaign that businesses can contribute to in the ways set out under each of the four themes above; whether that's by using Chamber events and social media discussion to make your voice heard; by responding to the Chamber's Quarterly Economic Surveys; or putting questions to aspiring and elected officials.

Share the manifesto far and wide and discuss with your peers!

For more information or to get in touch visit www.doncaster-chamber.co.uk/

Facebook: www.facebook.com/doncasterchamber

Twitter/ X: [@DNChamber](https://twitter.com/DNChamber)

LinkedIn: uk.linkedin.com/company/doncaster-chamber

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#WinningCity
#FutureOfDoncaster

