

## Tourism Industry Consultation

Verbatim comments from tourism businesses about Welcome to Yorkshire (respondents used WTY, W2Y & Wty) since Gary Verity left. I have simply cut and paste comments sent to me by email, direct message and in response to the survey I sent out. These are verbatim so spelling and grammatical mistakes have not been amended. I have kept responses confidential, and have removed those which were so outraged, they might be seen as offensive. In some cases, responses were brief and quite repetitive e.g. “to much emphasis on cycling” so I have not included all those. I have not included those relating directly to alleged bullying by Gary Verity or to the lack of transparency and accountability of the board.

The following responses are from 150+ tourism businesses across Yorkshire.

I know the media coverage due to cycling has been good for the county but as I have said many times before there is more to Yorkshire than cycling ...

As a holiday accommodation provider I have never felt drawn to join WTY.

You cannot take away what they have achieved, but you also can't take away what GV has personally gained! As a member I should benefit just a small amount, surely?

Someone needs to state openly and honestly what WTY is about and what it aims to achieve with its marketing.

I think Welcome to Yorkshire has done a fantastic job in raising the profile of Yorkshire as a whole. However Yorkshire is a very large and diverse county and I do not feel they have done enough to promote the different areas and they only seem interested in the large businesses, not the many small ones that make up the bulk of the Yorkshire tourism industry.

I also feel that there has been a near- obsession with cycling in recent years to the exclusion of all else. The only upside is that we get the roads resurfaced.

It is important for the likes of WtY to remember they are promoting the whole county and all tourism businesses within it. The whole cycle race strategy has been very successful, but has become too great a part of WTY and needs hiving off to a seperate organisation, but with close coordination to ensure the success of both.

never felt they were any use to me and my business. Perhaps my business is too on the fringes for the potential tourist or just too small. At several networking meetings I found the WTY presentation to be narrow in focus and content. Basically if you're not on a bike or offer B&B then WTY is not for your business.



W2Y is a DMO - a destination marketing organisation (I disagree that it is a management organisation, as it should not be investing in tourism infrastructure) - but too much focus has gone on creating events that they can market, particularly cycling. This excludes any tourism businesses that don't benefit. The Grand Depart was a coup, the Tour de Yorkshire has been an indulgence that should have been operated by a third party, albeit with marketing support from W2Y.

A long-term marketing plan should be created, and this should not be limited to focusing on one aspect of Yorkshire to the detriment of all others.  
As said above really - too much focus on cycling.

We initially joined in 2007 but left after the first year. Later we rejoined having been assured that things had changed but left again. Members get little for their money & no say in the marketing strategy.

They should be ethically and environmentally driven, rather than aggressive and profit driven

It's difficult to see a way-in for W2Y if they persist in pushing the cycling agenda at the expense of creative & innovative uses of town & community resources which are widespread & tangible.

I don't think many local businesses round here are wholly convinced that the hyperbole which accompanies the bikes, results in widespread discernible or indeed commercial benefits!

Fundamentally, the fact that W2Y membership is like being in a marketing club in which you are expected to continually pay for additional advertising, is anathema to very small shops & businesses.

This unfortunate situation has made us rethink and reassess our membership and links with WTY and I'm sure lots of other businesses across the county will feel the same, is it working for us

We have felt for some time that cycling has taken over at the expense of other aspects of tourism, WTY has almost become a cycling association

Whilst cycling brings people into Yorkshire and does benefit a lot of businesses, there is really so much more to Yorkshire, Our part of the Dales has not seen the TDY pass through here

We get bombarded with emails asking us to advertise here and there requesting large sums of money which for us as a small business is totally unrealistic



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We also feel that WTY has lost its personal touch since 2014 ,it seemed to change after that

What we do regarding our membership depends on what we hear from the current board ,so far the silence has been deafening. Whilst there is no doubt Gary Verity has bought success to WTY having such a string figurehead has been seen by many to be counter productive.

Too focused on cycling. Any advertising in their brochures are far too expensive for a small business. We are WTY members but do not feel we get any benefit from being a member and think it is a waste of money - what exactly do we get out of it? Many of the courses on offer are too far away from us and start at times difficult for a B&B owner to attend. What marketing activities?! Sure their have been lots, many centred around cycling (when we have so much more to offer in Yorkshire) but there is so little that is targeted at the small to medium sized business with a limited marketing budget.

We are so lucky in the North York Moors to have such a fabulous team at NYMNP that really go the extra mile to champion the great small businesses in the area. Feels ironic that we get so much more from this team when we don't pay any sort of membership for that! We are aware that WTY certainly puts Yorkshire in the global arena and has brought us more overseas visitors. However (and we have questioned this) the main/only focus seems to be cycling events. There's more to the area than cycling and we would like to see this reflected in their strategies.

We came out of WTY over 6 years ago as we didn't feel it offered our accommodation business enough for the cost paid.

Yorkshire has a lot to offer and this needs to be reflected in the marketing of the county. Eg by using all high profile activities / attractions to promote lesser known aspects / businesses of the area.

They are mostly priced out of our range. It would be great to be in Y magazine and some of the other publications but currently there is no chance. I understand that advertising costs but I can get in national magazines for less than that as they appreciate we are a charity and big bucks are not the order of the day.

need a much broader range of angles to actually bring 'spending' customers into the Dales A lot of hard work will need to be done in order to regain the publics trust...

As above. They do not promote tourism well to uk holiday makers and god forbid someone actually finds their website they'll not easily find my property on it.

The strategy is to attract tourists to Yorkshire by using cycling to showcase Yorkshire's spectacular people, towns and countryside to national and international audiences. The



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policy is to do one thing extraordinarily well, and not to fritter resources away on umpteen 'priorities'

I think in hindsight, there has been a lot of hype and "smoke & mirrors" giving the illusion of their power and presence, but actually perhaps we need to focus more on our own abilities, and realise that they are just another big business.

I think WTY are very good at marketing themselves

As a long standing member, their communications leave a lot to be desired. I have been unable to receive e-mail notices of workshops and treat days for some time, much to my disappointment and despite a number of phone calls and personal contact. Also I was appalled too at their £750,000 TDY purchases which they tried very hard to sell off very cheaply. They were stacked in a warehouse in Well. I expect they are still there.

They are very keen to enrol members but they fall short on after sales support

Marketing seems good but way too heavy reliance on cycling. So much more can happen in Yorkshire and it never gets a mention

To me they are synonymous with bikes and that is off putting as my holiday cottage is not particularly bike focused! They approached me when we launched the cottage but the cost they quoted was prohibitive and I felt they couldn't convince me it would be worthwhile.

We were members of W2Y for 8 years and won at their White Rose Awards on three occasions. We stopped our membership two years ago based on several things 1) we did not receive any support to encourage us to use of membership or even understand how the membership was beneficial for the business. It seemed a lot of money just to be able to enter the awards! 2) the awards seemed to be more of a who you know and if you were bezy mates with GV (yes we won twice very recently but it started to get cliquey). 3) we were promoting something and I asked W2Y if they were able to retweet something but they refused stating they could not be seen to have favourites 4) I didn't even know who my rep was 5) the listing of our business on their website was incorrect

Very cycling focused.

To be fair I think WTY did aim high and was ambitious under Sir Gary. However I don't think there was marketing support for other (non cycling) tourism businesses. It seemed to be left to district councils and businesses themselves to do run with other themes.

I would add, though, that if WTY does get its act together and try to encourage more international tourism, it would at the same time need to put together a coherent plan to protect against overtourism.



We used to be members of WTY. We were constantly encouraged to advertise special offers on the WTY website members area as we were assured it received so much visitor traffic. In 3 years, despite trying a range of offers, we never received a single booking via WTY. It left us feeling we couldn't believe the claims about visitor traffic to the site. I attended a range of workshops during my first couple of years membership, but then found these were simply repeated year on year with no new ideas. This made us ask how our membership fee was benefiting our small business. We did receive friendly support from our local rep, but beyond this, it was hard to see what value there was in being a member, and so we left the organisation. We will await developments with interest before deciding whether to re-join.

I actually think WTY did a brilliant job with the marketing as well as the cycling and it was a 'strategy'.....it isn't about cycling per se ...it's about putting the county in a high profile position through the cycling and that has most definitely worked....now though I think there should be a strong focus as well, on culture, and countryside....

I don't advocate throwing the baby out with the bath water. The standard of WTY campaigns and marketing outputs is always high - certainly superior to what most of the other regional tourism bodies produce, and arguably more effective than a lot of the Visit England stuff. The Yorkshire tourism brand has never been stronger and has largely been built on the back of WTY campaigns. Less focus and resources on the cycling might enable more promotional punch for other aspects of our tourism product (e.g. walking, running, wellbeing) although it's unlikely that would attract the same media interest and coverage. There is a lot more to Yorkshire than cycling. Great for walking as well. They are far too cycling focussed and hide behind slick videos captured from a limited number of events - does WTY bring in any external visitors ?? my experience is that it's mainly locals coming out to watch. They should also complement other tourism bodies instead of competing with them and look at other offers - cities, culture, retail etc

There has been a very strong focus on cycling in the past few years and whilst this has undoubtedly launched Yorkshire to another level internationally, there is much more going on in Yorkshire that could have the same leverage.

There also needs to be more interest in grass roots type of events things that the domestic tourist is interested in and can take part in. Having tried to present my event to WTY several times, it is clear that the emphasis has been on the big wins, instead of encouraging the smaller events that will have a great longevity.

No desire to think outside the box

Very narrow in focus, not really about the whole County, did not offer value to members or to bodies who pay for wider marketing. better at marketing WTY than marketing those giving the money to run it.



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A separate department marketing sport/cycling would be useful. There much more to Yorkshire than sport. Cycling is not my forte but the momentum we have at the moment must not be lost.

Can't say we've had any new customers from our listing--looks lovely, grand people to work with, but still probably not viable to stay in next year.

Hope the cycling side is not lost altogether. Strong clear marketing opportunities for WTY members with new exciting initiatives.

Initiatives (possibly in collaboration with others) that are realistically priced and not designed just to "farm" financially members pockets

Drop the cycling (it can run on its own wheels now) and seek other new pots to stir

Better interaction between WTY & Members

New website which is user friendly for visitors and WTY members

Welcome to Yorkshire was held up in other regions of the county as a shining star and model of best practise something to emulate. How little we knew. Whatever happens next needs to be transparent and inclusive so all tourism businesses st ALL levels can benefit in some way.

I have been considering if being a member of Welcome to Yorkshire was worthwhile. I have not seen our new Representative for the area since xx changed jobs. Also when we won xxxx Best xxx in England last year I received hardly any support from Welcome to Yorkshire. Part of the membership package is assistance with PR. We had very little national interest considering all the media contacts Welcome to Yorkshire claim they will get on board with our news story. I chased the PR department many times and got nowhere. I thought they would be delighted to have England's best xxx in their county!! I am sure other award winning businesses in Yorkshire that are members of WtY have not received the support they deserve.

There is too much emphasis on cycling. All these trips to various places around the world to promote Yorkshire, does it really make a difference. Do other Tourist Boards spend so much when Visit England and Visit Britain should be working international promotion.

The White Rose awards are too lavish - not good use of their budget. They have got so expensive to hold they are now charging for second guest to attend plus also charge accommodation entrants the cost of the overnight inspection.

I never believed the figures put out on how the Tour de France had such a great impact on businesses . When the weekend was upon us I know of many businesses who were caught out as the public did not spend money locally, farmers who rented field s out for parking did not receive the visitors they expected. I had at the time a Deli and we were expecting to be



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very busy . We opened very early in the morning to cope with the crowds of people predicted. They did not arrive . I was not alone in this .i now have a bed and breakfast but have not renewed subscription to WTY I felt it was expensive and as a very small business received nothing for the money I paid apart from a fancy pink plaque.

In all honesty I stay a member because I want to support the work that they do, I don't feel like I benefit personally. My business is not busier because I'm a member, it has no impact at all. I am disgusted, I can't dress it up.

We could never understand the benefits that were being offered by the WTY staff who periodically asked us to join.

While I am a fan of the cycling and it was fantastic to have the TdF here I have never thought cyclist spend much money. They normally cycle into the Dales, clog up the roads, bring most of their food and drinks with them and then leaving at the end of the day. From my experience they are frugal and even if they are coming to stay in the area, low cost is a major driver of their decision. Ideally we want more free spending visitors.

Craven District Council pay Â£180,000 to Welcome to Yorkshire for the Tour de Yorkshire to go through Skipton and South Craven but that is of no benefit to us here in North Craven. And that sum does not include officer time spent on organization, road closures, etc.

WTY tell us this brings millions of pounds of benefits but here in North Craven I have seen no benefit from any of the cycling events. In fact during the Tour de France my regular customers avoided coming because of it and I ended up with vacancies even though all accommodation in the Dales was booked up according to the hype.

I'm a member and honestly I have found the last few years all about cycling, cycling, cycling. As a little business I've never felt included. Even at the annual conference I feel out of place, not on the tour de Yorkshire route so never hear about anything else happening near us.

For a long time, W2Y has felt like a vehicle designed primarily to boost Gary Verity's reputation and political ambitions, with a cult of celebrity surrounding the man. Gary attending an event should not be newsworthy - the head of W2Y should be there to work, evaluate and support, not just shake hands and smile for photographs. His presence has often overshadowed the hard working folk who have delivered projects - including his own W2Y team, who I agree, work incredibly hard.

Felt Gary did a good job in the early years to raise Yorkshire profile but then he focussed too much on cycling. I joined in the first year but then could see little direct benefit for small businesses like ours, not cycling related.

Watched all the disappointed businesses post Tour De France as it did not live up to revenue expectations.



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Years ago when WTY started up, I experienced very aggressive marketing from them to get me to sign up as a member. At the time I was just starting out and earning so little, I couldn't afford the membership fees, I found them voracious from the start and it was never about a holistic approach to promoting Yorkshire and helping those who live and work here to flourish. It was always about making money and improving their profit margins, by any means.

I am disappointed; A seemingly successful & popular business with apparently excellent credentials, which has undoubtedly promoted the Yorkshire brand around the world & which has proved capable of managing substantial commercial ventures, has had to admit that all was not well behind the scenes & has parted company with its much heralded figurehead amid charges of long term personal impropriety & unprofessionalism.

Let's hope this is a fresh start and that WtY can move forward with a more inclusive approach and start to consider the small man too! It has always felt like they didn't care at all about their members unless they wanted something.

Like many others I've got a bit fed up on the cycling focus as it is just one bit of what Yorkshire has to offer. I have rejoined because although it is very expensive and I see very little return on investment, the prices to be in their leaflets if you are not a member is eye watering. It's irked me for a while because Visit York seem to be able to manager all the same things without making me pay through the nose.

We appear in the WTY garden leaflet and on the website but apart from that we get nothing from our membership.

i stopped being a member 4 years ago when they become solely focused on cycling.

I have never believed the figures quoted as to how much tourism industry has gained from the cycling events.

In the upper dales a lot of businesses are struggling and need collaborative support

Disappointing. While on the one hand, I understand that Gary is someone who is strong willed and determined, and he has hugely helped Yorkshire get in on the "map", it shouldn't be at a cost to others, whatever the method is.

Welcome to yorkshire are very good at promoting themselves

The organisation effectively reduced and removed existing local tourism organisations with their initial membership drive, making big promises about enhancing the reach of your business. After years of promises what have they delivered.... a bike ride



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No funding for local events, a charge for being a member but no representation, no one to contact and no one listening to local issues and needs.

It feels like a profit making organisation which is not looking after the interests of the whole Yorkshire tourism industry. Unfriendly and unapproachable.

Despite this, the bringing of the TDF GD to Yorkshire and the subsequent TDY's was inspired and brave and took Yorkshire to the world and in return brought the world to Yorkshire. Tourism businesses have benefited massively from this. I know this by the ongoing stream of visitors who return again and again from the exposure to the wider world, of the sheer beauty of the area.

The situation has arisen because of the poor management of those in charge. Irrespective of who the employee is, the management team as employers are totally responsible. The team at WtY have created some amazing results but because of GV's relationship with Tour de France senior team and Westminster politicians the emphasis in recent years has been too much on Cycling and other sports and has created a one trip pony image of WtY and Yorkshire.

Working with one of the districts in Yorkshire, I wanted market research on visitor figures and behaviour so I could base strategy on these. They didn't seem to exist.

I'm a travel writer living in xx and working for xxx (major travel publication). One of the roles I have is as their Yorkshire expert, so I have got Yorkshire into numerous xxx books, write numerous articles and news pieces about the region for xx online platform. It was me who pitched Yorkshire for xxx international Best in Travel campaign in 2014 and who got it included as one of the top 10 regions in the world to visit that year. I also love Yorkshire and think more people should be visiting. After 3 years I have only just managed to make it onto the Welcome to Yorkshire press mailing list, despite having been in contact with them several times.

Firstly I'd like to say that Welcome to Yorkshire has achieved a huge amount in promoting the Yorkshire brand both in the UK and around the world. Our profile has arguably never been higher. On the other hand there has clearly been a cost to this success. WTY was built around the personality of Gary Verity and had an over-riding focus on cycling - neither of which were ever going to be sustainable in the long term.

On balance I'm not sure Yorkshire tourism would've achieved as much over the past decade if there hadn't been a strong figurehead driving things forward - contrast WTY with the general apathy and bureaucratic paralysis of most government organisations - but there have clearly been short cuts and shortcomings and it's time for a reboot. For a long time have wondered how I benefit from membership. Cycling and Leeds have seemed to dominate. As a owner operator of a very small self catering business I have felt that WTY was only for the large business.

GV certainly raised the awareness of Yorkshires existence to the country. It has had an



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image of cold, wet and flat caps! Le Tour certainly dispelled that but GV did appear to dominate any promotion of Yorkshire.

Regardless of the successes, the organisation comes across as "unhelpful" and unresponsive to genuine approaches for help and advice. If that was because cycling was the priority then this should be addressed. Gary seemed to dominate and enjoy his position and power too much and to the detriment of capable people who seemed scared of making decisions. Has been a long time coming, but was to be expected. Lots of arrogance, smoke and mirrors, a big money making machine with no real accountability. It's very disappointing that a trusted organisation which has clearly done massively well encouraging tourism has been allowed to drift, unchecked, into this mess.

I am concerned that the manner Welcome to Yorkshire are dealing with this feels like a fudge. If what is being alleged is true, they have to be seen to be dealing with this appropriately now. This may mean some senior people having to consider their position.

I don't think there has been enough communication to WTY members about the situation. I don't think it's right that members should hear more from the media storm than the organisation itself. It's as if the members are an after-thought.

Appalled but somehow not surprised. This is a tale of our times. A charismatic individual creating a halo effect being unchallenged for inappropriate actions. Our industry is run primarily by small scale entrepreneurs in a low wage sector. We have paid a lot of money to WTY for essentially very little personal return.

### **In response to the question, what should happen next?**

New broom and new board members with transparency re fund allocation.

More inclusive for all businesses.

Focus on campaigns which involve all businesses

Focus more on unique features of areas - eg. Yorkshire Dales - waterfalls in spate, views that create the 'on top of the world feeling' amazing watering holes etc. Each part of Yorkshire is so different with so much to offer.

Proper measuring of results needed

A proper survey of the opinions of members and perhaps ask the question why are so many businesses who are not members.

Needs to go back to its roots as a proper DMO.



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I think their activity is very Leeds centric rather than the wider county.

The website/diary is difficult to search and heavily favours permanent activity (galleries and museums) over one-off events. We always hear a lot more from the marketing team at membership renewal time than any other!

As to welcome to Yorkshire they couldn't give a toss about their members, all they want is your money, money, money. It has very little benefits for the monthly membership fee.

As a local journalist working on national and international publications, I would like to see some sort of concerted effort to put together different tourism themes and ideas for journalists to work with, and better communication on major projects (such as heritage restorations). Most of the communications I've received so far from Welcome to Yorkshire Small businesses in my opinion gain nothing. People use social media, trip advisor etc to search for businesses, places to stay and local activities.

have either been really broad or about cycling. Quite frankly, cycling is one niche in a very broad spectrum of experiences that Yorkshire can offer visitors, and they focus on it too much.

I don't feel WtY works for me. The marketing appears to focus on big events and venues that frankly have the budgets and staff to market themselves. As it stands, I had been thinking of joining but as someone already unsure of the economic justification for paying the (for me quite large) membership fee, the current crisis hasn't filled me with confidence that WtY spends its money wisely or well.

The WTY marketing has been too heavily weighted towards Cycling over the years. I was pleased for Yorkshire to host a stage of the Tour de France and other Cycling events, but since then all their marketing focus seems to be on that only. There is more to Yorkshire than cycling! Plus, I didn't believe any of the stats about visitor numbers and income generated either. It worries me that above the WTY HQ it has 'Home of Cycling' emblazoned across the front of the building. Yorkshire is home to a lot more!

I also think the marketing has also been heavily weighted toward the Yorkshire Dales as well. There is probably a link with the Cycling events which have run through the National Park but I feel there is certain areas of Yorkshire which WTY don't promote/support at all, mainly the North York Moors (except the Yorkshire Coast which has been covered by the Cycling) I think south Yorkshire is probably feeling a bit dejected as well.

I am frustrated how we have to pay for everything. When we first joined occasionally WTY would retweet a post of ours (for example) but now it seems you have to pay for any type of support (even tweeting or FB posts).



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