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Changing Barnsley: from mining town to university town

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On 1 April 2002 the *Guardian* newspaper published an article describing architect Will Alsop's vision for Barnsley becoming a Tuscan Hill Town.

Immediately the newspaper's telephone switchboard was jammed with readers claiming to have spotted the annual April fool.

Not so! The joke was on them. Barnsley really was changing and Alsop's vision was fact, not fiction.

Had they gone mad in the Portland stone halls of Barnsley's Town Hall, residents were heard to mutter?

Was Barnsley turning from mining beneath its green hills to stone town walls above them in one fell swoop?

Well not quite, but Alsop's ideas made us in Barnsley think about who we are and what we are to be in the future and we began our journey to become a 21st-century market town. Nay THE 21st-Century Market Town. No less ambitious than the ideas of Alsop himself.

In the late 1990's Barnsley's reason for being was destroyed and we lost our identity. This new journey aims to recreate the sense of identity and purpose we once held so proudly as a mining community, but this time as a new place in a new world with new ambitions.

So what do we mean by 21st-century market town – where do our ambitions lie?

Well, it's more than just a town with a market, albeit a very special one.

The concept of market towns is one of a place of exchange. An exchange of goods and services often grown or made locally. Hence our aim to produce, as well as retail, just as we did when our charter was granted in 1249.

But in a 21st-century economy the exchange of ideas, knowledge and information is equally if not more important. So skills, education and learning will be a vital component of our new future.

This book tells of learning in our past and how it shaped people's lives in Barnsley. In particular it tells of the impact of the Mining and Technical College and our University Campus.

Ironically what was at the heart of our past learning will be the heart of learning in the future. The University Campus will be key to developing the skills for our new economy and helping us to raise our aspirations and ambitions even further.

It will provide opportunity to Barnsley people to achieve their dreams and for others from elsewhere to share their dreams with us.

Barnsley is changing – from mining town to market town. From a place built on coal to a place built upon enterprise and learning.

So when people ask me whatever happened to Will Alsop's Tuscan Hill Town, I tell them we're building it right here in Barnsley.

Cllr Stephen Houghton
Leader Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council