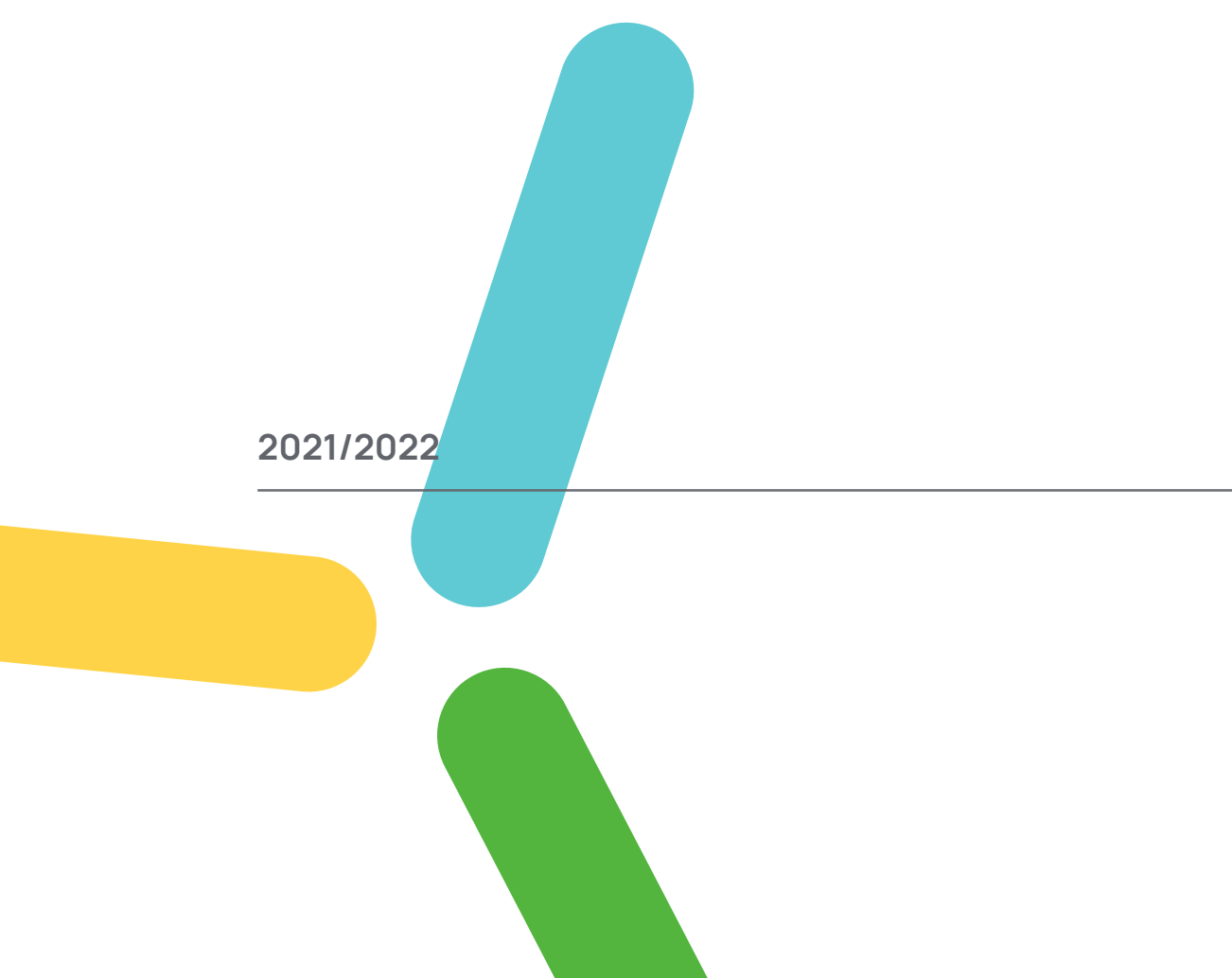




# Building a Better Future Together: Supporting Recovery in Cheshire and Warrington

2021/2022

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## Chair's Foreword

COVID-19 has had a devastating impact across the world. Cheshire and Warrington has not been immune, wiping an estimated £3 billion off our economy, almost doubling the number of our residents on Universal Credit, and forcing large numbers of our retail and hospitality businesses to close for months.

The Local Enterprise Partnership has responded by leading the recovery and growth of the Cheshire and Warrington economy through a powerful partnership between the private, public and third sectors. This Recovery Plan shows how we will build a better future together after Covid and sets out the steps the LEP is taking as part of that partnership in the short term to get the economy back on its feet, and back on course to make Cheshire and Warrington the most healthy, sustainable, inclusive and growing economy in the UK. We will build on this even further with the publication of a longer-term strategy at the end of the year.

I am proud that the LEP, its Growth Hub, Marketing Cheshire and partners have put in place a range of measures to ensure that our businesses can successfully restart and that people can get back to work:

- Ensuring the availability of direct advice and support, that has already helped 4300 businesses, ensuring they are well placed to take advantage of the strong restart we are seeing to the economy.

- The introduction of a £1.5m capital grant scheme which has helped almost 500 small businesses to ensure their businesses are Covid-secure and diversified for success beyond the pandemic.
- Signposting and providing access to mental health support.
- Provision of fully funded skills training, via our additional £600k investment in the Accelerate Skills programme, equipping individuals and businesses to succeed in the post Covid economy.
- Our continued support to over 400 employers via The Pledge, its webinars and Careers Fairs, so far inspiring over 12,500 young people and aiding over 11,000 adults who are looking for employment.
- Running 'Open for Business' and other campaigns to directly support the visitor, culture, events, hospitality, leisure and retail sectors as they reopen.
- Continuing to drive forward the delivery of our capital investments to keep the economy open: a total of £15.3m of Getting Building Fund and £24.7m of LGF have been awarded, ensuring projects such as the Warrington Centre Park Link and the Congleton Link Road were completed and ready post-Covid.
- Accelerating the delivery of significant Enterprise Zone investments to provide support to the construction industry and to ensure key facilities such as the Validation Centre of Excellence, a bio-secure lab at Alderley Park, was brought on stream as quickly as possible.
- Supporting biodiversity 'net gain' in development and improved environmental quality via our natural capital work.
- Working to get young people back into employment by ensuring the success of the Government's Kickstart programme.

The plan also sets out the great future that we can look forward to, including how we will take the opportunity to make Cheshire and Warrington a world leader in sectors such as green energy and life sciences, transforming our economy for future generations.

By working together, we cannot fail to build a better future for Cheshire and Warrington.

**Clare Hayward** MBE

Chair of the Cheshire and Warrington  
Local Enterprise Partnership

# Executive Summary

**The Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) leads the growth of the Cheshire and Warrington economy through a powerful partnership between the private, public, and third sectors. This Recovery Plan sets out how the LEP plans to put the economy back on its feet after Covid and get people back into work. It incorporates the LEP's priorities for delivery over**

2021-22 and the immediate steps it is taking to help make Cheshire and Warrington the healthiest, most sustainable, inclusive, and growing economy in the UK. Our Recovery Plan is organised via these themes.

Despite the economic challenges created by the pandemic, new trading relationships as a consequence of Brexit, and the accelerating pace of change of new technologies and climate change, the Cheshire and Warrington economy is resilient, with a strong and diverse business base, and highly skilled workforce. Whether it be energy or life sciences, advanced manufacturing or services, or the visitor economy, Cheshire and Warrington is well placed to bounce back strongly as the country emerges from lockdown.

## **Restarting the economy**

Like the rest of the UK, Cheshire and Warrington has been severely disrupted by Coronavirus and the national efforts to limit the spread of the disease. The LEP and its Growth Hub, business groups, local authorities, trade unions, the third sector and others have worked together to respond to and as far as possible mitigate the impacts of the pandemic and the restrictions imposed to limit the spread of the virus.

Our local authority partners delivered £280m of government Covid grants, helping businesses to cover some of the revenue they lost as a result of the pandemic. Alongside this, the LEP's Growth Hub continues to prove itself an invaluable source of advice to businesses looking for help in navigating their way through Covid and the changes in our trading arrangements with the rest of the world following the end of the Brexit transition period.

The LEP, its Growth Hub and Marketing Cheshire have also:

- set up a £1.5m restructuring capital grant scheme to help businesses and the third sector to adjust to operating in a Covid secure way, e.g. investing in IT or small scale infrastructure, enabling some of them to re-open earlier than would otherwise be possible and helping others to develop new ways of generating revenue which they will also be able to exploit in the longer term beyond the end of the pandemic.
- set up and run 'Open for Business' and other campaigns to directly support the visitor, culture, events, hospitality, leisure and retail sectors to reopen.
- ensured the availability of direct advice and business support via the Growth Hub, that has already helped over 4300 businesses throughout the pandemic.

## **A Healthy Recovery**

The pandemic has highlighted the importance of our health and drawn attention to new and existing health inequalities. It has put real pressure onto the NHS and social care providers, creating huge backlogs and extended waiting times for non-Covid treatments. It has also had a major impact on the mental well-being of the population, generating unprecedented levels of demand for mental health support.

In response, the LEP is:

- working with the Federation of Small Businesses and Cheshire West and Chester Council to ensure that small business owners, who have faced particularly acute challenges over the past eighteen months, can access mental health support.

- using the Pledge, the LEP's careers inspiration programme, to connect local young people to job vacancies in the health and social care sector.
- Cheshire and Warrington's life sciences sector has also played a critical role in the pandemic response, with Alderley Park being home to one of the first Lighthouse Labs in the country with hundreds of skilled staff engaged in the national Coronavirus testing effort.

The LEP is:

- accelerating its investment into Alderley Park, providing £5.05m of the Getting Building Fund to the Validation Centre of Excellence, one of the most bio-secure labs in the country, to provide further facilities for the scores of small companies discovering the drugs of tomorrow, reinforcing the importance of the area as a life sciences hub.
- investing £7.8m into a new lab and coworking space at Alderley Park via the Enterprise Zone

### **A Sustainable Recovery**

Cheshire and Warrington has the knowledge, expertise and opportunity to become a world leader in zero carbon energy technology, building on decades of industry-leading experience in energy distribution systems, fuels and nuclear engineering and design. Invest Net Zero Cheshire is predicting that there will be over 30,000 new jobs in clean energy over the next few years. We will be working with partners to establish an at scale smart energy system, providing a blueprint for localising energy supply, a key element in the future of energy distribution.

The LEP will be:

- lobbying the Government to provide support to deliver the HyNet project, creating the UK's first Hydrogen production and carbon capture and storage facility.
- accelerating its work with skills providers to keep pace with these transformational opportunities and connect businesses to an effective local skills and talent pipeline.
- focusing on practical action to enhance our natural capital in a healthy, sustainable and green recovery that works for people and the environment, and our farming sector.

### **An Inclusive Recovery**

The pandemic has hit some of the most vulnerable people in our communities the hardest, including the lowest paid, young people, women and minorities, and those living in more deprived areas with fewer facilities and green spaces. The LEP is supporting the inclusive Recovery via:

- leading the sub-region's programme to get people back into work who found themselves unemployed as a consequence of the pandemic, working alongside key partners, such as the Department for Work and Pensions, to ensure that every young person that wants one is able to get a place on the Government's Kickstart programme.
- funding a programme of on-line job fairs which has already inspired over 12,500 young people and aided over 11,000 adults who are looking for employment; and providing a single on-line portal for unemployed people to access job vacancies and the other support they need whilst they are out of work.
- channelling investment to provide opportunity and growth in places, with the aim of addressing disparities between communities, and boosting our subregion's places such as town centres and high streets, delivering high value jobs, housing and infrastructure, for example through HS2, which provides a once in a generation opportunity to level up places like Crewe, Winsford and parts of Warrington.

### **A Growing Economy**

Investment in the key programmes that are delivering healthy, sustainable, and inclusive growth in Cheshire and Warrington will help get our economy back onto its pre pandemic growth trajectory. Achieving this objective also means investing in the key foundations of the Cheshire and Warrington economy, including:

- Building on our world-class energy, life sciences, and advanced manufacturing sectors, Science Corridor and innovation assets
- Ensuring our existing and emerging workforce is aware of and has the skills to take advantage of the exciting opportunities for growth in our key sectors and our modern, digital economy. For example, providing fully funded skills training via our additional £600k investment into the Accelerate Skills programme, and supporting over 500 employers to connect to local young people to

meet skills needs via The Pledge.

- Supporting business to start up, scale up and successfully adapt to change, enhancing our reputation as an exporting powerhouse and inward investment magnet; and targeting our key growth sectors.
- Connectivity and infrastructure: making sure that we stay connected, physically and digitally, and that we have clear plans for investment in the infrastructure that we need for a successful, growing, healthy, sustainable and inclusive economy.

### **Next Steps**

The Covid pandemic has been the most challenging period that the world has faced in over three quarters of a century. This Recovery Plan sets out how the LEP and its partners are planning to help the Cheshire and Warrington economy get back on its feet and back on the road towards making the sub-region the most healthy, sustainable, inclusive and fast growing in the country. Later in the year, as the recovery becomes embedded, the LEP will publish a medium-term strategy exploring in more detail how that vision can be delivered.



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the healthiest,  
most sustainable,  
inclusive,  
and growing  
economy in  
the country.

This plan incorporates Cheshire and Warrington LEP's priorities for delivery over 2021-22 and our ambition to meet the subregional vision for the recovery of Cheshire and Warrington from COVID-19, which is to make our area the healthiest, most sustainable, inclusive and growing economy in the country.

# Introduction

**Alongside the programmes that the LEP is delivering, local authorities and other organisations in the public and third sector are also playing an essential role in the recovery, including for example, distributing restart grants, supporting mental health, ensuring public spaces are safe, supporting businesses with Covid-secure measures, and a huge range of other activities.**

We consulted with stakeholders on our draft plan and listened and responded to feedback in April and May 2021. Given the rapidly changing circumstances of the recovery, we have committed to produce a more medium-term strategy document by the end of the year. A key next step will be to work closely with our three local authorities and wider partners to ensure all our plans dovetail in the most effective way to deliver the subregional vision for all our places.

We welcome ongoing engagement in the vision, priorities and delivery, and look forward to working with you to build a better future together.

Working in partnership with the public, private, and voluntary sectors we have already taken significant steps to help restart the Cheshire and Warrington economy. We have channelled and promoted the Government support that has been made available for businesses and introduced tailored support locally.

We are clear that in returning to growth and striving to deliver on the vision for Cheshire and Warrington we will not return to the 'old normal' – an economy that worked for many but not for everyone, and in which the impact of our activities on the earth's natural resources was not fully acknowledged. COVID-19 has also exposed many of the weaknesses in the economy and reinforced some of the inequalities experienced by our poorest and most disadvantaged communities.

**We are therefore committed to building a better future together. We want to create a future for Cheshire and Warrington that makes it the healthiest, most sustainable, inclusive, and fastest growing place in the country.**

Our short-term recovery will focus on four strategic objectives which together will enable Cheshire and Warrington to return to the growth and prosperity it enjoyed before the pandemic:

1. **Healthy** - supporting the wider public sector and civil society as they lead the recovery in the health and wellbeing of our communities, including the mental wellbeing of workers and business owners. Continuing to back our life sciences industry to become a global leader in complex medicines.
2. **Sustainable** - demonstrating that Cheshire and Warrington is at the heart of the Green Industrial Revolution, we are ready to deliver the government's 10-Point Plan with clear proposals for decarbonising our economy and creating green jobs.
3. **Inclusive** - supporting skills and employment opportunities locally, channelling investment to provide opportunity and growth for all our communities, levelling up economic disparities, and boosting town centres and high streets.
4. **Growing** - investing in our health, sustainable, and inclusive objectives is essential to delivering fast growth that benefits everyone in our area. At the same time, we also must get the foundations of the economy right for skills and labour markets; innovation and ideas; business growth; and connectivity and infrastructure.



## Further challenges ahead

COVID-19 is not the only significant factor that our economy will have to respond to. After a long period of uncertainty the UK has reached an EU Free Trade Agreement which came into effect on 1st January 2021 and continues to develop and secure further global trade deals. These new trading arrangements and associated legal and regulatory regimes will also bring change for business and for our business support offer. Businesses also continue to adapt to the impact of new technologies, global competition, changing customer demands, and specific local challenges, such as recent flooding.

Cheshire and Warrington's leaders are determined to offer a better future to those who live and work in the sub-region. Investing in our healthy, sustainable, and inclusive objectives is essential to delivering fast growth that benefits everyone in our area, whether that be through backing our life sciences and energy sectors, or in providing careers advice and skills support for residents and employees in the area including our young people. In this regard we established the Cheshire and Warrington Sustainable and Inclusive Growth Commission in November 2020 to challenge and support the subregion on creatively addressing imminent challenges to decarbonise and ensure we have an inclusive economy that positively addresses inequalities. The interim findings of the Commission will be fed into our more medium-term plan next year.

At the same time, if we are to continue have a fast-growing economy, create jobs and opportunities locally, and restore Cheshire and Warrington's prosperity and productivity, we also must get the foundations of the economy right. We will focus on the following four areas.

- Innovation and ideas: Capitalising on the amazing innovation assets in our area, including our world-class energy, life sciences and manufacturing sectors and building stronger links with other places in the UK and beyond so that new ideas can be supported and brought to market.
- Skills and labour markets: Inspiring and informing our existing and emerging workforce about new technologies and career opportunities so they can make informed decisions about the skills they need to acquire in a changing economy, supporting our colleges and other training providers to build the capacity and capability to deliver the skills we need and helping those who face challenges to get back into employment and connected with opportunities.

- Business growth: Supporting business to grow and successfully adapt to change. As well as recovering from the impact of COVID-19, this also means adapting to our new trading arrangements with the world, and making sure that our economy remains outward-facing and an exporting powerhouse.
- Connectivity and infrastructure: Making sure that we stay connected, physically, and digitally, and that we have clear plans for investment in the infrastructure that we need for a successful, growing, inclusive economy.

Growth in Cheshire and Warrington also benefits residents beyond our borders, with a significant proportion of our workforce commuting from other parts of the North West and North Midlands such as the Wirral, St Helens and Stoke on Trent and also North Wales. We maintain links with areas beyond our borders such as the Liverpool City Region, Greater Manchester, Staffordshire and Mersey Dee, via their recovery plans and specific collaborative activities.

The Mersey Dee area is a strategically important and dynamic region, straddling West Cheshire and Chester, Liverpool City Region and North Wales. It contributes £22 billion to the UK economy and is one of the north's proven and 'business-critical' employment locations with a high density of significant employers, R&D assets and academic expertise. The area has proven what successful partnership working can deliver, and with continued investment this unique region can enhance its contribution to the Northern Powerhouse and the UK and to increased trade with Ireland, Europe and the world, due to its proximity to strategic trade routes.

Our proposals draw on the independent economic evidence that we have gathered over recent years, whilst also adjusting for the impact of COVID-19 and our new trading relationship with the European Union.

**Given the rapidly changing nature of the recovery, we have committed to publishing a more medium term strategy at the end of the year, taking into account recovery trends, to ensure that our collective activities have the strongest impact on delivery of our subregional vision.**

# Restarting the Cheshire and Warrington Economy

Prior to COVID-19, Cheshire and Warrington was one of the UK's success stories. It had a strong and diverse business base, high jobs growth, highly skilled workforce and a track record of partnership working and successful project delivery, although it was not without its challenges in terms of pockets of deprivation and inequality. An engine for growth, the Cheshire and Warrington economy doubled in size over the last twenty years to a GVA, pre-COVID-19, of almost £33 billion and had the potential to double again over the next twenty years.

Like the UK, our economy has been severely disrupted by Coronavirus and the national efforts to limit the spread of the disease. Over 100,000 people in Cheshire & Warrington are employed in the five sectors hit hardest by lockdown<sup>1</sup>; 128,500 workers in the area are or have been furloughed at some point during the crisis with a further 29,400 people accessing the Self-Employed Income Support Scheme, and the number of people claiming Universal Credit has increased by over 80% since March 2020.

## Business Support

Over the course of the pandemic, the LEP, business groups, local authorities, trade unions and the Community and Voluntary Sector and other key agencies have worked effectively together to respond, and as far as possible, mitigate the business impacts of the restrictions imposed to limit the spread of the virus. This has included establishing a dedicated Economic Resilience Cell under the Sub Regional Resilience Forum and developing the Cheshire Business Forum which brings together the voices of many business representation bodies and Government to ensure Cheshire business voices are directly heard. This has strengthened our partnership working, and we intend to continue to nurture these relationships beyond the

recovery, and to work with partners to respond to any future challenges as and when required.

The Growth Hub was a key point of contact for business support advice and support. Over 2020 we engaged over 4,300 SMEs to offer direct advice and have had 48,000 users of our website. This included advice for businesses on working safely during lockdown and local tier restrictions, as well as guidance for employees and the self-employed. We ran a series of COVID-19 podcasts and webinars for specific sectors, from construction to manufacturing to the professional services sector. Our regular business impact surveys and business feedback have been used to inform Government policy and support for SMEs. Marketing Cheshire has focused activity on specific business facing campaigns and on signposting businesses to the Growth Hub website and the Government resources and tailored guidance. Further information on the support available to business is available at: [candwgrowthhub.co.uk/covid-19/](https://candwgrowthhub.co.uk/covid-19/)

Giving consumers and visitors confidence that Cheshire and Warrington is somewhere that is open and safe to visit was important to reopening throughout 2020. Marketing activity focused on communicating which businesses were open and inspiring people to visit later. In the summer when businesses were open, we supported national schemes such as 'We're Good to Go' and 'Eat Out to Help Out'. As Tier systems evolved Marketing Cheshire delivered campaigns 'We Can Turn This Around /Open for Business' in partnership with the local authorities and Business Improvement Districts. We focused on 'what you can do' with social media, radio, and print media content which evolved into a winter campaign focused on promotion of online offers, pay-it-forward, and shop local during November and December. Radio, and print media content which evolved into a winter campaign focused on promotion of online offers, pay-it-forward, and shop local during November and December.

<sup>1</sup> Retail, Accommodation, Food & beverage services, Sport & leisure, Personal services.



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We engaged over 4,300 SMEs to offer direct advice and support throughout 2020.

# Supporting the hardest hit sectors

**We want to continue to support those sectors and businesses that have been hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic and stakeholder feedback confirmed universal support to do so.**

This includes our visitor economy, as well as the culture, events, hospitality, leisure, and retail sectors. Towns and high streets have been hit hard by lockdown. Google Mobility data illustrates that the closure of non-essential shops and activities resulted in a 63% reduction in footfall, leaving city and town centres empty.

Cheshire and Warrington is made up of many towns, from those with a strong industrial heritage to rural market towns, as well as the city of Chester. We will support our diverse places in collaboration with local authorities, through on-going High Street, Towns and Levelling Up Funding. This will include exploring actions for the Northern Power Towns.

The historic City of Chester provides the main visitor economy of the area alongside important national tourism attractions such as Tatton Park, Jodrell Bank, the Peak District and on into the North Wales Coast. The visitor economy is also crucial to the economy in our rural areas with many large hotels and wedding venues providing anchors to local supply chains.

Marketing Cheshire and the LEP are focussed on building on our support for the visitor economy and will work with Government to create opportunities for career development and drive productivity in the sector through ongoing domestic promotion. We are also working with the network of Destination Management Organisations (DMOs) across the North West to promote Cheshire & Warrington and engage nationally in Government's DMO review.

**The Destination Chester cluster and Destination Cheshire forums** representing over 20 business groups and larger visitor economy businesses have now been formalised and together we are engaged in developing a partnership driven coordinated strategy towards reopening and recovery.

Working with these business clusters, Marketing Cheshire are leading campaigns this year focused on staycations and day visits. They will be targeting key markets with specific propositions, to showcase the whole of the destination.

Marketing Cheshire and the LEP's Growth Hub will be supporting businesses to innovate to adapt and attract new talent so they can continue to build sustainable businesses. It will also take the opportunity to reshape the destination, and consider how it can be more sustainable and inclusive, working with local authorities, BIDs and businesses on initiatives to promote active travel and develop cultural programmes to bring people back to town and city centres.

Partner organisations and the hardest hit sectors themselves have been active in planning and supporting recovery as the following case studies demonstrate:



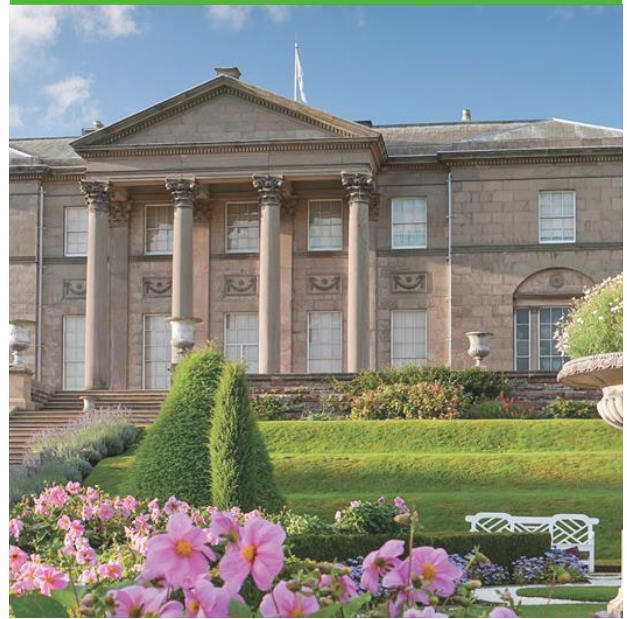
## Case Study: Destination Chester

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Destination Chester was set up in 2020 as the umbrella organisation representing the visitor economy of Chester and was formalised in February 2021.

Destination Chester works to provide a single, independent, joined-up voice for the destination. Its aims are to:

- Support the businesses and sectors hit hardest by the pandemic, including retail and hospitality, attractions and events, and creative sector freelancers.
  - Maximise and market the destination's USP's, through celebrating all the offers across Chester
  - Develop a summer and autumn events and activities programme, with safe places for friends and family to meet again that showcase the imagination of the local creative sector.
  - Step up our communication and marketing locally, regionally and nationally.
  - Destination Chester was set up in 2020 as the umbrella organisation representing the visitor economy of Chester and works to provide a single, independent, joined-up voice for the destination.
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## Case Study: Tatton Park Reopening

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Tatton Park receives the highest number of visitors of any attractions in Cheshire East, but its closure for two months at the start of the first lockdown had a major impact.

Despite this, Tatton Park was able to put measures in place to enable it to reopen in a Covid-secure way, and on a phased basis, with Parkland staying open throughout subsequent lockdowns. Even with the loss of events, weddings and group visits the attraction bounced back with visitor numbers on a par or better than 2019.

Out of necessity, online pre-booking was put in place for attractions such as the gardens and farm to cap visitor numbers at safe levels. The pandemic has brought about a rapid development of systems and new approaches, which has helped Tatton Park to adapt to ensure continued levels of business over the period. Overall, Tatton Park's survival and success during the pandemic has been helped by its quality of offer, a strong appetite for safe outdoor experiences, and a rekindled interest in locality, family and friends and the environment.

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Over £280 million of grant support has been provided by government and distributed to over 15,000 businesses through Cheshire East Council, Cheshire West and Chester Council and Warrington Borough Council.

The Growth Hub has also provided targeted support through approximately £1.5 million worth of grant support. The Cheshire & Warrington Recovery & Restructure Grant offers a grant of up to £5,000 to cover 80% of the cost of small items of equipment and other investment to support Cheshire & Warrington businesses adjust to the COVID-19 outbreak. Around 50% of this fund is directed towards the region's hard-hit visitor economy, targeting tourism, hospitality and retail businesses with support, the balance going to other businesses.

We established a Workforce Recovery Group for Cheshire and Warrington with DWP and Job Centre Plus, working closely with them to ensure the success of the Kickstart programme for the under-24s, and provide the newly unemployed with clear information and help with finding a job. We have also introduced a peer-to-peer networking programme for SME leaders through the Growth Hub. These networks have been developed to give businesses the opportunity to work together to address issues ranging from COVID-19, to EU transition, to identifying new market and growth opportunities.

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## Case study: Macclesfield Town Centre Recovery Plan

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In response to local concerns about the impacts of Covid-19 on Macclesfield Town Centre, a collaborative group of local organisations including Macclesfield Town Council, Cheshire East Council, Make it Macclesfield (CIC), Peaks and Plains Housing Trust, Macclesfield Museums and CVSCE joined forces as the Macclesfield Town Centre Recovery Working Group (MTCRWG) to develop a Town Centre Recovery Plan and push forward its delivery.

With encouragement from Professor Cathy Parker, Co-Chair of the Institute of Place Management and Research Lead on the High Street Task Force, the group surveyed businesses and residents to gather evidence to inform the plan and used innovative, pandemic friendly methods to engage with a range of local stakeholders, including the holding of virtual meetings to allow discussion on specific concerns and ideas.




↑ Say Hi! Campaign to welcome back the public to the town centre.

The resultant Macclesfield Town Centre Recovery Plan identified priorities for short to medium term interventions to support recovery of the town centre and led to a number of new workstreams which the group continue to deliver.

The group has already promoted the social media campaign 'Say Hi to the High Street', visiting local businesses with campaign materials and promoting them on social media. They have also worked with local hospitality businesses and Macclesfield Hospitality Action, to deliver a new outdoor seating area in a prominent location in the town centre, helping to boost the viability of businesses with no private outdoor space.

The group recognises the value of the collaborative relationships which have been created through this process. Although the Plan has already realised many of its short-term objectives, the Group are now thinking about how its activities can be sustained moving forward, and is eager to work with our organisation and others to realise the longer term regeneration of the Town Centre.

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A woman with long, light brown hair, wearing a white lab coat over a red top, is focused on her work in a laboratory. She is holding a glass flask containing an orange liquid. The background shows a clean, modern laboratory setting with other people working at benches.

Supporting the wider public sector and civil society as they lead the recovery in the health and wellbeing of our communities, including the mental wellbeing of workers and business owners. Continuing to support our life sciences industry to become a global leader in complex medicines.

**Delivering our vision for:**

# Healthy

Since the start of the pandemic there have been almost 61,000 cases of COVID-19 in Cheshire and Warrington and in excess of 2500 deaths<sup>2</sup>. In addition to the direct impacts on individuals and families there is increasing recognition of the toll that the pandemic and successive lockdowns have had on the wider health and well-being of communities, workers and business owners.

Covid has amplified health inequality and there is a danger that these increased inequalities could become permanent unless addressed. 60% of those that died due to Covid had a disability, which shows the importance of understanding the impact of the pandemic on different groups. It will also be important to consider the impact of long Covid on disability in the subregion, which may be significant - it is estimated that nationally there are 400,000 cases of long Covid.

#### **A safe and secure business environment**

Our organisation with Marketing Cheshire, local authority partners and business groups have been working closely together to help the owners of business premises understand the steps they need to take to remain 'Covid-secure' when open. This included the Cheshire and Warrington Restructure and Recovery Grant, and working closely with the economy and regulatory services teams in local authorities. Under normal circumstances the Community and Voluntary sector provide a range of physical and mental wellbeing services. Lockdown has severely curtailed their ability to operate, putting added pressure on primary health services. Collectively supporting charities to restart their support activities will therefore be an important activity as Lockdown eases.

The Cheshire Business Forum has established virtual drop-in sessions to provide business-to-business advice on providing a COVID-19 secure environment for employees and customers. The Federation for Small

Businesses for Cheshire and Merseyside has introduced weekly virtual cafes to help, inform, advise, and assist small businesses in adapting to COVID-19 guidance and regulations. Marketing Cheshire has worked closely with all three local authorities to provide targeted public health messages to both local communities and visitors.

We will ensure that we remain alert to any ongoing Covid challenges and be agile and ready to convene partners to respond as and when necessary. We will also advocate on behalf of businesses (including the third sector) with partners and government to help ensure that support gets to where it is needed.

<sup>2</sup> As at 16/04/2021 and 11/05/2021



↑ Alfresco dining options made available in Chester City Centre.

### **Case study: Cheshire and Warrington Restructure and Recovery Grant**

**The Cheshire and Warrington Restructure and Recovery Grant has allowed a range of businesses and the third sector to create safer and healthier environments.**

Over £1 million was awarded by the LEP to almost 500 small businesses across Cheshire and Warrington which were most impacted by the pandemic, allowing them to make key investments ensuring they were Covid-secure for reopening or adapt their businesses and premises to new ways of working. As a result of this employers were able to bring staff back from furlough and continue to trade. Without this financial support many of these businesses would have been unable to make the necessary investment and faced closure.

Beneficiaries ranged from hotels to sports clubs, to outdoor food market providers. The introduction of Personal Protective Equipment and screens allowed some businesses to continue vital work in person, such as a small engineering firm that required the use of on-site laboratory space. Beneficiaries such as restaurants and cafes were able to invest in new gazebos and outdoor furniture to expand their alfresco offer in line with Government guidance on national and local restrictions. Due to this investment, these businesses are well placed to reopen for ongoing trade.



## Mental health and economic inactivity

**Health is one of the measures of deprivation and taken as a whole, adults in Cheshire and Warrington spend around a fifth of their lives in relatively poor health.**

Over recent years, of those residents claiming Employment and Support Allowance, 47% have mental and behavioural disorders. Whilst the proportion of residents who cannot work due to chronic illness (17.6%) is lower than levels in the North West and the UK (22.3%), there are still significant numbers here who could be supported further to improve quality of life and life expectancy. It is critical that the public sector works collectively to support the wellbeing of all our residents, including those that are unable to work.

Our subregion aspires to achieving the healthy ageing target that was included in the UK industrial strategy, published by the Theresa May administration, to 'achieve an additional five years of healthy, independent life by 2035, while narrowing the gap between the experience of the richest and poorest'. Local research suggests that the most common reason people take time off work due to illness is for mental health conditions including stress, depression, and anxiety. The pandemic has undoubtedly led to a major deterioration in mental health.

Cheshire and Warrington partners are addressing this challenge by designing and promoting a range of evidence-based interventions that will enable people to feel more able to manage their mental health both when they are in work but also for those who are off work or unable to gain employment due to their condition and how this limits taking on a job. For example, Cheshire West and Chester Council have recently introduced a pilot programme of webinars for SMEs, Wellbeing 4 Performance, to provide local business leaders with a series of free online webinars to provide information and skills to help protect and develop businesses and employees, whilst the Federation of Small Businesses is also running a series of sessions on mental health open to small businesses across the sub-region.

As a subregion aiming to improve the health of our population, address inequalities, and increase life expectancy for all people, these types of activities are crucial to our ongoing success. The following case study provides an example of the invaluable work our local organisations do to support mental health in Cheshire and Warrington.

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### Case study: Cheshire Community Foundation

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**Young Minds Matter was a 3-year mental health grants programme managed by Cheshire Community Foundation, with a fund of £500,000 from generous donors in the local business community.**

The programme supported the work of Cheshire charities working in young people's mental health, demonstrating the power of private and voluntary sectors working together to make a difference to the lives of young people locally.

Pure Insight works with young care-leavers who have no-one in the world to turn to when things go wrong. At 21, Naz had to move towns after someone whom he believed to be a friend took over his flat and used it to sell drugs. When Naz protested he was met with abuse and violence and he fled fearing for his life.

The charity worked with Naz to create safety and stabilisation in his new home town and to explore the good relationships he could make locally. Naz now knows where to go in an emergency and how to build his own local support networks in the community.

He now has a GP and is receiving help with low mood and anxiety as well as with nightmares and a lack of sleep, which, in a short space of time, has been life-changing. When Naz disclosed that he was spending most of his benefits on products to help him deal with a trauma he'd been keeping secret, Pure Insight referred him to a charity to support him for free, freeing up money for food as well as helping him recover.

When the pandemic hit, Naz could have been completely alone, but Pure Insight provided a phone with 3 months unlimited calls/data so that there was always a friendly voice, a shoulder to cry on and somewhere to turn in a crisis.

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## Working with the health and care sector

Our health and care workforce have led the frontline of the pandemic response, and their efforts and contribution have made abundantly clear to all how critically important these services are within our economy. We are therefore working closely with the NHS and local authorities to identify opportunities for young people from a diverse range of backgrounds who have an interest in entering the health and social care sector and will work with the Pledge Partnership in inspiring young people and those who are not in employment to pursue careers in the sector in Cheshire and Warrington.

There are also significant opportunities for investment in our healthcare assets. Leighton Hospital and

Halton and Warrington Hospital are both developing propositions for the Hospital Infrastructure Fund. We will continue to work with local NHS Trusts to support the scoping of the schemes and in order to realise the economic opportunities and job benefits.

## Life sciences and complex medicines

Cheshire and Warrington has been at the forefront of drug discovery and development for over sixty years including the first beta-blockers and anti-oestrogens for use in cancer therapy. The current pandemic has highlighted the important role of our drug discovery and development sector in helping people to continue to live healthy and happy lives and the sector's presence and vibrancy here is an important part of our economy's overall resilience.

It is the only location in the UK which covers the whole of the life sciences life cycle from discovery to formulation, testing, manufacture and export. Alderley Park is the location of one of the first three Lighthouse COVID-19 testing labs in the country and is also the home of one of the national large-scale vaccination centres. Therefore we plan to do more to position Cheshire and Warrington Life Sciences industry (and the wider Cheshire Science Corridor) as playing a critical role in north west and national growth opportunities.

## Our vision to be a global leader in complex medicines.

As well as being home to the full lifecycle across discovery, development, delivery, and diagnostics, we have leading digital health capabilities and want to remain at the cutting-edge of medicines manufacturing. The North West Science Corridor between Liverpool City Region, Greater Manchester and Cheshire and Warrington is home to world class companies, world-leading research universities, and fast-growing entrepreneurial businesses. This powerful ecosystem can translate ground-breaking science into commercial investment and scalable medicines manufacturing. We are working with the life sciences sector locally to put this vision into practice and have already identified some early opportunities.

Ensuring that there are effective pathways to the development, formulation, testing and production of new medicines, including vaccines, will be critical for the UK moving forwards. It is also crucial to attract and retain talent in the subregion, ensuring that we have the right skills base, and encouraging new entrants to the sector.

The Medicines Discovery Catapult (MDC), based at Alderley Park, is a national centre of excellence in drug discovery with a remit to support the UK life sciences community.

The MDC is addressing systemic problems and bottlenecks and using innovative technologies to enable "fast-to-patient" medicines discovery. In contrast to the speed at which new Coronavirus vaccines have been developed, new drug development typically costs £1.15bn per drug and takes 12 years from the initial discovery stage to reach the market, so the cost and risk of failures are high. In addition, patient expectations are rising; thus, health systems around the world are demanding access to cost-competitive and innovative medicines that provide better results with fewer side effects.

To meet this market need, the medicines manufacturing platform is shifting away from the dominance of small molecules to one with a balance between small molecules and complex medicines. Despite Cheshire and Warrington being home to one of the largest concentrations of talent in Europe, including many organisations set up to support growth in this sector, the region only accounts for a fraction of this market (based on confirmed valuations of SMEs in the region of approx. £120m).

Working with government, colleagues in Liverpool and Manchester, and with the Medicines Discovery Catapult, we want to exploit the area's critical mass of expertise and infrastructure in the development and commercialisation of novel complex medicines, with robust support, validation and translational propositions to grow the local industry. The Catapult has developed proposals for a £40m National Translational Technology Development Centre and a Catapult Quarter to enable stimulus and capacity building for the UK diagnostics sector. This builds upon its success in delivering the COVID-19 lab testing platform and proven national impact across adjacent sectors of new medicines and biomarkers. It also complements government's recent investment through Strength in Places Fund into the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine and Alderley Park-based Anti-Microbial Research Centre and Getting Building Fund into a new Validation Centre of Excellence also at Alderley Park. We are also investing more widely across the North West life sciences cluster, accelerating investment in the Cheshire Science Corridor through a £30m borrowing facility agreed with the three local authorities and investing £7.8m into new lab and co-working space at Alderley Park. 150,000 sq ft of new Grade A office space has already completed in the Glasshouse (Feb 2020), which is 90% let.

Additionally we have invested £10m of Local Growth Funding in the Cheshire and Greater Manchester Life Science Fund in 2015/16, alongside CEC, GMCA and Bruntwood, creating a £31m fund. The fund has helped establish a bio-medical cluster in Alderley park alongside a similar one at Manchester Science Park. It has also raised the profile of the North West as an established place to undertake bio-medical investments and we have some high-profile drug discovery companies that have benefitted from the existing fund such as the Anti-Microbial Research Centre and Blueberry Therapeutics. However, the fund is close to being fully invested and will be closed to new investment in April 2021.

It is crucial we build on the success that the Fund has achieved. There is high demand for life science funding, especially given the 80-90% drop in early-stage capital availability compared to 2019 as investors turn away from higher risk investments. We are therefore seeking funding to enable us to contribute £10m towards the establishment of a new £50m fund, alongside Bruntwood and GMCA on a parri-passu equal footing. This fund would cover the whole of Cheshire and Warrington and Greater Manchester and run for a 15-year period with a five-year investment period. In January 2021, the LEP Board approved, in principle an initial investment of £5m.



↑ A Lab at Alderley Park, the UK's largest single site life science campus.

## Validation Centre of Excellence, Alderley Park


Building on the success of the Medicines Discovery Catapult led Lighthouse Lab, the Medicines Discovery Catapult and Alderley Park will create a new Validation Centre of Excellence for innovative diagnostics, biomarkers, and complex medicines. This will develop the UK's diagnostic capability and capacity and the associated supply chain.

We supported this project with investment from the £15.5 million Getting Building Fund award. The Validation Centre of Excellence will incorporate the creation of specialist laboratories at Alderley Park for testing for highly infectious pathogens, including respiratory viruses such as COVID-19.

## Priorities for 2021/ 2022

The LEP and its partners will:

1. Continue to work with the Cheshire Business Group to provide advice and guidance to small businesses on creating COVID-19 secure environments; and through Marketing Cheshire provide advice to the broader visitor and hospitality sectors as they reopen, including promoting the 'We're Good to Go' industry standard.
2. The Growth Hub will continue to work with the three local authorities to promote the national and local mental health support that is available to businesses and employees.
3. We will run virtual Health and Social Care Industry Insights workshops
4. Establish a Life Sciences sector group by June 2021 to develop a plan to reinforce Cheshire and Warrington as one of the best locations in the world for medicines discovery, formulation and manufacturing as set out in the Life Sciences Sector Deal. This will include exploring options for expanding and strengthening the offer of the Medicines Discovery Catapult at Alderley Park
5. Accelerate investment in the Cheshire Science Corridor Enterprise Zone following conclusion of a £30m borrowing facility through the our local authority partners.
6. Conclude negotiations by July 2021 to create a successor to the Greater Manchester and Cheshire Life Sciences Fund with a minimum fund value of £25m.
7. Deliver £5.05m Getting Building Fund investment in laboratory space for Validation Centre of Excellence at Alderley Park.
8. Deliver £4m Enterprise Zone investment in Blocks 22-24 at Alderley Park to provide 90k sq ft of new lab space plus a 2,400-space multi-storey car park.



Positioning Cheshire and Warrington at the heart of the Green Industrial Revolution, setting out how we can deliver the government's 10-Point Plan and developing clear proposals for decarbonising our economy and creating green jobs.

Our subregional partners play a huge role in this agenda, with industry, business, local authorities and others all actively engaged.

**Delivering our vision for:**

# Sustainable

## The Government's Ten Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution

In November 2020, the Prime Minister published the government's Ten Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution. Cheshire and Warrington has the knowledge, expertise and opportunity to be at the forefront of developing responses to at least four parts of the plan in particular.

In the immediate short term, they link to the recognised need to decarbonise our industrial cluster at pace and build on the work that is currently being led by those industries and groups such as Cheshire Energy Hub and Net Zero North West. They also link more broadly to the work that will be required to improve the energy efficiency of our homes, work places and the public sector estate which will provide an opportunity for the creation of new, well paid 'green jobs'.

As part of this, we recognise the importance of understanding future skills needs for the green industrial revolution and developing the right skills locally to deliver our ambitions, including working with colleges, universities, other academic institutions and training providers.

Cheshire and Warrington is recognised as being a leader in the drive to deliver low carbon energy and clean growth, with decades of industry-leading experience in energy distribution systems, fuels and nuclear engineering and design. We also have the fourth highest carbon emissions in the country. We therefore have the incentive and opportunity to be a world leader in developing and applying low carbon technologies driving economic growth and delivering a reduction in carbon emissions that will make a significant contribution to delivering not just local and regional targets but national ones as well. We will work with partners to amplify this messaging and support the cluster's case to lead this agenda nationally and globally, including in the run up to COP26 in November 2021 in Glasgow.

The message industry tells us is that for this to happen, creating a regulatory and investment framework that encourages innovation, supports a shift to smart production, distribution, and storage of low and zero carbon energy (including nuclear) and ensures critical energy infrastructure must not become a barrier during transition, and this has to be an early priority for government. Therefore we will work with partners to monitor activity and strengthen this case with government where necessary.

### The Government's Ten Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution

#### Point 1

Advancing offshore Wind

#### Point 2

Driving the growth of Low Carbon Hydrogen

#### Point 3

Delivering new and advanced Nuclear Power

#### Point 4

Accelerating the shift to Zero Emission Vehicles

#### Point 5

Green public transport, cycling and walking

#### Point 6

Jet Zero and Green Ships

#### Point 7

Greener Buildings

#### Point 8

Investing in Carbon Capture, usage and storage

#### Point 9

Protecting our natural environment

#### Point 10

Green finance and innovation

## De-carbonising Our Industrial Cluster at Ellesmere Port

The Sustainable and Inclusive Growth Commission, outlined earlier in this document, will take a longer term view to challenge the area and provide proposals for how to become a UK and global leader on sustainability and inclusion.

Our initial focus is on progressing the opportunity hydrogen, coupled with Carbon Capture Usage and Storage (CCUS) offers in decarbonising the industrial cluster centred around Ellesmere Port. One of the UK's largest, the cluster covers 100km<sup>2</sup> and consumes approximately 5% of the UK's energy for industrial processes, heat and transport. The Cluster includes some of Cheshire's major manufacturing employers covering oil refining, glass manufacture, nuclear fuel enrichment, chemical production and automotive manufacture.

Our approach in Ellesmere Port is also complementary to the designation of freeport status for the Port of Liverpool. We will continue to work in partnership with Liverpool City Region as they develop their business case to government over the coming months.

Our area is already advanced in developing firm proposals to take forward hydrogen as a key part of the energy mix in a low carbon whole energy system. Already work is progressing on the UK's largest carbon capture usage and storage plant (CCUS) at the Tata Chemicals Europe site in Northwich, which will be operational in 2021. Detailed planning is also underway on deliverable proposals for large scale hydrogen supply; hydrogen distribution; blending of hydrogen with natural gas for supply to homes; and switching of industry from natural gas to hydrogen.

Central to all of these is the £1 billion HyNet Project, which has the potential to add £17 billion of GVA, create 5000 new jobs across the North West and save over 1 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> per annum by 2025; the equivalent of taking more than 600,000 cars off the road. The HyNet project is aiming to make the area the UK's and potentially the world's first net zero industrial cluster.

Other green innovation assets in the cluster include the University of Chester's Thornton Science Park which is developing expertise in the development and use of hydrogen and green ammonia. Thornton is home to the LEP-funded Energy Innovation Centre opened in 2016.

## Net Zero North West

Net Zero North West is a newly formed industry-led cluster acting as a public and private sector investment vehicle for industrial decarbonisation and clean growth projects in the North West. Its core mission is to become the UK's first low carbon industrial cluster by 2030 and world's first net zero industrial cluster by 2040. Through this work the cluster aims to supercharge the UK's green recovery by driving job creation, innovation, and investment in the North West and net zero economy. Net Zero North West unites business, Local Enterprise Partnerships, Metro Mayors, boroughs and academia to build a united voice and holistic vision for industrial decarbonisation in the North West.

## Smart Energy Networks

Industry and academia have come together through the Cheshire Energy Hub to develop an Energy Innovation District (EID) in Cheshire and Warrington. It has the potential to become the UK's first low carbon industrial cluster by 2030, implementing market leading solutions to reduce the cost of low or zero carbon energy for all users in the region. Government has recognised this potential already with over £25 million provided in the last year alone to support project development. In support of this ambition we have already commissioned the E-Port Net Zero Blueprint For Capital Investment project, and Invest Net Zero is now actively marketing the investment propositions which came out of that blueprint.

The project looked at existing energy use and generation in the area which involved talking to industrial, commercial and residential energy users to find out how much energy they use. It then considered opportunities for current and future energy generation, including renewables and at how future energy uses, like electric vehicles, and new fuels, like hydrogen, could change the energy market.

We provided almost £750,000 towards development of this master plan which set out a ten-year private sector investment programme for developing a smart grid in Ellesmere Port. The smart grid will allow local businesses and residents to buy and trade energy locally, rather than relying on the national grid. This project supports and is complementary to decarbonising the Ellesmere Port industrial cluster, and to the area's bid to be the UK / world's first net zero industrial cluster.

<sup>4</sup> DIT estimates

## World Leader in Nuclear Power

The national and international market for nuclear new build, maintenance and decommissioning is estimated at over £1.2 trillion by 2030<sup>4</sup>. Companies in Cheshire and Warrington are at the vanguard of research into the next generation of nuclear reactors including nuclear fusion, small modular reactors and even smaller micro reactors such as U-Battery. The area also has unparalleled knowledge related to the maintenance and decommissioning of nuclear sites. Supporting innovation and enabling new entrants into the nuclear supply chain can be challenging due to the nature of the sector and the level of regulation that applies when working in the nuclear market. The sub-region is working with government, the Nuclear Advanced Manufacturing Research Centre and other LEP areas to develop a business case proposal aiming to strategically support the nuclear supply chain in the UK, as set out in the Nuclear Sector Deal.

**From engineering design, construction, operation and decommissioning there are huge opportunities to strengthen the UK nuclear supply chain and export our skills and expertise around the world.**

The nuclear sector supports over 6,000 jobs in Cheshire and Warrington including a significant concentration of design and engineering expertise at Birchwood, Warrington and at Capenhurst. There is a real opportunity for the UK to grow this further, boost our capacity and capability for R&D into next generation and fusion and small modular reactors in doing so delivering more highly skilled, productive jobs.

The proposals for new nuclear reactors at Sizewell in Suffolk, along with decommissioning of the existing nuclear fleet in the UK and around the world offer significant opportunities for the nuclear supply chain in our area.

We will work with the nuclear sector locally to develop ideas to accelerate, stimulate and inspire innovation between industry, academia and Government to develop, commercialise and promote nuclear energy, and make the case for further investment in the sector (and the Cheshire Science Corridor). Knowledge developed from leveraging the significant nuclear competency at Birchwood Park in Warrington can be applied to other technology dependent sectors, such as aerospace and renewables. We will continue to ensure strong propositions for the low carbon energy sector across the subregion.



↑ Hydrogen/Electric Hybrid Refuse Vehicles at Cheshire East Depot.

## Case Study: Hydrogen Refuelling, Project Vanguard

Storengy UK in partnership with Cheshire East Council will be building a green hydrogen refuelling station in Middlewich, Cheshire. This programme was funded via the LEP. The facility will produce hydrogen in the greenest way possible – using an electrolyser connected to solar panels. This will provide safe, clean hydrogen fuel, which will be pumped into dual-fuel bin trucks used by the council and a Storengy works vehicle. The project will see a reduction of diesel usage by more than 10,000 litres per year, reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and improving local air quality benefits.



## Promoting active and sustainable travel

Transitioning to a sustainable economy is not just about decarbonising heat and power. Transport currently accounts for around 26% of greenhouse gas emissions. To tackle this, we need more investment in digital infrastructure to reduce the need to travel and support the switch to electric and autonomous vehicles, and to other sustainable transport modes including consideration of micro mobility schemes to accommodate travel needs. The Sustainable and Inclusive Growth Commission is considering transport as a key theme, and will present proposals on this to inform our longer term strategy.

This subregional focus on active travel, in particular walking and cycling, and our complementary focus on natural capital and biodiversity net gain, will have the added bonus of improving health, quality of life and ultimately life expectancy for residents.

We were unsuccessful in bidding for Transforming Cities Fund (TCF), primarily because of the focus on larger cities. We will continue to put the case to government that similar funding mechanisms need to be put in place for our key towns, including Chester, Warrington and Crewe, so that we can build upon the work undertaken for the TCF bids and, more recently, the work to implement emergency schemes during the pandemic, to encourage a permanent shift to walking and cycling.

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### Case Study: Carbon free public transport

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**Warrington Council has plans which would enable Warrington's Own Buses, the Council's arm's length bus company, to roll out an electric fleet as well as providing associated charging infrastructure.**

This would be available to all other bus operators in the town. The Council is currently in the process of relocating the Warrington's Own Buses' existing depot to free up a prime site for regeneration as part of the Southern Gateway plans. Getting Building Fund has been secured to enable provision to be made for it to become an electric bus depot.

## Natural capital and the economy in rural areas

Natural capital, farming and the rural economy play a key role in making Cheshire and Warrington an attractive place to live, visit and invest. It is also critical in building our resilience to climate change and as part of long-term sustainable growth. Intensive dairy farming has shaped the landscape of Cheshire and Warrington for centuries, it has the second largest dairy herd in the country and almost 2,900 farm holdings covering cereal and crop production, dairy, beef, fowl and other animals. There are opportunities to work with some of the major landowners in Cheshire and Warrington to respond to the opportunities in the post-Brexit farming and environment framework, to improve practices and natural capital, soil quality and wider biodiversity. Cheshire and Warrington is keen to work with Defra to explore how early action could be taken in this area.

During 2020 we worked with several partners to commission a Natural Capital Audit which will provide a detailed baseline for the existing provision of blue and green infrastructure. During 2021 we will develop initial proposals for an investment pipeline of projects that could, amongst other things, reduce the risk of flooding, increase the amount of carbon stored in the natural environment and improve air quality.

The Sustainable and Inclusive Growth Commission also has a specific workstream looking at land use management and decarbonising agriculture. We will support work to examine the potential for a specific green investment fund for Cheshire and Warrington that could be used to support local carbon offsetting activity for any elements of our economy that are impractical or too costly to fully decarbonise.

## Priorities for 2021/ 2022

The LEP and its partners will:

1. As part of ongoing collaboration through Net Zero North West to de-carbonise the industrial cluster located along the south bank of the River Mersey, commission economic consultants by June 2021 to develop the strategic and economic case.
2. Work with the University of Chester to secure an investment/development partner for Thornton Science Park before the end of the calendar year.
3. Work with industry and neighbouring areas to use COP26 in November 2021 as a vehicle to progress the regions energy priorities. This will be supported by a strengthened communications strategy for our Energy and Clean Growth objectives.
4. Work with the Cheshire and Warrington Rural Strategy Board to develop proposals for implementing the findings of the Natural Capital Audit, and continue to support the economy in rural areas to recover from COVID-19 whilst meeting our sustainability goals.
5. The LEP's Employer Skills Board will work with industry and providers to put in place plans by August 2021 to respond to the employment opportunities and skills requirements of the Green Industrial Revolution.



Supporting skills and employment opportunities locally, channelling investment to provide opportunity and growth for all our communities, levelling up economic disparities, and boosting our subregion's places such as town centres and high streets. **Delivering our vision:**

# Inclusive

**Cheshire and Warrington will be a place where people, regardless of their background or circumstances, are helped to 'live their best lives'.**

Government has placed 'levelling up' at the heart of its programme. Notwithstanding the economic success of Cheshire and Warrington as a whole, 5% of our population were in the top 10% most deprived places in the country on the Index of Multiple Deprivation areas and nearly a quarter of our workforce was earning below the real living wage<sup>5</sup> - a larger percentage than in Manchester, and we aim to reduce this proportion. We also aim to get back to pre Covid levels of unemployment faster than the national average.

**Local Authorities are developing their own plans for supporting recovery in their communities.**

We have a role in supporting local plans where appropriate and add value where it can as well as to coordinate projects that are more strategic and larger scale. Levelling up is a strategic government driver and therefore warrants collective further attention.

We are supporting the Sustainable and Inclusive Growth Commission to put forward proposals to positively create an inclusive economy, and address inequality in the subregion. This will include working on ways in which subregional partners can consider inclusion in their policy and investment decisions. This may include a focus on Digital Inclusion, to help ensure that all households have access to essential online resources, which became a key focus with the pandemic.

## Digital Careers and Jobs Fairs

At the beginning of 2020, the Pledge and the Digital Skills Partnership agreed to pilot an approach to on-line Careers/Jobs fairs. The previously well-established model that operated at the time was that a single business would do a session with 30-40 learners in a school or college. Network Rail and Bentley brokered

a partnership between Learn Live, the Pledge, and Warrington & Vale Royal College to pilot a very successful on-line event focussed on Wind Turbines in early March 2020.

With the onset of the pandemic this approach to careers and jobs fairs for young people was mainstreamed in Cheshire and Warrington, with

regular online events organised. Now, typically, 8,000 young people from across Cheshire and Warrington will take part in an event. Feedback from employers, teachers, and the young people themselves has been very positive. Employers such as Sellafield have said that they value the opportunity to have meaningful encounters with such high volumes of learners.

As the pandemic began to take its toll on jobs, the Pledge partnered with Job Centre Plus (JCP) to use the approach developed for young people to deliver an

all-age online jobs fair. The most recent event attracted 11,000 participants (many aged over 40). Cheshire JCP has now mainstreamed the approach developed with the delivery of monthly online job fairs. As a result of the success of these online events TalkTalk and McCann Medical have approached Cheshire JCP and initiated an online 'Ambition 21' event for the whole of the North West Region. We are looking at continuing with these approaches, which support economic inclusion in our communities, and also assist with tackling underemployment. We know that there is a strong link between employment and better health outcomes, and therefore this activity supports our whole vision.

<sup>5</sup> As defined by the Resolution Foundation



↑ Left to Right: Council Leader Louise Gittins, Tracy - Community Inspirer, Sharon Wallace - ForHousing at Poverty Truth Commission Celebration Event, March 2020.

## Case Study: West Cheshire Poverty Truth Commission

### The West Cheshire Poverty Truth Commission started with a question:

Could people living in poverty help shape the way a borough's leaders make decisions about the support services in place? Would it make a difference to the decisions that are being made? Would it also strengthen relationships, change attitudes and create solutions to some of the difficult questions poverty creates?

The West Cheshire PTC found that the answer to that is yes. Following on from the success of the very first Poverty Truth Commission (PTC) in Glasgow, Scotland, the first West Cheshire PTC (WCPTC) was set up in 2017, with the aim of tackling the root causes of poverty. The WCPTC was the first to be led and administered by a Local Authority, Cheshire West and Chester Council, helping to address gaps in services and inequalities across the borough. The success of the first WCPTC led to the launch of a second WCPTC

in 2019 that ran until March 2020 and now continues via an Advisory Board to drive work around the poverty emergency declared for the borough in October 2020.

The Board continues to make sure people with lived experience are at the heart of how the borough thinks and acts when tackling poverty and inequality. The WCPTC aimed to give a face to the facts by creating safe spaces for community inspirers, those with lived experience of poverty, to tell their stories. It also provided opportunities for those making and influencing decisions to listen. The WCPTC framework ensured that people with lived experience are at the heart of how the borough thinks and acts in tackling poverty and inequality and this continues to inform the approach of the Board and the Fairer Future Strategy being developed in 2021.

## Supporting our young people in education and employment.

Even before the pandemic, the skills landscape was changing to respond to the needs of business having to operate in a new, digital and hi-tech world. The pandemic has had a significant effect on our existing workforce, our current learners and our future talent pipeline. The young have been particularly affected by the pandemic: -

- Our young people are dealing with a 74% reduction in 16-18 apprenticeship starts this April compared to last year.
- Based on historic data, 54% of 18-year-olds will be seeking a job or an apprenticeship this summer, but those opportunities will probably not be there due to economic impacts of the pandemic.
- This amounts to 10,000 18 year olds 'at risk' (of not being in employment, education or training) in Cheshire and Warrington as well as a further c.1,400 16 year olds who have historically not progressed to post-16 education.
- Place of residence, disadvantage and gender constrain young people's attainment and the constraints are being significantly increased because of COVID-19.
- The pandemic has also highlighted the importance of digital connectivity to the attainment of young people, and that 13% of secondary school pupils don't have access to a computer and/or the internet emphasising the importance of digital inclusion.

Our #GettingStudentsOnline digital inclusion campaign provided funding to make local businesses aware of the numbers of our students without access to computers or the internet and invite them to make donations of cash or new computers to schools to assist these students.

The funding was used to purchase laptops for a range of Cheshire and Warrington schools with the highest percentage of students who are eligible for free school meals.

We are already delivering programmes of support where we have worked with our employers to inspire young people. We have established our 'Pledge' network to inform young people about new technologies and career opportunities. During the pandemic this has been complemented by virtual careers fairs delivered in partnership with schools and colleges across Cheshire and Warrington.

Through these methods we also promote and encourage take up of apprenticeships, which are a tool for levelling up, enabling people who may be put off by high fees for education and those preferring a more vocational approach to learning, to achieve career success.

### Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Working Group

The Cheshire and Warrington SEND working group was formed to address the issue that currently, only 29% of young people with SEND go onto employment post 18. Nationally, there are estimated to be 1.37 million young people with special educational needs and disability, which is a large number of potential employees who could bring benefit to the economy.

The SEND group has worked to produce guidelines and material that can support employers, education providers and young people to confidently enter the world of work. The SEND group has now joined forces with the employers' Equality and Diversity group to create a social mobility group which enables live opportunities to be shared and taken up by young people with SEND. It has also allowed our network of employers to better prepare themselves for taking on a young person with SEND. Some of the key outcomes to date have been -

- Autism Awareness Training delivered by a partner specialist school to employers
- Development of young person and employer profiles to aid communication between the two parties
- A combined force of education providers and employers to deliver work experience opportunities and paid employment

The group will be measuring the success of the work through Gatsby data and through the number of placements and paid employment secured.

## Workforce recovery

As stated above, we established a subregional Workforce Recovery Group working with DWP and Job Centre Plus as part of our pandemic response. Partners will embed the success of our existing programmes outlined below and respond to the priorities emerging from this group including ensuring the success of the Government's Kickstart programme, providing the newly unemployed with clear information and help with finding a job, support business start-ups, strengthening skills brokerage and account manager roles within our organisation, and continuing to ensure this approach works for the whole subregion. The group also monitors complex needs of those furthest from the labour market and has a trajectory for reducing unemployment faster than the national average. This group's approach complements local programmes, such as Accelerate with the University of Chester and the subregional Digital Skills Partnership. We will focus on three specific skills and education priorities via this group: -

**Young People** - our employers will be at the heart of inspiring and informing people about future technologies, career pathways and learning so that they can make well-informed decisions about their futures.

For younger people making career choices or entering the jobs market for the first time, The Pledge programme, led by local employers to inspire and inform young people about new technologies and career opportunities shifted with advice from our Digital Skills Partnership to deliver a programme of successful online career events. Jobcentre Plus quickly adopted this online model and established a programme of online job fairs – the last event attracted over 11,000 participants on the day.

By December 2021 each secondary school in Cheshire and Warrington will have an allocated Enterprise Advisor (currently 61% have one), and we are targeting engagement with an additional 100 employers as part of the pledge programme.

**Employees** - employees will develop the skills and aptitudes that employers require to be able to grow, innovate and adopt digital. Highlighted skill gaps include amongst others green energy, life sciences, logistics, digital and STEM skills to support our key sectors.

We continue to work with partners and business to understand the impact of the pandemic on the local labour market and also the opportunities for employment growth in recovery. This includes completing by August 2021 a deep dive into the skills needs of the low carbon sector.

Digital and STEM skills will be central to the future economy and to support this we will develop the business case for an **Institute of Technology** for submission by April 2022. We will continue to work closely with the University of Chester and other providers to rescope and repurpose the **Accelerate Programme**.

**Economically Inactive and Unemployed** – those who are out of work will be helped to access employment; those who are threatened with unemployment will be helped to stay employed; and those furthest from the labour market will be helped to move closer to it. We will align national and local programmes, and local investment (where available), to secure maximum impact.

Whilst clear plans are emerging to prepare people to quickly return people to work, creating jobs for them in the short term is a greater challenge.

Getting workers currently furloughed back into their old jobs as their employers gain the confidence to reopen and make their premises and facilities 'Covid-secure' is a first step in the process. We are also engaged with DWP on the implementation of the Kickstart Jobs Scheme to ensure that every young person who wants one is offered a high-quality placement that equips them for a bright future. We are also offering to add 60% to any money that employers spend on formal training for young people on the Kickstart programme. By December 2021 we aim to have secured 1,500 Kickstart placements and separately, to have successfully delivered a series of skills bootcamps with a minimum of 40 participants securing job interviews.

## Investment in strategic infrastructure and priority housing

As an area we also have specific and unique opportunities to bring forward inclusive growth to unlock opportunities and help level up disparities between communities. Some of these are driven by national investment in key infrastructure.

They include exploiting the opportunities offered by the arrival of HS2 services at Crewe and Northern Powerhouse Rail (NPR) and HS2 at Warrington. These provide a once in a generation opportunity to level up places like Crewe, Winsford and parts of Warrington by delivering high value jobs, housing and infrastructure as well as making a significant contribution to wider economic growth across the sub-region. This will require a proactive public sector investment strategy that facilitates the delivery of key development, infrastructure and other interventions that will unlock and accelerate growth, and consideration of social value procurement and activities like pre recruitment for major schemes, to support social inclusion. The LEP and our partners will work with local authorities to understand in more detail the actions that can be taken to mainstream inclusivity into strategic infrastructure decisions.

We have brought together key strategic employment sites, housing growth areas and town centre regeneration programmes in the towns of Crewe, Middlewich, Winsford, Northwich and Warrington to create a High-Speed Growth Corridor that runs from Crewe to Warrington. This includes significant opportunities around hub stations at Crewe (HS2) and Warrington Bank Quay (HS2 / NPR).

It will build on traditional strengths in high value manufacturing, engineering and logistics as well as growing financial and professional services in Crewe and Warrington. We aim to secure a Tax Increment Financing (TIF) model in which we and our local authority partners actively invest up front in infrastructure (including local contributions to the HS2 and NPR hub stations) and new development by borrowing against future business rate income from a selected number of strategic employment sites. The proposals have the potential to deliver 39,000 new homes, 6m sq ft of new office space, 9,000 new jobs and £280+ million of investment.

Housing is an important part of sustainable growth – getting the right houses built in the right locations at an affordable price to attract and retain the talent our economy needs. New housing growth will be facilitated through our strategic partnership with Homes England.

Within the High Speed Growth Corridor we have identified a series of Housing Pathfinder Schemes that will benefit from LEP, Local Authority and Homes England co-investment.

A Strategic Outline Business Case for the Growth Corridor has been developed and has been submitted for consideration. We are now looking to government to actively engage in discussions on delivering this ambitious programme.

## Accelerating town centre and high street renewal

Several places in Cheshire and Warrington have been successful in securing funding through the Stronger Towns Fund and Future High Streets Fund. This has recognised the reality that despite the success of our economy overall some parts of the region need additional support and investment if they are to reach their full potential. It will be important that residents and businesses living in these communities see rapid progress in developing and delivering the projects set out in the successful bids from Warrington, Winsford and Crewe. This work will be led locally through the governance arrangements set up to support the bidding process.

↓ Ellesmere Port's new Civic Hub, part of High Street regeneration.







↑ The Pyramid Warrington, one of the areas to benefit from funding.

## Case study: Warrington Stronger Towns Fund Proposals

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Warrington has been awarded £22.5m from the Stronger Towns Fund to support delivery of an ambitious Investment Plan which outlines seven core projects that would help to provide long-lasting benefits to the town. The plan includes funding proposals for:

**A digital enterprise hub.** Which would be aimed at supporting all aspects of digital and disruptive technologies.

**A health and wellbeing hub.** Helping to reduce health deprivation and improve quality of life, as well as increasing accessibility to healthcare and wellbeing services. The hub would be developed in vacant retail space in the town centre and will help provide more mental health services, assessments for older people and access to a range of council health and wellbeing services.

**An advanced construction training centre.** Which will develop sustainable building skills and provide an opportunity to reskill people in sectors such as housebuilding, surveying, plumbing and civil engineering that have declined during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**An all-electric bus fleet depot** – Providing the stimulus for the full electrification of a Warrington bus fleet and replace the depot with land for sustainable housing.

**A comprehensive active travel programme.** Putting in place the right infrastructure to encourage more walking and cycling throughout the town centre. This would include redesigning key town centre streets with cyclists and pedestrians in mind, establishing a Community Cycle Hub in the town centre and would ensure a series of bus priority measures to encourage people to take public or active transport methods.

**A health and social care academy.** Which will support workers to integrate the latest technology into their work, and will offer opportunities to build a social care workforce in Warrington fit for the future.

**A remastered cultural hub at the Pyramid.** Which will nurture the arts professionals of the future, providing a modern and flexible creative space to collaborate, produce, present and perform. A refurbished Pyramid will improve Warrington's cultural offering, attracting a range of high quality touring artists, as well as providing a platform to showcase our own local talent.

## Priorities for 2021/ 2022

The LEP and its partners will: -

1. Engage an additional 100 employers (of which at least 20 are digital) between now and Dec 2021 in the successful delivery of the Pledge programme. This will mean over 500 employers will be engaged with the Pledge and at least 70% of schools achieve Gatsby Benchmark 5
2. Have enterprise advisors in all our schools by December 2021 (currently 61% of schools have an enterprise advisor) including at least 20 digital and STEM.
3. Hold 15 career events (all including a digital and/ or STEM theme and at least one in a health-related theme) and a comprehensive library of videos by December 2021.
4. Ensure at least 60% of schools achieve Gatsby Benchmark 6 by September 2022, and develop a coherent programme of work experience for all our young people in Key stages 4 and 5 to be developed between now and Sept 2022 (including a 20% increase in the number of young people undertaking digital and STEM placements and at least 40 students undertaking work experience in the NHS).
5. Through the Workforce Recovery Group work with the Department for Work and Pensions and Job Centre Plus, expand the range of virtual and online support for people impacted by redundancy because of the pandemic, including delivering six online job fairs and skills bootcamps with 40 participants securing job interviews by January 2022.
6. Aim to secure 1500 Kickstart job placements for young people in Cheshire and Warrington.
7. Work with government to progress the High-Speed Growth Corridor Business Case and ensure it benefits existing communities within Cheshire and Warrington.
8. Work with local partners including Town Boards in Crewe, Warrington and Winsford to implement Future High Street Fund programmes and Town Investment Plans and develop further bids to the Levelling Up Fund.
9. Invest £25,000 during 2021-22 to support development of business cases for the first housing pathfinder projects.

Investing in our healthy, sustainable, and inclusive objectives is essential to delivering fast growth that benefits everyone in our area, whether that be through backing our life sciences and energy sectors, or in providing careers advice and skills support for our young people and those seeking employment.  
**Delivering our vision:**

# Growing

**At the same time, if we are to continue to have a growing economy, create jobs and opportunities locally, and continue to restore Cheshire and Warrington's prosperity and productivity, we also must get the foundations of the economy right.**

## Our vision for Growing

Alongside the activity set out above, we will focus on the following four areas.

- **Innovation and ideas:** Capitalising on the amazing innovation assets in our area, including our world-class energy, life sciences and manufacturing sectors and building stronger links with other places in the UK and beyond so that new ideas can be supported and brought to market.
- **Skills and labour markets:** Inspiring and informing our existing and emerging workforce about new technologies and career opportunities so they can make informed decisions about the skills they need to acquire in a changing economy, supporting our colleges and other training providers to build the capacity and capability to deliver the skills we need and helping those who face particular challenges to get back into employment and connected with opportunities.
- **Business growth:** Supporting business to grow and successfully adapt to change. As well as recovering from the impact of COVID-19, this also means adapting to our new trading arrangements with the world, and making sure that our economy remains outward-facing and an exporting powerhouse.
- **Connectivity and infrastructure:** Making sure that we stay connected, physically and digitally, and that we have clear plans for investment in the infrastructure that we need for a successful, growing, healthy, sustainable and inclusive economy.

## Innovation and ideas

To deliver sustained improvements in productivity and ensure that Cheshire & Warrington has large numbers of high quality, well-paid and rewarding jobs, science, research and innovation need to be at the heart of recovery and our long-term planning. This has been recognised nationally by government with the publication of its Research and Development Roadmap<sup>6</sup> in July 2020 and its more recent Plan for Growth.

Cheshire and Warrington has an enviable depth and breadth of science, research and innovation assets and expertise. From discovery and development of the next generation of medicines and drug treatments, at Alderley Park, energy research expertise at Birchwood Park and Thornton Science Park to the headquarters of the world's largest science experiment, the Square Kilometre Array at Jodrell Bank – our area is at the forefront of new discovery and innovation.

We have already set out the importance of the life sciences and energy sectors to our vision for a healthy, inclusive and sustainable region. We will continue to ensure the Cheshire Science Corridor is a key focus for the development and commercialisation of ideas, and work with other key sectors, such as manufacturing, to help them remain at or enter the cutting edge of innovation.

Manufacturing remains at the heart of the Cheshire and Warrington economy, and at the forefront of process innovation with increasing use of digitisation and artificial intelligence in the design and production process.

Home to national and international brands including Bentley Motors, Vauxhall, Siemens, Tata Chemicals and AstraZeneca, Cheshire and Warrington has a rich heritage of manufacturing excellence including a significant legacy from ICI (Imperial Chemical Industries) which had a major presence in the sub region. From luxury cars, fuels, and chemicals, through to a range of household brands in food, drink and consumer goods, Cheshire and Warrington benefits from a diverse and highly productive manufacturing base. Around a quarter of Cheshire and Warrington's GVA and almost 10% of employment is generated by manufacturing activity and includes a mix of primes and lower tier suppliers. This in turn drives significant export activity and inward investment.

We will ensure that we continue to monitor our sectoral mix and growth trajectories, including which sectors have the best potential for innovation and growth.

<sup>6</sup> [tinyurl.com/govroadmap](https://tinyurl.com/govroadmap)

## Skills and labour markets

We have already set out the importance of education and skills to our goals for an inclusive Cheshire and Warrington. This is particularly the case for the young people and those that have lost their jobs because of the pandemic.

Alongside the impact of the pandemic, much of the analysis that underpinned Cheshire and Warrington's Skills and Education Plan when it was published in 2018 remains valid. Many of the key features of the Cheshire and Warrington labour market identified therein continue to prevail: The employer base is strong and makes a significant contribution to UK plc, the ageing workforce will drive high levels of replacement demand, Future demand for skills will increasingly be at Level 4+, High numbers of residents earn below the Real Living Wage, and may be experiencing in-work poverty. The Employers' Skills and Education Board believes that the key market failure identified in the Plan, that:

"We have a clear mis-match between the skills employers need and the skills individuals choose to acquire. This is because not enough people get the information they need to make informed decisions about the subjects to study and the careers to follow. This is particularly true for STEM and Digital skills."

We will continue to work with businesses to ensure we have an employer led approach that provides skills for growth. As a first step, we will work with the University of Chester to re-scope the Accelerate skills brokerage programme to ensure that it can deliver in a post-Covid environment.

We recognise the critical importance of STEM and digital skills to the future Cheshire and Warrington economy. In response to this we have invested £5m skills capital to ensure that learners and businesses can access cutting edge equipment to develop the skills needed for the future. A range of projects are being supported including:

- the Made.Digital project where at least 9,000 young people over 5 years will be learning how to use technology and develop important coding skills for the modern digital and hi-tech economy.
- the Widening Access to Technology and Digital Skills (STREAM) project – a collaboration between 3 training providers and various community organisations, raising awareness of digital skills. The project is facilitating access to technology and opportunities.

- to develop digital skills. Live streaming will ensure this project has a wide reach to over 15,000 people over 5 years.
- Advanced Construction Training (ACT) centres which involve a 'hub and spoke' model and are driving collaboration between all our local colleges and employers to develop, commercialise and promote digital technologies and skills training for construction, nuclear and allied industries. The specialist equipment being purchased through the investment has been agreed upon following consultation with employers and will enhance existing resources at each of the partner colleges.

## Business growth

Cheshire and Warrington has a strong track record in exporting and attracting inward investment, and in

an effort to deliver quicker recovery and position our place as a top destination for foreign investment in the post-EU trading environment, we want to increase our place marketing and inward investment activity and intensity with subregional partners. This includes continuing to work with the Department for International Trade on developing the world class life science and pharmaceutical cluster in East Cheshire and South Manchester as a High Potential Opportunity.

Near to two major UK cities and with excellent transport links, Cheshire and Warrington is a major logistics hub, with concentrations in Warrington and Crewe. A large employer with over 29,000 jobs, logistics and distribution has experienced high employment and business growth in recent years. It includes well known names such as Eddie Stobart, ASDA, Hermes, and AO. This has been accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The growth of logistics in Cheshire and Warrington is in part due to the development of OMEGA, a £1 billion 575-acre mixed-use development on the site of the former Burtonwood Airbase near the junction of the M6 and M62 motorways. The area has specialisms in warehousing and support activities for transport, and postal and courier services; and significant opportunities to innovate in the future.

With over 5,000 VAT-registered businesses, employing nearly 70,000 people, the Financial and Business Services sector in Cheshire and Warrington is significant in terms of employment and GVA. It covers a range of activities including banking, credit, insurance and pension funding, wealth management, legal and accounting, involving many high profile, global brands.

Also, with support from DIT we have put dedicated resources in place to respond to Inward Investment opportunities including support for existing foreign-owned companies in the area to expand, and also to support business with aspirations to export their goods and services. We have also recently welcomed a dedicated export manager seconded from DIT who is leading on developing a new export strategy for the sub region as well as offering practical support to businesses on the benefits of exporting.

We also want to strengthen the support provided through our Growth Hub, particularly in identifying and supporting high potential start-ups and then, with enhanced mentoring and support, help more businesses to scale up, in doing so creating more jobs. Supporting existing businesses with plans for expansion and job creation, as well as targeted inward investment activity is another proven way of stimulation economic growth and delivering jobs. As part of this we launched a new Peer-to-Peer networking programme in November 2020. This programme will bring together 100 SMEs with the ambition and ability to grow to share best practice as well as real world experience on surviving and thriving through COVID-19 and EU Exit. This has already proven invaluable with early feedback from participants very positive.

As set out above, we also recognise the disproportionate impact the COVID-19 impact has had on some businesses. This is especially true for the retail sector where structural changes in digital shopping have accelerated changes within the sector; as well as those in the events, leisure, hospitality and visitor economy,

We are also keen to understand the positive role that the cultural and creative sector can play in driving recovery across Cheshire and Warrington and creating a strong quality of life for our residents. In many places, this sector has helped bring a renewed focus and drive to communities, high streets and town centres. with many pockets of excellence that have grown in recent years.

## Connectivity and infrastructure

As part of its submission in response to the Comprehensive Spending Review in September 2020, we set out a series of initial investment priorities through a sub-regional investment pipeline. Over the course of three years we are investing £1.2 million to support the development of business cases for several schemes to ensure that they are well progressed and in a good position to secure the capital investment needed to deliver them. We have a strong partnership approach for the delivery of these objectives with local authorities, and other key partners (e.g. Homes England, Environment Agency, Highways Agency etc).

During 2021 we will undertake further development and refinement of this pipeline, so that it supports our growth ambitions, ensures we have the skilled talent pipeline we need and the digital connectivity that will be so important in the future economy. We will also continue to build relationships for investment with bodies such as the new National Investment Bank.

Hence, short-term priorities will be particularly focused on developing a pipeline of schemes comprising:

- active travel schemes and investment in all-electric buses to support walking, cycling and public transport;
- schemes in the Mersey-Dee area and in our high-speed growth corridor, to deliver 6m sq ft of new office space, 9,000 new jobs and a £280+ million of investment;
- addressing digital inclusivity and enabling Cheshire and Warrington to grasp the new digital opportunities created by the pandemic through our digital infrastructure plan.

Investment in the Strategic Road Network and the Rail Network will also be important for supporting long-term growth. Network Rail is currently undertaking a Continuous Modular Strategic Plan to identify key infrastructure requirements and Highways England will be shortly engaging with stakeholders for Road Investment Strategy 3. It is critical that DfT, Highways England and Network Rail work closely with us to ensure that national infrastructure improvements to support economic growth of the sub-region are developed and then delivered in a timely manner. One of the future changes that has been massively accelerated by the Coronavirus crisis has been a shift to doing business, work and learning online. At the height of the crisis it is estimated that nearly half of those in employment were working remotely from home<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> [tinyurl.com/onshomeworking](https://tinyurl.com/onshomeworking)

Online retail has experienced as much growth (as a proportion of all sales) in the last five months as in the previous 10 years and now accounts for over 30% of all retail purchases<sup>8</sup>. And young people have relied on a range of online platforms and resources in order to continue their education whilst schools, colleges and university campuses have been closed. Therefore, digital connectivity is integral to our aspirations for a healthy, sustainable, inclusive and growing Cheshire and Warrington, and underscores the importance of digital inclusion to our core vision

Cheshire and Warrington has perhaps been fortunate that such good progress has been made in provision of high speed fibre broadband through the Connecting Cheshire programme. But there remain a number of areas that struggle with getting a decent broadband service, especially if there are multiple demands on broadband width within the household and even the neighbourhood.

We are currently finalising a Digital Infrastructure Plan which looks at options to improve coverage in those areas which do experience poor service, but also at a range of investments that could be made to improve and enhance existing coverage across the area to meet the changing demands of businesses and households and of places.

Two emerging priorities of the Digital Infrastructure Plan for us to take forward are:

- Develop a pipeline of 'shovel-ready' projects within the C&W LEP sub-region to improve digital connectivity for residents and businesses. This could include enabling gigabit infrastructure across the sub-region, extended 4G roll-out and 5G trials, and adoption of digital skills amongst business and communities.
- Develop and promote a narrative setting out the opportunities for digital innovation and testbed facility within C&W LEP sub-region, highlighting key sector and regional strengths - manufacturing, life sciences, energy & clean growth, finance & business services, and logistics & distribution.

Our investment programme reflects identified priorities across the Mersey Dee geography including digital infrastructure, rail and sustainable transport projects to support growth and movement cross border. The Growth Track 360 prospectus<sup>9</sup> sets out priorities for cross-border rail improvements, alongside wider transport investments in the MDA area. We and our partners will continue to review the overall transport

<sup>8</sup> [tinyurl.com/onsbusiness](https://tinyurl.com/onsbusiness), <sup>9</sup> [growthtrack360.com](https://growthtrack360.com)

and infrastructure picture, which has been affected by Covid, to understand new usage patterns, and consider future developments that support health, inclusion and sustainability as well as fast growth.

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## Case Study: Getting Building Fund Chester Drainage Tunnel

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£5.5m has been awarded from the Getting Building Fund to construct a new rainwater drainage tunnel, which forms a critical part of delivering Phase 1 of the Northgate scheme in the centre of Chester. It will also enable other regeneration schemes to be developed. The tunnel will be almost 1km long and 1.2m diameter and will deliver environmental benefits such as significantly reducing the risk of flooding and the separation of rainwater from foul water.

The Northgate scheme this supports will replace existing poor-quality buildings and under-used land with a comprehensive mixed-use development of the highest architectural quality. Phase 1 of the scheme will deliver a new market, a cinema, food/beverage units, offices and new public realm/event space.

↓ Garry Bowker, Northwest Regional Director of VINCI Construction; Clare Huber, Head of Construction and Andrew Lewis, Chief Executive - Cheshire West and Chester Council with the tunnel boring machine.



## Priorities for 2021/2022

The LEP and its partners will:

- Work with the University of Chester to rescope and repurpose the Accelerate skills brokerage programme and build on the £1 million of 100% subsidised training provided in 2020.
  - Support the manufacturing sector through the Growth Hub and the specialist productivity and innovation support offers including
    - C&W4.0 programme led by the University of Liverpool's Virtual Engineering Centre
    - GISMO project led by Lancashire University
    - Made Smarter project led by the Growth Company
  - Through Marketing Cheshire work with the Culture, Events, Retail, Hospitality and Visitor Economy Sector to develop a Destination Management Plan by July 2021.
  - Promote and market Cheshire and Warrington in line with the Government's reopening roadmap, and with the advice and support of Destination Chester, and Destination Cheshire, representative groups of over 20 businesses and business organisations.
  - Develop a bespoke Trade and Investment Strategy for Cheshire and Warrington by September 2021, with support from government, including how to provide the best support for International Trade advice and key account management.
  - Through the Foreign Direct Investment Programme successfully land 10 new investments in Cheshire and Warrington by March 2022.
  - Roll out the Growth Hub Peer Network programme phase 2 to approximately 100 businesses with a focus on leadership, business growth and expansion by March 2022.
  - Through the Growth Hub support the business start-up agenda with access to mentoring, finance and sharing best practice by March 2022
  - Through the Growth Hub provide business support to 1500 unique businesses.
  - Through the growth hub continue to provide support to businesses and understand and adapt to new trading arrangements by March 2022.
  - Deliver innovation support through the Growth Hub in partnership with Innovate Edge, Universities and academic institutions to ensure our businesses have access to support, knowledge and expertise to develop resilient and high growth businesses.
- Allocate up to £400k by August 2021 to support a further round of investment pipeline business case development.
  - Work with local authority partners and Digital Cheshire to prepare a bid to BDUK's Rural Gigabit programme by June 2021, including exploring opportunities for a local top up scheme.



# Delivery and next steps

**This Recovery Plan was initially published as a draft to support a programme of engagement and consultation during Spring 2021, which has resulted in this document. Given the rapidly changing nature of the recovery, we have committed to developing a longer term strategy by the end of the year, taking into account recovery trends, to ensure that our collective activities have the strongest impact on the delivery of our subregional vision.**

Many of our proposals, if not most of them, can be delivered locally. Others will need a partnership with Government, supported with powers, funding or other flexibilities.

But with this partnership in place, Cheshire and Warrington can emerge from COVID-19 powering growth in the North, levelling up its left behind communities, establishing itself as a world leader in clean growth technology and using its expertise in life sciences to help the UK respond quickly and effectively should a health crisis like COVID-19 ever happen again.

**The Cheshire and Warrington economy was one of the most successful in the UK pre-Covid, and has the ability to be so again.**

Healthy Target	Target Date
Continue to work with the Cheshire Business Group to provide advice and guidance to small businesses on creating COVID-19 secure environments; and through Marketing Cheshire provide advice to the visitor and hospitality sector as it reopens, including promoting the 'We're Good to Go' industry standard.	Ongoing
The Growth Hub will continue to work with the three local authorities to promote the national and local mental health support that is available to businesses and employees.	Ongoing
Establish a Life Sciences sector group by June 2021 to develop a plan to reinforce Cheshire and Warrington as one of the best locations in the world for medicines discovery, formulation and manufacturing as set out in the Life Sciences Sector Deal. This will include exploring options for expanding and strengthening the offer of the Medicines Discovery Catapult at Alderley Park	June 2021
Accelerate investment in the Cheshire Science Corridor Enterprise Zone following conclusion of a £30m borrowing facility through our local authority partners.	Ongoing
Conclude negotiations by July 2021 to create a successor to the Greater Manchester and Cheshire Life Sciences Fund with a minimum fund value of £25m.	July 2021
Deliver £5.05m Getting Building Fund investment in laboratory space for Validation Centre of Excellence at Alderley Park.	March 2022
Deliver £4m Enterprise Zone investment in Blocks 22-24 at Alderley Park to provide 90k sq ft of new lab space plus a 2,400-space multi-storey car park.	December 2021
<b>Sustainable Target</b>	
As part of ongoing collaboration through Net Zero North West decarbonise the industrial cluster located along the south bank of the River Mersey, commission economic consultants by June 2021 to develop the strategic and economic case.	June 2021
Work with the University of Chester to secure an investment/development partner for Thornton Science Park before the end of the calendar year.	December 2021
Work with industry and neighbouring areas to use COP26 in November 2021 as a vehicle to progress the regions energy priorities. This will be supported by a strengthened communications strategy for our Energy and Clean Growth objectives.	November 2021
Work with the Cheshire and Warrington Rural Strategy Board to develop proposals for implementing the findings of the Natural Capital Audit, and continue to support the economy in rural areas to recover from COVID-19 whilst meeting our sustainability goals.	August 2021
The LEP's Employer Skills Board will work with industry and providers to put in place plans by August 2021 to respond to the employment opportunities and skills requirements of the Green Industrial Revolution.	August 2021

Inclusive Target	Target Date
Engagement of an additional 100 employers (of which at least 20 are digital) between now and Dec 2021 in the successful delivery of the Pledge programme. This will mean over 500 employers will be engaged with the Pledge and at least 70% of schools achieve Gatsby Benchmark 5	December 2021
Enterprise advisors in all our schools by December 2021 (currently 61% of schools have an enterprise advisor) including at least 20 digital and STEM.	December 2021
15 career events (all including a digital and/or STEM theme and at least one in a health-related theme) and a comprehensive library of videos by December 2021.	December 2021
To ensure at least 60% of schools achieve Gatsby Benchmark 6 by September 2022 develop a coherent programme of work experience for all our young people in Key stages 4 and 5 to be developed between now and Sept 2022 (including a 20% increase in the number of young people undertaking digital and STEM placements and at least 40 students undertaking work experience in the NHS).	September 2022
Through the Workforce Recovery Group work with the Department for Work and Pensions and Job Centre Plus to expand the range of virtual and online support for people impacted by redundancy because of the pandemic, including delivering six online job fairs and skills bootcamps with 40 participants securing job interviews by January 2022.	January 2022
Aim to secure 1500 Kickstart job placements for young people in Cheshire and Warrington.	December 2021
Work with government to progress the High-Speed Growth Corridor Business Case and ensure it benefits existing communities within Cheshire and Warrington. Submit revised SOBC by June 2021	June 2021
Work with local partners including Town Boards in Crewe, Warrington and Winsford to implement Future High Street Fund programmes and Town Investment Plans and develop further bids to the Levelling Up Fund.	Ongoing
Invest £150,000 to support development of business cases for the first housing pathfinder projects.	March 2022

<b>Growing Target</b>	<b>Target Date</b>
Work with the University of Chester to rescope and repurpose the Accelerate skills brokerage programme and build on the £1 million of 100% subsidised training provided in 2020.	
Publish Skills Report by April 2021.	April 2021
Local Growth Fund skills investments to exceed their contracted outputs – 11,000 learners benefitting between now and December 2021.	December 2021
Support the manufacturing sector through the Growth Hub and the specialist productivity and innovation support offers including C&W4.0 programme for, led by the University of Liverpool's Virtual Engineering Centre, GISMO led by Lancaster University, and Made Smarter project led by the Growth Company.	March 2022
Through Marketing Cheshire work with the Culture, Events, Retail, Hospitality and Visitor Economy Sector to develop a Destination Management Plan.	July 2021
Promote and market Cheshire and Warrington in line with the Government's reopening roadmap, and with the advice and support of Destination Chester, and Destination Cheshire, representative groups of over 20 businesses and business organisations.	September 2021
Develop a bespoke Trade and Investment Strategy for Cheshire and Warrington with support from government, including investment propositions and. how to provide the best support for International Trade advice and key account management.	September 2021
Through the Foreign Direct Investment Programme successfully land 10 new investments in Cheshire and Warrington.	September 2021
Roll out the Growth Hub's Peer-to-Peer network to a further cohort of approximately 1500 businesses to share best practice on leadership and growth.	March 2022
Through the Cheshire and Warrington Growth Hub provide business support to 1,200 unique businesses.	March 2022
Allocate up to £400k by August 2021 to support a further round of investment pipeline business case development.	August 2021
Work with local authority partners and Digital Cheshire to prepare a bid to BDUK's Rural Gigabit programme by June 2021, including exploring opportunities for a local top up scheme.	June 2021
Through the Growth Hub support the business start-up agenda with access to mentoring, finance and sharing best practice.	March 2022
Through the Growth Hub continue to provide support to businesses to understand and adapt to new trading arrangements.	March 2022
Development the Growth Hub digital footprint and support offers through website integration to CRM.	June 2021
Deliver innovation support through the Growth Hub in partnership with Innovate Edge, Universities/academic institutions to ensure our businesses have access to support, knowledge and expertise to develop resilient and high growth businesses.	March 2022

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