

**Marketing
Cheshire**

**Local Visitor
Economy
Partnership**

Recognised by



VisitEngland[®]

Board Papers

Thursday 12th December 2024

Agenda

Thursday 12th December 2024, 8am – 10am

Park Royal Hotel, Stretton Rd, Stretton, Warrington, WA4 4NS

Time		Item	Lead	Reference
08:00am	1	Welcome and Apologies	TB	
08:05am	2	Declarations of Interest	TB	
08:10am	3	Minutes and matters arising from Board Meeting held on 17 th October 2024	TB	
08:15am	4	Board Matters		
		- Joint Committee update	PC	
		- Terms of Reference	CM	
		- Recruitment of new Chair and Board Members	CM	
08:30am	5	MD Report	CM	(Board Paper 280)
09:00am	6	Financials		
		- Budget update position	CM	
		- Commercial and Financial approach 2025/2026	CM	
09:45am	7	A.O.B		
10:00am	8	Meeting Close		

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Board, held at Walton Hall Golf Club, Warrington
On Thursday 17th October 10am – 12pm**

Present:
CWTB Directors

Attendees
Trevor Brocklebank – Chair
Philip Cox
Sarah Callander-Beckett
Peter Mearns
Colin Potts
Jamie Christon
Gemma Davies
Eleanor Underhill

In attendance:

Debbie Simpson -online attendee
Liam Hartzenberg
Steve Purdham, BAB
Mike Benson, Murray Smith Auditors
Councillor Jean Flaherty – representing Warrington BC
Carole Hyde, Cheshire East Council (observer)
Sharon Pond (minute taker)

Apologies:

Cristian Marcucci
Steven Broomhead
Richard Milkins
Mark Goldsmith

Opening by the Chair and Welcome

TB welcomed Board members and thanked them for joining the meeting. TB also welcomed Steve Purdham, Chair of the BAB, Mike Benson, Murray Smith Auditors and Councillor Jean Flaherty representing Steven Broomhead, Warrington BC, to the meeting

Declarations of Interest

Board members to advise Sharon of any declarations of interest.

Minutes and Actions from the last Meeting and Matters Arising

The Board confirmed that the minutes from the meeting on the 5th September 2024 were correct. JC requested that the minutes going forward clearly identify Board Directors and Observers.

**Action
Sharon**

JC also requested that the MC website is reviewed and updated with the correct board director information.

**Action
LH**

It was confirmed that the actions from the previous meeting have been resolved and it was agreed the link to the What's on guide would be circulated in the minutes
<https://indd.adobe.com/view/b4b890a0-1b50-470c-9af3-65b5a5b2ecd8>

TB voiced concerns around the delays in formally agreeing the Marketing Cheshire Board governance and PC confirmed he is in discussions with Cheshire East Council to get this resolved. There is some urgency with this as the paper would need to be processed through the Joint Committee once the processes have been resolved with Cheshire East Council.

It was also agreed that Philip would discuss the Governance issue with Carole Hyde after the meeting.

Action
PC/CH

TB also highlighted the need to address the funding around the Destination Cheshire project.

PC referred to the development of the Growth Plan which will become a statutory requirement should ECW become a mayoral combined authority. The government requirement on the plan is that it identifies a small number of key sectors. PC mentioned HyNet funding and the job creation around this project, including recruiting from Canada and India, stating that this really demonstrates the importance of promoting the whole of Cheshire and Warrington as a great place to live and work and it was advised that Carole Hyde is leading on a strand of work around culture and the visitor economy.

SCB questioned whether we are working with the schools and universities to ensure we have the right skills in our region for these job roles. PC confirmed that Northwest Net Zero, the organisation overseeing this project has skills within its remit.

EU raised the point around the importance of updating the MC and ECW websites as soon as possible.

CP questioned if we had any further updates on Lady Borwick, VisitEngland's visit to Cheshire. LH / CM to discuss with Nicola Said

CM/LH

TB confirmed that his application to become a member of the Liverpool to Manchester Railway Board had been accepted. PC also confirmed that Paul Taylor, BAB member has also been appointed to the board.

Introduction to Steve Purdham, Chair of the Business Advisory Board

TB introduced Steve who provided the board with the following update.

Steve's background is in technology and has lived in Cheshire since 1981 and is originally from the Northeast.

The BAB held the first meeting of the board yesterday evening with their 21 members, all of whom have different skills. One of the items on the agenda was devolution and SP stated that for Cheshire and Warrington to be successful in the current climate in the next 5 -10 years the single most important objective is for Cheshire and Warrington to become a mayoral combined authority.

SP raised concerns over the need to publicise what Cheshire and Warrington has to offer and in not doing this effectively we are losing out to other areas in our region such as Liverpool and Manchester. There is a need to have a key spokesperson for Cheshire and Warrington in the same way that Liverpool has Steve Rotherham.

The BAB are continuing with the work that was undertaken by the LEP including, transportation and connectivity, Skills and Education, digital innovation and connectivity and funding channels. This work will be aligned to our clusters such as decarbonation and net zero, life sciences and advanced manufacturing.

EU questioned whether the MC board should be more proactive in supporting and broadcasting the business aspect of Cheshire and Warrington, or whether we are seen as the delivery arm of the organisation.

SCB referred to the fact that we do not have an organisation in place at the moment in Cheshire that is able to promote both the visitor economy and the business economy in C&W.

SP advised that there are a lot of projects around C&W that he was not aware of prior to joining the BAB, such as Hynet and emphasised the need for a coordinated approach to PR, but understood the issues around resources and the need to ensure the visitor economy role of MC is prioritised.

GD stated that the MC board does have a strategy and direction and it is important that the board works on its strategic priorities. GD referred to the Joint Committee and advised that each leader and joint leader has been allocated a theme to lead on, and it will be important for these thematic leaders to engage and work with the BAB going forward.

PM felt that promoting both the Visitor Economy and Business economy is something that we should find the resources for MC to undertake. PM also emphasised the importance of the Arts and Culture sector and stated that it is great to see Annabel Turpin on the board of the BAB.

TB advised that the duality of MC has been around since we joined the LEP with the work on UKREiF and the Cheshire Science corridor and is therefore a seamless division in the way it operates. MC is also a LVEP, and this will become an increasing part of our role. It is however important to ensure that we are delivering for our members.

It was agreed that we need to work out how to undertake both roles properly.

SP advised that he is available to meet individually with board members to discuss their views, SP's details are available from Sharon.

The members of the BAB board can be viewed - <https://cheshireandwarrington.com/how-we-work/structure/boards-and-committees/cheshire-and-warrington-business-advisory-board/>

Managing Director Report

LH and PC ran through the MD report and highlighted the following key items.

- LH highlighted that September was a busy month for the team, the hard work from the team around the partner conference paid off, which was a great success with 88 attendees and excellent feedback received, participants liked variety of themes and workshops.
- The 2025 awards will be held on the 6th March at Chester Cathedral and the finalists were announced this week. Discussions are taking place with potential partners.
- City with a break campaign will continue with Avanti West Coast until mid-November. The Christmas campaign with TfW is hoped to commence in early November, the campaign will encourage people to stay within Chester and visit areas across Cheshire.
- Christmas Campaign with TfW is about discovering what to do in C&W.
- PR – really good articles in September including the culinary exploration of Chester and Joy Division Day in Macclesfield.
- We have commissioned Reith Consulting Ltd to develop a Travel Trade Strategy and Action Plan. The work is ongoing, with research already commenced and consultation due to begin in late October. The anticipated completion for report recommendations is during December.
- Keith Blundell has been leading on the Visitor Pass work and we have appointed Qline to deliver the feasibility study.
- We are in the process of developing the visitor website which will have additional functionality and will showcase the destination as an inspirational and high-quality destination.
- We are progressing our work on the Cheshire Film office and plans are in place to attend FOCUS, a trade show for producers and location scouts, with the support of Chester Zoo and Tatton Estates.
- The STEAM data for 2023 has been received and shows that visitor numbers have increased by 4.1% between 2022 and 2023 with 29 billion visitors at a value of

3.9 billion. Keith Blundell is drafting a press release.

- UKREiIF will take place in May and work is being undertaken on sponsorship opportunities.
- PC advised that the Government are looking at a Devolution timetable of May 2026, however, the department have set out a timetable which achieves a date of May 2027, GD is working with the team on this project, the May 2026 deadline will put pressure on staffing resources. It will also be important to obtain support from the public to ensure success.
- The Visitor Economy roundtable took place on the 16th September and as a follow up to this there will be a workshop taking place in November and a second roundtable on the 17th January.

Comments from Board

TB congratulated and thanked the MC team on the success of the partner event.

CP felt the themes for the conference merited a wider audience and there is a need to market the event wider to obtain better attendance.

EU asked what the geographical coverage of the Awards is like, stating that she felt it was imbalanced last year. LH advised that the coverage is better from East and West but lacking from Warrington, advising that a lot of work has been undertaken to encourage entries.

SCB questioned who the spokesperson will be from the three local authorities to be the point of contact for devolution. GD advised that at the moment it will be Cllr Louise Gittins in her role as Chair of the sub-region but in collaboration with the other Leaders. GD stated that they are ensuring key messaging is consistent across Cheshire and Warrington and public statements on devolution have been issued to the press. TB voiced concern that the comms with the local community groups such as town parishes is not happening quick enough.

It was agreed that it is important to include Cheshire residents in visitor number data. CP stated that we need to be careful when reviewing the STEAM data regarding the messages we take away from the data and how we publicise this messaging. There is a need to consider the businesses who are struggling due to the cost of living and CP's instinct would be to include a cautious quote on the press release. It was agreed that this would be discussed and agreed offline.

TB reiterated the broadness of the work that has been undertaken and the key message to give SP would be the importance of the visitor economy which is worth nearly £4 Billion and employs 38 thousand people in the sector.

Role of Board and Board Recruitment

PC advised that the aim for the role of the board is to be the business advisory board for the visitor economy once the governance issues have been resolved.

It was confirmed that the terms of reference have been approved by the board.

AOB

None

Future Board Meetings

12th December 2024 - 8am, Via Teams

Signature (Trevor Brocklebank, Chair)

.....

Date

MD Report

12 December 2024

Period October – December

Paper 280

Introduction

I returned to work at the start of November initially on a phased return but now back full time. A big thank you and credit to the Marketing Cheshire team, and in particular Liam, Fiona and Ashley, for stepping up in my absence and delivering several key events and activities, including the MC Connect Event in October.

Visitor Economy

1. Marketing Cheshire Tourism Awards

Thursday 6 March 2025, Chester Cathedral, Caterers Cheeky Chilli have been awarded the contract for the awards, with the menu tasting already taken place and chosen. Hollyoaks actor and Cheshire resident Ashley Taylor-Dawson will host the 2025 event.

- Ticket Sales are progressing well with 106 sold, well ahead of the same figure last December. They include new businesses (Delamere Manor, Pied Bull) who are not currently MC partners. We are following up. The early bird rate runs until Friday 17 Jan, and we anticipate a flurry of ticket sales post-Christmas.
- Sponsorship, the team is actively contacting potential sponsors for support. Contrasts with Digitickets (online ticket sales) and Insight6 (Mystery Shopping) have been secured already in exchange for sponsorship packages. We have agreed a contra deal with Chester Hospitality Awards (CHA's), Marketing Cheshire will provide 2 tickets, a page in the awards booklet and exposure at the awards in exchange for the same in return for the CHA's. The timing for this works well as the CHA's will be at nomination stage in March at the MC awards and then MC will be launching the next round of awards when the CHA's take place on 25 June 2025.

2. Marketing Campaigns and Content

Our national campaign "A City with a Break" in partnership with Transport for Wales (TfW) and Avanti West Coast (AWC), has drawn to an end. The campaign for the first time brought together both transport providers along with Chester Zoo and Cheshire Oaks to create a £50k campaign fund to encourage visitors to stay longer and do more.

- Over the 6-month period between June–November we attracted 56,000 clicks through paid media, utilising the Meta Network, organic social, search and display and PrDOOH (Programmatic Out of Home) we featured across 315 locations, including London Underground, with 4,410 screens delivering 244,000 plays. Post PrDOOH campaign analysis through Happydemics, a specialist brand measurement solution, found 17% recalled the ad, and over 50% were considering visiting the destination. PrDOOH activity had improved perceptions of the destination, when compared to a pre-campaign poll.
- Overall, the Chester landing page at visitchester.com saw a 7% increase in traffic year on year with 75,000 views, achieved through an audience reach of 4.1m. Engagement time

with web content remained high at 93% with an average dwell time of 1 minute, and premium city stay itineraries the most engaging.

- Latest figures from TfW show Chester received the highest number of passengers between 2022-24, between July and August with 92,756, a 30% increase on the same period last year. In addition, affiliate income from Avanti as part of the campaign totals £3,700 and growing, estimated to achieve between £5-6k by year end, which is a direct return on investment.

Our Christmas campaign in partnership with TfW is currently running, around the Chester and the Christmas Markets.

- Campaign period is 15th November to 20th December
- Meta only campaign supported by influencer activity, short form video content (reels). It is the first national campaign with dedicated influencer activity.
- The campaign has a projected reach of 15m through influencer activity, and 1m through paid Ads with 20k clicks, with 2 weeks remaining it currently sits at 15k clicks.
- Paired with organic social content and PR, with several pieces secured, including CondeNast – [Best Christmas Markets](#), The Times – [7 Best Boutique Christmas Markets](#). Featured as part of a study with LNER – [The Top Festive destinations in the UK](#), ranking 5/10 from 88 towns and cities. In addition to roundups in the Sun, The Mail and the Mirror.
- Between Nov-Dec Chester Christmas content on visitchester.com has seen an increase of 82% compared to 2023, at 28k visits, with new content including gift guides, blogs and itineraries. Content around the Christmas Market has increased by 30% with 176k views.

3. Public Relations

We held PR focus calls with contacts in Warrington and Northwich this month, as we expand our PR activity and destination development from the successful pilot approach in Macclesfield. Several contacts, including representatives from the BIDs, Councils, Museums, Markets and Attractions attended the calls. We also discussed PR hooks for 2025 with Warrington with possible press trips and opportunities already in the Pipeline, Sarah Baxter for the Telegraph poised to visit in 2025. Exploring a piece with a property writer on the attraction from Hong Kong expats.

Recent coverage includes,

- Daily Mail and iNews (print) feature on Tarporley published from a recently arranged press trip with Angela Epstein – [No Pressure in Cheshire](#).
- Delicious Magazine (print and online) will publish a recent press release focusing on our Salt Heritage that combined food and drink with our waterways and salt brine history.

Chester Racecourse have offered for MC to host the Director's Box at no cost at a race meet on the 2025 calendar (date TBC in the new year). The box can accommodate around 24 guests and offers an excellent opportunity to support priority activity next year.

Strategic Projects

4. Travel Trade.

Keith Blundell and Rebecca Wainwright are continuing to deliver the Travel Trade feasibility study, with an initial situational report already completed. The project is now into its second stage, with questionnaires distributed and interviews with national DMO's taking place, who work with the travel trade market. It is hoped that shared knowledge and information from meetings will help to shape and develop the recommended actions and activities for Cheshire's future travel trade strategy, with completion anticipated by end January 2025.

5. Visitor Pass

Initial meeting has taken place with Qline, and introductions have been made with attractions to book appointments to discuss the project in further detail. A meeting will be held in December to discuss initial findings, stakeholder feedback and next steps.

6. Visit Cheshire Website

We continue to work with our developer and plan to go-live in Q1 of 2025. Design concepts have been shared with internal teams and partners for feedback, in addition to a public audience panel poll conducted via YouGov responded to a number of questions based on a series of pages.

More than half of respondents found "Visit Cheshire" as opposed to "Visit Chester and Cheshire" to be more representative of the county and the broader visitor offer. Which aligns with our research that the current branding creates a cluttered product offering. However, responders found Chester was well presented and accessible from the homepage and content positioned the destination as high quality. In addition, 38% strongly agreed that the overall website design was of high quality and 30% strongly agreed that it would inspire them to visit the destination, while 63% felt, inspired, curious and interested by the website's design and content offering.

All partners have been contacted for new content, we are collating and working through new and existing content alongside imagery. Most popular blogs and itineraries will be updated before the end of the year and all content on key pages will be refreshed and rewritten.

The current website, continues to perform with an average page view count of 4 and 1:07s dwell time and 93% engagement rate;

- October, 556,632 views, 132,584 users
- November, 778,305 views, 193,570 users

7. Film Office

Screen Tourism specialist Seren Welch and Tricolor Consulting have been appointed to conduct the Film Office feasibility study and work is now underway. In person and online stakeholder workshops are set to take place in January. I will be meeting the consultants at Focus 2024 in London on 11 December, where we are joining a Filming in Cheshire Stand with Chester Zoo, Tatton Estates and Bolesworth.

Outreach and Events

8. Media Gateway

Following a successful fam trip for Howard Salinger from Media Getaway in October, we have had verbal confirmation that the event will be coming to Chester in 2026, potentially 6-8th July. The 2025 event will remain in Bradford to which we will attend and promote that we will be hosting the following year. The initial announcement is mooted to be end of January, giving us over 18 months of preparation and promotion.

We have secured support from CWaC Council, Chester Hospitality Association, and Gerald Tatum to fund two-thirds of the £15,000 hosting fee, with MC funding the remaining £5,000.

9. Chester X Wrexham workshop

Held on 28 November at the Grosvenor Pulford, the event brought together around 30 visitor economy leaders, tour and transport operators, and hoteliers to discuss closer collaboration between the cities. The event was organised by MC and led by Visit England and Visit Wales, with contributions from Marketing Liverpool. The aim was to forge closer working and the development of more products and itineraries to market to the travel trade and consumers. Next steps include the development of products and a follow up, speed-dating style event for more operators and visitor economy businesses.

10. UKREiiF

Monthly meetings are ongoing with local authority business support teams. The main call to action is support around sponsorship. Enterprise Cheshire and Warrington are funding the space at the show and associated stand build costs, as well as 3 x exhibitor tickets per Local Authority to attend the show. Each of the 3 local authorities have supported in identifying a pipeline of businesses. Senior council contacts are supporting with talking to business leaders about UKREiiF sponsorship. To date there has been no confirmations.

ECW are combining efforts with the local authorities and private sector to nominate business leaders to be speakers on the main stages at the show.

Data and Insight

Partner Meetings

Destination Chester: meeting took place on the 21 November at the Racecourse and included an overview from Louise Stewart of future development plans.

Destination Cheshire: Meeting took place at Lion Salt Works on 29 October.

Local Authority SLAs: Quarterly meetings were held as follows

- Cheshire East – 4 November
- Cheshire West and Chester – 5 November
- Warrington BC – 14 November

Look ahead – 2025 Q1 priorities

- Travel Trade Strategy and Action Plan – including Wrexham activity
- Visitor Pass feasibility study report and recommendations
- Film Office stakeholder workshops
- Marketing Cheshire Awards
- Chester ABID business case development
- Cheshire Day, 30 March
- English Tourism Week (14-23 March) preparations
- Lapland UK planning decision (January)

