



Cheshire East Tourism Recovery Plan

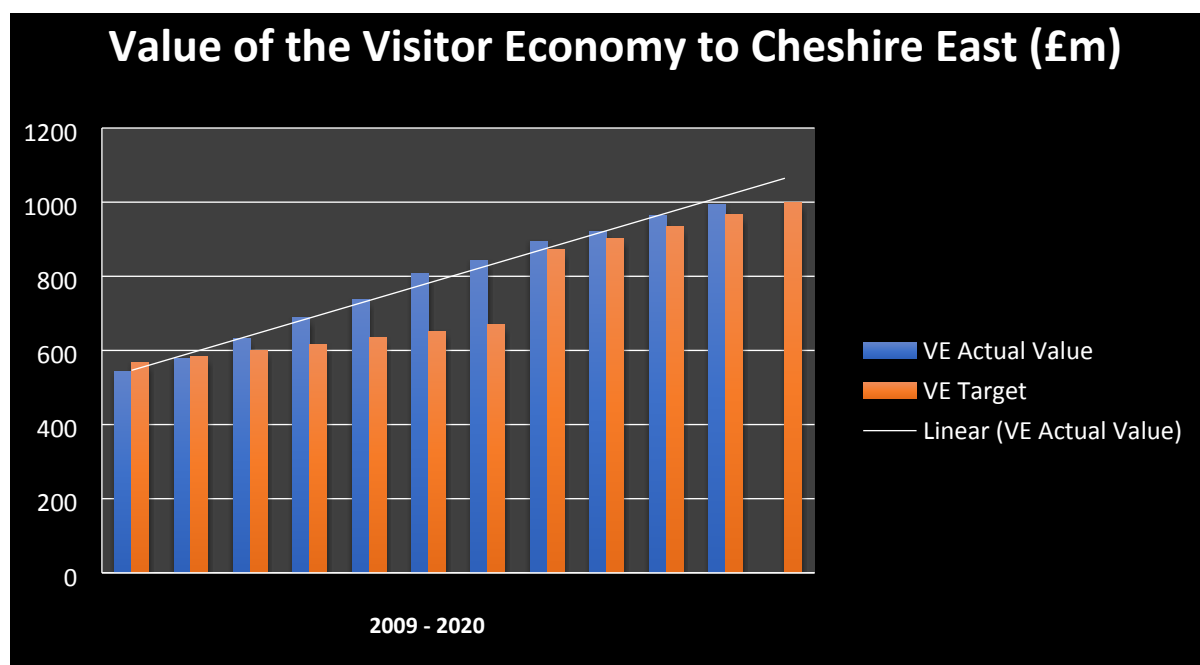
2021

TOURISM RECOVERY PLAN

Overview: Cheshire East Visitor Economy recovery

Cheshire East has an exciting tourism product that continues to evolve despite the challenges and impact of the Covid pandemic. Jodrell Bank is a UNESCO World Heritage Site; Tatton Park is the 3rd most visited paid for attraction in the North West; there is accessible countryside from riverside walks to the Peak District fringe; market towns including Macclesfield, the gateway to the Peak District and the former home of Ian Curtis (Singer/song writer with Joy Division). This combined with accommodation from luxury hotels to cosy boltholes, world class events, farm-stays, and the best health club spa in the 'Good Spa awards 2019' means that Cheshire East's visitor economy has the potential to come back stronger than before.

The pandemic has shown how important our restaurants, bars, cafes, theatres, museums, tourist attractions and retail destinations are to our area, its life and its economy, reflecting the adage 'sometimes you don't know what you have until it's gone'. Before the pandemic, the overall 'economic value' of tourism in Cheshire East was £994 million, supporting 11,812 FTE jobs and welcoming over 16 million visitors. This brings in much-needed revenue to the borough, boosting its economy, supporting the 'Quality of Place' agenda and helping its positioning through place marketing. As we look towards economic recovery, the visitor economy has a strong base from which to further growth, innovation and creativity across the sector.



2021 will benefit from new openings including

- BeWilderwood – family attraction opened in April at Cholmondeley Castle
- First Light – A new visitor experience at Jodrell Bank

The vaccine rollout gives us optimism to plan ahead once more for growth in day visitors and staycations. This document outlines a recovery plan to support the tourism and hospitality sector in Cheshire East while once again looking forward to a longer-term strategy.

The UK Tourism Economy predicted to return to pre-Covid levels by end of 2022 for domestic markets and the end of 2023 for International markets. However, Oxford Economics does not predict tourism in the UK to return in full to 2019 levels of volume and expenditure until 2025. Whichever economic assumptions are correct, we would still need to understand more fully how different parts of the visitor economy may fare. The impact on visitor and lifestyle businesses of prolonged closure and disruption to their markets offers both challenges and opportunities through the period of recovery that need to be considered. Public confidence and market shifts in some offers (such as outdoor attractions, self-catering and camping) may be more responsive in some areas than others (such as business travel, indoor attractions or hotels) and international travel is likely to face disruption for longer than in-country choices.

Because of the 'staycation' factor we might therefore assume that the recovery of the day-visit, 'visiting friends and relatives', local hospitality and self-contained accommodation elements have a potential to recover ground more quickly than other markets, accepting that there are significant losses to make up. Therefore, a working assumption is that over the period of the recovery plan (2021- 22) Cheshire East has the potential to regain a visitor economy value equivalent to a value of over £800m, with potential beyond then to once again aspire to a value of £1bn +.

Destination marketing also supports 'place marketing' as the destination image helps communicate 'quality of place', raises profile and positions the area among wider audiences including prospective residents and investors. Alongside a perceived value-shift in locational priorities and an accelerated shift in working patterns, there is an opportunity to position Cheshire East as an attractive place to live, work and invest as well as visit.

We will continue to engage with industry partners as well as our residents, who we expect will be keen to rediscover everything available on their doorstep. Looking further ahead, we have a fantastic destination offer to develop for the future too, which will allow us to attract more domestic visitors and potentially more international visitors from 2022/23. In addition, we need to consider our position in business tourism in light of the new context from 2022 onwards.

In the context of the disruption of the sector and the trend in economic contribution it is appropriate to focus on a recovery plan rather than a longer-term strategy. Recovery cannot be achieved by Cheshire East Council alone, but relies on business, other agencies and key partners such as Marketing Cheshire working in a coordinated and complementary fashion.

The focus of the recovery plan is therefore to assist the sector to survive and recover through targeted support, against a backdrop of a reduced baseline and to be responsive to changing circumstances. It will also focus on that data necessary to

inform strategic decisions about the future of the sector through gathering research to inform the development of the next Visitor Economy Strategy.

Background: Cheshire East Visitor Economy 2009 – 2020

The Visitor Economy is a broad term that is defined as the part of Cheshire East's economy which is supported by the expenditure of visitors. These are visitors staying overnight and those on day trips. The total value of the visitor economy pre-Covid was £994 million (STEAM 2019), on target to reach over £1bn by 2020. The majority of these are day visitors, contributing £742 million of the total. However, the impact of overnight visitors has grown by 66% over the previous 10 years and contributed over £250 million to the economy. Indications show that Cheshire East is seen as a location with great links to visitor destinations both within and outside of our boundary, whilst having attractions and outdoor space without bustling crowds that visitors are now keen to avoid.

Since 2009 Cheshire East has worked with local and national partners to develop the visitor economy to the benefit of visitors and residents. We have seen increases in the quality of events; increases in quality accommodation; new tourist attractions and a growth in employment within the sector. Cheshire East is seen as a visitor destination for day visits and increasingly for overnight stays and is in a good position to benefit from the anticipated staycation once lockdown ends.

In the most recent visitor economy strategy (2016-2020) the focus was on quality of place; infrastructure; dwell time; skills and investment. These are still highly relevant and will continue to have a strong focus however there is a requirement post-Covid to ensure hospitality & tourism businesses survive to allow for a recovery and subsequent growth in the visitor economy of Cheshire East.

Recent intelligence points to a substantial reduction in the value of the visitor economy for the UK and therefore we anticipate the value of the Visitor Economy in Cheshire East having reduced to around 2009 levels through the Pandemic. We must work closely with business and partners to support the sector and to provide conditions for sustainable growth. This will be achieved through providing the sector with a strong voice to secure financial and business support, ensuring initiatives such as high-profile marketing campaigns and subsequently revisiting our approach to attracting business tourism and conferences to Cheshire East when the market allows.

There is a recognition that the sector can recover a large amount that was lost over the past eighteen months. However, some parts will recover faster than others and priority areas such as conferences and events will require additional stimulus and encouragement to return and even exceed 2019 levels.

Why a Recovery Plan and not a new Visitor Economy Strategy?

The aim of the recovery plan, for the period 2021 and 2022, is to assist the sector to survive and recover through targeted support, whether through the Council or its partners. In addition to the actions of businesses themselves, additional measures and actions may be required to ensure a strong recovery for our visitor economy

sector. Therefore, this initial focus is on encouraging resilience and on recovery as a long-term strategy is not considered the right immediate response. Longer term aspirations and strategic approach to achieve them are still important, but we must first ensure that we have a recovering and growing sector in the short term to enable those aspirations to be met. That will enable work on a new Visitor Economy Strategy to be delivered for 2023 onwards, which will look to the medium and longer-term.

Interventions as part of recovery should still take account of the strategic priorities and themes of the 2016-20 visitor economy strategy which provide a valid context for growth until a new strategy is developed.



COVID – Impact on Hospitality & Tourism

Coronavirus has had a significant impact on the Visitor Economy of Cheshire East with figures for 2020 expected to show the sector falling back to levels not seen since before 2009. Hotel occupancy levels have fallen significantly with many seeing levels around 20% compared to around 80% in summer 2019. Events, weddings and attractions have all been impacted along with the supply-chains. The effects on the hospitality sector also impact on our town centres, affecting footfall and vibrancy.

For a national perspective the Office for National Statistics' latest published GDP estimates for the UK as a whole estimated that UK GDP in the first quarter of 2021 (January to March) was down 1.6% on its 2020 Quarter 4 level (and 8.8% below its 2019 Q4 level), but the Food & Accommodation Services sector's GDP in 2021 Quarter 1 was down 18.6% on the previous quarter.

For Cheshire East, there are no official (Office for National Statistics) estimates yet of the impact of COVID on hospitality sector economic output or on employment, however, we have got estimates of GVA (and employment) by industry for all recent years (and projections up to the 2030s) from the Council's Cheshire & Warrington Econometric Model (CWEM).

According to the estimates from current CWEM model: The GVA of Cheshire East's Accommodation sub-sector in 2020 was 48.0% lower than in 2019, while the GVA of the Borough's Pubs, Restaurants & Other Food and Drink Services sub-sector was 45.6% below its 2019 level. To put this in context, the CWEM estimates suggest that, in 2020, Cheshire East's total GVA (across all industries and services) was only 2.5% lower than in 2019.

There have been many other challenges, including temporary closures of businesses, a loss of in-person conferences and business meetings, loss of wedding business, a lack of high-profile events, a need for businesses to borrow to survive and general uncertainty in the markets. In addition, the pandemic led to a loss of staff from the sector as business reduced, leaving a difficult legacy of staff shortage, poor retention due to uncertainty and a skills gap. However, there will be opportunities including camping, caravanning and glamping for when visitors are ready to explore again, as well as the 'visiting friends and relatives' market. Added to that the high-profile openings of BeWildewood and First Light at Jodrell Bank, give reason for optimism from the second part of 2021 onwards.

During the COVID 19 pandemic we have been liaising with the sector to understand their issues and represent their interests. The Council has also managed and facilitated government business support and grants and to date, the Council has facilitated over £100m of grants to businesses in Cheshire East, including hotels, pubs, restaurants, cafes, B&Bs and other accommodation providers.

We have also ensured that the most up to date economic and industry specific information and research has been disseminated to the sector. Through Marketing Cheshire, we have purchased a User Generated Content platform to re-imagine Cheshire as a visitor destination through the eyes of residents and visitors; this also provides key data to understand target markets for future marketing campaigns.

The visitor economy in Cheshire East outperformed strategic targets for over 10 years and this recovery plan can help it will come back stronger than ever. There are some real opportunities for the sector in Cheshire East and this plan will enable a focus on these emerging trends.

However, plans need to be flexible and responsive enough to deal with the continuing influence of the Pandemic over this period. For example, the impact of a 'third wave' has brought its own challenges and further spikes in Coronavirus may yet continue. Therefore, the Council will keep measures under review and may still have to respond to changing circumstances. For example, a 'task group' including Public Health, Assets, Culture and Visitor Economy is deployed at time of increasing risk to consider, advise on and address the potential health issues related to mass events where necessary.

Wider context

In partnership with the Council, the visitor economy in Cheshire and Warrington is currently supported by the Cheshire and Warrington Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and the local Destination Management Organisation, Marketing Cheshire. The LEP's Strategic Economic Plan, and supporting plans for skills development, transport and quality of place all support visitor economy growth. They contain actions that will contribute to improvements in visitor-oriented infrastructure, tourism or cultural product and effective promotion as well as the skills of the people that the sector relies on to deliver a good visitor experience.

While the outcome of a national review by Government of Destination Management Organisations has yet to be concluded, the Destination Management Plan (DMP) for the sub-region needs to be supported with tourism strategies (or recovery plans) for all parts of Cheshire including Cheshire East. The recovery plan and longer-term strategy serves a dual purpose; to detail the actions that Cheshire East needs to take to develop or enable a successful visitor economy and to demonstrate how we are contributing to achieving the shared vision, priorities and targets described in the DMP. The supporting strategies will also show how they link to the aspirations and priorities of local tourism associations, sector groups and local plans – economic, rural, cultural, transport, environmental and spatial – to make the most of available capacity and resources.

It is anticipated that initially the value of the visitor economy in Cheshire East will reduce significantly from a 2019 position of £994 million. Medium term there will be a new strategy to ensure the sector returns and increases its value to the Cheshire East economy. However, short-term actions are required now, taking account of the many reasons for optimism and increasing confidence, especially since the fast rollout of the vaccine.

Sector-wide research from ClearSight shows that for only the second time since the pandemic began, those who believe the worst is now behind us outnumber those who fear the worst is still to come. Encouragingly for the economy, those who have been vaccinated are markedly more upbeat about the outlook. While the mood is unquestionably changing for the better, only a minority are anticipating a return to normality in the short term.

Demand for self-catering accommodation is likely to be strong along with visits to see family and friends as people seek to reconnect with loved ones that they have not seen for so long. With little to do during lockdown other than go on walks or cycle rides, many people will embrace a more active outdoor lifestyle, which will translate into holiday preferences. Therefore, it is expected that the staycation demand is set to grow strongly, with research showing that the staycation has been growing for the past 10 years and will grow at a faster pace post-pandemic. The rise will be especially strong around the traditional self-catering proposition and the growing popularity of camping and glamping.

British countryside holidays have seen the greatest rise in popularity with many visitors indicating they are planning to go to a rural destination in 2021/22. This is in sharp contrast from those seeking city breaks, while demand in cultural/historical sightseeing holidays within the UK is growing.

Limited options to travel overseas may boost people's desire to explore sights closer to home or to discover what's on their own doorstep. These areas of growth provide opportunities to combine nature-based holidays with culture, for example, by developing and/or promoting walking and cycling trails or self-drive routes. Official data on air passenger arrivals and visits to the UK by overseas residents shows how badly affected inbound tourism was to the UK in 2020. It is not expected that inbound tourism will return at any level until mid-2022; therefore, a clear plan to target those seeking a staycation is required.

The Office for National Statistics has published a survey of public behaviour over the Christmas period and public perceptions regarding the future. While this survey was undertaken before the new lockdown, the perceptions regarding how soon the UK will get back to normal will have implications for holiday booking patterns this year. In this regard the main findings are:

- A quarter of adults (25%) felt that life will return to normal in six months or less, compared with 22% the week before.
- One in five (20%) adults felt that it will take more than a year for life to return to normal, compared with 23% the week before.

So, while there was some improvement in perceptions, it is concerning in tourism terms that only a quarter of people feel that life will return to normal before July 2021 and this indicates that considerable work will need to be undertaken to increase consumer confidence.

The BDRC VisitBritain tracker also indicates that lack of confidence and uncertainty regarding how travel guidelines will evolve is likely to significantly restrict travel intent until early summer. While reassurance is undoubtedly needed to help encourage people to book, many look destined to wait until the last minute before committing to their trips.

The Visit Britain COVID Consumer Tracker highlights 'countryside/rural' as a destination choice for 2021. The combination of our Market Towns, visitor attractions and our varied hospitality offer set in the expansive Cheshire countryside can appeal to most UK consumers. It is anticipated that as confidence increases there will be many more last-minute trips, especially for weekend breaks or bank holiday getaways. In addition, ongoing restrictions and uncertainty mean that international travel may continue to be difficult this year and as such, there is an opportunity to capitalise on domestic markets and encourage people back to Cheshire and Warrington.

Cheshire East will work with Marketing Cheshire and Visit England to target 'Pre-Nesters' and families in Manchester, Liverpool, Birmingham and North Wales, looking to break into existing markets and new visitors. We will also look to target 'Empty nesters' and visitors from London and the South East. Finally, to support the

footfall and income to businesses, we will target local visitors, (in particular families or 'visiting friends & relatives') and those with a higher disposable income, as we are unlikely to see a return of larger groups any time soon.

Links with wider economic agendas

It is important that the Cheshire East Tourism Recovery Plan links to and complements many other related strategies and plans within the sub-region and wider. For example, the Tourism Recovery Plan is one of the components of a wider Cheshire East economic recovery and will link into the Cheshire & Warrington LEP Recovery Plan. It will also contribute to the Cheshire Destination Management Plan (DMP), prepared by Marketing Cheshire. This ensures that tourism is aligned with wider priorities, including quality of place, town centre vitality, digital inclusion and attracting talent. It will align the area with local, sub-regional and national initiatives to increase the value of the UK visitor economy.

We cannot achieve a sustainable re-start without links to other agendas and strategies including the national Hospitality Strategy and the national High Streets Strategy. The visitor economy is part of a wider economic recovery and will both contribute to and benefit from that wider recovery. It contributes to the re-invigoration of our highstreets and the Night-time Economy, is a key part of our economy in Rural areas and is closely related to our cultural economy. In addition, the visitor economy can both contribute to and benefit from place-marketing activity in Cheshire East and Cheshire as a whole. The visitor economy team will work with economic development, rural economy, cultural economy and other colleagues to help facilitate a sustainable re-start that provides a basis for future growth.

We will work with local partners including Marketing Cheshire, the LEP and our neighbouring authorities as well regional partners such as Marketing Manchester and Visit Peak District. It is clear Cheshire East must align with opportunities as they arise and needs to utilise our current assets to position ourselves to receive available funding and support. Among other things, Cheshire East will work with Marketing Cheshire to establish a 'Destination Cheshire' network to strengthen public-private partnerships to input and shape destination recovery and to influence regional and national strategies. This complements a 'Destination Chester' network and will build on forums and networks that Cheshire East has previously established or supported over the last few years.

Preparing for a Re-start: A national and local priority

There are indications that consumer confidence is beginning to increase especially due to the rapid vaccine rollout. We must be flexible to change when opportunities arise; this could be around business support, being an advocate for the sector and, where possible, seek long term support in the form of grants, training, and marketing. We need to invest in data that shows how the UK visitors are responding in our area to the relaxation of specific COVID rules. We will also have to understand and engage with our new audiences to ensure that they have awareness of the opportunities that await them as visitors, and we can take advantage of to the potential for repeat visits and recommendation.

In the immediate term, removal of legal restrictions along with associated guidance provides a context for the sector to respond to opportunities and to encourage consumer confidence, while maintaining a focus on safety and responsible behaviour. We intend to work with partners to ensure that relevant support is available to assist the recovery potential of the sector beyond the initial roadmap out of the third lockdown.

In June 2021 the Government published a Tourism Strategy recognising that Tourism is an economic, social and cultural asset and a major contributor to jobs and growth. It set out an aspiration to reach 2019 levels at least a year faster than independent forecasts predict and to ensure that the sector's recovery benefits every region, with visitors staying longer, growing accommodation occupancy rates in the off-season and high levels of investment in tourism products.

It also recognises the need to ensure the tourism sector contributes to the enhancement and conservation of our cultural, natural and historic heritage. It also set out the continuation of some short-term measures such as the VAT cut for tourism and hospitality, and business rates relief for eligible properties to help businesses with cash flow, and some new proposals were set out such as the introduction of a domestic tourism rail product and a voucher scheme run by the National Lottery to help stimulate demand. In July 2021, also the Government published a Hospitality Strategy focused on reopening, recovery and resilience alongside a High streets Strategy.

At a more local level this plan complements national objectives to address current recruitment problems, stimulate demand, promote hospitality, encourage visitors to stay longer, and to work with the sector to learn lessons, spreading best practice on investment in future resilience measures. It complements other economic recovery measures at both the Cheshire East and sub-regional level, providing a focus on the visitor economy and promoting collaboration to achieve a re-start for this important part of the Cheshire East economy.

Cheshire East in a re-imagined tourism world

Broadly the Visitor Economy objectives from the 2016-20 strategy remain valid:



However, Cheshire East tourism and hospitality, just like in many other regions in the UK, has been badly hit by the COVID pandemic. Research has clearly shown that there are parts of the sector that will recover quicker than others, so the main focus for the Recovery Plan will be aligned to this data. We will not abandon parts of the sector such as conferences and international travel, but work will be done to ensure Cheshire East is in a strong position to capitalise once these areas begin to recover and grow.

Based on data sources highlighted previously, we will focus the Recovery Plan around a set of priorities that align to consumer and business sentiment and have the potential to position Cheshire East as safe destination to visit once lockdown and other restrictions have fully ceased. 'Wellness' for example is an area where Cheshire East can benefit, and this segment of tourism is growing twice as fast as more 'traditional' visitor activities. Additionally, Expedia data reveals that in 2019 areas of outstanding natural beauty in the UK recorded an increase in tourists of almost 25%.

Its data also revealed an increase in demand for locations appreciated for scenic walks in picturesque countryside and spa retreats and activities. Accommodation providers in the south west of England saw growth of almost 20% and the historic city of Bath saw an increase in demand of almost 15%, compared to 2018.

Expedia said: "Wellness tourism has become increasingly popular with the UK ranking in the top 10 wellness tourism markets globally. As travellers prioritise

wellness in their everyday lives and even while travelling, this market is set to become more valuable."

Cheshire East will connect to place marketing initiatives and push the 'Room to Breathe' marketing campaigns alongside amplifying differentiators that allow us to stand out from the crowd.

In line with a sustainable and green recovery, we will not necessarily target an increase in visitor numbers but will look to engage with visitors to encourage longer stays, return visits and greater awareness of the offer available; leading to an overall increase in spend.

The importance of Cheshire East's outdoor offer, including attractions, wider countryside and events (as these re-start), places the borough in a potentially good position to regain lost ground. There will also be a focus on Cheshire East as a safe destination with a profile on self-catering, glamping, camping and caravanning which are all potential growth areas for Cheshire East, with an increased level of interest in potential new sites.

Within Cheshire East there is also a focus on supporting outdoor attractions and outdoor hospitality in the wake of Covid to encourage extended dwell time for visitors, and to ensure safe spaces in the event of new strains or reintroduced social distancing impacting on indoor areas. The ability of businesses to invest in resilience, including outdoor facilities or improved ventilation, has a particular relevance for many venues and town centre vitality going forward.

A Need for Positioning

Cheshire East is ideally positioned to take advantage of some of the key thematic trends post-Covid. Apart from an excellent geographical position with good connectivity providing access to new markets, the area is well positioned to exploit key themes such as:

- Outdoor experiences
- Friends and family
- Wellness
- Lifestyle and culture
- Sustainable and green

Key areas of activity that support this positioning include:

- **Outdoor events** – Whilst many events will probably re-appear from 2022 there will be some larger scale events that will look to late 2021 to run. Events such as the RHS Show, Rewind festival and the 2021 Tour of Britain are nationally known events that have the potential to attract visitors providing much needed income for business and the hospitality industry.
- **Filming/Film Tourism** – Filming is one of the sectors we are already seeing an increase in and Cheshire East will continue to pursue filming opportunities through our national partner Creative England.

- **Heritage** – During the pandemic many people have discovered the rich history of the UK through on-line initiatives. With the variety of heritage in Cheshire East, from Jodrell Bank's status as a World Heritage site, to Tatton Park's listed Park & Garden, we can reconnect with visitors looking to experience these places in person
- **Culture** – Over the last year new audiences have engaged with Culture through online platforms and social media, as many venues have been closed and events have been cancelled. The challenge is to not only to welcome visitors back into venues but also to translate these new digital engagers into actual physical consumers. The opportunity is to use culture as a means to encourage people back into our town centres through using the towns themselves as open venues where culture can be discovered in the open air, through public art, outdoor events, installations and happenings.
- **Weddings** - Cheshire East usually hosts over 2000 each year; with 74% of couples coming from outside the area. Insight shows that many couples have moved their dates to the second half of 2021 however many venues have reported a large increase in enquiries and additional bookings. There is also the potential for overnight stays and additional spend, plus the supply-chain associated with the sector.
- **Town Centres** – There is a need to link to the Town Centre Recovery Plans and the future Vitality Plans to ensure visitor economy can play its part in the re-animation of the town centres. This will be through plans to grow the night-time economy, al-fresco dining (including pavement licences etc) and events
- **Visiting Friends & Relatives** – A key theme in the staycation market especially with the easing of lockdown measures and disparate families and friends looking to re-connect
- **Green Space** - Cheshire East has an abundance of green space through the rural areas of our borough, to Cheshire's Peak District and through to our Market Towns. We know visitors are looking to avoid bustling crowds and this highlights one of our strengths.
- **Cycling/walking** – Cheshire East is blessed with a host of wonderful cycle and walking routes including the Middlewood Way, The Gritstone and Sandstone Trails, Cheshire's Peak District and the many countryside roads and public rights of way.
- **Glamping/Camping/Caravanning** – Research indicates these are the part of the visitor economy that will come back quicker. Cheshire East has seen a growing number of sites opening in the past few years and marketing campaigns highlighting the offer will begin late spring 2021
- **Historic Estates & Houses** – There are a number of important Historic properties in Cheshire East, including National Trust, Historic Houses and the Council's management of Tatton Park. Cheshire East is well positioned to benefit from attracting visitors to enjoy the open space of these attractions and or to attend their events and wedding venues.
- **Spa's & Retreats** – Cheshire East is blessed to have some of the best Spa's in the Country meaning a clear USP for any promotions
- **Self-Catering** – Seen by consumers as the safest way to visit places and with the range and quality that Cheshire East has to offer, this will be at the forefront of any pro-active work

Recovery interventions

In the first year, as restrictions are removed the focus will be on supporting our towns, tourism & hospitality businesses, and attractions developing resilience through the re-start of the economy. Working with partners we will help to position Cheshire East as a safe outdoor location with world class product for all. This will initially target the local resident, 'visiting friends and relatives' and short break visitors to discover what is on the doorstep, moving to regional and national markets as the relevant re-opening steps are met. Further into the year this will be expanded to those looking for outdoor activities including cycling, walking and hiking.

Cheshire East will partner with Marketing Cheshire and VisitBritain to integrate our tourism product in Marketing Campaigns targeting a national audience and will link in with areas of expertise clearly linked to our 'Green Outdoor' unique selling point (usp).

Visitor Information both physical and on-line will also be key and more people look to understand locations before they book. Once in Cheshire, Visitor Information Centres can continue to play an important role in showcasing the area and giving reasons to stay longer and to return later.

We must make sure that key websites and social media complement the planned marketing campaigns. The Cheshire East visitor offer needs to have a clear profile on Marketing Cheshire and VisitEngland media sites, but we also need to catch the potential visitor at the start of their thinking. For example, we need to have a presence on various camping, caravanning and glamping websites and apps to ensure Cheshire East is part of their decision making when booking trips.

We will maintain contact with business owners to better understand their, utilising this to inform ongoing activity and to be the sector voice in strategic discussions. We need to be flexible to react to changing research and consumer sentiment and ensure that our actions are fair and open. Flexibility also includes changing the messaging when and if relevant.

Where relevant and possible, Cheshire East will support businesses seeking to improve their viability and to enhance town centre vitality, through measures such as creating outdoor hospitality areas or working together on initiatives. Cheshire East Council has already distributed grants to many hospitality businesses and specific grants such as 'The Welcome Back' fund have given support to town centres and hospitality businesses, including:

- Town centre focused communications including press advertising & mini videos for 11 town centres.
- Social distancing communications.
- Highway measures to relieve pinch points and allow social distancing
- Road closures to facilitate events

During the next phase of the grant it is anticipated that there will be an additional range of activities: planning more communications but also looking to support some of the infrastructure that can generate activity.

Recruitment and retention are immediate issues for the sector's recovery and as such requires interventions that will assist Cheshire East businesses to recruit staff, thus ensuring their business can function effectively. Proposals are being developed for a 'Hospitality Sector Academy' to assist local people get into hospitality positions within the borough bringing by together industry, Job Centre Plus and external Training Providers.

Promotional work will initially focus on specific campaign periods and themes, linking in with Marketing Cheshire & Visit England national campaigns. A number of these have already started, including '*Chester & Cheshire is looking up*' - a visual campaign to show the beauty of the destination in Spring 2021. '*Cheshire Day*' was held for the first time on 30th March 2021, generating significant results through a limited social media campaign. Engagement was high amongst businesses, residents and those who knew Cheshire and was focussed on showing a favourite place in Cheshire. The research from this day will be utilised to enable more targeted campaigns moving forward and plans are already in place to make Cheshire Day 2022 bigger and better. National media coverage has already featured Cheshire hotels and spas, reasons to visit and events such as the RHS Flower show.

Further planned campaigns include:

Summer 2021 - Welcome Back – What's New, What's Different, What's on

Spring / Summer promotion to introduce what businesses have opened, changed, new offerings, experiences you did not know about and favourites you have missed. Address the need states of Discovery, Freedom to Explore and Treat Yourself.

Autumn 2021

A campaign to increase visits and stays around the 'shoulder' months and encourage families and locals to explore our destination and enjoy the changing seasons and unique events

Christmas 2021 (November – December)

On the assumption that Covid restrictions are more limited or manageable, Cheshire East can look forward to Christmas Lights Switch on, Christmas events at Country houses and popular Christmas markets. There will be a campaign built around supporting local, the promotion of local products and independent shopping

Priorities going into 2022 will include:

- Ensuring research is clear and relevant to allow campaigns and intelligence to tourism & hospitality businesses is correct and helpful
- Cheshire Day 2022
- Campaign plans around fresh air, open space, 'slow' tourism to bring visitors during the low season of January – April
- Engage with unique event organisers to bring new and relevant content to Cheshire East

- Prepare and design the new Cheshire East Visitor Economy Strategy for 2023-2027 ensuring the knowledge and intelligence is through local tourism & hospitality businesses, regional partners and national tourism agencies

Recovery Plan Key Actions

The success of the recovery plan requires a multi-disciplinary approach involving other CEC departments, Tourism Agencies, Business, DCMS and research agencies along with neighbouring authorities, the LEP and Marketing Cheshire. We will:

- Deliver 'Visitor Economy Forums' aligned to business needs with relevant presentations from industry experts.
- Work with and support Marketing Cheshire to engage with Cheshire East businesses and organise relevant webinars as appropriate.
- Work with Marketing Cheshire to establish a 'Destination Cheshire' network to strengthen public-private partnerships, to input and shape destination recovery and to influence regional and national strategies.
- Work with Marketing Cheshire and other organisations to develop and promote effective campaigns, media profile and user content.
- Help to realise the value of the visitor economy as part of regeneration plans in Crewe & Macclesfield, such as opportunities around Crewe Lyceum Square - LY2, Lyceum Theatre reopening and the new Crewe Market Hall, as well as further development of a Civic and Cultural quarter.
- Articulate the role of tourism, culture and events in all Cheshire East towns (eg through Town Vitality Plans) with the aim of creating successful town centres and realising the value of the visitor economy to their vibrancy.
- Work with the Rural Strategy Group on how the visitor economy can contribute to growth in jobs, skills and prosperity.
- Seek to increase the numbers and range of people experiencing the arts and culture in local destinations to boost the visitor economy, providing increased income leading to greater sustainability and resilience for culture and tourism businesses.
- Ensure access to new tools to assist in business recovery. For example, User Generated Content platforms have the ability to cut marketing costs, increase visibility and increase relevance in searches.
- Ensure Cheshire East tourism & hospitality businesses have access to the most up to date research from industry professionals. We will also work with partners to access data sources that give an in-depth understanding of who are coming to Cheshire, what they are doing and research around consumer sentiment and forward plans. This will inform campaign planning and visitor economy strategies going forward
- Support the tourism and hospitality sector with initiatives to drive the recruitment, retention and training of staff: Develop plans through a Cheshire East 'Hospitality Skills' group to understand and address training requirements, job retention and employment opportunities.
- Provide sector relevant business support. Cheshire East Council will continue to utilise government grants to further support sectors including visitor economy, town centres and our rural areas.

- Engage with the Cheshire & Warrington LEP especially through the Build Back Better agenda: [CWLEP_BuildingBackBetter-iss01.pdf](#) (871candwep.co.uk). The LEP want to support those sectors and businesses that have been hardest hit by the Covid-19 pandemic, including visitor economy, culture, events, hospitality and leisure. Cheshire East with its important national tourism attractions such as Tatton Park and Jodrell, alongside the Cheshire Peak District and Market Towns are crucial to the economy, especially in rural areas with many large hotels and wedding venues providing anchors to local supply chains.
- Respond to the Government's Destination Management Organisation (DMO) review in 2021. Cheshire East Council will input to the review and help shape future priorities of Marketing Cheshire.
- Research and develop the 'working' holiday trend in Cheshire East; where visitors assist in environmental projects, possibly through Cheshire East Rangers and other environmental organisations.
- Engage with neighbouring authorities to establish best practice in facilitating outdoor hospitality in town centres and other recovery initiatives.

Monitoring and evaluation

We will also continue to provide annual data around the value and importance of the visitor economy in Cheshire East through the STEAM Data and monitor trends on hotel occupancy and performance. Cheshire East will additionally seek ways to collect data on the self-catering sector to ensure, along with hotel data, we understand the current position of the market and can inform future strategy. Other business data, town centre footfall, attractions data, consumer sentiment and feedback will be collected where available to inform plans and the development of future strategy.

Conclusion

As part of the Council's wider approach to post-Covid economic recovery, a sector-specific plan for the period 2021 and 2022 will assist the Cheshire East Visitor Economy to recover with support that will supplement and amplify the actions of businesses themselves. Working with partners and businesses, this will assist the sector to recover lost ground and place it in a better position to achieve growth once again. Recovery in the short-term will enable a new Visitor Economy Strategy to be delivered for 2023 onwards, which will look to the medium and longer-term.

The Plan provides a framework for support and promotion that will assist the sector to be resilient in the short-term and to recover. It sets out several actions that will enable the sector to take advantage of opportunities and position Cheshire East as a safe, accessible destination with quality assets and experiences. This includes partnership working, promotional campaigns, a focus on both rural assets and town centres, addressing recruitment and retention issues, business support, networking opportunities and research to inform a future Visitor Economy Strategy. However, plans need to be flexible and responsive enough to deal with the continuing influence of the Pandemic over this period. Therefore, the Council will keep measures under review and may still have to respond to changing circumstances.