



**Friday 10<sup>th</sup> September 2021 8.30am-10.30am  
Online Meeting**

**CHESTER GROWTH PARTNERSHIP MEMBERS**

Peter Carstensen, Harry Bolton, Cllr Adam Langan, Carl Critchlow, Andy Farrall, Nicholas Dobbs, Katrina Kerr, Peter Cocker, Chris Matheson MP, Tim Stratford, Cllr Stuart Parker, Mike Hogg, Nicola Said

**OTHER ATTENDEES**

Catherine Walker, Robert Gatensbury, Roz Munslow, Luke Arnold, Andy Seddon, David Butler, Geraint Jones

**APOLOGIES**

Andrew Lewis, Gemma Davies, Andy Foster, Joe Manning, Peter Cocker, Beth Skinner

1.	<p><b>Welcome and Introductions – Peter Carstensen</b> PC welcomed everybody and noted the apologies. The minutes of the last meeting on 7<sup>th</sup> May 2021 were approved.</p> <p>PC commented on a positive Cheshire Update event organised by Place North West. It was well attended and discussions on the day highlighted how much interest in and scope there was for development in Chester.</p> <p>Since the last Board meeting PC had become aware of a growing frustration among local stakeholders in the role Chester played within the Council's priorities and how to ensure the voice of Chester was heard. PC suggested more partnership-based discussions to reach a consensus on how things could be improved. MH shared those frustrations and would be happy to contribute to any meeting/panel.</p> <p>RB would also be keen to join any related group discussion and added that this may be influenced by the borough containing a number of towns and communities each seeking a loud voice. TS agreed with the views expressed but felt this was not solely a local authority issue. It was necessary to establish a high-level voice and partnership thinking from across the community, including residents, business, the third sector and local authority.</p> <p><b>ACTION:</b> Board members to contact RG if they would like to be involved in a sub/focus group.</p> <p><b>ACTION:</b> RG to contact KK about an up-coming feature on Chester in Commercial Property Management.</p>
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<p>2.</p>	<p><b>Reimagining Chester City Centre – Harry Bolton</b>          HB gave a short verbal update on the Reimagining work and thanked those present for input to date. The report included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Re-imagining</li> <li>• Baseline information</li> <li>• Action plans, structured thematically</li> <li>• A look at the residential population and creating a city that people wanted to live in</li> <li>• A look at the high street</li> <li>• Branding and wayfinding</li> <li>• Structural and physical recommendations.</li> </ul> <p><b>ACTION:</b> HB keen to get working group together for a session to feedback further and distil action plans into a tangible programme of activities that everyone can sign up to and get behind.</p> <p>AF asked if the report included proposals for Debenhams with HB confirming.</p> <p>KK questioned why Board members could not see the report and urged the Council to speed the process up. CW replied that the report was going through some internal formalities before being issued. There had also been a slight delay as the first iteration did not fully reflect the brief. RB added it was common practice for commissioning bodies to read and approve reports before issuing more widely.</p> <p><b>ACTION:</b> RG to circulate the report as soon as possible.</p>
<p>3.</p>	<p><b>Destination Chester and Business Update – Carl Critchlow and Nicola Said</b>          CC updated verbally for Destination Chester with the following highlights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Footfall back to 2019 levels for the bulk of summer and often exceeded; reflective of how attractive Chester was as a destination</li> <li>• Hotels performing relatively well; “Staycation City of the Year”</li> <li>• Hospitality - some forced temporary closures due to track and trace protocols and associated issues of fresh produce going out of date</li> <li>• The al fresco relaxed regulations were temporary, but a consultation was planned in a couple of weeks to see how the industry moved forward. The BID hoped things would continue and hopefully expand</li> <li>• Retail performance was mixed. High-end stores, e.g., jewellers were performing very well with large retail encountering fluctuations</li> <li>• There had been 18 business closures, offset by 21 new businesses opening</li> <li>• The BID was in conversations with businesses to link hospitality and retailers with students as they returned</li> <li>• Chester Comedy Festival returned in July with many events sold out</li> <li>• Work continued with the police and Council in respect of ASB and cleanliness</li> </ul> <p>PC thanked CC and added there was a suggestion from Whitehall that the relaxation of al fresco restrictions could be made permanent. CGP needed to be on the front foot to react and put suggestions forward.</p>

	<p>NS provided the Business Update with the following highlights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Room rate was a lot higher with an average daily rate of £99 compared to £80 in 2019</li> <li>• Attractions reported their busiest August on record</li> <li>• Visitor Information Centre reported many visitors replacing international short haul holidays with a longer stay in Chester</li> <li>• Advertising - reached 60% of targeted households in first 10 days</li> <li>• Through the Destination Chester network, in partnership with the Council, successful in receiving c. £400K of funding for a programme running Oct-Mar, called Chester Designed by Nature which Storyhouse have been commissioned to deliver</li> <li>• For Christmas a co-ordinated programme of marketing. The Christmas Market will be happening, and trader pitches are fully sold out</li> <li>• Visit England was leading on a programme with the National Lottery around day visits in the autumn. Attractions being encouraged to sign up to the voucher scheme</li> <li>• Currently launching a partnership with Springboard at the end of the month with funding for initial training for hospitality jobs and partnering with businesses for guaranteed interviews. Encouraging sign-up and engagement.</li> </ul> <p>PC thanked NS and added it would be helpful to circulate the presentation, together with the collection of articles around the staycation theme.</p> <p><b>ACTION:</b> NS to circulate further details.</p> <p>RM reported on the pilot al fresco parklet outside the Town Hall, which would be in use through to end of September and hopefully into October. It had been very well received with very few management or ASB issues. PC commented that this was evidence of ASB being more of an issue for empty spaces. NS said the parklet concept would hopefully be incorporated into the Christmas Market too. NS also confirmed that the Christmas Market will be in the usual space, adding that options near the front of the Cathedral were also being explored.</p> <p>ES asked if Marketing Cheshire were liaising with the Employability Team at the University as well as the Student Union for the Springboard partnership work with NS agreeing to ensure necessary connections are made.</p>
4.	<p><b>Dee House – Robert Gatensbury</b></p> <p>RG updated on the latest project progress on Dee House with the following highlights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Submitted for Listed Building Consent (LBC) in the summer for the package of stabilisation works with a decision expected in October</li> <li>• Developed specification and tender for stabilisation works are due to go out on 16<sup>th</sup> September and looking to make an appointment by 4<sup>th</sup> November</li> <li>• Also looking to focus on branding for on-site and online information with the Council comms team working on an informative signboard</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working with CBRE to deliver soft market testing re. appropriate uses, gaps in information, Council engagement, viability issues. Deadline was today so interest will be reviewed with CBRE</li> <li>• Hoping for on-site activity over the winter with further engagement, further public information, and the start of the process to shortlist the final scheme and the potential development partner</li> </ul> <p>RG indicated that most work would take place between Dec and Apr with further works up until July 2022. A cautious and phased approach will be taken given the unknown conditions of the building.</p>
<p>5.</p>	<p><b>One City Plan Review Update – Robert Gatensbury</b>  RG gave an update on the One City Plan Review with the following highlights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Executive Summary of the GFN report has now been received and included several high-level conclusions and recommendations</li> <li>• Many groups were reached out to including those typically hard to reach</li> <li>• Five key themes have emerged as a basis to take forward</li> </ul> <p><b>ACTION:</b> RG to share executive summary with board members</p> <p>Latest input and feedback need to be drawn together and will go to Cabinet in January to report back and suggest changes, with a view to a final document after that steer and approval.</p> <p>PC added that other documents such as the Transport Strategy needed to feed into this work. Board member comments were requested early to assist.</p> <p><b>ACTION:</b> Board members to feed comments through to RG</p> <p>AF highlighted the Smart Mobility work should be written up within the next three weeks and ready for circulation.</p>
<p>6.</p>	<p><b>City Place / Levelling Up Fund Update – Robert Gatensbury</b>  Following requests for support when the bid was submitted in early June, RG provided an update:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus for the bid was City Place which recognised two opportunities; (a) to re-ignite and support a piece of regeneration which needed to be finished off; (b) linking with the opportunity to look at how a Chester History Centre/City Archives could play a role by being located within City Place</li> <li>• The bid included a new archive centre, supporting grade A office space, multi-modal transport hub incl. community café, and associated public realm supporting gateway opportunities to and from the station</li> <li>• Delivery as per government timetable would be by March 2023.</li> </ul> <p>CW said that no future rounds of funding had been confirmed yet, but they were expected. In addition, the Community Renewal Fund results had been delayed indefinitely after previously being expected in July.</p>

	<p>KK asked about the rationale behind another hotel however RG clarified this was not part of the bid and was added merely for context as already being delivered commercially with planning permission secured.</p> <p>ES questioned any risk of spending HLF money due to links with the LUF with RG responding that the Archives is a joint project with Cheshire East and although there are some sensitivities, timescales should not be an issue.</p> <p>AB asked if there was a new governance model set as the current Archives building is not currently a visitor facility. RB sat on the group that looked at this stating the current archive building was not fit-for-purpose.</p>
<p>7.</p>	<p><b>Strategic Funding Update – Catherine Walker</b>  Additional Restrictions Grant:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Funding from government received as part of the Covid pandemic and if the latest tranche was fully spent by the end of June, further funding would be allocated to local authorities</li> <li>• Now had ARG funding (£1.995M) valid to end of March and the proposals and businesses cases were being worked up to further help businesses and support economic recovery</li> <li>• Four components to the proposals: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Hardship grants: a further round of funding for those still impacted by Covid restrictions, e.g., staff shortages, staff isolation issues or industries which have not fully picked up</li> <li>○ Business support: how can we work with the businesses showing growth potential or those impacted who are looking to start a new business. Start-and-scale Programme providing intensive support around start-ups.</li> <li>○ Investor Fund: currently a strong pipeline of inward investment enquiries and activity. Help to get existing businesses over the line, accelerate decisions and create jobs while expanding and attracting new businesses into the area</li> <li>○ Skills, innovation and supply chain approach: working to develop activity that will result in grants, working with businesses to support innovation, pick up on supply chain issues</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Ambitious programme to be completed by end of March. Some pilot activities to create programmes which were sustainable thereafter or could tap into the UK Shared Prosperity Fund which is anticipated next year.</li> </ul> <p>Mersey Dee Alliance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Council had been working on an MDA fiscal stimulus package</li> <li>• Included working with government to say we have specific challenges and significant employers/businesses that have been significantly impacted by both Brexit and Covid and therefore needed a short-term stimulus into the economy</li> <li>• FSP originally submitted in April and negotiations with the UK and Welsh governments had continued while the second version of that submission was worked up.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There were four main strands to the bid: digital, places, low carbon and business and innovation.</li> </ul> <p>PC asked about the value of the request with CW replying that it was originally £400M, but it was necessary to show where other existing funding streams did not meet the 'ask', so the value was somewhat fluid. CW will keep members updated – a quick decision was not expected.</p>
8.	<p><b>Local Plan Review – David Butler</b></p> <p>The consultation on the Local Plan taking 12 weeks from 23<sup>rd</sup> June to 15<sup>th</sup> September was highlighted and a presentation was given.</p> <p>PC thanked DB and asked if any input was required from the business community with DB stating a formal response from CGP would be useful, to include sites promoted for development, together with areas to be protected. The interactive map tool could be used.</p> <p>AB highlighted the need for a gear change in the number of people living in the city centre with DB replying these were the issues the planners liked to look at and is not straightforward as the government have changed permitted development rules.</p> <p>KK suggested the Council-owned buildings behind the market would make a good community scheme. RB echoed the sentiments with MH adding that increasing residency in the city would increase chances of recovery and success.</p>
9.	<p><b>AOB</b></p> <p><b>ACTION:</b> Possible item for next agenda an update from Julie Derbyshire at CityFibre.</p> <p>PC thanked everyone for attending and their contributions and closed the meeting.</p>
10.	<p><b>Date of next meeting</b></p> <p>Friday 19<sup>th</sup> November 2021 – 8.30am</p>