

1. Introduction to Cheshire

Cheshire is located in the heart of the North West offering an inspiring combination of the ancient and the modern. From Roman sandals to killer heels, the county effortlessly blends centuries of substance with rolling acres of style. Cheshire is also a business location of national and international importance, providing companies with an ideal commercial base and their employees with a first-class quality of life.



With a population of 887,000, the area is considered the most successful of the five sub regions that make up England’s North West, with an eighth of people in the region contributing a sixth of its economic output. GVA (gross value added) and economic activity levels are significantly above the regional and national averages, while unemployment rates are below them. In total, the Cheshire and Warrington economy is worth around £22 billion a year and supports 429,000 jobs. The area is fortunate in having a broad business base, but there are particular strengths in chemical, petrochemicals, automotive, nuclear and energy, manufacturing, financial and professional services, creative industries and tourism.



Cheshire is within easy reach of major air, rail and road links. The region is located 180 miles from London and is easily accessible from all other parts of the UK.

Chester boasts the most complete set of Roman city walls in Britain and visitors from all over the globe stand under the famous Eastgate Clock and look down over the city's cobbled streets. Stunning architecture, fascinating street entertainment, boutique shops, and a marvellous mix of international eateries and charming quintessentially English pubs set the tone for this bustling city.

By contrast yet so perfectly fitting, the Cheshire countryside is dappled with stately homes, historic estates and unspoilt, breathtaking countryside, making it a perfect destination for those wishing to get away from it all in the heart of the North West's countryside.



2. Cheshire Gardens of Distinction: Home of England's Finest Gardens

MORI research commissioned by the North West Regional Development Agency, (NWDA) in 2006 provided evidence to suggest that visitors choose destinations or themed activities before they choose precise products or services. The CGoD project seeks to support this by encouraging gardens to collectively market themselves under a single destination brand framework 'Cheshire's Gardens of Distinction', allowing gardens to undertake marketing activity more effectively and efficiently.

Cheshire's Gardens of Distinction (CGoD) project celebrates the richness and diversity of Cheshire's horticultural heritage and green spaces. Building on the success of Cheshire's Year of Gardens '08 (CYOG '08) marketing programme and the ERDF 3 year programme, the project aims to continue to achieve significant impact for the regional tourism industry from local, national and international markets.

2.1 Cheshire's Year of Gardens 08

Cheshire's Year of Gardens '08 was a major initiative to celebrate the richness and diversity of Cheshire's horticultural heritage and green spaces. CYOG 08 worked with 25 Gardens of Distinction, the one year initiative had 5 programme strands; Community Grant Scheme; Arts Programme; Event Challenge Fund; Business Cluster programme; and Marketing & Gateway activities.

The analysis of visitor and economic impacts indicates that the programme met and exceeded the targets set. There was an absolute increase in visitor volumes equivalent to 346,000, and a net visitor increase equivalent 277,400 visitors. These increases are mirrored by an uplift in visitor expenditure of £10.2 million with an overall economic impact to the programme of over £12.2 million and the creation of over 200 FTE jobs within the Cheshire, Warrington and Halton economy.

The Community Grants Scheme supported the delivery of 88 community projects; involved an estimated 8,000 participants from local communities and school groups; and, secured 4,000 days of volunteering valued at £400,000.

The Arts programme achieved all but one of the targets set. It involved more than 160 artists and over 2,800 participants in the delivery of a diverse range of arts and cultural projects to the benefit of audiences of well over 1.4million. The art projects have attracted audiences from near and far and there is evidence that these audiences have been inspired by, and have developed an appetite for, arts and cultural provision in public spaces and gardens particularly.

The Events Challenge Fund achieved a number of key aims. By supporting the gardens to stage new and different events throughout the year, it has generated new reasons to visit the gardens and attracted both new and repeat visitors. The Fund helped to lengthen the season by providing greater opportunity to visit outside off-peak times, in the evenings and by diversifying the product offer.

The Business Clusters Programme achieved all the targets set. Advice and guidance was provided to 59 different businesses, 15 businesses were assisted with ICT, 42 adults took part in

development workshops, 10 businesses were supported in developing access statements, 11 new members were recruited and 16 businesses accredited with VAQAS accreditation.

The effectiveness of the Marketing Strategy for Cheshire's Year of Gardens was demonstrated throughout the evaluation, and particularly in the visitor and economic impacts. Additionally the strategy achieved a number of other key targets and aims.



The PR coverage attracted for the year far exceeded of that targeted and valued at over £2million. The Branding for the programme has been successful in both positioning Cheshire as a 'Garden County' and in achieving a clear alignment between its intention and its manifestation in visitor minds.

The channels used to promote the year have all been effective in increasing awareness and in instilling action amongst both existing visitors and those who are new to gardens, new to the gardens of Cheshire and new to the region as a whole.

Finally, it is clear from the evidence provided that the programme delivered a number of early legacies. These together with the notable commitments and aspirations born out of the year, provided a very strong platform from which the Gardens of Distinctions initiative was further developed.



2.2 Regional Marketing Culture & Heritage Project: European Regional Development Fund

The Regional Marketing Culture & Heritage Project was a North-West campaign aimed at increasing visitor spend in the region through the focused promotion of the region's three key themes that demonstrate the best prospects for future growth – namely Industrial Powerhouse (industrial heritage-based),

Adventure Capital (outdoor activity) and Cheshire's Gardens of Distinction (horticultural heritage). All three thematic campaigns built upon the success of previous work to achieve significant impact for the regional tourism industry from national and international markets with funding from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).

In April 2009, the CGoD project successfully secured £1.6million from this ERDF funding allowing CGoD to build on the success of CYOG' 08 programme until March 2012.

The aim was to increase visitor spend in the region from national and international markets by promoting the richness and diversity of Cheshire's horticultural assets and building on the legacy of Cheshire's Year of Gardens (CYOG' 08).

The project set out the following objectives:

- Increase in visitor numbers by 240,000 by March 2012
- To achieve an average ROI of higher than 24:1 on all marketing activities by 2012
- Target the most appropriate audience to increase the levels of day visitor spend generating an economic impact figure of up to £14.2m by 2012
- To ensure that Cheshire's gardens are recognised as a key contributor and driver for the cultural and visitor economy of Cheshire and the North West
- Raise awareness of Cheshire's product overseas and attract a key international, horticultural conference to the sub-region by 2012

The final evaluation report is pending, however all objectives were exceeded and a legacy programme developed.

2.3 Cheshire's Gardens of Distinction legacy

The gardens have agreed to commit financially to ensure the continuation of the brand post ERDF and a development of a steering group has been formed to drive the project forward for 2012.

There are now 27 CGoD signed up for the legacy approach. A steering group has been established consisting of a mixture of private gardens, public and various gardening organisations

including the RHS. The group has agreed to meet every 6 months.

There is a small committee group which has been formed to deliver the marketing activity. This group will only report into the steering group at the meetings.

The Garden Forum meetings will continue but organised by the gardens not Marketing Cheshire.

Basic marketing activities have been agreed but the group is actively seeking sponsors for the whole programme, concentrating efforts on; corporate sponsors in relations to their CSR budgets and commercial sponsors such as garden centres.

CGoD is now moving to develop the destination as a learning county. This summer the group is piloting a week long garden residential course. The aim is to have 25 – 30 garden lovers on the course. We are marketing to gardening groups and leisure gardeners rather than expert horticulturalists. The proposed schedule has a nice soft mix of horticulture skills and education combined with an enjoyable weeks visit to the Home of England's Finest Gardens.

It is hoped any income generated from the course will be filtered back into the overall legacy budget to continue marketing the group further.

The following gardens are part of the CGoD legacy:

- Abbeywood Garden
- Arley Hall & Gardens
- Bents Garden & Home
- Biddulph Grange
- Bluebell Cottage Gardens
- Capesthorne Hall
- Chester Zoological Gardens
- Cholmondeley Castle
- Ness Botanic Gardens
- Norton Priory Museum & Gardens
- Port Sunlight Museum & Garden Village
- Rode Hall
- Stonyford Cottage
- Tatton Garden Society

- Tatton Park
- The Dorothy Clive Garden
- Trentham Leisure Limited
- Walton Hall & Gardens
- Wollerton Old Hall
- Grosvenor Garden Centre

3. Hybrid Parks – Cheshire’s Gardens of Distinctions involvement

Cheshire West and Chester (CWaC) are one of 3 local authorities within the Cheshire & Warrington sub-region, providing services within social welfare, health, education, culture and heritage.

The proposal for Cheshire’s Gardens of Distinction (CGoD) was aligned strongly to economic strategies at regional and sub-regional level as well as to other community and cultural strategies and was developed by a partnership of organisations with the support of parks and gardens. CGoD programme is a major initiative to promote the diversity of Cheshire’s green spaces, providing benefits to a wide range of tourism-related businesses, the wider visitor economy, the environment and local communities.

Evidence suggests that parks and gardens are becoming ever more popular and that investment in parks and related events stimulates significant additional visitors and expenditure. It has been estimated that Cheshire’s gardens attract 3.73 million visitors, spending £ 61m.

The Regional Economic Strategy’s objectives to improve productivity and to grow the capability of the workforce is underpinned by a third ‘driver’ – the creation and maintenance of conditions for sustainable growth and private sector investment. This means investing in the region’s environment, culture and infrastructure, physical improvements and a better image that is attractive both to business investors and to visitors. Equally it means tackling deprivation, valuing diversity and social inclusion. It includes building an inclusive society where local people, voluntary organisations and faith communities are more active in improving the quality of life and of their surroundings.

CWaC is keen to share its experiences, in particular in the tourism economy, and understands the Hybrid Parks project as a great opportunity to use experiences made elsewhere and to jointly work on the challenges of climate change feeding directly into our future work and the Regional Economic Strategy.

4. Useful links

www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk

www.cheshiregardens.com

www.visitchester.com

<http://cmsen.eghn.org/cheshire-ml>

<http://cmsen.eghn.org/cheshire-rp>

Additional information about Hybrid Parks and INTERREG IVC
www.hybridparks.eu