

**VisitWiltshire Futures Q&A**

**March 2024**

Following Wiltshire Council’s announcement in 2023 that they were withdrawing their funding of VisitWiltshire and strategic support for tourism, the VisitWiltshire Ltd Board conducted a detailed review to determine the best way forward for the company and its supporting tourism and hospitality businesses in Wiltshire.

As well as withdrawing funding and strategic support, the Council have also publicly stated that they are currently not able to support the creation of a Wiltshire Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP). LVEPs are the new accredited public/private partnership organisations that together will form the Government’s new national tourism structure in England.

As a result, the VisitWiltshire Ltd and Great West Way Ltd Boards have agreed to merge.

This new arrangement through which Great West Way Ltd will trade as VisitWiltshire retains VisitWiltshire brands and channels and means that for existing Partners, business will continue as usual. Investing Partners will see no change in the way they are supported and promoted via VisitWiltshire marketing and distribution channels.

***Q. What are the benefits of this new arrangement to VisitWiltshire Partners?***

A. The benefits to current and future VisitWiltshire Partners are:

* The award-winning VisitWiltshire brands, channels, assets and resources will continue to be maintained. VisitWiltshire Partners will see no change in the way they are supported and promoted.
* Economies of scale achieved by combining operations.
* Maintains a route for Wiltshire towns and tourism businesses to still be promoted by the national tourist boards and other 3rd parties.
* Maximises potential for future partnership activity and income generation.
* Retains the industry-leading experience and skills of the VisitWiltshire team.
* Increased reach and distribution for businesses.
* Retains Wiltshire brand and marketing channels to continue to drive growth.
1. ***How will VisitWiltshire’s marketing channels be impacted?***

**A.** All the main VisitWiltshire marketing and promotional channels and marketing activity will continue to operate and be vehicles for you to generate new business. The award-winning [www.visitwiltshire.co.uk](http://www.visitwiltshire.co.uk) website and social media programme will continue to operate under a VisitWiltshire and Wiltshire destination brand identities. Digital print, content, travel trade and PR activity will also continue.

***Q. Is the change going to cost my business more?***

A. No.

***Q. Why was merging VisitWiltshire Ltd and Great West Way® Ltd the preferred option?***

A. Having appraised a number of business models and options over the last 12 months, the VisitWiltshire Board were unanimous in agreeing that merging the 2 companies was the best option. The Board are satisfied that merging with Great West Way:

* Is in the best interests of its VisitWiltshire investing Partners and members.
* Builds on VisitWiltshire’s track-record in driving tourism growth.
* Preserves VisitWiltshire’s award-winning tourism brands, assets and channels.
* Ensures VisitWiltshire marketing channels and activity will continue to be promoted under the same consistent VisitWiltshire branding and messaging (Great West Way Ltd trading as VisitWiltshire).
* Is cost-effective and sustainable.
* Has the support of Wiltshire towns, tourism and hospitality businesses.
* Maintains a route for Wiltshire and Wiltshire destinations to benefit from VisitBritain, VisitEngland and other 3rd party promotion and activities.

***Q. What other options were considered?***

**A.** The Board considered a number of options including downsizing and combining with another organisation. They concluded that the best option for investing Partners and the sector as a whole, and the only option that retained VisitWiltshire brands and channels while also giving potential for a continued relationship with VisitEngland/VisitBritain was to combine with Great West Way.

***Q. I’m currently a VisitWiltshire Partner and a Great West Way Ambassador, will I be able to retain the separate benefits of both brands and channels?***

A. Yes, VisitWiltshire and Great West Way marketing channels, distribution and reach will continue to be kept separate, with separate Partner & Ambassador schemes. As a supporter of both brands, you will continue to benefit from separate consumer, travel trade, industry and PR programmes.

***Q. What activity and businesses support services will change or no longer be provided as a result of the Wiltshire Council funding cut?***

A. Business support, marketing, insight and other services previously provided as part of our contract with Wiltshire Council for non-investing towns and businesses will either cease or be available on a chargeable basis only. VisitWiltshire marketing and promotional channels will continue as before.

***Q. Why is Wiltshire’s visitor economy so important?***

**A.** Pre-pandemic, Wiltshire’s visitor economy generates £1.5 billion per annum, supporting 29,000 jobs, 9% of all employment. VisitWiltshire activity achieves an ROI of 44:1 and has out-performed all its main competitor destinations in key performance indicators including spreading the benefit of tourism around the county; extending Wiltshire’s tourism season, increasing visitor spend, targeting high-spending visitors, and growing international staying visitors.

***Q. Can you tell me more about Local Visitor Economy Partnerships. Why does Wiltshire need one?***

**A.** In 2022, the Government announced that it was creating a new national structure for visitor economy management and marketing in England. This includes the accreditation of approx. 40 Destination Management Organizations as Local Visitor Economy Partnerships (LVEPs). It is estimated that Wiltshire will lose £50million p/a in visitor spend alone as a direct result of not having an accredited LVEP. Wiltshire tourism, towns and businesses will also lose access to national marketing and business support activity and tourism grant programmes from DCMS and other Government departments that will be allocated only to areas that have accredited LVEPs.

***Q. VisitWiltshire have won many awards and according to VisitEngland have “traditionally been one of the strongest DMOs in England” why have they not already formed an LVEP?***

A. VisitWiltshire passed all the Government’s criteria in the Expression of Interest stage and were expected by VisitEngland to be in the first group of 12 LVEPs announced in 2023. However, Wiltshire Council’s withdrawal of strategic support for tourism and funding for VisitWiltshire meant that despite VisitWiltshire having 500 supporting businesses, they were no longer able to pass the criteria for public sector funding and strategic support for tourism.

***Q. So what’s the plan for securing a LVEP for Wiltshire?***

A. Wiltshire Council have said publicly that they do not support the idea of a Wiltshire-only county LVEP, but that at some point in the future they may look at the feasibility of exploring creating a new regional Wessex LVEP, linked to a new Devolution Deal with Government. VisitWiltshire will continue to engage with Wiltshire Council, as well as other key partners, in order to try and secure their support for Wiltshire tourism and a Wiltshire LVEP.

***Q. Can you tell me more about Great West Way?***

A. Great West Way is one of the world’s premier touring routes between London and Bristol, and an award-winning Destination Marketing Organisation. Approximately 25% of the route is in Wiltshire. Since its launch in 2018 it has generated significant new business for the county, successfully generating additional domestic visits and spend and encouraging international visitors to travel outside London. With respect to its Wiltshire geography, Great West Way Ltd have committed to continuing to operate as VisitWiltshire using the VisitWiltshire brand and channels.

***Q. What is happening to the award-winning VisitWiltshire team?***

A. The VisitWiltshire team will be transferred over to, and will continue to work on, VisitWiltshire branded channels and activity. Your existing point of contact, including telephone numbers and email addresses, will remain the same.

***Q. When is this change happening?***

A. The transfer is scheduled to take place on 1 April 2024. Our bank account details will change and we will let you have details of the new bank account shortly. In future you will be contacted and invoiced as VisitWiltshire, but as a trading name of Great West Way, rather than as VisitWiltshire Ltd.

***Q. Will my personal data remain safe?***

A. Great West Way Ltd are committed to ensuring your data remains secure and is held in-line with GDPR requirements. Great West Way’s privacy statement can be seen [here.](https://www.greatwestway.co.uk/information/privacy-policy)

***Q. How can I find out more?***

A. Please contact davidandrews@visitwiltshire.co.uk or any of the team if you would like to find out more, or if you have any further questions.