

MINUTES OF THE 462nd MEETING OF THE VISITENGLAND ADVISORY BOARD (VEAB)

Tuesday 18 November 2025 at 1000-1300

Coade/Betjeman Rooms, Cannon Bridge House
25 Dowgate Hill, London EC4R 2YA

Present: Lady Victoria Borwick, (Chair/VB), VEAB Chair
Dr Sarah Green OBE (SG), Board Member (online)
Allan Lambert (AL), Board Member
Nigel Wilkinson MBE (NW), Board Member
Laura Backhouse (LB), DCMS Observer
Lata Mistry (LM), DCMS Observer
Katie Panagou (KP), VEAB Boardroom Apprentice Observer
Kendra Blumsky (KB), BTA Boardroom Apprentice Observer

In Attendance: Patricia Yates (CEO/PY), Chief Executive/BTA Accounting Officer
Andrew Stokes OBE (AS), England and Commercial Director
Debra Lang (DL), Director of HR & Professional Services
Serena Jacob (SJ), Finance Director
Lyndsey Turner-Swift (LTS), Deputy Director VE
Janet Uttley (JU), Head of Industry Development VE (for item 7)
Henry Bankes (HB), General Counsel and Company Secretary
Julia Howells (JH), Company Secretarial Executive (minutes)

Apologies: Helen Bonser-Wilton (HBW), Board Member
Nadine Thomson (NT), Board Member
Fiona Pollard CBE (FP), Board Member

1.0 Welcome and Opening Remarks

1.1 Welcome

1. The Chair welcomed attendees, including SG who was joining online and LM, Head of DCMS's Visitor Economy Growth Strategy branch, who was attending as an observer. KP's last meeting as VEAB Boardroom Apprentice would be acknowledged under any other business.

1.2 Apologies

2. Apologies for absence had been received from HBW, NT and FP. With four members in attendance the meeting was quorate. NT had provided notes on the papers which would be referenced throughout the meeting.

1.3 Register of Interests

3. As per the register dated 12 November 2025.

1.4 Minutes from the Last Meeting

4. **DECISION:** The VEAB approved the minutes dated 9 September as an accurate record of the meeting.

1.5 Action Tracker

5. **ACTION: LTS to circulate the notes and slide deck from the 20 October DCMS/LVEP Strategy session once approved. [DONE]**
6. Inhouse training: Given information security protocols, DL advised that work continued to find a solution for non-VE/VB email address users to access the training modules.

1.6 Chair's Update & Diary

7. Later in the day VB would be visiting Hull and the following evening attending the Remarkable East Yorkshire Tourism Awards. Ongoing meetings, including with VE award winners, highlighted innovation, environmental and access awareness, but the general sentiment VB was hearing from her visits around the country, was that economic confidence was low and trading conditions remained tough.

2.0 CEO's Updates

2.1 CEO's Report

8. PY advised that there was no update in respect of the ALB Review.
9. On funding, she had been briefed that final advice was due to go to the Secretary of State. A read out was scheduled for the end of the month with final figures hoping to be confirmed in December.
10. DCMS would formally announce the appointment of the new BTA Chair on 19 November. The new Chair would serve a 3-year term and would take up the role on 1 December. Introductory meetings would then be scheduled for all BTA Board members and Committee Chairs.
11. Discussions continued regarding VE's potential role running the Short Term Lets Registration scheme for Government. Full clarity around expectations and finances were awaited. LB advised of complexities around drafting related policy and legislation and that costings were being discussed with Treasury. Launch date was mid 2026 (TBC). Additional points raised included:
 - The scheme would be voluntary in its first year after which it would likely to be compulsory.
 - Would regulation lead to licensing?
 - LB confirmed that the IT for the scheme was being developed by DCMS and was currently in the testing stage. DL noted that the project team was content with the technical specification proposed.
 - AL advised making the minimum ask clear.
 - In response to SG's query, it was confirmed that traders would be required to verify they were compliant but there was no requirement to upload documents.
 - LB offered to share a prototype of the IT with the VEAB.
12. The CEO spoke about VB and VE's engagement with the Great North and DCMS publishing a paper for consideration by the Mayors. To support this VB/VE were hosting the northern LVEPs to discuss joint working and a call was scheduled with the Mayor of the North East. The launch of the North West domestic coastal campaign had taken place in Southport. A compelling year-long cultural events programme would be delivered in the town in response to the 2024 incident, being run under the custodianship of Liverpool City Region LVEP. PY highlighted the huge

appetite for and interest in the domestic campaign which aimed to drive visits, increase local pride and engage businesses.

13. WTM at the start of November had been well-attended and had included the launch of Normans 2027 (the Bayeux Tapestry being exhibited at the British Museum from September 2026 to July 2027). VB was linked in through the French country manager and VE would appoint a Project Manager to maximise product development opportunities and domestic promotion of this campaign.
14. It had been widely trailed in the media that the Budget would provide regional Mayors with the power to raise a Tourism Tax on accommodation. The expectation was the tax would not be capped and revenue raised would not be ring-fenced to tourism. A full discussion took place, key points included:
 - NW felt the policy was counter to growth and voiced concern that a sector currently in recession and under pressure was being taxed further. He hoped that England would learn some lessons from the nations which had already implemented a similar policy.
 - AL agreed that the introduction of the tax did not reflect an understanding of the state of the sector. He felt some thought should be given to how the tax impacted the domestic market and recommended the Government listen to the voices of business operators.
 - How did the tax sit with A-BIDs? In some areas it could result in reduced funding or duplicate taxation.
 - SG was of the view that whilst it would not be ring-fenced Mayors should be expected to state their intent around use of the tax, with some commitment to supporting the Visitor Economy Growth Plan.
 - PY queried whether the ability to bring in a Tourism Tax might change some Mayors' relationship with VE/VB.
 - LB accepted this was a difficult and complex matter, involving balancing MCA funding need and protecting the sector. The introduction of any tax would take time as primary legislation would be required. She expected ring-fencing to be debated and an impact assessment to be developed.
15. **ACTION: LB to arrange a session for the STL team to demo the STLR IT prototype.**

3.0 DCMS update

16. LB advised that the Visitor Economy Growth Plan was now expected to be published in the new year. Delays were due to the difficult operating context and ministerial changes across Whitehall. She understood the fundamental need for a clear narrative for the sector. The next iteration of the Plan was due to be shared with the VEAC in January.
17. LM felt that the DCMS workshop for LVEPs had been helpful in terms of wider engagement. In terms of regional growth and international competitiveness there had been support for keeping London as an international gateway. NW underlined the plan should recognise the importance of the domestic market to the majority of SMEs.

4.0 Strategy Day Follow Up

4.1 LVEPs and VE Support

AS reported the following developments:

18. Kent: The County Council was involved in setting up a new structure, employing some former Visit Kent team members, and in due course would start conversations on how to reapply for LVEP status.
19. Cambridgeshire & Peterborough: The Mayor was leading the process to reapply for LVEP status in the new year. Key stakeholders had been brought together, funding provided to draft a strategy and the Mayor would chair and develop the board.
20. Bedford (and partners TBC): It was expected that any LVEP application would be part of Universal Studios' planning agreement.
21. Cornwall: VE was engaging with Cornwall Council which had expressed interest in exploring the creation of a new tourism body which could in the future apply for LVEP status. There were a number of organisations/groups in the area interested in a new tourism body and AS and Robin Tjolle would continue to manage stakeholders towards a local solution.
22. There was a clear understanding of the economic instability currently being faced by LVEPs and a need to proactively identify any risk areas.
23. LTS talked through recommendations around LVEP evaluation and learnings, the support programme and review process in light of the emerging Visitor Economy Growth Plan and VB/VE strategy. The range of LVEP structures (including those in MCAs) meant that any future approach would need to be discussed and nuanced to suit individual organisations as they and the landscape evolved.
24. LTS spoke about the evolving and important role of the Regional Development Leads as the LVEP structure matured, moving from supporting LVEP set-up to strategically aligned destination support/advocacy. RDLs would also support product development and core programmes (including governance support) and be the custodians of the accreditation.
25. **DECISION: The VEAB endorsed the evolution of the role of the RDLs, the ongoing support programme, and LVEP review process as tabled.**
26. **ACTION: LTS to share the LVEP Evaluation report with the VEAB once finalised.**
27. **DECISION: After discussion the VEAB agreed that NT and HBW should both be invited to join the LVEP Awards Panel.**
28. **ACTION: LTW to invite NT and HBW to join the LVEP Awards Panel.**

4.2 VE Priorities

29. Following on from the Joint Boards' Strategy Day, updated strategic priorities, taking in feedback around prioritisation, increasing activity to build domestic demand and acknowledging limited resource, were tabled for review. Given the 2026-27 budget was unknown, assumptions were based on the current year's figures. Key feedback included:
 - Noting limited resource and the need for trade-offs, there was support for prioritising building domestic demand.
 - Concerns were raised about deprioritising areas. Board Members sought further detail as to how each project was being evaluated and judged.
 - AL and NW supported a coastal/rural focus, feeling that there was greater potential for city/metro regions to fill any voids themselves.
 - SG questioned how this approach would align with Mayoral growth plans and whether there was an alternative way to fund business events (e.g. the DBT agenda). She felt

there could be some challenge around investment in English Tourism Week. And that VE's strategic approach of working via LVEPs should guide resource allocation.

30. **DECISION: The VEAB agreed in principle support for the direction of travel in respect of VE priorities, but asked for clarity as to how projects were being evaluated**
31. **ACTION: AS to circulate to the VEAB a summary of recent VE fam trips.**

5.0 Regional Reports

32. Citing business results, NW reiterated his view that the fine weather during the summer masked a drop in consumer confidence which continued into the shoulder season. He painted a pessimistic picture of businesses closing/scaling down and could not see what might change in the next year. NW flagged the issue of Business Property Relief and how the change to inheritance tax was negatively impacting on investment decisions for owners. Positively he felt that WTM had been busier than usual and highlighted the potential offered by sales missions and fam trips.
33. SG concurred on general trends. She reflected on the impact of the North East DDP since its establishment in 2021. Key outputs included: 38% growth; reaching 1,500 business, increased regional travel trade presence and business events; the development of a strong narrative to attract investors; and the establishment of a number of high-quality venues/attractions. The DDP was, for a relatively small investment, an effective vehicle for driving change and leveraging funding for the visitor economy, including from the MCA. She flagged concerns around potential framework changes and future investment. Given the impressive ROI, AL asked where next could benefit from the same level of focus and investment.
34. AL spoke of a 'paralysed' industry, weak performance, business failure and lack of support. He felt much depended on investment confidence.
35. KP confirmed her agreement with the above noting that trading at her company was also challenged.
36. From a sustainability perspective, KB highlighted decarbonisation cost challenges, including the "spark gap" (move from gas to electricity), which was high in the UK when compared to Europe.
37. Despite the challenging outlook, there were some encouraging signals: WTM had been busy and the CEO advised that the Starring Great Britain campaign was performing well internationally, engaging partners who were building strong new product and itineraries.

6.0 Corporate Reports

6.1 Finance update

38. SJ advised that trends reported to the end of September continued into October. She highlighted a number of budgetary pressures being faced by the BTA which would also impact VE, including staff costs and dilapidation charges from exiting 3 Grosvenor Gardens.

6.2 ARC report

39. NW reported that he had been appointed permanent Chair of BTA's Audit & Risk Committee. He updated on the 22 October meeting, noting funding received by BTA from FCDO's Soft Power Fund and from underspends in the Government's centrally held Missions

Communications Budget. Progress was being made resolving issues with the Branch Office and subsidiary company in India. On internal audit, an indicative opinion of *moderate assurance* had been received, the Missions programme had an overall assurance of *moderate* and the Communications audit results were TBC. DL had provided an Information Security update, confirming that the BTA's Security Operations Centre (SOC) would be fully implemented by the end of December. The Delegation of Authority policy had been updated in advance of approval by the BTA Board. NW was thanked for his report.

7.0 Items for Discussion/Approval

7.1 Visit England Awards for Excellence

40. JU joined for this item. Following up on her presentation to the Board's June meeting she was now seeking approval to progress to the procurement stage to outsource to a commercial event/ sponsorship management company. A pipeline of potential sponsors had already been developed. There was support from VEAB members to moving the awards toward a cost neutral position and for the direction of travel as set out. Impact to winners and the need to support LVEPs in sharing research/support for the local competition organisers was noted. SG would reach out offline to the team on a matter regarding the regional heats. JU was thanked for her work.
41. **DECISION: The VEAB unanimously agreed that JU and the team should proceed with the pilot to drive the Awards to cost-neutral and to begin procurement to enable appointment of an event/sponsorship management company as soon as possible.**

8.0 Papers for Noting/Information

8.1 VEAB Dashboard and KPIs

42. In response to comments, LTS advised that now strategic priorities were confirmed and with a new VE Evaluation Manager in post, a fresh look was being taken to evaluation and the move towards outcomes not outputs.
43. It was advised that the number of AccessAble Accessibility guides was expected to increase now the next wave of the programme had commenced with LVEPs and that regenerative tourism action plan downloads should increase as a result of a webinar series about to launch with LVEPs and their businesses. Political engagement was back-loaded in the year with the core event, English Tourism Week, taking place in March. VB hoped organisations were being encouraged to engage with their regional government/Mayors/MPs all year round.

8.3 Engagement Calendar

44. Due to budgetary pressures, the team would contact Board members if they needed them to attend specific events. However, it was expected that many Board Members would already be attending local events. NW had agreed to attend the Visit Worcestershire LVEP conference in January and could attend the Lancashire Tourism awards in February if required.

8.4 2026 Forward Plan

45. AS stated that the plan for 2026 would be informed by the financial settlement. It was agreed to first confirm the VE Awards and June meeting venue and then explore a potential opportunity for the September meeting to be hosted by a partner at an external venue (invitation issued to the Chair).

9.0 Any Other Business

46. At the Chair's request KP shared information on thematic holidays and fed back on her experience as VEAB Boardroom Apprentice. (Notes circulated with draft minutes). KP and KB were thanked for their commitment and contributions to both VEAB and BTA Boards and wished the very best for the future.
47. HB said there had been no indication that the Boardroom Apprentice Programme would run in 2026. After discussion the VEAB supported the notion that BTA might run its own in-house programme, taking into account feedback provided. This would be subject to resource being available.
48. **ACTION: DL & HB to determine the views of the BTA Board to sponsor an in-house Board Apprentice programme. [DONE]**
49. AL, a King's Trust mentor, was pleased to report that All Things Dotty, a Plymouth company creating products for the visually impaired which had received support from VB/VE Accessibility and Inclusion Lead, Ross Caladine, had won a National Enterprise Award.
50. LB advised that Ross was standing down from his Government access advisor role and asked colleagues to contact her should they know of anyone who could fill the vacancy.
51. The Chair thanked everyone attending for their input during the meeting and for the work put into developing the papers tabled. The meeting was concluded at 12.50.

The date of the next meeting – Tuesday 3 March 2026, Coade/Betjeman Rooms, Cannon Bridge House, London

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