

**MINUTES OF THE 478th MEETING OF THE
BRITISH TOURIST AUTHORITY (BTA) BOARD
held on Tuesday 14 April 2026 at 0945-1230
Hintze Hall Boardroom, Natural History Museum
London, SW7 5BD**

Present:

Harris Bokhari OBE (Chair)	Board Member & Chair
Karin Sheppard (KS)	Board Member (online)
Peter Gowers (PG)	Board Member
Beth Knight (BK)	Board Member
Neil Rami (NR)	Board Member
Mary Walsh (MW)	Board Member
Lady Victoria Borwick (VB)	Board Member/VEAB Chair
Michael Bewick (MB)	Board Member/Wales representative (Ex-officio)
Stephen Leckie (SL)	Board member/VisitScotland Chairman (Ex-officio)
Nigel Wilkinson MBE (NW)	ARC Chair/VEAB member
Duncan Parish (DP)	DCMS
Jon Tippell (JT)	Board Subject Expert - Data & Digital

In Attendance:

Patricia Yates (PY/CEO)	CEO/Accounting Officer
Serena Jacobs (SJ)	Director of Finance
Andrew Stokes OBE (AS)	Director of VisitEngland
Robin Johnson (RJ)	Director of Global Marketing (online)
Fiona Macdonald (FM)	Head of Strategy & Business Planning for item 1)
Henry Bankes (HB)	General Counsel & Company Secretary
Julia Howells (JH)	Company Secretariat Executive (minutes)
Taslima Begum (TB)	BTA Chair's Special Assistant

Guest Speaker:

Dr Douglas Gurr	Director, National History Museum
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Apologies:

Debra Lang	Director of Professional Services
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0.0 Welcome

1. The Chair welcomed everyone to the Natural History Museum (NHM). This meeting followed the new approach of holding Board meetings in key destinations and strengthening regional/industry stakeholder engagement. He reflected enthusiastically on his time as a NHM Trustee (now Trustee Emeritus). ALVA had recently announced the NHM as the UK's number one visitor attraction for 2025.
2. KS and RJ were joining online from overseas.

1.0 Chair's Introduction and Preliminaries

1.2 Apologies for absence

3. There were apologies for absence from Debra Lang.

1.3 Declarations of Interest/Conflicts

4. Were as per the register dated 6 March 2026.

1.4 Minutes of the Meeting of 3 February 2026

5. The minutes were approved as an accurate record of the meeting and would be published online.

1.1 Chair's Introduction

6. All papers would be taken as read encouraging focus on strategic discussion.
7. Board members had had the opportunity to discuss the proposals set out in the Chair's paper in pre-meeting calls. There were no further questions/comments and the following approvals were formalised:
 8. **DECISION: The Board approved Pensions Advisory Committee membership as Nigel Wilkinson (VEAB member and ARC Chair) and Helen Bonser-Wilton (VEAB member),**
 9. **DECISION: The Board approved membership of the new Nations Committee as: Stephen Leckie (Chair), Michael Bewick and Victoria Borwick, with the Chair of Tourism Northern Ireland, or their recommended representative, as an observer.**
 10. **DECISION: The Board approved that Mark Read be approached to be a Board Subject Expert (Marketing).**
 11. **ACTION: Board members to contact the Chair to volunteer to sit on the Commercial Committee.**
 12. **ACTION: HB to draft TOR for the Nations and Commercial Committees.**
 13. **ACTION: RJ to approach Mark Read to be a Board Subject Expert (Marketing).**
14. The Chair welcomed and introduced JT, the Board's first Subject Matter Expert (Data & Digital) to the meeting. He also introduced TB, his new Special Assistant.
15. The Chair thanked SL for hosting his recent, insightful visit to Scotland, taking in a VS Board meeting, visits and stakeholder meetings in Aberdeen.
16. DG welcomed the Board to the museum. He spoke about Government engagement and offered the following by way of advice as to how to approach the current Government for funding:
 - Design proposals/pitches taking into account the Government position, e.g. in the context of the BTA seeking funding from Government, ensure that asks address those areas of priority to Government;
 - Ensure that the case for tourism being strongly positive for the health of the economy is clearly stated;
 - Recognise that the current global situation is dangerous, so ensure that the case for tourism being a strong force to break down barriers between nations is always made.
17. In response to MW's question about regional reach, DG talked about how the NHM scaled projects nationally and globally (e.g. Dippy Tour, Wildlife Photographer of the Year Competition, Gardens project) and working in partnership, inc. schools networks, to extend reach beyond physical visits.
18. DG suggested a potential BTA/NHM campaign to showcase activities outside of London.
19. Internationally DG recommended selling the UK, specifically to the US, as a safe and welcoming destination. And following the PM's recent visit working with agencies/tour operators to ensuring Britain is on Chinese travel itineraries.
20. The Chair thanked DG and his team for hosting the BTA Board meeting.

1.5 Matters Arising/Action Tracker

21. Action tracker status noted.

1.6 Youth Council

22. There was broad support for the developing proposal which was presented as an initiative aligned with the Secretary of State's priorities. Key feedback included:

- DP recommended focusing on the value of establishing a Youth Council, with particular focus on career opportunities for the young.
- PG suggested setting out 2-3 focused objectives with tangible outputs to provide framework and support evaluation.
- NR felt that governance structure would ensure meaningful youth engagement and changing the narrative about career choice would be key to growing the sector (e.g. automotive industry model).
- Consult with other organisations who were successfully running similar forums (e.g. ACE and the Hospitality Junior Board, Yorkshire).
- Some concern around delivery in the context of resource constraints.
- The Chair suggested working in partnership with VS and VW on this initiative - possibly sharing resource?

23. **ACTION: FM to update the Youth Council proposal in light of Board comments and bring back to the Board for final approval, including confirmation of Board sponsor.**

2.0 Nations' Insight

2.1 Update on VisitWales activities/successes/best practice

24. Key discussion points relating to MB's VW update presentation included:

- Tourism is the second largest employer in Wales.
- Domestic visitors are 12% down.
- Priority international markets are US and Germany (encouraged GREAT funding for German campaign now restored).
- In response to a query from KS, MB said that VB could best support VW by creating a pipeline to support small businesses to access international markets/develop international ready product, with a view to driving visit numbers back to pre-pandemic levels.
- Potential structural changes - if Plaid Cymru were to win the next election VW could move from Welsh Government to a new development agency. MB felt the change could be welcomed by industry as (from the perspective of some) it would enable VW to present the views of industry to Welsh Government – where those views are contrary to policy - in a way which was not possible under the current structure in which VW is part of Government.
- PG queried the impact of recent Welsh policy on welcome/tourism numbers (e.g. Tourism levy, STL registration, 20 mph speed limit) and whether it might be useful to explore the position/perceived position of welcome across Britain as a whole.
- In response to DP's comments around targeting investment asks and demonstrating ROI, MB confirmed that additional international marketing resource was the priority, but also noted the importance of community development and comms.

3.0 CEO's Update

3.1 CEO's report

25. The Board welcomed indications that the Home Office was considering whether to add £1 to each visa/ETAs application for use to fund VB's international activity from 2027. This could generate up to £32 million p.a.

26. An indicative funding letter set out a flat core settlement for 26/7, 27/8, 28/9 and GREAT funding for 26/7 had been confirmed.
27. Short Term Lets (STL) project: An overview had been provided noting recent agreement of budget for 26/7, which would allow staff recruitment. DP advised that key financial and reputational risks were being addressed as part of the process to draft the Memorandum of Understanding between BTA and DCMS. He said that there would be an amount of mitigation around financial exposure but also an expectation that BTA manage costs carefully. PY highlighted the pressure this new project put on the Finance Director and her team.
28. AS confirmed that insight had been sought from VS and VW who were setting up similar schemes. In response to MW's question around cost, it was confirmed that the call centre operation would be for an initial period only. PG requested that any recommendation to the Board to sign-off the STL project include aggregated costs and maximum financial exposure.
29. **ACTION: SJ/AS to oversee the drafting and issuing of a recommendation to the Board to sign-off BTA's role in the STL project. Expected to be issued and a meeting scheduled before the next Board meeting in June.**
30. Retail update: The CEO referred back to June 2025 discussions and Board in-principle approval that the BTA license the shop to a third party or close it. As update, negotiations with the prospective licensee were ongoing and there was also a possibility that some of those employed in roles linked to the shop may apply for new roles being created as part of the STL project, which would mitigate some of the redundancy costs were the shop to close.
31. **ACTION: AS to oversee completion of negotiations with the potential licensee and to bring back to the Board information to a level to allow evaluation of the two options and for a final decision to be made.**
32. As a result of the war in Iran, marketing had been redirected from the GCC, TIER (Tourism Industry Emergency Response) meetings were taking place with industry and Government stakeholders.
33. NW flagged the risk presented to tourism by expected fuel shortages.
34. Change programme consultation continued with strong engagement from staff affected. All responses would be considered before the end of April deadline.
35. The CEO advised that involvement on the PM's China's tour had helped open direct channels with No.10. She noted that the Green Party's success at the Gorton by-election had referenced holidays for hardworking families, resulting in follow-up around VE's domestic seaside holiday campaign.
36. Following some challenge at the GREAT Programme board by the new Permanent Secretary for Comms around tourism investment, she and RJ had had a very positive meeting discussing the importance of tourism and how to fund tourism marketing.
37. The CEO outlined plans for involvement in Greater Together LA, 19-21 May. The Chair would attend following a week of US meetings, including with the Ambassador. In response to NR's question about involvement in the King's visit to the US, PY advised that this fell within the pre-election period and would have to be managed accordingly. The Chair understood that VB/VE would be represented at the King's reception in New York.
38. VB spoke about the impact of English Tourism Week in terms of increased MP engagement, downloads of Industry and MP toolkits (ref. Elevating BTA), press activity with an approx. equivalent value of £100k, social media reach of 3.5m, the team presence across the country and a record number of Tourism Superstar votes for Mick Hurst of the Battle of Evesham. Full analysis would be discussed at VEAB.

3.2 CEO's Engagements & 3.3 Dashboard

Noted

39. **ACTION: The CEO to share the end of year dashboard notes with the Board.**

5.0 Finance - items 5-8 brought forward

5.1 2026/27 Budget

40. SJ outlined the budget recommendation, noting that there were a number of risks, the main one being controlling staff costs given current uncertainties.

41. **DECISION: The Board approved the 2026/27 Budget as presented.**

5.2 Financial Update 2025/26

42. The latest forecast projected a yearend position within DCMS tolerance of 1% underspend. Retail loss was at the level expected, staff costs met forecast, however Capital expenditure was estimated to be 5% underspent. NW said that the ask for ARC to monitor value for money would involve review of how financial report figures were presented.

5.3 ARA Planning

43. A tighter ARA production timetable was noted. The first full draft would be issued to the Board on 19 May with comments due one week later. VB commended the Chair's Foreword and suggested, noting space constraints, that it could be more impactful if it referenced recent visits.

6.0 Annual Risk Review

44. SJ advised that there were no changes to the previous year's risk appetite. Overall risk appetite level remained 'Open' with an ambitious approach to marketing. The risk register had been updated to reflect emerging risks such as the STL project.

45. In response to BK's query around macro-economic risks that could not be controlled it was explained that these were managed on a case-by-case basis in respect of how the organisation reacted to and mitigated against impact.

46. **DECISION: The Board noted the Annual Risk Review and changes to the Corporate Risk Register and approved the revised Risk Management Policy as tabled.**

7.0 Retail Review Update

47. Discussed under CEO's report (see items 30-31).

8.0 Papers for Information

48. All papers were noted.

4.0 Elevating BTA

49. The CEO introduced this item updating on the changed structure of the Comms team; a single team covering both corporate and industry communications with a refreshed digital-first approach. A key messaging sheet, as requested at the February meeting, was provided to Board members.
50. In respect of support for Government and Ministerial priorities, she flagged the significant strategic shifts made since Labour took power and reported that the Permanent Secretary for Comms had commended BTA's data-led, audience centric, fun comms approach.
51. Following the suggestion of a Tourism Investment Conference she had spoken with the Minister for Investment around the potential for a Tourism Investment breakout from the UK Investment Summit. UK Hospitality supported the notion and a draft pitch was being developed for review.
52. Discussion took place around transformation and what good would look like for BTA in five years. Key points included:
- In response to comments about domestic bias and clarity around VB/VE messages, the CEO explained the differing VB/VE approaches and the challenge presented as many MPs prioritised domestic sentiment over international competitiveness.
 - KS raised the importance of aligning the ambition of the BTA with the wider ambition for the visitor economy, as set out in the forthcoming Visitor Economy Growth Strategy. And that the sector should aim to be seen in 3–5 years' time as 'an industry worth elevating', for example through stronger recognition in future industrial or economic strategies.
 - DP felt the key focus should be impact for the voter on the street. There would be challenge around Industrial Strategy in respect of productivity, careers/wage scale and geographical focus. He recommended BTA work to deliver on Visitor Economy Growth Strategy principles: supporting Mayors to deliver their growth ambitions; investment outside of London; creative/tech initiatives to ensure Britain has a stand-out offer; and opportunity and employment, improving the perception of careers for all.
 - JT felt that more clarity was required around demonstrating and measuring impact and how this was communicated, e.g. dashboard, narrative etc.
 - There was a view that the Tourism Industry required elevation before the BTA did.
 - Referencing DG's earlier point, NR felt that a braver, more emotional approach to positioning economic importance should be adopted.
 - Comms should be consistent with positive storytelling, voices not numbers.
 - MW offered to support the collaborative development of an evidence base if required, highlighting the power of third-party endorsement.
53. The Chair summarised by saying that greater emphasis needed to be given to elevating the whole tourism industry - and clarifying the role of the BTA in that - rather than focusing primarily on elevating the BTA as an organisation.

9.0 Any Other Business

54. There was no further business.
55. The Chair thanked the CEO and the executive team for doing such a great job. This was acknowledged by the Board.

The meeting was closed at 12.30 and was followed by a tour of the NHM Tank Room.

END

The next meeting will take place Monday 15 - Tuesday 16 June 2026
Venue: Newcastle-upon-Tyne