

Chester Zoo

Trustee

Role brief

November 2026

TWO EXCITING OPPORTUNITIES TO JOIN OUR BOARD OF TRUSTEES

We have two Trustee vacancies on our Board as part of our succession planning. We're looking for one Trustee with a background in conservation, and one Trustee with a background in business, commercial growth and diversification.

The role is voluntary with reasonable expenses reimbursed, and you will receive a full induction and training. The Board meets in Chester six times a year with an annual two-day away day, and you will likely join a committee meeting three to four times a year. We have a 'zoo first' approach and prefer in-person attendance, although hybrid options are available as needed.

We're looking for one Trustee with a background in conservation. Senior experience in conservation or a related field, bringing insight into the science and practice of preventing extinction - from species recovery and field programmes to research, education, animal health, policy and partnerships. Zoo or wildlife organisation experience is advantageous but not essential.

We're looking for one Trustee with a background in business and commercial growth. A senior commercial leader, bold and innovative, with experience of growing and diversifying income, developing new revenue streams and managing commercial risk. Visitor attraction experience is advantageous but not essential.

As a Trustee, you will support the development of the zoo's strategy, act as a guardian for its assets, and ensure that governance is of the highest possible standard. You'll also get to work alongside brilliant people from a variety of fields and disciplines who love wildlife and care about nature.

Reflective of the scale, complexity and diversity of the organisation, the high-calibre Board of Trustees brings skills and expertise from a wide range of backgrounds and perspectives from business leaders to conservation experts. Whilst previous board experience in a large, complex organisation would be beneficial, it's not a pre-requisite.

What is important is that you bring your own unique perspective, demonstrate sound judgement and leadership, and contribute to the discussions and decisions that shape the future of Chester Zoo — ultimately impacting our global conservation mission.

Reports to

Chair of Trustees

Key responsibilities of the Trustees

With other Trustees to hold the Society 'in Trust' for current and future beneficiaries by:

- Ensuring that the Society has a clear mission and strategic direction and is focused on achieving these.
- Being responsible for the performance of the Society and for its 'corporate' behaviour.
- Ensuring that the Society complies with all legal and regulatory requirements.
- Acting as guardians of the Society's assets, both tangible and intangible, taking all due care over their security, deployment and proper application.
- Ensuring that the Society's governance is of the highest possible standard.

The Candidate

All Trustee candidates would be expected to meet the following criteria:

- Have a personal interest in helping to prevent the extinction of threatened species and making a difference to wildlife, globally.
- A track record of making successful strategic contributions to organisations, possibly but not necessarily as a trustee, governor or non-executive director.
- Alignment to the Nolan Principles of Behaviour in Public Life: selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership.
- An understanding of governance processes and effectiveness.

Role-specific experience and expertise

We're looking for one Trustee with a background in conservation. Senior experience in conservation or a related field. Zoo or wildlife experience helpful, not essential.

We're looking for one Trustee with a background in business and commercial growth. Senior commercial experience in growth and diversification. Visitor attraction experience helpful, not essential.

Personal qualities

- Strong interpersonal skills, inclusive, engaging and articulate. Low ego and comfortable 'sharing the stage' with others, not needing to dominate proceedings. A coaching and mentoring style.
- Constructively challenging to test validity of input and strength of logic. Able to cut through complex issues to reach clear decisions.
- A strategic thinker with strong problem solving and critical reasoning skills, adept at asking the right questions and evaluating and analysing information.
- Board ready: Astute; high integrity/ethical standards with a clear sense as to what constitutes appropriate behaviour; sound judgement and capable of being Chair/Vice Chair or leading a committee.
- Ability to work as an effective member of the Board, all of whose members are equally and jointly responsible for its decisions.
- A demonstrable commitment to equality and diversity.
- An active listener and contributor who is able to bring individual skills to the deliberations of the Board and build strong working relationships with a diverse range of stakeholders.
- Skilled in the areas of networking, influencing, advocacy, diplomacy and sensitivity.
- An affinity for the North West region with an understanding of the relevant economic, social and political dynamics.
- Places value on honouring commitments, with a preparedness to devote the necessary time and effort required in the role of Trustee to make a valuable contribution to the zoo.

The terms of appointment

Reward

Whilst Trustees' expenses are met, this appointment is not remunerated.

Time commitment

The anticipated time commitment is circa 12 days per annum (including six formal meetings a year and an annual two day away day).

The recruitment process

We understand the challenge involved in recruiting a new Trustee and the importance of the process in terms of influencing a candidate's perception of the organisation. This process is intended to allow both parties to have sufficient time and opportunity to assess suitability, the balance between individual and organisational aspirations, to share details of the high-level organisation strategy and key organisation objectives.

Our aim is to ensure there is clarity around the role of Trustee, the key challenges and priorities.

- The introductory discussion will be with Jen Atkins, Chief People Officer at Chester Zoo.
- Shortlisted candidates will be invited to initially meet with representatives of Chester Zoo's Nominations Committee. Interview dates will mid January 2027.
- At the final stage, the preferred candidate(s), will be invited to meet with Jamie Christon, Chief Executive Officer and Lee Rawlinson, Deputy Chair of the Trustee Board. Interview dates will be end of Jan/beginning of Feb 2027.

HOW TO APPLY

Apply online: chesterzoo jobs page – click here to apply

Closing date: 18th December 2026

Appointment: at the June 2027 AGM, with the opportunity to shadow the board from March 2027

OUR BOARD SHOULD REFLECT THE COMMUNITIES WE SERVE

We want our Board to better reflect the diversity of the communities we serve. We particularly welcome applications from people whose perspectives and experiences are currently under-represented in our governance, including people from Black, Asian and other ethnically diverse backgrounds, disabled people, LGBTQ+ people, younger adults and people from lower socio-economic backgrounds.
We believe bringing together people with different backgrounds, experiences and perspectives will strengthen our decision-making and help us achieve more for conservation, education and our communities.
Appointments will be made on merit against the skills and experience set out for the role.





ABOUT CHESTER ZOO

Chester Zoo is the UK's favourite zoo as well as an international conservation charity. The North of England Zoological Society – the charity that runs Chester Zoo – is a not-for-profit organisation managed by a board of trustees, with an annual income of £70.5 million.

We work with around 60 partners in 6 key regions across the world to protect key species and landscapes that are under threat. Chester Zoo take a 360 approach to conservation, working with species at the hub in Chester as well as in the field, protecting landscapes and working with local governments, communities and NGOs to deliver lasting impact.

What began as a family run zoo in 1931 has grown into a globally-renowned centre of excellence for conservation and scientific research, and one of the UK's biggest and most popular visitor attractions, with more than 2 million annual visitors. The zoo's 130-acre site in Chester, which is home to more than 34,000 animals and around 450 species, is where this species-saving work is made possible.

Experts from the zoo are recognised by governments and NGOs across the world as leaders within the global conservation community, from its expertise in social sciences to its international Centre for Zoo Science.

Chester Zoo is also a global leader in plant conservation. We hold Conservation Practitioner Accreditation from Botanic Gardens Conservation International (BGCI), making us one of only 24 botanic gardens worldwide and the only zoo in the UK to achieve it. We protect over 400 threatened plant species and care for five National Plant Collections.

Educating and inspiring the conservationists of the future is one of Chester Zoo's key focuses. In 2025, our educators enabled 93,445 participations in taught school programmes, 55,403 people benefited from free educational tickets, 633 teachers across the UK were trained to deliver conservation education, and our online live lessons reached around 90,000 learners.

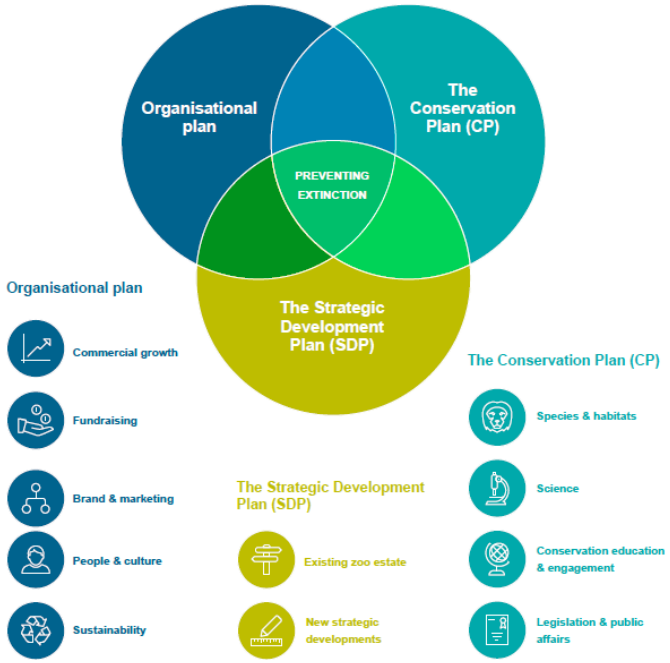
None of this would be possible without our people. Around 1,100 colleagues, working alongside 251 volunteers who gave 30,575 hours in 2025, make our mission happen.

A UNITED STRATEGY TO PREVENT EXTINCTION

Chester Zoo has an ambitious strategy that takes the charity to its centenary in 2031. This strategy looks to ensure the zoo maximises its contribution to conservation and education, delivering tangible and lasting change across six key conservation targets.

The delivery of the zoo's conservation work is intrinsically linked with the strategic development of the zoo site and the development of the organisation more broadly.

We are also developing our North Star 2050 vision with our Trustees, and as an executive team we are making sure our plan for the next five years creates the roadmap to it.



The Strategic Development Plan (SDP)

The SDP sets out a plan to transform the zoo through the development of habitat-themed environmental zones, aligned with and supporting the CP, while ensuring the zoo is in the best position to attract visitors to the site. The plan focuses on two key strands of activity:

- New strategic developments to the zoo
- The management plan for the existing zoo estate

The Conservation Plan (CP)

The CP focuses on a holistic approach to deliver lasting impact, focusing on four Ps: the protection of animal and plant populations, the places that need to be protected to allow species to thrive, the people that impact these environments and the policy areas which affect conservation outcomes at a wider level. The zoo has six key targets that it's pledged to meet by 2030, which are enabled by the following plans:

- Species plan
- The zoo's science plan
- Conservation, education and engagement

The Organisational Plan

In order to achieve the mission and deliver the Strategic Development Plan (SDP) and Conservation Plan (CP), Chester Zoo needs to remain financially successful, as well as grow and diversify its income streams. This plan maps the key elements of activity to achieve this:

- The zoo's commercial strategy
- Fundraising strategy
- Brand strategy
- People strategy
- Sustainability strategy
- Public affairs strategy

Find out more

Our Trustees

Read the profiles of our current Board of Trustees and find out more about their backgrounds by visiting our website.

Our Annual Report

Read our latest Annual Report for a full picture of our finances, achievements and impact over the past year, including our conservation work around the world, our visitor and community engagement, and how we are performing against our strategic goals.

For an informal confidential chat please get in touch with Jen Atkins, Chief People Officer, on 07483 082926.



