

Mid Wales Regional Forum

30 September 2019

Y Talbot, Tregaron, Ceredigion

10.00am -1.00pm

Present:

Name		Representing
Steve Hughson (Chair)	SH	Royal Welsh Agricultural Society
Wendy Abel	WA	Mid North Powys Tourism Network
Val Hawkins	VH	Mid Wales Tourism
Rowland Rees-Evans	RRE	Mid Wales Tourism
Anthony Rosser	AR	BHA Wales Chair / Lake Vyrnwy
Aled Davies	AD	Natural Resources Wales
Richard Tyler	RT	Brecon Beacons National Park Authority
Ann Eleri Thomas	AET	Ceredigion CC / Ceredigion Destination Management Partnership
Dafydd Wyn Morgan	DwM	Cambrian Mountains Initiative
Bev Dimmock	BD	RSPB
Rhodri Arnold	RhA	WATO
Mike Booth	MB	Welsh Water
Julie Lewis	JL	Powys County Council
Gareth Price	GP	Twristiaeth Ceredigion Tourism
Rhodri Llwyd Morgan	RhLIM	Aberystwyth University
Rebecca Wilson	RW	Transport for Wales
Dylan Roberts	DR	Salop Leisure
Rob Bullen	RB	Dyfi Biosphere
		Welsh Government
Gerwyn Evans	GE	Head of Tourism Development, VW
Gwawr Price	GP/WW M	Wales Way Manager, VW
Helen Jones	HJ/REM	Regional Engagement Manager, VW
Lucy Von Weber	LVW	Head of Marketing, VW
Kate Clark	KC	Deputy Director, Policy and Engagement, Culture, Tourism and Sport
Alan Samuel	AS	Regional Engagement Assistant, VW

Apologies

Rob Holt	RH	Deputy Director Tourism Development & Major Events, VW
Peter Francombe	PF	Tourism Industry Support Manager, VW
Paul Donovan	PD	WATO
Claire Williams	CW	Cambrian Rail Partnership
Justin Beard Murray	JBM	Metropole Hotel
Aled Rees	AR	Twristiaeth Ceredigion Tourism/Cambria Tours
Llion Pughe	LIP	Best of Wales
Arwyn Watkins OBE	AW	Cambrian Training Company
Greg Thomas	GT	Powys County Council

Minutes:

<p>Welcome and opening comments – Steve Hughson</p> <p>SH welcomed all to the Forum and commented on the positive number of attendees. Recounting his journey to this Forum, SH remarked about the beauty of the Cambrian Mountains and how the low level of pollutants here should be seen as a marketing opportunity, linking to the Wellness agenda.</p> <p>SH added that the four Regional Forum Chairs had attended the Tourism Management Board, along with the Deputy Minister. The draft Action Plan had been received positively. During Brexit discussions, challenges and opportunities were highlighted e.g. staycations with the challenge of the potential reduction in visitor disposal income.</p> <p>SH thanked VH and all at MWT ahead of her tourism awards update. SH acknowledged the hard work involved in setting up these awards and thanked everyone involved, including members of the forum who formed the judging panel.</p> <p>SH expressed concern that the Mid Wales Growth Deal was potentially losing momentum and felt that the Forum needed to engage with developments in order to maximise opportunities for the sector. The next GMW meeting is scheduled for 18 October and he would follow this up.</p> <p>Action: to ensure that GMW is included in the next agenda.</p> <p>SH welcomed AS and thanked Visit Wales for the administrative support. SH also welcomed RT back to the Forum and passed condolences to Greg Thomas following a family bereavement.</p>	<p>HJ</p>
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Minutes / actions from last meeting / Regional updates - Steve Hughson

Minutes for the last meeting were approved by DR and seconded by RRE.

Actions from last meeting:

SH offered members the opportunities to comment on the Terms of Reference agreed upon in July (no comments received). He also emphasised that this would be a working document and could be updated as necessary.

SH highlighted the regional importance of significant project proposals, such as Welshpool Canal & Ceredigion Harbour. Although time restrictions prevented presentations on this occasion, they would be invited to a future meeting.

HJ invited all members to ask questions about the RTEF and TPIF funded projects and explained that a meeting was planned after the Forum for project leads; aim was to aid collaboration and partnership working.

SH thanked VH for agreeing to be the Mid representative on the Regional Learning Skills Partnership (RLSP) and looked forward to her updates regarding this at future Forum meetings.

Regional updates

SH thanked those members for providing updates pre-meeting, emphasising that they were a key component in the communication process between Visit Wales and the industry. Emphasising their importance, members were asked if they would like to make any changes in the updates process. All agreed that the current system was appropriate. SH re-iterated his request for this information to be submitted in a timely fashion, when requested.

Members were also reminded to sign up online to the VW newsletter and to encourage their networks to do likewise in order to keep up to date with key developments and information:

<https://businesswales.gov.wales/tourism/tourism-newsletterbulletin>

Action: Marine Group to be invited to next meeting to present on the Ceredigion Harbour Project

HJ

Although time constraints are normally prohibitive, SH invited all members to highlight their key achievements on this occasion:

Verbal highlights

N.B. Only late/non submissions included below; submitted reports circulated to members in advance of meeting.

AR explained that the UK Hospitality Cymru has worked in collaboration with Welsh Government to raise skills and education in tourism industry. The formation of the Wales Tourism and Hospitality Industry Training partnership has now been confirmed, with Visit Wales providing the secretariat. RRE asked how this worked considering education is devolved. AR explained that although Visit Wales provide the secretariat, this partnership is seen as an industry led vehicle with direct input into the Westminster agenda. SH highlighted the recruitment and retention issues in rural Wales.

AR also provided a project update of the planned £7m invested in the Lake Vyrnwy area. A partnership between RSPB and Severn Trent is developing a major project (now half way through the second phase). This will include a new visitor centre, traffic management, interpretation and an initiative to develop a sustainable Lake Vyrnwy. A training centre will be built which could potentially help train upland farmers in exploring their business models.

RhLIM announced a significant project to transform Aberystwyth University's Old College building. The outcome of the HLF bid will be known by Christmas 2019.

RW introduced her role as Partnerships Marketing Manager with Transport for Wales. SH welcomed Rebecca to the group.

RT also announced a sizable HLF bid in the South Beacons area. This project extends more toward the Valleys regions and is focused on Waterfall Country.

RB reported on the Dyfi Biosphere's recent meeting with the First Minister regarding core funding. Rob continued to announce CAT's £1m funding for the Zero Carbon Innovation Lab and Visitor Centre upgrades.

MB introduced his new role as the Elan Valley Attractions Manager; highlighting the work progressing with the HLF Elan Links project including purchasing a pop-up planetarium.

VH apologised for the late delivery of her update report. VH spoke of the 'Real Mid Wales project and expressed appreciation for Visit Wales funding. This project focuses on targeting the staycation market within two hours travel time. VH is also working on business engagement to encourage businesses to improve their information on the Visit Wales website.

<p>GP apologised for not submitting an update. He added as Vice Chair of a Product Innovation Group, collaborative projects were being explored.</p> <p>Action – To forward all updates (including late submissions) to members</p> <p>Action – Members to provide updates by deadline in advance of next meeting</p>	<p>AS</p> <p>ALL MEMBERS</p>
<p>Welsh Government update – Gerwyn Evans</p> <p>GE explained today’s focus is about the draft Action Plan and requested to the Chair for time to concentrate on this. He however informed members about funding opportunities, highlighting VW’s ability to obtain funds to benefit the rural economy.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Micro Small Business Fund (MSBF) has re-opened • European Union Funded • All Wales scheme • Available to start up and existing micro & small businesses (fewer than 50 FTE employees) • Open to Third Sector entities • Up to 40% support (non-repayable) • Minimum £25,000 support – but can be lower in exceptional cases • Circa £10,000 funding per FTE job – but can be exceeded in exceptional cases • Applications can be submitted throughout the year • A new fund, the Wales Tourism Investment Fund (WTIF) is now available • £50mn fund • Partnership between Welsh Government and Development Bank for Wales • Brings together both commercial (80%) and grant funding (20%) into one combined package • Capital to tourism businesses of between £100,000 and £5,000,000 • Repayment term is between 10-15 years, and can include seasonality payment break. <p>Further information to be found through below link: https://businesswales.gov.wales/tourism/finance</p>	

Developing an Action Plan for the Visitor Economy –Gerwyn Evans / Kate Clark

The draft Action Plan is now awaiting ministerial approval. GE described the plan as ambitious and invited Forum members' challenges and ideas.

The 'plan on a page' crystallises a larger, 30 page document.

RRE felt strengthening the messages of quality in branding is important.

KC highlighted above all, the plan's alignment to the Economic Action Plan. GE added the plan also aligns to the Wellbeing and Future Generations Act and made reference to the Climate Change emergency in terms of balancing the visitor offering.

GE made reference to the 386 responses to the '10 questions'. Responses were varied, reflecting the diverse nature of the industry. KC said that a common link in responses was the issue of sustainability. SH expressed thanks to members for responses and was pleased to see the Mid Wales region as the second largest respondent group.

GE unpacked the "Bro" (regionally/nationally) and "Byd" (internationally) approach and commented on the current engagement success at the Rugby World Cup in Japan. AR enquired about international visitors figures in relation to marketing spend. LVW stated that 10% (10 million) international visitor to Wales have a marketing spend of £1.5 to 2 million. LVW also confirmed a £3-5 million domestic marketing spend; adding that although repeat business is positive, it's important to continually attract new visitors. GE noted the international marketing plan will modify its focus to near European Markets, but will retain flexibility. LVW added that international markets are selected on their cost-effectiveness and entry opportunities.

Discussions around marketing in airports and train stations followed. AR asked whether marketing at international airports in England (Liverpool, Manchester etc.) is planned. LVE assured members the strategy going forward demonstrates a commitment to international marketing.

LVW announced themed 'years of' campaigns will change to a 2 year cycle of allowing businesses to have longer in planning their campaigns. GE acknowledged the requirement of including food and accommodation more effectively in the 'years of' offering.

GE commented on the Wales Way's strategic inclusion in the plan. SH asked if there will be any cross over to local routes e.g. Glyndwr's

way. GP explained that the Wales Way concept is aimed to encourage visitors to “igam ogam” off the main routes.

SH asked if there was more potential to explore around the history of Wales and cultural/musical events. KC explained the culture referred to in the plan includes heritage and agreed that this is fundamental to our offering.

Value over volume was discussed; GE explained the need to improve spend and spread particularly over shoulder seasons. Attracting the right kind of customer is important. GE acknowledged the challenges to be faced through Brexit and also the opportunities; targeting new visitors and staycations will be a key focus. KC recognised other UK regions are also preparing for these markets which results in increased competition.

AR expressed concern around AirBnB as a market disrupter. GE agreed but added that the company can't be ignored. SH concluded although the AirBnB model has some benefits, the unregulated element produces an unfair business advantage. RRE concurred.

RT asked about the value over volume model. LVW explained visitor behaviour is the driver of this plan and the likely spend per visitor in a range of Welsh destinations (seasonality, spread and spend). DR suggested that facilities and amenities e.g. car parking need to be appropriate to help address this issue.

GE announced investment plans similar to the Parador model in Spain - targeting heritage building in appropriate areas. RRE commented this model depends on the finer details but felt this is positive overall (triggering improvements in an area's total offering). AR mentioned Clevedon as an example where this has worked in England. GE added a further investment plan to develop a contemporary arts centre in a hub and spoke approach.

GE updated members on the Wales Tourism Investment Fund (WTIF) progress. The first two deals have begun which will help to drive the profile and perception of Wales. GE also reported on a potentially new approach to capital investment and development – concentrating on one area in Wales at a time and improving the area holistically. SH asked if the current four regional areas will be eligible to apply, GE confirmed this.

GE moved to discuss the major events function which is to be renamed as “Events Wales”. Domestic events form much of the events focus as the international competition is fierce and very expensive. SH added the promoting of these events is important and is attracting partners to add value. RT added that small events also play a role as they are real and authentic.

GE stated the importance of local facilities and the funding secured to help their development. He provided an example of the cutting edge, 'Changing Places' facilities. SH added that the RWAS is planning to spend £350,000 on improving the shower and toileting facilities. RhA asked how these facilities will be run and maintained. GE explained the applications should include sustainability provisions.

The possibility of removing grading charges was shared by GE. Wales is experiencing a consistent decline in graded properties. VH felt that the grading system is important and is not price dependant. DR suggested the grading criteria should have a strong link to regulation; this would demonstrate the difference in investment when compared with unregulated accommodation. AR viewed grading as fundamental – many people visit Wales to relax and that removing grading would result in a perception of lower quality.

GE discussed the Action Plan's product led strategy, identifying eight product areas for development: sustainable tourism, wales coast path and national trails, heritage tourism, film and television, golf, cycling, 100% Wales experiences and cruises. Discussion continued around including angling and broadening cycling to include adventure sports. DR reiterated this, explaining the significance of these activities for Mid Wales.

GE appealed for the group to move towards voicing a united opinion in terms of approaching government regarding a tourism tax and feels that statute is required to see this applied effectively.

Visit Wales statistics and market intelligence will be developed to include an annual visitors' and residents' survey.

KC noted all members' comments for inclusion in the Action Plan before final Ministerial approval. GE invited the members to submit further comments after the meeting. However, this would need to be as soon as possible.

Action – Any additional comments to be forwarded to HJ asap

Steve thanked GE and KC – explained this is the industry's plan – and invited all members to own it and importantly share to their networks, re-iterating that the communication process is one of the main purposes of the Forum.

**ALL
MEMBERS**

Visit Wales Marketing update – Lucy Von Weber

LVW presented a marketing update to members noting a planned focus on seasonality, spread and spend. The presentation also updated members about:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The year of the outdoors beginning in January • TV advertising and online digital strategy • Wales Way link with Expedia including a homepage take over • Large screen advertising in transport hubs • Secret Escapes website campaign • Micro gapping (persuading gap students in UK to stay here and tour). • Successful AirBnB kayaking experience • New Visit Wales website launched in April – highlighting the search facility and improved listings • 30 second cut down social media content • Elan Valley, Llangranong and Cader Idris performed highly in social media rankings • Visitor behaviour moving towards responsible tourism attitudes. • The 15th October Roadshow has seen a low take up in Mid Wales and appealed for members to sign up. <p>SH thanked Lucy for the very positive work Visit Wales is undertaking and urged everyone to book a place on the VW Roadshow and disseminate information regarding this event to their networks.</p> <p>Action – send presentation to all Action – send link to members to book place on Roadshow Action – members to disseminate Roadshow link to their networks</p>	<p>AS HJ ALL members</p>
<p>National Eisteddfod of Wales: Tregaron 2020 – Robyn Tomos</p> <p>Mr Robyn Tomos provided an update on plans to deliver the 2020 Eistedfod Genedlaethol in Tregaron. The event poses significant economic opportunities for the area.</p> <p>The Eisteddfod is not only a week-long event, but a business opportunity over a longer period of time. Benefits of the Eisteddfod:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It’s a uniquely Welsh, stand-alone experience. • 160,000 visitor and 250 trade stalls. • Secondary spend is excellent. • 1,500 caravan sites in Tregaron will benefit as will other Ceredigion towns. • Prediction of £8 million investment in the area. • The event has international status and keen to develop this. • A total Welsh language experience is a unique offering. • The Eisteddfod leaves a legacy left in the host community – to harness the energy created through the process. <p>SH thanked Robyn for his presentation and agreed the authenticity of the Eisteddfod is important to Wales. SH invited members to comment.</p>	

GP is pleased to already have Eisteddfod bookings but the challenge lies in having enough accommodation to meet demand. RT sees the 1500 caravans on offer as something to help with this.

RhLIM added he is in regular contact with the Eisteddfod office and although the availability of accommodation in Tregaron is challenging, discussion about using bus companies are being held. This would increase options of accommodation further afield and visiting areas outside of the Eisteddfod times.

AR expressed a positive experience of hosting visitors during the Meifod Eisteddfod, however, better awareness of visitor needs and expectations would have been useful in order to fully understand the practicalities and provide an excellent experience.

SH expressed all good wishes to Robyn and the wider Eisteddfod committee for a very successful 2020 Eisteddfod in Tregaron and the region as a whole.

AOB

VH reminded members of the tourism awards evening: 17th October at Theatr Hafren. Over 130 applications had been received and were assessed using a “whole business” scoring approach.

SH wished all finalists well and again thanked MWT for managing the awards and the judging panel (comprised of Forum members) who had given of their time and expertise. He noted that the Mid region’s achievement was testament to MWT’s hard work, adding that MWT has been approached to offer assistance with the SE awards’ process.

SH thanked all for attending and concluded with a message to members to please communicate all information received to their networks and provide any feedback to Visit Wales ahead of the next meeting and/or via update reports.

Date of next meeting

27th January 2020
Lake Vyrnwy Hotel

Action: arrange for a presentation about Vyrnwy HLF project

HJ