

Mid Wales Regional Tourism Forum

2 March 2023 (12:30 – 15:00)
International Pavilion, RWAS Showground, Llanelwedd

Minutes

Attendees

In person:

Chair - **Steve Hughson**, **Nathan Richards**, **Claire Carew** (Visit Wales), **Julie Lewis**, **Nicola Williams** (Powys County Council), **Carwyn Jones-Evans** (Ceredigion County Council), **Arwyn Watkins** (Cambrian Training), **Dafydd Wyn Morgan** (Cambrian Mountains Initiative), **Michael Booth** (Dwr Cymru), **Val Hawkins** (Mid Wales Tourism), **Anthony Rosser** (UK Hospitality Cymru)

Online:

Heledd Owen, **Joanne Starkey**, **Sian Greenslade** (Visit Wales), **Gwenfair Owen** (Ceredigion County Council), **Rob Bullen** (CAT), **Beverly Dimmock** (RSPB), **Aled Davies**, **Jenn Jones** (Natural Resources Wales), **Roland Rees-Evans** (Penrhos Park), **Kate Gardner** (National Trust), **Laura Williams** (Royal Welsh Agricultural Society), **Victoria Leyshon** (Transport for Wales), **Rhodri Llwyd Morgan** (Aberystwyth University), **Helen Roderick** (Brecon Beacons National Park Authority), **Tanya Friswell** (Pentir Pumlumon),

Apologies

Rob Holt (Visit Wales), **Eileen Kinsman** (CAT), **Greg Loweth** (Metropole Hotel), **Aled Rhys Jones** [**Laura Williams** standing in] (Royal Welsh Agricultural Society), **Peter James** (Welsh Government), **Carol Williams** (Brecon Beacons National Park Authority), **Andrea Mansfield** (Powys County Council), **Paul Donovan** (Escape Routes)

Guest Presenters

Dan Simmons (Tourism Exchange GB)

1. Welcome & Update from Chair

1.1 SH welcomed attendees and shared apologies received before highlighting actions from the previous meeting which are now complete.



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- 1.2 SH had been in contact with Rhidian Morgan re: sustainable tourism funding. No direct funding is available for sustainable tourism but there is a Development Bank of Wales fund which is helping businesses cut their energy costs by investing in renewable energy sources. [Development Bank of Wales and Welsh Government Launch New Green Business Loan Scheme \(businessnewswales.com\)](https://www.businessnewswales.com)
- 1.3 SH highlighted the opportunity to update the Minister for the Economy and Deputy Minister (Tourism) during the Visitor Economy meeting and encouraged members to share issues.

2. Update from Mid Wales Tourism including Tourism Exchange Great Britain

- 2.1 VH gave an overview of the work of Mid Wales Tourism and shared a presentation on recent developments and future planned activity to raise the profile of the Mid Wales region.
- 2.2 VH highlighted some of the ongoing issues affecting the sector as well as opportunities to grasp:
- Cost of living crisis
 - Staff and supply chain shortages
 - 'Staycation' trends
 - Collaboration between different sectors and organisations
 - Consistent marketing messaging
 - Attracting International visitors back to Wales
 - Building new relationships with visitors
- 2.3 MWT have changed their marketing platform and rebuilt the Visit Mid Wales website with significant changes, reflecting the strong product across the region. Stats show an increase in (unique) users on the platform of 88% in January and February and 124% increase in page views over the same period.
- 2.4 VH gave examples of some of the projects and activities that MWT has supported third parties with around PR and marketing through the Media Hub.
- 2.5 DS (TXGB) provided an overview of the platform which has been made available to the tourism industry in Wales. TXGB is a system which makes it possible to manage distribution in one place and allows for more bookability through linking live inventory to more booking channels. The platform has been very well received by smaller businesses as it often creates additional opportunities for them and supplements/replaces their existing booking channels. TXGB can also support events; from local events to international events such as the World Snooker Tour which they are working on. No upfront



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costs or subscription fee. 2.5% commission charged per booking.
<https://www.txgb.co.uk/destinations/>

2.6 Welsh businesses and regions are currently being on-boarded, with some already taking bookings through this online marketplace. To ensure there is effective distribution opportunities through Visit Wales, Mid Wales Tourism has been appointed as regional contractors. VH is the regional contact on TXGB. And DS and James Berzins are the contacts at TXGB. For any further information please contact visitwales@mwtcymru.co.uk or support@txgb.co.uk

3. Update from National Trust – Pont ar Daf Project

3.1 KG from National Trust gave a progress update. The project is behind schedule for the March completion date. There were issues with underground culverts. The car park and toilet block are progressing well. The main issue is getting electricity to the site. National Trust are working with National Grid around EV charging, to determine what provision there might be on opening in April. Decision yet to be made as to when customers will begin to be charged for using the car park. The Chair welcomed this much needed project which will improve visitor experience and reduce parking on the roadside.

4. Visit Wales Update

4.1 HO updated members that Dawn Bowden has now taken over responsibility for the tourism brief. She is very excited about the added responsibility (alongside her existing responsibilities for sport, heritage, culture and creative) and is very keen to meet stakeholders at the earliest opportunity. She will be meeting the four chairs of the regional partnerships shortly. DM will chair next VEF on 6 March.

4.2 HO added that we are currently finalising business plan and looking to finalise funding priorities for next financial year with a £10.6m revenue and £5m capital budget. Priorities will include supporting the sustainability of the sector, marketing programme, skills development, grading and cruise development in line with our strategy, Welcome to Wales.

4.3 One programme launched early is Brilliant Basics for the next 2 years, with a £5m fund. We are looking to support small-scale infrastructure improvements in key destinations – the fund was launched last week. The fund is open to LAs and NPSs with maximum grant of £300k available. In addition to BB there is also the [Wales Tourism Investment Fund \(WTIF\)](#) available.



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- 4.4 SH asked whether there might be an opportunity for the 4 fora chairs to shape and influence the business plan, feeding in the professional view from the sector. HO to arrange a meeting between VW and for chairs w/b 06/03/2023. **ACTION.** SH will also ask the Minister in next week's meeting how the fora can feed into the process.
- 4.5 VH mentioned building campaigns behind the 9 new welcome awards and commented upon the Quality Assurance/Grading scheme and need for more promotion to raise the awareness of both visitors and businesses that are not part of the scheme.
- 4.6 HO updated on the Statutory licensing scheme – The consultation started just before Christmas and will close on 17 March. We are keen for the sector to have their views on shaping the scheme and 300+ responses have been received so far. We'll be looking to publish the consultation outcome shortly (date TBC) and will be presenting options on the way forward to Ministers. Further information on the consultation is available here.
- 4.7 The formal consultation on the Tourism Levy ended before Christmas and responses (1500+) are being analysed by Welsh Treasury. Consultation responses and next steps to be confirmed shortly (date TBC). The levy is a mechanism to invest in our communities with discretion for LAs in if and how it is being implemented locally.
- 4.8 UK Gov Energy Relief Scheme – we know that energy costs are a major issue for the sector at the moment, and will increase in April. The WG is doing all it can (business rate relief etc), but with the main levers with UKG we have been calling on them to look again at the sectors (tourism and hospitality) exempted from the higher relief available.
- 4.9 Welsh Tourism Week – w/b 15/05/2023. VW in discussions with WTA about running an event similar to the successful event held in the Senedd last year.
- 4.10 Council tax premium – written statement published earlier in the week. HO to share statement. **ACTION.** SH had previously raised the issue with the Minister in the last VEF due to concern around predicted 40% drop off and would like to see any outcome of the conversation.
- 4.11 HO gave a presentation on marketing that will be shared with the meeting notes.
- 4.12 SH commented upon cross-cutting themes and how the work around the football World Cup can help to promote tourism. Further opportunity when World Chef event take ss place in ICC.

- 4.13 CC updated on her new role as Head of Industry Engagement. Would like to know members' thoughts on re-introduction of face-face roadshows. Members were generally supportive of these Roadshows.

5. Sector Update

5.1 SH thanked members for updates received and picked out some of the highlights from Powys CC, Cambrian Mountains and Dwr Cymru – Elan Valley. SH encouraged additional submissions after the meeting.

5.2 SH asked for key messages from the sector to present at the next VEF.

- Vyrnwy Valley – Serious concern over future of some accommodation providers.
- Closures across the region a trend – energy costs, staffing costs and bite back from recovery.
- Staycation projection really strong but mixed feedback in terms of bookings – business events and accommodation providers reporting very positively but restaurant bookings are generally very low and the more unpredictable than ever.
- Ongoing skills challenge but reports of increased numbers of applicants for vacant roles in the last 2 months. Suggestion of a piece of work around employing 15/16 year-olds in the industry- working hours, LA registration etc.
- Cuts to rural transport services likely to impact upon employees getting to/from workplaces.
- Concerns around potential additional pressures Statutory Licensing might put on the sector.

6. Growing Mid Wales/UK Shared Prosperity Fund

6.1 CJE/NW gave a presentation that will be shared with the meeting notes.

6.2 CJE covered the Mid Wales Growth Deal and touched upon the 9 prospective projects. The Chair asked for greater visibility for these proposed projects, which would also indicate progress. **ACTION** - NR to share CJE's notes on the 9 projects with meeting notes, together with links to the monthly newsletter.

6.3 NW highlighted the opportunity for additional project ideas/aspirations to be put forward and urged the forum members to bring any such ideas to their attention.

6.4 NW gave an overview of the Regional Skills Partnership. 3-Year Employment and Skills Plan will be launched on 23 March 2023.

6.5 CJE updated on Shared Prosperity Fund. Going live on 20 March 2023.

6.6 JL suggested sharing Mid Wales Tourism Strategy with the meeting notes.
ACTION for NR.

7. Closing remarks / AOB

7.1 There was a discussion around the format of the next meeting and agreement on an in-person meeting on **Monday 12 June 12:00 – 14:00 in Aberystwyth University**. SH asked members for suggestions for agenda items.

7.2 AW mentioned the Mid Wales Autumn Fair and Truck Fest at RWAS on 07/08 October 2023.

7.3 SH will take points forward from today's meeting to the Visitor Economy Forum on behalf of the MWRF and will feedback notes through NR.