

Mid Wales Regional Tourism Forum

12 June 2023 (12:00 – 14:00)
Cambria Building, Aberystwyth University

Minutes

Attendees

Chair - **Steve Hughson**

Steffan Roberts, Nathan Richards, Clare Dwight (Visit Wales), **Julie Lewis** (Powys County Council), **Gwenfair Owen** (Ceredigion County Council), **Paul Donovan** (WATO), **Dylan Roberts** (Salop Leisure), **Arwyn Watkins OBE** (Cambrian Training), **Val Hawkins, Zoe Hawkins** (Mid Wales Tourism), **Anthony Rosser** (Lake Vyrnwy Tourism), **Gwenfair Owen** (Ceredigion County Council), **Rob Bullen** (CAT), **Beverly Dimmock** (RSPB), **Aled Davies, Jenn Jones** (Natural Resources Wales), **Roland Rees-Evans** (Penrhos Park), **Gwenno Griffith** (National Trust), **Clare James** (Royal Welsh Agricultural Society), **Victoria Leyshon** (Transport for Wales), **Rhodri Llwyd Morgan** (Aberystwyth University), **Tanya Friswell, Sue Wright** (Pentir Pumplumon), **John Davies** (NFU Cymru)

Apologies

Rob Holt (Visit Wales), **Aled Rhys Jones** [Clare James standing in] (Royal Welsh Agricultural Society), **Kate Gardener** [Gwenno Griffith standing in] (National Trust), **Peter James** (Welsh Government), **Carol Williams** (Brecon Beacons National Park Authority), **Dafydd Wyn Morgan** (Cambrian Mountains), **Aled Rhys** (Cambria Tours), **Michael Booth** (Dwr Cymru – Elan Valley)

Guest Presenters

Professor Rhys Jones (Aberystwyth University – CUPHAT Project)

1. Welcome from Chair, Introductions and Apologies, Actions from 03 March 2023

1.1 SH welcomed members and commented positively upon the numbers attending the 'in-person only' meeting. He thanked RLM and Aberystwyth University for their hospitality. Congratulations were passed on to members who were involved in Wales Tourism Week in May. SH referenced the Visitor Economy Forum (VEF) meeting taking place on 13 June and told members that agenda items 5/6 were to equip him with information and points to share with the Minister at the VEF, to influence Welsh Government thinking. SH drew upon some of the ongoing issues affecting the sector – cost of living crisis and the 182-day rule, stating the need for evidence of impact. SH touched upon the Tourism Levy and Statutory Licensing and the need for forum members and wider industry stakeholders to engage with the process to shape and influence the policies.

1.2 RRE questioned the value in engaging with Welsh Government (WG) on the development of the policies, given that the decisions seem to have been already made



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and views expressed in the various consultation events seem to not have been taken into consideration.

- 1.3 AR asked for a show of hands and deduced that only 8 customer facing fora members were present. SR pointed out that the make-up of the forum was purposely not entirely industry led. In response to 1.4 he said that all of the policies in question were still high level with very little detail and re-assured members that WG officials are listening and engaging with stakeholders through consultation workshops, the Regional Fora and the Visitor Economy Forum. SR stated there was huge opportunity for the forum and its members to shape and influence the development of the policies.
- 1.4 SH updated on the WG engagement meetings that took place in May around the introduction of the Statutory Licencing Scheme which many forum members attended. SH felt that the only clear message from the meeting in Builth Wells was that the industry would welcome a simple, low-cost Registration (not Licensing) Scheme as was initially proposed. A wider licensing scheme and fit and proper person tests were not supported. SH concluded by recognising the sense of frustration across the sector and pointed out the value of the VEF, the positive relationship with, and the value of having direct access to, the Minister, unlike UK Government.
- 1.5 AW questioned the stability of the Plaid-Labour co-operation agreement. SR responded saying it is 'firm' as things stand.

2. Update on Coastal Uplands: Heritage and Tourism (CUPHAT) Project

- 2.1 RJ gave a presentation on the developments of the CUPHAT Project, covering the themes and geographical areas of the project and the work done with local communities and businesses within the Cambrian Mountains and Preseli Hills, including workshops and coaching sessions. UK Shared Prosperity Funding (SPF) has been applied for to expand the project.
- 2.2 Questions were raised around the potential for collaboration between Powys – Ceredigion but the structure of the funding application doesn't allow for regional bids.
- 2.3 AR commented on similar work being carried out by volunteers in the Vyrnwy Valley. VH added that the work at community level is phenomenal and highlighted the importance of linking into tourist associations and WG.

3. Update from Aberystwyth University – Yr Hen Goleg Project

- 3.1 RLM gave a verbal update on the Old College Project at Aberystwyth University. He first thanked AR for the advice he had given. The update was timely, given that the announcement of the beginning of the restoration works 'proper' was made on the same day, to be carried out by (main contractor) Andrew Scott. The estimated cost is £43m, one of the largest heritage projects, funded by the Lottery Heritage Fund, philanthropic alumni, WEFO and WG, who have been pivotal. The project which incorporates the Old College and 2x Georgian Villas (phase 1) is due to complete in 2025, with the Cambria Building (phase 2) due for completion the following year. The buildings will house a learning centre, heritage centre, a 55-bed 4* hotel, a function



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room for up to 200 people and space to host large scale events; the University have worked with Amgueddfa Cymru, National Library of Wales and Hay Festival with plans to set up an annual event from 2026/2027.

4. Visit Wales Update

4.1 SR updated on the **Statutory Licensing Scheme**:

The consultation on the statutory licensing scheme for all visitor accommodation providers in Wales closed in March 2023 with over 1500 responses received. These responses are being independently analysed, with a final report due w/c 26 June 2023. The report will be published in July 2023. Three stakeholder events were held in May 2023 to gather further detailed evidence and insight on the proposals and the delivery of certain elements of the scheme. A big thank you to the forum members that joined. A further meeting was held with Local Authority Public Protection leads on 01 June 2023 to discuss these elements as well as potential delivery model for the scheme.

- 4.2 SH questioned whether there might be additional opportunities for sector leads to come together to steer the policy thinking. SR explained that narrowing down the options from high level will consider and reflect the views fed in from the sector.
- 4.3 There was discussion around the terms ‘registration’ and ‘licensing’. It was suggested by AR that the sector is already licensed when consideration is given to the existing legislation and protocols that are followed. JD called for a softer approach on behalf of NFU Cymru members. There was support around the room for ‘light touch’ registration to capture more providers in the beginning, before growing the scheme.
- 4.4 DR expressed concerns around the effect of licensing on (particularly) smaller operators which could lead to a reduction in visitor numbers and in turn, the closure of local shops and garages etc and the effect that would have on local communities.

4.5 SR updated on the **Visitor Levy**:

This is currently at policy development stage. Welsh Treasury will meet with officials from local authorities in the coming weeks to discuss the practicalities of implementing the levy. The intention is to introduce the bill to the Senedd for scrutiny within this Senedd term. The objective is to understand how accommodation providers currently operate and inform how the levy will work in practice. **Action – NR to circulate the views of LAs expressed in the consultation, if available publicly.**

- 4.6 SH commented upon the need for a level of central governance and structure around the oversight of the Levy and questioned whether there would be further guidance for LAs. SH reported that he had contacted Powys C.C. who were apparently waiting for further guidance before they would even consider the matter at Cabinet level. SR confirmed that there are plans for further guidance.
- 4.7 *A report has been published which examines the views of Welsh residents and UK consumers of domestic holidays on whether they think visitors should contribute via*



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a Levy, are willing to pay a Levy and whether they would still come if a Levy was introduced: [Visitor levy research: views of consumers and residents | GOV.WALES](#)

4.8 Tourism Levy: Consultation outcome: [Discretionary visitor levy for local authorities | GOV.WALES](#)

4.9 SR updated on the exploration around the **reform of the school year**:

This work is a Programme for Government commitment and is being carried out in collaboration, as part of the Co-operation Agreement between Welsh Government and Plaid Cymru. The Minister for Education and Welsh Language has committed to a formal consultation regarding the structure of the school year. The Minister has also confirmed that the overall number of holiday weeks would not be reduced and the summer break will be no less than four weeks. Important to note that the consultation has not yet begun and any decision following the consultation would have at least a 12-18 month implementation period as we recognise concerns from various sectors about needing a suitably long lead in time. Through exploring the reform of the school year WG are looking at ways in which the school calendar could help improve learner progression and attainment, address disadvantage, reduce educational inequalities, support learner and staff wellbeing and better align with modern life. **Action – NR to arrange for the policy team to update at a future meeting.**

4.10 SR updated on **Industry Engagement**:

Our current pages sit on Business Wales but we'll be moving over to have an industry section on Visitwales.com and looking to have the first phase complete by the autumn. In addition to our on-line presence we'll be returning to in-person events. This will include four regional roadshows in October 2023 and then 2025 so roadshows will be biennial. In 2024 we'll return to the National Tourism Awards and one national conference and then repeat the sequence in future years. Dates TBC.

4.11 SR advised that the **Brilliant Basics** capital fund has closed. Full applications had been received and are being assessed and scored. Applicants will be informed of the outcome week commencing 26 June.

4.12 SR reminded the forum that in September, WG will introduce a default **20mph speed limit** on restricted roads across Wales, pointing to the overwhelming evidence suggesting the safety and environmental benefits. Assets are available for sharing on your social media platforms. Concerns were raised around inbound tourists' lack of awareness of the legislation, CD advised that toolkits will be made available and work is underway with networks wider than Wales to send out the message.

4.13 CD gave a presentation on **marketing activity**. **Action – NR to share slides with the draft minutes.**

4.14 CD mentioned the work the team are doing with VH and Mid Wales Tourism around TXGB.

4.15 RLM offered to support marketing in the US through links between Aberystwyth University and universities in the US.



4.16 JL asked where and when will the Wales Way figure. CD advised that is being used with travel trade and internationally. **Action – CD to circulate the information going out through NR.**

5. Industry Snapshot

5.1 SH explained that the purpose of the agenda item was to capture the concerns within the Mid Wales tourism sector to support the Chairs update to the Minister at the VEF to accurately convey the current position of the sector. In addition, Wales Tourism and Hospitality Skills Partnership continues to work to identify evidence-based issues relating to recruiting, training and retaining staff in the tourism and hospitality sector in Wales, and to propose solutions where practicable. They would like to gather information and industry views on current issues and concerns around people and skills shortages and operational issues that are affecting businesses in the sector.

6. Feedback

6.1 The following points were raised:

- 4 Self-catering businesses closing in the Vyrnwy Valley due to the 182-day rule;
- Many farmers who operate self-catering units do not trade during certain times of the farming calendar to focus upon commitments such as lambing, harvesting etc. This will impact on their ability to hit 182;
- Increased costs of circa 40% impacting on viability and wiping out increased income from bookings;
- Section 106 – restricting sale of properties on farms;
- Self-catering Properties are being sold as a result of the 182-day rule, often to buyers from outside of the area, at inflated prices; This works against the policy of supporting local communities and the Welsh Language;
- Cost of living – resulting in shorter term bookings with smaller economic return; again impacting on 182;
- Decisions having to be made - holding out for longer bookings to fulfil 182-day rule v shorter lets to secure some income;
- Restaurants only opening during certain periods – energy prices, recruitment/skills issues, transport links for employees. Subsequent effect on visitor experience;
- 95% of businesses within the sector are micro businesses so the effect rurally will be higher in Mid Wales;
- Increased costs have meant 30% reduction in spend on upgrading facilities;
- Too many policy developments happening at the same time; and
- A sense that policies are being developed without consideration for the input through consultation – need for restored trust.

7. Adventure Activity Assurance Scheme (AAAS) Update

7.1 PD (WATO - Wales Adventure Tourism Organisation) gave a verbal update on the AAAS scheme which has recently been updated with Glyn Roberts (VW), showing the content on the [AAAS - Homepage | Business Wales \(gov.wales\)](#) pages. The VW



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Activity Assurance Scheme is required for Adventure Activity providers who wish to be listed on VisitWales.com and it offers two routes to becoming assured by Visit Wales, one that recognises a provider's current assurance status and; one that enables those providers without a current assured status, to become assured. The cost to route 2 is £275+ expenses which is considerably cheaper than alternative accreditations/assurances.

- 7.2 PD gave a verbal showed the assets and toolkit available on the [AdventureSmartUK | Be Adventure Smart: make your good day better](#) website, urging forum members to share amongst their networks for use with clients/guests, to promote safety in the outdoors. He advised members to check their marketing material to ensure that it fits the guidelines and sends the correct messages.

8. Sector Updates

SH thanked members for sending in the updates and asked that those outstanding be sent to NR by CoP on 15 June 2023. The updates will be collated and circulated with the draft minutes.

9. Closing remarks / AOB

- 9.1 There was a short discussion around the format of the next meeting and agreement on an in-person meeting w/b **11 September 2023**. Venue in Powys TBC. NR to share poll with suggested dates/times.