



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

## Mid Wales Regional Tourism Forum

**07 December 2023**

**11:00 – 13:00**

**Dyfi Wildlife Centre, Cors Dyfi Reserve, Machynlleth SY20 8SR**

### Minutes

#### Attendees

Chair - **Steve Hughson**

**Nathan Richards, Steffan Roberts, Lucy Von Weber** (Visit Wales), **Julie Bell** (Brecon Beacons Tourism), **Rebecca Butcher** (Cambrian Railway), **Beverly Dimmock** (RSPB), **Tanya Friswell** (Pentir Pumlumon), **Val Hawkins, Zoe Hawkins** (Mid Wales Tourism), **Clare James** (Royal Welsh Agricultural Society), **Sarah James** (Countryside & Landowners Association), **Jenn Jones** (Natural Resources Wales), **Rhodri Llwyd Morgan** (Aberystwyth University), **Gwenfair Owen** (Ceredigion County Council), **Simon Pickard** (Welsh Association of Visitor Attractions), **Aled Rees** (Cambria Tours), **Dylan Roberts** (Salop Leisure), **Rowland Rees-Evans** (Penrhos Park).

#### Guests/Presenters

**Rachel Cilliers** (SE Forum Chair), **Richard Lawrence, James Nicol** (Bute Energy).

#### Apologies

**Michael Booth** (Dwr Cymru – Elan Valley), **Rob Bullen** (CAT), **Aled Davies** (Natural Resources Wales), **John Davies** (NFU Cymru), **Paul Donovan** (WATO), **Kate Gardener** (National Trust), **Julie Lewis** (Powys County Council), **Victoria Leyshon** (TfW), **Aled Rhys Jones [Clare James standing in]** (Royal Welsh Agricultural Society), **Helen Roderick** (Bannau Brycheiniog National Park), **Anthony Rosser** (Lake Vyrnwy Tourism), **Sue Wright** (Pentir Pumlumon), **Dafydd Wyn Morgan** (Cambrian Mountains), **Greg Loweth** (Metropole Hotel), **Gareth Price** (Twristiaeth Ceredigion Tourism), **Arwyn Watkins** (Cambrian Training),

### **1. Welcome from Chair, Introductions and Apologies, Actions from 7 September 2023**

**1.1** SH welcomed the new members to the Forum.

**1.2** MWT were congratulated on a successful conference at the Metropole Hotel on 23 November. The slides on Fire Safety Legislation and Waste Management and Recycling rules which were presented at the conference, will be shared with forum members. Visit Wales were thanked for their excellent Roadshows, the feedback from which would be discussed later.

**1.3** Minutes from the previous meeting were circulated, agreed and have been published. Actions have been completed. [Minutes - 07 September 2023](#)



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

- 1.4** Discussions around the Governance of the Visitor Economy Forum (VEF) are ongoing. It is felt that the group which was established during Covid needs a refresh to deliver better governance and be more outcome / action focussed. Options are being considered and will be communicated in due course.

## **2. Introduction to Dyfi Wildlife Centre**

- 2.1** SH introduced EE who explained the background and growth of the Dyfi Wildlife Centre since 2013. The build was made possible as the result of a number of funding pots, including Heritage Lottery Fund, WG Community Facilities Programme and the Brilliant Basics Scheme. The sustainable elements of the build were highlighted, including timber sourced from local forests, reclaimed mats and an extremely efficient ground source heat pump. In addition, solar panels and power walls for electricity storage allow the centre to send energy back to the grid. The accessibility of the centre was also emphasised, including the observatory and the *Changing Places* facility. Visitor numbers are good, with a 3-fold increase since opening.

## **3. Industry Snapshot and Feedback**

- 3.1** SH explained that the purpose of the agenda item was to capture the concerns and highlights within the Mid Wales tourism sector, to support the Chair's update to the Minister at the VEF, to accurately convey the current position of the sector.

SH summarised the main issues and feedback from the Roadshows by way of setting the scene for the discussion, pointing out that the 182 day rule remains the biggest issue which was made clear during all four Roadshows.

The following points were raised:

### *182 Day Rule*

- The need to keep pushing for a review – send evidence to Chair.
- The industry would like to feed into the review.
- Ministers were not briefed well enough or early enough to avoid the inevitable impact on tourism.
- Holiday lets going back into the housing market will impact beyond the tourism industry if sold as 2<sup>nd</sup> homes. Whilst LAs might benefit from increased council taxes, local businesses will suffer as 2<sup>nd</sup> home-owners don't spend as much time and money as tourists.
- Planning and other restrictions were also raised as a barrier for those wishing to release their property to the open market.

### *School Year Reform*

- More consideration needs to be given to the week/s being cut/added.



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

- Moving a week to October will promote year-round tourism.
- Boost to sector and wider economy during the shoulder season.
- Taking a week in July will be damaging to the visitor economy, and event sector in particular.
- Extending May half term would be less damaging than extending October half term – weather/daylight hours. It was felt that 2 weeks in October would see an increase in holidays abroad and have no benefit to the Welsh Tourism sector.
- Need for an economic impact assessment before deciding upon weeks; and
- If October, we will lose visitors to warmer climes.

#### *Non – Domestic Rate Relief*

- It was felt strongly that Wales should agree to extend the existing rate relief (75%) in line with the recent decision by UK Treasury. Failure to do so would add further negative pressure to Welsh Tourism and Hospitality at a time when the landscape is very challenging. It would also create a negative competitive position with our nearest neighbour.

#### *Other*

- Rateable valuation/non-domestic rates and waste management/recycling rules will all add to the danger of more businesses closing.
- Many Waste Management Companies are not set up to deal with the requirements of the new regulations which will require significant investment.
- Need for a strategy of how the forum can influence change.
- More evidence needed of the impacts of the policies being felt.
- Survey needed to determine cumulative effect of policies creating uncertainty for investment. It was felt that the Welsh Government needs to look at an overarching Impact Assessment of the various policy changes affecting the sector. These various policies and regulatory changes cannot be considered in isolation as together they are having a negative impact, which is much greater than the individual parts.
- It was felt that Tourism is not as high on the priority list as it always seems to lose out when considered against Housing, Finance, Transport and now Education.
- Need to meet with other Ministers to discuss these policies and their impact upon the sector.

**3.2** The chair asked whether the Barometer could be used to measure the impact of policies on the sector as Welsh Government did not seem to value the recent PASC Survey which indicated that 75% of tourism businesses in Wales were struggling to hit the 182 day target. **Action: LVW to speak to VW Research re: influencing barometer questions to gain insight into cumulative effect of policies creating uncertainty for investment.**



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

- 3.3** SR explained that some of the policies causing concern are still in development and urged members to feed into the consultation.

## **4. Visit Wales Update**

### **4.1 SR updated on Tourism Development:**

#### **Roadshows**

Thanks were extended to everyone for their participation at the recent VW Roadshows. They were extremely well attended and a success from Visit Wales' point of view. The aim of the roadshows was to outline Visit Wales' positive prospects of future opportunities across marketing, development and events, and there were important conversations had around wider policies, in particular 182-day rule, which have been fed back to Ministers.

### **4.2 SR updated on Wider Welsh Government Business:**

#### **Financial / Budget**

The Forum was alerted to the challenging financial situation post UK Autumn Statement (on 22 November) and told them to expect to see difficult spending choices and inevitable budget reductions in the WG draft Budget for 2024-2025 that will be published on 19 December.

#### **School Year Reform**

Members were made aware of the consultation that has been recently launched by the Education Minister looking to reform the school year. The main proposal at this stage is to shorten the summer holiday period by one week (from the start of the holiday period) and adding a week at the beginning of October half term.

The Education team is looking to establish a stakeholder group to work closely alongside them in developing the policy. A number of members have already been contacted, including the Chair.

Consultation will run for 12 weeks from 21 November and everyone is encouraged to present their views to gain an understanding of the impacts, both positive and negative, for the visitor economy.

#### **Statutory Licensing**

An update is due on the Statutory Licensing Scheme Bill. A written statement will be issued (around 13 Dec) that will outline the next steps. An incremental approach is being taken to implementation, starting with a registration scheme.

### **4.3 LVW updated on Marketing:**

The focus is now on the 2024 campaign which has fresh, new creatives, showing people enjoying Wales. New shoot this year in North Wales,



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

Portmeirion and the Ffestiniog Highland Railway. The backing track is Adwaith's *Ar Lan y Mor*. The new ad will be live from Boxing day onwards, on all major linear channels as well as on streaming services and on demand/catch up.

Based on insights about viewing habit changes, a shift is being seen (especially in the older age bracket) towards watching TV on demand and on devices rather than traditional linear TV. Therefore, more of the marketing budget is being spent on these platforms. VW is one of the first brands to advertise on Disney Plus which is a great opportunity to get Wales in front of new audiences on this platform.

As part of the 2024 new campaign there will be OOH in London, underground, overground and a key roadside spot in January for 2 weeks. There are also media partnerships with Tripadvisor, Mumsnet, Walk/Rambler's magazine and Conde Nast as well as influencer marketing in March.

VW are now in a strong position with Visit Britain, following a Welsh Affairs Committee report, which concluded that VB needs to promote Wales more in its marketing materials.

## 5. Bute Energy Community Benefits Fund and Recreation Plan

**5.1** SH explained the reason for inviting Bute Energy to present at the meeting was to raise awareness of significant proposed development of Wind Energy Parks across Mid Wales and associated funding coming into the region by way of Community Benefit Funds. There are also proposals to create outdoor activities and improve access within the upland energy parks. SH stressed that politics and thoughts on the plans themselves would not be discussed, but the challenge of influencing strategic and investment priorities around improving the way of life for the wider community.

**5.2** JN explained that Bute Energy have held consultation events across communities within the region and want to work with communities to maximise the potential for the use of the fund. Bute Energy want local people sitting on boards to make decisions on how substantial pots of money can be spent to impact significantly upon local communities now, and in the future. He asked members to think bigger than short term, cosmetic upgrades within communities, but rather to consider priorities such as improvements to (for example) heath care services and affordable housing.

**5.3** RL clarified that funding will start when sites are up and running. He gave examples of funding schemes and how the recreation plan has been implemented at existing sites, including grants and the use of staff time and expertise to help clubs and organisations within communities. **Action: NR to share contact details for RL/JN with members.**

**5.4** VH questioned whether the energy created will benefit the local grid. JN explained that the energy is transported around the grid to where the need is



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

greatest. Bute Energy are investigating how the grid can be used to directly benefit local businesses and farms.

## **6. Launch of the Cambria Line Window Seater**

- 6.1** RB from Cambrian Rail Partnership gave an overview of the Cambria Line Window Seater Audio App which launched in Machynlleth Railway Station on 10 August. A follow up launch will take place in spring 2024.

## **7. Sector Updates**

- 7.1** SH thanked members for providing their updates and mentioned some key highlights. The updates will be circulated with the draft minutes.

## **8. Closing remarks / AOB**

- 8.1** KT from VW has provided an update on skills/training/recruitment, including information on funding available until 31 March 2024, for a range of courses for tourism & hospitality businesses. **Action: NR to share slides with draft minutes.**

- 8.2** Date of the next meeting - 7 March 2024 10:30 – 13:00 at Cardigan Castle.

### ***Actions:***

- 1. NR to share presentation slides with the draft minutes, along with contact details for Richard Lawrence/James Nicol of Bute Energy.*
- 2. LVW to speak to VW Research re: influencing barometer questions to gain insight into cumulative effect of policies creating uncertainty for investment.*