

Visit Wales - Mid Wales Regional Tourism Forum

25 June 2020

Virtual (Online) Meeting

Attendees representing the following organisations:
Royal Welsh Agricultural Society
Mid North Powys Tourism Network
Mid Wales Tourism
Cambrian Training Company
BHA Wales Chair / Lake Vyrnwy
Brecon Beacons NPA
Cambrian Mountains Initiative
Wales Activity Tourism Organisation
Salop Leisure
Dyfi Biosphere
Natural Resources Wales
Ceredigion County Council
Brecon Beacons Tourism
Tynrhyd Retreat
Powys County Council
Penrhos Golf Club
Aberystwyth University
Dwr Cymru Welsh Water
Transport for Wales
Visit Wales representatives

Welcome & Introductions – Steve Hughson

SH welcomed everyone and thanked members for their attendance and commitment; he continued by thanking Welsh Government for their continued support of the industry.

Members were assured that through the Chair's attendance at the weekly COVID-19 Taskforce meetings their concerns and those of the industry were being heard at the highest levels of Welsh and UK Government. The First Minister had attended the last of such meetings and understood and appreciated industry issues in the context of this public health crisis. The important role of members in feeding back as sector representatives was made clear and members were urged to continue to feed through any concerns through HJ; the Forum's two-way communication channel function was particularly crucial at this time, in order for WG/VW messages and information to be communicated to the industry; this would be vital in helping to build business, employee and visitor confidence going forward.

Policy Update - Rob Holt

RH thanked all for their continued support and updated members following the First Minister's statement. There was a lot of work being done regarding definitions, preparing the guidance and ensuring there were no wider issues with communities, (seen as a priority going forward).

Key dates (subject to public health conditions being favourable):

- July 6, five mile travel restriction to be lifted;
- July 13, re-opening of "accommodation without shared facilities" (subject to the July 9 review); definition of this would allow self-catering for single families or hotels offering en-suite facilities and where applicable room service (bars/restaurants shared areas to remain closed). Restrictions around the caravan sector would be lifted, allowing facilities to open where there were no shared bathroom/kitchen facilities. Outdoor attractions (which were never legislated to close) would be able to open; some of the indoor attraction sector would be considered in the next review.

A review of the hospitality sector was underway and announcements were imminent.

Members expressed concerns around social distancing / number of people gathering together. The current legislation prevented larger groups from staying in one accommodation property / caravan. This was also felt to be restricting provision in the activity provider sector. RH stressed that this was an issue outside tourism and would only change when public guidance around social distancing was amended.

Campsites would not be included for re-opening on July 13, but would be reviewed in the next phase. The conversation led into issues around equality, the opening of disabled facilities (particularly toilets) at caravan/camping/caravan sites etc. Some members also felt that the continual closure of campsites (following travel restriction lifting) would result in instances of unlawful wild camping. RH explained that "shared facilities" was an issue and the cleaning of shared toilets and showers was not easily monitored at camp sites, but acknowledged that this was a complex situation.

A Visitor Charter and 'Good to Go' standard were under development; both to be finalised and published as soon as possible.

A number of issues were being addressed, including vulnerable groups, lobbying UK Gov regarding an extension of funding support, the skills agenda, events and how a potential second wave and possible local lockdowns would be dealt with.

All announcements would continue to be made in a phased, cautious manner; each ongoing change would be dependent on the responsible and successful re-opening at each stage; they would be subject to the public health position and Hywel Dda Health Board in particular, along with WLGA were key players in the South West / Mid landscape.

Arwyn Davies - Ceredigion CC

AD stressed that it was crucial to maintain the “test, trace, protect” system as restrictions were eased. Over the coming weeks, the likely re-opening of schools, easing of restrictions around travel and some sectors of the tourism industry (followed by the influx of students in September) would mean increased numbers and travel. Ceredigion CC would be working within the overarching WG guidelines and supporting WG to manage and maintain the resilience of the system and to re-build community, business and visitor confidence.

Paul Donovan - Adventure Smart / WATO

Adventure Smart UK has developed “enjoying the outdoors safely” messages, intended to accompany the COVID-19 messaging. These would be important resources in the phased re-opening of the outdoors process, particularly in the context of countryside and coast activities. Bilingual posters available through the following link, for all to use free of charge - <https://www.adventuresmart.uk/toolkit-c19-posters/>

Rhidian Morgan - VW Finance Update

ERF Phase 2 would be open for applications from June 29. It was likely that the funding would be awarded very quickly, as in the previous round and members were urged to communicate scheme details to their networks. Information had been shared through the VW newsletter. There would be a Phase 3 at some point, but details were not known yet.

Members felt strongly that ongoing / long term funding support was crucial for the sustainability and progression of the industry. RM assured all that WG continued to exert pressure on the UK Government in discussions around future industry funding.

Lucy Von Weber, Visit Wales - Marketing / Recovery Planning –

LVW updated on the guidance (which would be published asap) and thanked everyone for their input. It continued to be checked by several unions, HSE, legal teams at WG and would be fully bilingual.

The ‘Check in’ and ‘Year of Outdoors’ messaging would be resumed as soon as possible.

The VW website would be the channel for the Visitor Charter. The launch of the “Good to Go” scheme for business was imminent. Both would be extremely useful tools in managing the “Test, Trace, Protect” process and helping to rebuild and reinforce visitor, community and business confidence going forward.

Hyper local travel, local travel, in Wales and then domestic travel were expected to be the visitor preferences in the short term renewal process and VW content needed to reflect that.

Members felt that clear and concise marketing communications were essential moving forward and welcomed the overarching Guidance, “Good to Go” and Visitor Charter and looked forward to their imminent communication to the industry.

Val Hawkins, MWT - Behavioural Insights Research

MWT has begun work in the context of the safe and responsible re-opening of the tourism sector and community / business feelings during this phased approach. VH thanked all who had contributed to date with this important piece of regional work, (which would be fed into VW) and would be updating members at the next meeting.

Jo Corke - Research

<https://www.visitbritain.org/covid-19-consumer-sentiment-tracker>

The Consumer Survey in conjunction with Visit England & Scotland is now in week five. There appeared to be more confidence in UK visitors taking a short break this summer, but people were following Government guidance and there would be a need to track changes according to the fast moving situation. This data would be analysed and utilised by marketing colleagues moving forward.

The Barometer Survey would soon be communicated to businesses, in order to assess how the industry planned to re-open and to better understand the ongoing economic situation, including data on real time redundancies.

The Great Britain Visitor and Tourism Survey would begin in July, with the Occupancy Survey feeding in.

Although this was clearly a sensitive and worrying issue, members were asked to share any information on redundancies, in order for the situation to be monitored and information provided to Government Ministers.

Any information collected by the industry / Local Authorities regarding community views, concerns and hopes as the phased return of the industry progressed would also be welcomed.

Chair / Closing Remarks

There were no other matters arising.

SH thanked everyone for their attendance and valued contributions. It was felt that the current format was beneficial during this period of crisis and would be retained at least for the short term; this would be reviewed at the next meeting.

Date of next meeting:

23 July 11:00 – 13:00.