

## Visit Wales - Mid Wales Regional Tourism Forum

16 September 2020

### Virtual (Online) Meeting

<b>Attendees representing the following organisations:</b>
Mid North Powys Tourism Network
Mid Wales Tourism
Cambrian Training Company
BHA Wales Chair / Lake Vyrnwy
Cambrian Mountains Initiative
Dyfi Biosphere
Natural Resources Wales
Ceredigion County Council
Brecon Beacons Tourism
Tynrhyd Retreat
Powys County Council
Penrhos Golf Club
RSPB
Dwr Cymru Welsh Water
Transport for Wales
Visit Wales representatives

#### **Welcome & Introductions – Anthony Rosser**

AR chaired the meeting in the absence of Steve Hughson (SH) who sent his apologies. AR welcomed members and thanked them for their attendance; he also conveyed SH's thanks to members for their valuable input into the weekly COVID-19 Taskforce meetings and reminded members to encourage their networks to sign up to the Visit Wales e-newsletters and to continue to communicate information received through the Forum.

AR informed members that the four regional forum Chairs had met with VW officials and felt that the future format and function of the Forum needed to be reviewed going forward.

AR commended VW's rapid response at the outset of the pandemic and officials' ongoing support.

AR summarised the general trading position of the industry as mixed; positive for some, but noting that others, such as the Weddings and Events sectors remained very badly affected. He also highlighted the excellent practices and systems implemented by the majority of businesses, whilst acknowledging the poorer examples adopted by a small minority.

### **Policy Update - Rob Holt**

RH thanked industry bodies, local authorities and members for their ongoing support. He emphasised that Visit Wales is part of Welsh Government and as such, can react quickly to the ever changing circumstances; he understood that the next months would be critical for the industry and acknowledged that the Events sector in particular continued to be badly affected; while successful “Test Events” had been undertaken, the introduction of local lockdowns required them to be paused.

RH shared positive reports of COVID-19 business practice but also acknowledged reports of poor practice (such as lack of customer data collection) and non-compliance, which Local Authorities have the powers to address. Julie Lewis, Powys County Council, noted that although resources were limited, officials were in circulation, checking premises for non-compliance issues and communicating information to businesses and the wider general public. Ann Eleri Thomas, Ceredigion County Council, also reported that officials were inspecting businesses and finding that the majority of businesses were complying. RH emphasised that the most appropriate means of reporting poor practice incidents was through the relevant Local Authorities.

Rowland Rees-Evans felt that visitors and businesses had behaved responsibly and that no evidence had been produced to link visitors to the increase in COVID-19 cases, particularly in rural areas. RH acknowledged that the majority continued to observe the regulations, but reiterated that the balance between public health and the economy continued to be challenging and that the behaviour of individuals remained the crucial factor, rather than the conduct of one particular sector.

RH provided the current position in response to members’ queries. Please see link [frequently asked questions](#)

RH announced that he would be moving to Events Wales on October 1 and that Mari Stephens would take the lead on Tourism Marketing and Development at Visit Wales. AR thanked RH for his tireless service and support during these unprecedented times.

### **Rhidian Morgan - VW Finance Update**

RH provided an update on the Economic Resilience Fund (ERF3) (N.B. Businesses across Wales can now find out if they can apply for funding from the **third phase of the Economic Resilience Fund (ERF)** by visiting the online [Eligibility Checker.](#))

Providing the current position in response to members’ queries, RH emphasised that the ongoing VAT issue was being discussed with HMRC and WG continue to lobby the UK Government.

RM explained that it had been necessary to repurpose “Brilliant Basics” (capital) funding to contribute to the funding support provided during the pandemic. This fund would not be resurrected this financial year, however the regeneration team has a remit to address improvements in town development etc.

RM highlighted the 34% funding support offered by Welsh Government to date, the highest in the UK. He added that regarding the number of applications, tourism and hospitality uptake is currently second only to construction. Further funding support was being looked at and lobbying of the UK Government was ongoing. RM emphasised that the challenging role of the WG was to “fill the funding gaps” and while every endeavour was being made, this may not be possible in all cases.

AR thanked RM for his presentation and for the rapid funding mechanisms developed to support the industry.

### **Jo Corke – Research**

#### **Presentation circulated**

JC shared research updates which focused on the mid-July to mid-September periods. The most recent research would be shared on the Welsh Government website, including a four-week summary. Future research included an events survey and the Visit Britain international survey (including Ireland).

### **Clare Dwight, Visit Wales - Marketing / Recovery Planning**

#### **Presentation circulated**

CD addressed community concerns regarding visitors; this was being combatted through messages of reassurance and positive messaging around local, responsible travel and the “Addo” and “Good to Go” campaigns. CD encouraged all members to sign-up and communicate to their networks and to make use of the free, online “Addo” assets.

The ‘This is Autumn – This is Wales’ and ‘This is Winter’ would utilise social assets, PR, on-going paid partnerships and paid digital promotions. Work was also underway in developing business to business links, including the travel trade, group and coach business and online trade exhibitions (all activities subject to changes in circumstances regarding Public Health and also budget dependant).

### **Kerry Thatcher, Visit Wales - Skills**

KT gave an update on the Wales Tourism and Hospitality Skills Partnership and the Flexible Skills Programme proposal.

Both Arwyn Watkins, Cambrian Training Company and AR welcomed this proposal as a significant movement in the hospitality skills industry.

KT invited members to email her for further details and discussions.

### **Val Hawkins, MWT-Behavioural Insights Research**

#### **Presentation circulated**

VH presented an update of the Tourism Product Innovation Fund (TPIF) Marketing Project “#RealMidWales” which is undertaking activity to create messages, aligned to the outcomes of behavioural insights research and to VW activities and messaging.

All members were encouraged to get involved and to contact VH for further information.

**AOB**

AR addressed the importance of wellbeing, particularly at this most stressful time. AR invited all members to consider the people in their networks and consider checking in on them.

**Chair / Closing Remarks**

AR thanked members and presenters for their attendance and input. AR also summarised the difficulties over the last six months and the challenges posed going forward.

**Date of next meeting:**

November 5 10.30am – 12.30pm