

Visit Wales - Mid Wales Regional Tourism Forum

5 November 2020

Virtual (Online) Meeting

Attendees representing the following organisations:
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
Tynrhyd Retreat
Powys County Council
Penrhos Golf Club
RSPB
Transport for Wales
Visit Wales representatives
Salop Leisure
Royal Welsh Agricultural Society/Events Sector

Welcome & Introductions – Steve Hughson

SH began by welcoming members and highlighted the positive Mid Wales coverage received by BBC Autumn Watch at the Centre of Alternative Technology. SH thanked members for their continued input which directly feeds to the COVID-19 Taskforce Group which meets weekly with Ministers. SH (and Mari Stevens) also thanked Val Hawkins (VH) and the Mid Wales Tourism Team for the work undertaken in communicating with the industry and promoting Mid Wales in a safe and engaging manner. He reminded the group of the importance of continuing to submit questions and issues via the forum admin to the weekly meetings.

Policy Update – Mari Stevens & Rob Holt

MS explained the hospitality regulations are currently being refined, and also thanked members for their input (often at short notice), which is fed directly into the weekly COVID-19 meetings via Chair, SH. MS explained the FAQs have been published in advance of the regulations and guidance, and will be updated as time progresses.

MS highlighted the current regulations which will be reviewed on 19 November.

FAQs: <https://gov.wales/coronavirus-regulations-guidance>

MS also highlighted work underway to discuss further the time groups are permitted to gather and how these are often context dependent.

RH explained the forthcoming review will be undertaken as always in the context of a Public Health crisis. MS added that a long term approach to messaging, exercising calm and caution is the key to businesses staying open and providing safe experiences. Anthony Rosser felt that being cautious about promoting Wales is a difficult stance, particularly when income is key. AR highlighted the opportunity for Mid Wales to promote the wide open spaces which visitors are calling for.

RH provided members with an events update; test events are not likely to happen until February 2021 with events not able to re-start until Spring (March). A quicker roll out of fast testing might aid these developments. The restrictions about groups gathering is a challenge for events, including the wedding sector (maximum of 15 people). RH explained the Cultural Resilience Fund had received hundreds of applications which are currently being worked through.

Lucy Von Weber (LvW) shared a link to demonstrate the spread of infection in different circumstances: <https://english.elpais.com/society/2020-10-28/a-room-a-bar-and-a-class-how-the-coronavirus-is-spread-through-the-air.html>.

SH asked if the cross border messages will be consistent and coherent; MH explained a meeting is planned to explore where alignments can be made, but emphasised that the Public Health Wales position (what's best for Wales) is the key driver of Welsh Government decisions.

SH raised the subject of enforcement measures being a collective responsibility. MS did note the difficulties with adherence to self-isolation on which Welsh Government is working with LAs to improve, however individual compliance and responsibility is key to this.

Statutory grading was raised by SH to which LvW explained formalised registration was not a priority and would be unwieldy in these circumstances (particularly as this would likely be linked to a tourism tax). Free grading however, will continue to be realised in 2021; this was suggested by Val Hawkins as a great opportunity in communication campaign planning.

SH raised the question of a COVID-19 exit strategy; MS highlighted that although much has been learned about the disease, an end to the pandemic is still unclear. Knowledge gained from 2020 will inform the short and medium terms plans of 2021 including a continuation of contact tracing and vaccine development. With this knowledge MS expressed optimism in Wales' ability to develop managed strategies to undertake business even in the short term; focusing on couples and families in the Christmas period, for example.

Rhidian Morgan - VW Finance Update

RM updated members on the progress of the ERF3 (Economic Resilience Fund) scheme; this was a £100 million scheme which received applications worth £140 million in 27 hours. This overwhelming response had caused the fund to pause in order to manage and process the applications (which includes an appraisal of their quality)

and suitability). RM pointed to a number of businesses which are developing their products and services, even in this time of uncertainty. Future funding will depend on WG priorities and the capacity of the finance teams. Arwyn Watkins OBE shared a link to a helpful podcast which describes the ERF process: <https://businessnewswales.com/economic-resilience-fund-update-wales-business-review/>

AR queried the process of future funding applications and asked if they would be assessed on project merit, RM explained that an ERF4 was likely and an Expression of Interest (EOI) would be used as a vehicle to determine worthwhile projects.

RM explained that although the ERF3 fund is closed, the ERF Lockdown fund is still available for business to register: <https://businesswales.gov.wales/coronavirus-advice/>

Lucy Von Weber, Visit Wales - Marketing / Recovery Planning

LvW provided members with a marketing update including:

- Addo messages will continue to be promoted throughout the winter, with limited social activity also taking place over the next few weeks to inspire for the future
- Some proactive PR will take place around I'm a Celebrity – to promote Welsh experiences for visitors to enjoy in future
- Opportunities are being explored such as a 'give the gift of experience' digital campaign in the lead up to Christmas – to encourage consumers to buy experiences in Wales rather than gifts, supporting the local tourism industry. A similar campaign was very successful in 2019. This is all subject to budget confirmation
- Digital assets are being produced and PR support given to outline the new guidelines for the hospitality industry, to reassure the public that all measures have been taken to ensure a safe experience and emphasise messages about the need for consumers to act responsibly and follow the measures implemented by businesses
- Budget proposals for 2020/2021 are currently being prepared, and a bid will be made for appropriate campaign activity

MS also remarked about the Digital Team's progress in adding new content and search engine optimisation to the Visit Wales website. In addition MS suggested short-terms plans can be built using platforms such as St David's Day and the Wales & the World programme.

Jo Starkey - Research

JS shared research updates and offered a caveat in being mindful of the rapidly changing environment (in terms of research data).

JS presented findings from the Business Barometer, Consumer Insights Tourism Tracker and Occupancy Annual Report (2019). Members can find links to these in the presentation supplied by JS.

AR commented on the redundancy figures (resulting from COVID-19) and suggested the figure to be larger. JS explained the sample size and timing accounts for this however AR's point is valid and the use of research is contextual. SH welcomed AR's scrutiny and noted such analysis is a key role of forum members.

Helen Jones, Visit Wales - Skills

HJ shared the Working Wales link with members: <https://workingwales.gov.wales/> and highlighted the Industry Engagement Newsletters' statistics. HJ thanked members for their continual efforts in communicating the information through their networks.

SH thanked HJ for the update and reiterated the importance of members to sign-up to all relevant newsletters and bulletins and to encourage others in the industry to do the same. LvW suggested members make use of the digest of bulletins, which lists all of the bulletins since March 2020:

<https://businesswales.gov.wales/tourism/coronavirus-covid-19-bulletins>

AOB

None.

Chair / Closing Remarks

SH thanked members and reiterated the importance of their weekly input which reaches Ministerial level through the COVID Taskforce.

Date of next meeting:

January 13 2021 1.30pm – 3.30pm