

Visit Wales - Mid Wales Regional Tourism Forum

20 May 2021

Virtual (Online) Meeting

Attendees representing the following organisations:
Mid North Powys Tourism Network
Royal Welsh Agricultural Society
Mid Wales Tourism
Cambrian Training Company
BHA Wales Chair / Lake Vyrnwy
Cambrian Mountains Initiative
Dyfi Biosphere
Natural Resources Wales
Ceredigion County Council
Powys County Council
Penrhos Golf Club
RSPB
Salop Leisure
WATO / Adventure Smart UK
Cambria Tours
Brecon Beacons National Park Authority
Twristiaeth Ceredigion Tourism
Best of Wales
Dwr Cymru Welsh Water
Aberystwyth University
The Metropole Hotel
Welsh Government / Visit Wales representatives

Welcome & Introductions – Steve Hughson (SH)

SH welcomed members and presenters, and reiterated the purpose of the forum; to allow members to share their updates and ideas and maintain a cycle of information between the industry and Welsh Government.

SH thanked Helen Jones for her dedicated work as Regional Engagement Manager and wished her success in her new role. SH also welcomed Helen's successor, Rebecca Rees to the forum and thanked Gwawr Price for her interim forum support.

SH gave a brief introduction to the agenda and highlighted the work ahead of the industry in moving towards further easing of restrictions and working with the new Welsh Government Ministers to achieve this. SH also noted the importance of both the Visitor Economy Stakeholder Group and Event Wales Advisory Group, which meet regularly to aid recovery planning. SH pointed to issues in the recovery of events, pronounced by differences with the UK Government plans i.e. removing the two-metre distancing rule.

SH welcomed Steffan Roberts as the new Deputy Director of Tourism Development, and wished all members the very best in their business endeavours going forward. SH announced news of the late Pam Powell; extending thoughts to the family and friends of Pam, a dedicated and passionate advocate of tourism in Mid Wales for over 40 years.

SH reviewed the minutes of the previous meeting and asked members to formally adopt these; no objections noted. SH encouraged all members to fully participate in the forum; to raise questions and contribute to discussions.

Steffan Roberts (SR), Deputy Director of Tourism Development

SR announced his new role as Deputy Director of Tourism Development and thanked his predecessor, Rob Holt for his service to the forum (after moving to Major Events). SR provided members with a background to his experiences within Welsh Government and looks forward to the continued engagement with the forum. SR gave recognition of the importance of forum engagement, particularly over this last year. SR reiterated the importance of the forum's two-way process; to cascade information to networks, and the opportunity to listen to industry issues. SR noted the move from crisis to recovery and a more normal period requires strategic planning, which is in place. SR echoed SH's thanks to Helen Jones for her hard work and welcomed Rebecca Rees (RR) to the team after which, RR introduced herself to the forum.

SR explained the Minister of Economy, Vaughan Gething will lead on aligned policies, including tourism, hospitality, events and skills, which places these industries in a strong position. SR summarised alert levels changes (from the current three, to two) and the proposed move to alert level one. The alert level change will involve less pronounced easements, but will initially consider changes to weddings and events restrictions. SR also explained that Ministers are making considerations beyond alert level one; some planning has already taken place, including further changes to social distancing regulations.

See current guidance: <https://businesswales.gov.wales/coronavirus-advice/>

SR reminded members of the status of current funding packages, including the latest phase of ERF which opened on Monday (17 May), offering grants of up to £25,000: <https://gov.wales/further-support-welsh-businesses>, and the cultural recovery fund (CRF), which is now closed and applications are being scrutinised.

SH thanked SR for his updates and reiterated the importance of the next review. SH suggested an invitation to the forum should be extended to the new Ministers. Val Hawkins (VH) and voiced concern about the loss of a Tourism Minister (echoed by Arwyn Watkins OBE (AW) and Anthony Rosser (AR)), SR explained the full Minister of Economy has a focus on the visitor economy as part of his wider economic plans.

VH also voiced concerns about the loss of tourism experience within the Visit Wales team.

AR praised the work of the Tourism Taskforce, which achieved a depth of understanding and influence at Ministerial level. AR continued to suggest this arrangement of communication is fundamental and should continue. SH also expressed disappointment that the hospitality, tourism and events sectors were not explicitly mentioned in the ministerial changes. SH explained the former Deputy Minister attended all but one of the taskforce meetings, therefore a gap in such representation might develop. SR assured members that the exceptional engagement undertaken through the forums will continue to be developed. SH explained that the engagement work has created a family among industry partners and should continue.

Kerry Thatcher (KT), Visit Wales - Skills

SH welcomed KT to the forum and highlighted the challenges faced in the tourism and hospitality and events sectors due to skills and recruitment issues. KT presented Skills development work undertaken by Visit Wales, including:

- Signposting so businesses can easily find the information they need
- Working with regional skills partnerships
- Secretariat for the Wales Tourism & Hospitality Skills Partnership
- Work with stakeholders, industry, Careers Wales (links with schools etc), JobcentrePlus, Springboard and others to identify issues and possible solutions.

AW announced the Mid Wales Regional Learning and Skills Partnership held its first meeting in May (covering Powys and Ceredigion). KT added that both AW and AR are members of the skills partnership. SH suggested learning new skills and recruitment is only part of the picture, but also those on furlough require a period of reorientation to their jobs. AR described the skills developments as momentous and presents lasting opportunities. AW highlighted the strong evidence base in place to drive skills development, which has helped to remove barriers associated with apprenticeship routes. AW also suggested school leavers are not the sole route to filling the skills shortages, returners to work are also an important source of recruitment.

KT provided a link to the tourism, hospitality and skills webpage:

<https://businesswales.gov.wales/tourism/skills>

Dylan Roberts suggested Welsh medium schools might be a deterrent to those from outside Wales seeking to educate their children in English. Llion Pughe (LIP) explained schools offer bilingual opportunities and we should not overlook this, LIP also noted it is important to focus on supporting the recruitment of those resident in Mid Wales, and grow our own skills base.

Paul Donovan (PD) thanked KT for her presentation and explained from an adventure activity provider perspective, the skills and qualifications required sit within Sport, and not in tourism. PD also noted the outdoor activity Trail Blazer apprenticeships available in England are available to some, but not all Welsh residents. AW explained the frustrations of the Trail Blazers scheme features across a number of sectors, adding that although qualifications are portable, Trail Blazers is not set up this way. AW

suggested there is an opportunity to raise this in the forthcoming Qualifications Wales steering group meeting.

SH thanked KT for her presentation and the questions raised by members.

Jo Starkey, (JS) Visit Wales – Tourism Research

JS presented the latest tourism research updates including:

- Forecasts which estimates international and domestic visitor revenue.
- Domestic staycations are forecasted to make a more rapid recovery compared to an inbound recovery which is forecast to take over four years.
- Public sentiment is looking more positive since the announcement of the easements. However, the scars will remain to businesses.
- Travel confidence has increased however but is still fragile, clear messaging and well managed experiences are a factor in this.
- Travel restrictions not the only concerns – the amount of activities and opportunities are also factors.
- Staycations are not surprisingly strong, also even when overseas travel is lifted, staycations are predicted to stay strong. The easing of quarantine might swing more positively to the overseas demand. Value for money for families and younger travellers will be key – prices for UK destinations would be mindful of this.
- In terms of intentions, a 'wait and see approach' is prominent, particularly when we're concerned with autumn bookings

JS shared links to future research publications:

<https://gov.wales/covid-19-uk-tourism-consumer-tracker-survey-wales-profile>

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

JS added an encouraging picture for Mid Wales in that there is appetite for visitors to experience a smaller town and village destinations. Daytrip intentions continue to increase. SH thanked JS for her presentation and acknowledged the important status of research in terms of effective planning.

VH added insights from Mid Wales Tourism research figures, including increased visitor interest in age groups 18-24 and 25-34, whilst 65+ decreased. Birmingham, Manchester and Cardiff are key markets showing interest in the Mid Wales region.

Ann Eleri Thomas (AET) offered a snapshot of Ceredigion businesses booking experiences; suggesting these are healthy. JS attributed some of these findings to strong pockets of bookings of self-catering accommodation in key periods, and worth noting in terms of the spread of accommodation bookings. AR reported strong bookings at Lake Vyrnwy Hotel & Spa, however AR acknowledged certain sectors such as weddings envisage a more difficult summer ahead.

Lucy Von Weber (LvW) highlighted the difference between self-catering and serviced accommodation with regards to future bookings. Evidence of visitors making multiple serviced accommodation bookings and taking advantage of no-penalty cancellations was having an impact on research and business confidence:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-57155307>

Claire Chappell, (CC) Visit Wales

CC described the progress made towards a new governance framework to understand better how we engage with the industry. CC also explained that the new Minister has been invited to an inter-ministerial group at UK level to discuss recovery plans which have common themes throughout the UK. CC gave details of a domestic campaign launched today by UK Government to promote city visits, however the UK Government predicts the international market is unlikely to recover until 2023. CC continued to share areas of marketing focus including: skills, sustainable green and inclusive tourism, UK a leading nation for events and business events and developing the Addo message further. CC provided links to Addo videos and encouraged members to make full use of Addo assets.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IRtEljwDkGk>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q2KPLz mhAzg>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IRtEljwDkGk>
<https://assets.wales.com/assets>

CC shared plans for an autumn push which focuses on the interventions and marketing activity which encourages seasonality, spread and spend. Additionally, CC explained Visit Wales has a responsibility to promote skills through effective public relations, using heroes of the sector. AW offered to put forward those heroes in the Mid Wales area who are engaged in the sector.

Val Hawkins, (VH) Mid Wales Tourism

VH presented the marketing activity which Mid Wales Tourism has undertaken to support their members and the national recovery plan, including:

- 41 newsletters
- Social media posts reaching over 1 million views
- Supporting members seven days a week
- A COVID microsite and hub – with links to guidance
- PR and Media – a balanced and supportive approach
- Destination marketing – built upon themes which focus on foundations of recovery
- Marketing research
- Represented Mid Wales nationally e.g., a Guardian featuring inland towns (Rhayader and Elan Valley)

VH noted the full impact of COVID-19 is unknown, therefore full engagement with all stakeholders and Welsh Government is essential. Roland-Rees Evans thanked VH and Mid Wales Tourism for all their hard work. SH also praised the speed and proactivity of Mid Wales Tourism's response to the crisis.

Rob Holt, (RH) Deputy Director of Major Events

SH welcomed RH to the forum to update members regarding the events testing progress. RH reported that several testing events are underway and the results are

to be processed, after which the data will be fed into the next review. Working collaboratively with England's major events team is also feeding into the lessons learned. RH explained the difficulties in testing; PCR testing works, however scalability is difficult, particularly for mass gatherings. A home testing might be a solution to this. RH added a major hurdle to safe events is how to authorise a range of small and large events. RH concluded that these developments will feed into the review on the 3 and 4 of June. SH thanked RH for reporting to the forum.

Dafydd-Wyn Morgan (DwM) - Project Manager - Dyfodol Cambrian Futures

On behalf of the forum, SH thanked Dafydd Wyn Morgan for his hard work and humour. DwM paid tribute Pam Powell and shared stories of his impressionable meetings with her. DwM then updated members with the progress and future of the Cambrian Mountains Initiative project, which after four years of activity will end in December 2021. Aled Davies, NRW enquired about the landscape status of the Cambrian Mountains, which DwM explained is in a consultative stage.

DwM shared his presentation, which highlighted the many achievements Cambrian Mountains Initiative project has achieved over the last four years. SH again thanked DwM for his passion and the scale and scope achieved by the project; the goal of raising the profile of the Cambrian Mountains has clearly been achieved and the night skies work has been incredible – cosmic in fact. LvW also praised the quality of the work undertaken throughout the project and look forward to collaborating in the final stages of branding work.

AOB

SH thanked all presenters and members for their attendance and contributions.

Chair / Closing Remarks

SH reminded members the forum is a vehicle for two-way communication platform and encouraged feedback of ideas and development both to and from member networks.

Date of next meeting:

TBC