



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

## Mid Wales Regional Tourism Forum

30 September 2021

3 – 5pm

Minutes

### Attendees

Chair – **Steve Hughson** (Royal Welsh Agricultural Society), **Rhidian Morgan, Heledd Owen, Lucy Von Webber, Kerry Thatcher, Rebecca Rees, Suzanne Thomas, Joanne Starkey** (Visit Wales), **AnnEleri Thomas** (Ceredigion County Council), **Wendy Abel & Julie Lewis** (Powys County Council), **Anthony Rosser** (BHA Wales Chair / Lake Vyrnwy), **Laura Thomas** (Brecon Beacons Tourism), **Beverly Dimmock** (RSPB), **Rob Bullen** (Eco Dyfi / Dyfi Biosphere / CAT), **Dafydd Wyn Morgan** (Cambrian Mountains Initiative), **Rowland Rees-Evans** (Penrhos Golf Club), **Arwyn Watkins** (Cambrian Training Company), **Val Hawkins** (Mid Wales Tourism)

### Apologies

**Steffan Roberts & Gwawr Price** (Visit Wales), **Andrea Mansfield** (Powys County Council), **Dylan Roberts** (Salop Caravans), **Rebecca Wilson** (Transport for Wales Rail), **Justin Baird Murray** (Metropole Hotel), **Llion Pughe** (Best of Wales), **Gareth Price** (Twristiaeth Ceredigion Tourism), **Jenn Jones & Aled Davies** (Natural Resources Wales), **Carol Williams** (Brecon Beacons National Park Authority), **Claire Williams** (Ceredigion County Council), **Paul Donovan** (Escape Routes), **Aled Rees** (Teithiau Cambria), **Michael Booth** (Elan Valley Visitor Centre)

### 1. Welcome & Update from Chair

- 1.1 SH welcomed the group and thanked everyone for their continued input, stressing the importance of this industry engagement as Welsh Government were budget setting for the next Financial Year. SH represented this Regional Forum on the Visitor Economy Taskforce which had been a key driving force in this sector's response to the pandemic. Prior to each meeting views from this Forum had been sought but no feedback had been given before the last meeting – SH encouraged attendees to provide their views.
- 1.2 SH turned his thoughts to the current pandemic response. Members of the Senedd will be debating the [COVID pass](#), on 5 October, which would have implications on nightclub, music venues and events.
- 1.3 SH encouraged attendees to engage with the [Mid Wales Tourism Conference](#), which is being held in the Metropole Hotel on 9 November. This would be the first face to face meeting of its kind.
- 1.4 One clarification amendment was noted to the minutes, which were adopted by the Forum. Following the last meeting, there was one outstanding action – for Forum members to self-nominate to join the Growing Mid Wales Steering Group. Two nominations were received and SH had agreed that Val Hawkins and Dafydd Wyn Morgan should represent the Forum on that Group. This was noted by the Forum.

## **2. Update on Growing Mid Wales**

- 2.1 JL gave an update on the Growing Mid Wales Regional Tourism Feasibility Study and the wider Mid Wales Growth Deal. The brief for the Feasibility Study is now live on Sell2Wales and a contractor will be selected at the end of October. Early November the Steering Group will first meet and JL thanked VH and DWM for volunteering to join the Group.
- 2.2 On 21 September, the Mid Wales Growth Deal passed a significant milestone with the approval (by joint Cabinet) of the draft Portfolio Business Case that will now be submitted to UK and Welsh Governments. Six projects had been selected under the Tourism work stream - four, more developed projects and two on the long list. The four shortlisted tourism workstream projects:
1. CAT, Cynefin Project
  2. Dwr Cymru, Elan Valley Lakes Project
  3. Montgomery Canal Restoration Project
  4. Ceredigion Harbours Development Project
- Two projects remain on the long list for consideration at a later date when more developed:
1. Green Man festival Site
  2. Dwr Cymru, Brecon Beacons Activity Project
- 2.3 JL explained all projects listed are not guaranteed the funding until robust business cases have been brought forward and the portfolio of projects will be reviewed annually.
- 2.4 SH said the deal needs private sector knowledge and input. AW expressed concern about the lack of engagement with the private sector, following the cessation of the Economic Strategy Group and said this should be considered a risk. He continued that we need to get private sector on board – as evidenced in the Swansea City deal.
- 2.5 RRE said he was under the impression that without the private sector buy in the funding couldn't be drawn down. JL said there is a match funding requirement for all projects as one third of the project funds would need to be matched by the projects themselves.
- 2.6 SH declared an interest as Vice Chair of the group and said we needed to acknowledge that this was the first tranche of projects and further tranches would be considered down the line. We needed to keep the thinking alive on this as private sector funding and leverage are key to delivery.

## **3. Reflections from the sector on hospitality reopening / impact on businesses**

- 3.1 SH explained as this had been such a challenging time for the Tourism and Hospitality Sector to work through it was important we gathered feedback from members. AR had been asked to provide reflections from the sector. In gathering information for the update AR had spoken to contacts but hadn't managed to

gather information from the Adventure sector so this was omitted from the update.

3.2 AR explained that for small industry operators the pandemic had been 'pretty brutal' but what we saw from the sector was resilience. Communication between industry and Welsh Government had been excellent and stakeholders felt involved in driving forward policy decisions – we needed to maintain this now. It was a busy Summer, which could have become challenging in bad weather but this wasn't an issue. We hear the guests will be back and that there is a strong marketplace into the Autumn. However, with international markets opening up and domestic costs increasing we have to be alert to visitors returning to foreign holidays as this will be the case as we are unaware of the financial pressures. Transactions increased, as did prices when people saw the value of their businesses. There was also a different demographic of visitors and a new market of people from the British Isles.

3.3 Key points made included:

- Staffing - Getting people into work was difficult and businesses had to find staff from other places after Brexit. This attracted young people in Education – a lot of who have now moved onto University. This is the current main issue but also needed to be considered in the long term.
- Re-opening - Communications around 'opening up' was challenging with four different approaches being adopted across the four nations, the changing of opening dates and last minute nature of changes to the rules. The challenges in not opening up fully, was that not all parts of a business could be opened up and many are still not fully open.
- Guest behaviour – at times it was disappointing but others suggested there was sympathy for the industry. There was a delight from the new people discovering Wales.
- New ways of working - Technology and Innovation have changed the way we have done things – some have kept these changes and adapted but others have reverted to old working practices like pen and paper for taking orders.
- Funding – Welsh Government funding and investment support was excellent. The careful approach by the Government to fund was approved of and fully welcomed and this has made a massive difference.
- Future financial pressures – Fears for businesses around the VAT rate returning in full, interest on loans, capital repayment holidays – will kick back in, national insurance increases, inflation, rate for electricity going up, minimum wage increases and rates holidays disappearing
- Sharing economy – There were also concerns about air bnb lets, fly camping and tourer vans.

3.4 SH thanked AR for the comprehensive update and opened up the discussion to the Forum. SH added that with furlough ending today it marked the beginning of the end of not 'living in the real world'. The VAT increase was also a challenge for the industry.

3.5 RM said similar issues were raised at last week's North Wales Regional Forum and this was the type of feedback Welsh Government welcomed. The budget for next year was uncertain and these conversations will help form our thinking. RM recognised that some of the issues raised around finance were macro level

issues for UK Government to consider, such as VAT and this needed to form part of the continued dialogue between the Governments. RM explained that he was working on a new governance structure for the sector that would strengthen the role between the Forum chairs, Lead officials and the Minister – ensuring it would play more of an advisory role. This Forum would fit under this new structure and would become more powerful.

- 3.6 RM said it was a positive to hear the funding provided by Welsh Government has shown we still have businesses in place today but it was recognised that it would never have been possible to save every single business. Having this ongoing dialogue was key to helping us shape our programmes.
- 3.7 Further members of the Forum echoed AR's comments around a workforce shortage and the thanks of the industry to the funding received from Government.
- 3.8 VH said the most recent figures from Powys Council show the overall impact of tourism saw a 60% decline in 2020 and it should be recognised that Tourism was late starting in 2021. Bookings for 2022 were already being tracked and the length of stay has increased so there are opportunities looking ahead but we cannot underestimate the challenges and financial concerns. It was not too late to look at Business rate relief for next year. There are still a lot of underlying issues which will have a knock on effect from our sector to others.
- 3.9 LVW said Welsh Government are not complacent about the staycation trend with the international market opening up. However, the tracker on the Visit Wales website had forecasted excellent results for next year. It was also appreciated that a great four/five months did not make a good year.

#### **4. Sector Updates**

- 4.1 Members had submitted a written update prior to the meeting and this was shared after the meeting. SH picked out a notable update regarding an increase in marine wildlife disturbances and violations of the voluntary marine code of conduct from Ceredigion Council. Disturbances are mainly attributed to the increase in the popularity and availability of stand up paddle boards, personal water craft including jet skis and the demand for commercially operated wildlife boat trips. JL queried whether joined up working with environmental groups, on a webinar, could form part of Visit Wales work next year? A similar outdoor safety campaign had been delivered over the Summer and this has been well received. LVW said there was a plan for biodiversity and wildlife, this was something we could look into.

#### **5. Update from VW**

##### **General update – Coronavirus / funding**

- 5.1 RM said that on 17 September the First Minister announced the introduction of a Covid Pass for Domestic Use in Wales in certain venues/events. If this legislation was passed by the Senedd it would come into force from 11 October and will become compulsory for everyone attending; nightclubs, indoor non-seated events

for more than 500 people, outdoor non-seated events for more than 4,000 people and any setting or event for more than 10,000 people.

- 5.2 RM said, as there was still uncertainty around the pandemic, future funding under the Economic Resilience Fund (ERF) is still being discussed. As highlighted in the initial Welcome to Wales strategy there was a pot of funding set aside for Brilliant Basics but this money was repurposed for the ERF. This year we supported 26 projects during Round 1 of Brilliant Basics amounting to investment of £2.4m. Four projects received funding in Mid Wales. As the scheme was launched six months into the Financial Year (FY), it was incumbent on projects to be able to deliver by the end of the FY. The question is now whether to develop next year's projects on a similar basis; do we go for many low value projects or fewer bigger, more impactful regional projects. Feedback was sought from the Forum members. Those who fed back at the meeting all felt that fewer and smaller projects are the right fit for Mid Wales. There is missing infrastructure that could be developed with this funding.
- 5.3 HO introduced herself as the new Deputy Director for Marketing, Visit Wales and explained she had previously come from another Welsh Government communications role. HO said that relationships with industry were stronger than ever and we needed to continue this. Despite a great Summer, Visit Wales were not being complacent between seasons. SH wished HO well in her new role.

#### **Skills campaign update**

- 5.4 KT explained that two new case studies filmed in Adventure Park Snowdonia and Dylan's restaurant will be added to the website. A toolkit for business would also be available soon. The team were finalising the paid for media plan, with the target audience: parents of young children and older returners. The next phase would be the sub sector of tourism.
- 5.5 KT highlighted a relevant skills [recruitment event](#) starting on 19 October that Forum members might be interested in. Details will be circulated after the meeting. There was flexible skills funding available to help businesses with this gap. A recently approved application had requested a package of training and had received 50% of their funding costs to help with this.
- 5.6 AW updated that Ministerial approval was now received to extend the apprenticeship scheme until the end of February 2022 – there was a £2,000 and £4,000 incentive for businesses to hire an apprentice.

#### **Recovery Plan / Marketing over the Autumn / Winter**

- 5.7 LVW explained that marketing was one aspect of the recovery plan that began after the four regional sessions. It was approaching the end of the first six months of the plan and so could soon be shared. Up until 1 June, £1m in funding was delivered to Local Authorities and National Park Authorities. LVW shared the themes under the recovery plan and said that the statutory registration process, which had paused during the pandemic, would soon resume.
- 5.8 LVW ran through the Autumn / Winter campaign and explained that we had only recently concluded the Addo campaign but it would still underpin all further activity. The slides would be shared post meeting.

## **6. Closing remarks from Chair and date of next meeting**

- 6.1 SH concluded the meeting by reminding Forum members to share what they'd heard as the representatives for their sector and for Visit Wales to take back the thoughts from the Forum. The next meeting would take place towards the end of January 2022.