

Visit Wales – North Wales Regional Tourism Forum

14 January 2021 – Virtual (online) Meeting

Present	Representing
MB	Chair Tourism Forum
SPJ	Cyngor Gwynedd
MT	IOACC
JM	CCBC
JR	CCBC/NWEF
CO	Chair DMP Conwy
PM	Denbighshire CC
RJ	Flintshire CC
JS	Chair Destination Flintshire
JB	Wrexham CBC
VR	ATA
EEJ	GUEST WATO
NJ	ATA
JWE	Guest of MB
GJ	Guest of NJ
DW	SNP
IL	Chair Destination Denbighshire
RH	Deputy Director, Tourism Development VW
RM	Head of Tourism Development VW
LVW	Head of Marketing Tourism VW
JS	Head of Research & Insights VW
CP	Deputy Director Marketing VW
AF	Regional Engagement Manager, VW

Apologies

HP	SNP
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<p>Welcome</p> <p>MB welcomed everyone to the Forum. MB stated that times are still tough and there is a need to support each other personally, the issue of mental health amongst the industry has been discussed at the task force meetings, but we have the roll out of the vaccine to look forward to and that we now have the clear structure of tiers and reviews and through this we have a way of planning.</p>
<p>Update from VW</p> <p>RH stressed that the focus over the next few months was distribution of financial support to the sector. Not surprisingly the level of interest has been phenomenal.</p> <p>RM updated the group on the current situation with the support scheme:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Just over 6k applications in already (5k micro, just under £1k SME and the rest made up of larger businesses). Values of applications roughly £57m at present out of the £180m fund. • Peaked in first few hours that the fund opened but now it's trailed off.

- Some applications are ineligible i.e. some duplicates, non-tourism businesses etc.
- The current scheme covers the six weeks up to the end of January 2021 and we are looking about what can be done next and lobbying UK Government on national led schemes; VAT, furlough, delay repayments.
- We have a good relationship with UK Tourism Minister and input at UK level discussions (TIER, Tourism Industry Council) so all issues raised at a Wales level are being raised with UK Government
- Just need to re-iterate that the announcement on funding schemes by the UK Gov last week and that a pot of £227m for Wales was forthcoming, when in fact this was included in the £600m guaranteed for Wales

MB was pleased to report that the application process for the Sector Specific Fund was much easier this time and that other business had report the same to him.

RH continued to update

- We now have the alert levels in place & legally, regulations have to be reviewed every three weeks but can be changed within this time frame.
- Next reviews will be 28 Jan, 18 Feb and 11 March.
- The mood is that there will tightening of restriction before they are relaxed with new strains and unlikely to change before March.
- As the R number reduces we can review but the chance of us moving to level 3 is highly unlikely before the next review date, a situation similar to that in England and Scotland.
- We now have a roll out of vaccine with a view to get through the categories ASAP with a likelihood of 50% of the population being vaccinated by the spring. But we need to be aware of these new strains and the fact that the under 50s will still need to be vaccinated.
- Mitigations need to be place for a while yet
- Normality for February half term week is unlikely.

NJ asked about restriction remaining in place on a pan Wales basis or scope for regional, RH stated that the alert plan allowed for regional variation but at the moment the national approach is unlikely to change at this time. Key issue being the spread in NE Wales. Industry are asking for stronger enforcement to ensure people are not traveling to the NPs the more we can enforce now the more chance we have of getting the disease under control and we can get back to level 3 and then 2 asap.

AJ asked if self-catering could open for Easter. RH understood it was difficult re forward planning but it depends entirely on where we are in the alert levels. RH added Ministerial daily updates gave an indication in between review dates and if we were meeting criteria. RH did state that accommodation can be made available for key workers and the vulnerable. The Tourism Task Force continues to meet on a weekly basis and the focus last week was on longer term finance, mental health and forward planning. There is discussion on the move to free grading from April 2021 and possible statutory registration, whilst this has been debated before to ensure a level playing field for operators in terms of health

and safety etc. It could be a tool to look at second home ownership and the effects they have on local communities – RH welcomed any views. Skills are also on the agenda at this time, issues such as skills lost to other sectors where the gaps are. Sharon Lusher has recently been appointed as chair of the Skills Partnership which liaises closely with the Regional Learning Skills Partnerships and sector representatives.

RH wanted to say a big ‘thank you’ to Local Authority colleagues who had work tirelessly with short notice to distribute business grants.

LVW

3 main projects at the moment

- Mental Health which has come up at the Task Force meetings. WG have been asked to look at how we can deliver to the tourism sector. Currently scoping and looking for gaps. We are not looking to deliver but to look at what we can help happen i.e. what has happened with the agriculture sector where WG have facilitated Mind Cymru to deliver a sector specific programme. There are services in play like Hospitality Action.
- We are also looking at the logistics and a business case around a potential voucher/incentive scheme to help stimulate bookings as soon as it is safe to do so. Importantly, that includes looking at the influence that a voucher scheme can have in spreading benefit and managing visitors as well as just stimulating bookings, if market demand is already present e.g. encouraging people to areas or products where there is capacity so it's as much about management of visitors as it is about stimulating business.
- With respect to future planning we are looking at running a virtual roadshow We are looking at the logistics and working closely with regional colleagues so we can deliver this as part of the Forum. We are of course meeting with stakeholder and the four regional fora to help tailor our messages.
- Finally Addo is now underpinning our comms and the ethos we will use for the rest of 2021 as well as us hoping to rejuvenate the Year of Outdoors.

CO had an observation regarding the Addo messaging and asked if it could be run community wide, levels of refuse are still high despite the fact that we have no visitors. LVW agreed and we are having those discussion with the LAs and NPs. LVW added that we are conscious of the need for a welcome back message. We are in discussion with the national media who focus in on isolated incidents of people travelling to beauty spots from other home nations. SPJ added that Gwynedd are working with 20 communities to review local challenges which arose over summer 2020.

CC explained that she was now covering Mari Stevens role as DD for marketing

- First priorities were how VW can work with stakeholders on a recovery plan. This is not a road map to recovery.
- Short term (Jan – April) looking at The Corona Virus Control Plan, the alert level restrictions as they gradually fall and what support we can continue to provide, not just financially but scenario planning, comms

messaging to stakeholders and communities to ensure we are delivering safe environments. We want to use the Addo messaging in a sensitive way to ensure this happens.

- As we move to level 3 and 2 we need to be ready to convey the correct messaging to visitors and that restrictions may be different from those in other home nations.
- We need to help the sector to get messages out that our product is a safe place to visit and re build public confidence, we also want to discuss future interventions and how we continue to lobby UK Government for financial support and what interventions the sector needs as we move out of the pandemic.
- In the medium term (April – June) we will focus on how we stimulate and control demand in the honey pots. We will work with research colleagues and stakeholders to anticipate levels of demand as we start to open up
- In the medium to long term we will look at how we develop our local visitor economies again, re building confidence and tailoring recovery plans for sun sectors such as events, business tourism and the cruise market.
- And finally how do we re look at '*Priorities for the Visitor Economy 2020-2025*' and work with you to decide what is relevant now and what needs to be refreshed and updated - this will work through the Task Force, The Regional Fora and finally with the wider stakeholders through the planning workshops we have discussed
- On a positive note and in respect of Brexit we plan on using St David's Day as a start for us to look to our international markets
- Need to be aware of consumer sentiment as we come out of the pandemic. We plan to project Wales around wellbeing and doing good things. We know visitors are looking for sustainability, less of a carbon foot print, wellbeing experiences etc.
- We will be holding a 72 hour virtual global event engaging with diaspora and key celebrities and stakeholders to celebrate Wales.

MB thanked VW and was pleased that the wellbeing and sustainability were core to the future, it is what the NW Fora had aligned to develop.

Tourism Research & discussion

JS gave an updated to the forum focusing on the data sources that had been available during the pandemic and gave general update. Unfortunately the two main surveys which we rely on to measure value and volume of tourism (GBTS & GBDVS) have been impacted by the pandemic to measure data. We are working closely with the other 'Visits' and the ONS to refine our approach moving forward.

Partner updates

MB invited asked if the guests to the Fora wanted to input

JWE gave an overview of the Snowdonia 360 product, interest in the product had been very encouraging and felt the offer was ideal to distribute visitors away from the 'honeypots'. JWE wanted to know about mechanisms to report people travelling into the region under current restrictions. CC stated that we have assets to share with stakeholders to re inforce messaging and added that there

was a strengthened campaign surrounding the stay at home messaging. In response to the regulatory aspects SPJ stated that contraventions needed to be reported to the Police and any Business contravening regulations should be reported to LA public protection.

CC added we will be promoting TWW in association with the outdoors as we open up and move people away from the 'honeypots' and explore more. And link to products such as the 360. LVW added that one of the benefits of routes is that they are a safe way to travel. A discussion on the issues of camper van and illegal parking camping took place. JWE agreed and stated they were looking at developing a code of conduct to ensure campervans used licensed sites and act responsibly. SPJ stated that they were reviewing the challenges surrounding by Motor Home and the concerns of illegal camping.

GJ stated that there had been upsurge in demand for caravan pitches in 2020. There had been an additional 80k units sold in 2020. Wild camping has become endemic and the litter problems that come with it.

We need waste points as we can't stop it – we need to possibly adopt the French approach and use our public car space with additional facilities and associated payments to local communities, we need to manage this strictly and quickly and needs to be driven by LAs. MB asked if we could add this to the agenda of the next meeting.

DW – SNP

- SNO also looking to wild camping and working with Gwynedd and Bangor UNI
- Ambassadors scheme launched Dec 2021
- 70th anniversary of park this year and looking to publish book to celebrate achievements - 70 things to do in the park and look at spreading visitor impact.

MB asked if there is a reduction in visitors following recent comms – DW confirmed that it had worked.

SPJ gave an update from Cyngor Gwynedd:

- Gwynedd had been busy with business support recovery planning and consultation
- Reviewing priorities for next 10 years and looking at funding opportunities to deliver those
- Looking at ways to build community confidence for the forthcoming season
- On business support Gwynedd have dealt with £100m of funding to businesses. Over 3k payment made over December and we have over 500 applications for the discretionary fund
- Secured funding for town centre support and future proofing. Also funding for COVID secure activity in town centres and key resorts
- Bids into WG for to help businesses in digital development and projects in relation to food tourism
- Gwynedd have been supporting a '*support local campaign*'

- TAD in Caernarfon work at the castle is underway
- Further cash injection to Neuadd Dwyfor in Pwllheli to the value of £850k
- Slate nomination progressing and we await final decision in the summer
- We are also consulting on second homes and looking at EV charging points

MT – IOACC

- Brexit – looking at mitigation plan and the effect around Holyhead.
- Traffic flows less but anticipating an increase by end January
- Contraflow on A55 until mid-February or longer if needed
- In discussion with WG re border control area at the port
- Focus on getting funding out to business – over 1k payments made, discretionary grant opening 18 Jan until February
- Looking at priorities going forward to ensure we have adequate resources where needed.
- Also looking at how we can tackle issues of wild camping

JM – Conwy

- Consumed with paying grants out and to date that figure is circa £80m
- Launch an ambassador programme in the near future
- Just concluded a study on the Caravan sector to the east of the county and the economic benefit they bring
- Refreshing economic strategy in light of COVID and Brexit
- Issue from trade is recruitment pre-season and we do not know when thing can open potentially 2 years of limited recruitment and the long termism effects
- DMP has been in consultation with Awel y Mor wind farm and NP and their transport plans

PM – Denbighshire

- Heavily involved with grant activity and fielding enquiries
- Looking at future planning
- All public toilets closed and some car parks at honeypots
- We have set up a business recovery group
- Local shopping campaign and light up Denbighshire pre-Christmas
- DMP continues to meet with 4 on line Fora

RJ – Flintshire

- Working hard on business support and recovery planning in place
- Continue to develop ambassador programme
- In terms of assets we have an 83mile signed leisure tour around the county and this could be aligned to the Wales Way.
- Flintshire also doing a shop local campaign

JB – Wrexham

- Continue to work closely with Denbighshire and Flintshire
- COVID infection rates have increased but these are now decreasing

- Country Parks and Car Parks closed and we are working to encourage people to exercise from home
- We are developing a new DM plan to help recovery
- New Master Plan at the WHS Pontcysyllte site
- Developing the National Football Museum Wales
- Lots of improvement works taking place following the ERF 3 funding

AJ asked about further grants should lockdown persist, LVW said that this was part of discussions at the Task Force meetings.

LVW added that VW keep asking VW to respond and comment on social media, as part of Government we are unable to do that and asked that people either Direct Message, Email or write to Government Business for formal response. And if colleagues could help re enforce that VW and BW are part of Government.

MB thank every for their attendance and input

Date of next meeting

To be confirmed