

Visit Wales – North Wales Regional Tourism Forum

17 March 2021 – Virtual (online) Meeting

Present	Representing
MB	Chair Tourism Forum
SPJ	Cyngor Gwynedd
MT	IOACC
JM	CCBC
IL	Chair Denbighshire DMP
CO	Chair DMP Conwy
PM	Denbighshire CC
RJ	Flintshire CC
SR	Chair DMP Wrexham
JB	Wrexham CBC
VR	ATA
NJ	ATA
IL	Chair Destination Denbighshire
JJ	NWT
RW	Guest of MB
HP	SNP
LVW	Head of Marketing Tourism VW
RM	Head of Tourism Development VW
ST	Head of Cruise Wales VW
CD	Senior Tourism B2B Manager
AF	Regional Engagement Manager, VW

Apologies

CP	Deputy Director Marketing VW
RH	VW
SJ	Cyngor Gwynedd
JR	CCBC / NWEF
JS	Chair Flintshire DMP

Welcome

MB welcomed everyone to the meeting and acknowledged that the roll out of the vaccine programme brought hope but we should not forget the pressure on the sector and the fact that returning to normality would also be a hurdle and a burden to some and that we need to support our colleagues moving forward.

MB stressed that the Tourism Task Force continues to meet on a weekly basis and that the sector has repeatedly asked, through the Forum for a route map to recovery. This had not been forthcoming, a response which had been consistent from Government, but the Task Force will continue to put pressure on and ask about parity with other home nations on re opening and other cross border issues. We of course welcome the re-opening (subject to confirmation) of parts

the sector pre-Easter. The Task Force continues to ask for financial support where sub sector are still asked to remain closed.

Update from VW

RM gave an update on finance and introduced ST to the Forum.

- SSF2 launched last Tuesday, a £30m fund which closed last Friday with circa £30m of applications from 1300 SMEs
- 50 staff have being re deployed to process these applications with £1.5m offers already processed
- All offers need to be processed by the end of April at the latest
- £150m restricted business fund has also been made available through the LAs (NDR Scheme)
- Total commitment to date is circa £2b, which is in addition to the UK Govt Furlough and other schemes aimed at businesses
- We are not cited on future schemes but we continue to review and monitor the sectors needs going forward.

MB asked what the period of time the current SSF covers , RH confirmed it was 25 Jan up until end of March 2021

JJ asked about the exclusion of micro businesses from the recent SSF scheme, RM acknowledged that we had had negative comments from micro businesses but those businesses were eligible for the £150k through the NDR scheme. VW are not the designers of the schemes but we do feed in all comments we receive and value these comments. RM reminded the Forum that WG had provided grants over and above what had been available in other home nations but we do recognise that some businesses do fall through the gaps and these are blunt instruments. JJ added that there was huge amount of desperation in the sector but understood the rational.

MB stated that it is hard to hear some of the stories from the micro businesses and that it was important for the Forum to hear their stories and concerns

RM wanted to thank the LAs for their hard work in distributing the NDR grants.

LvW Update and Recovery Planning

LvW drew members' attention to recent, relevant frequently asked questions and demonstrated the accuracy required in communicating guidance, which had unfortunately been misconstrued in some media channels.

LvW shared the Addo / Promise visuals and encouraged members to share the message with their networks. CC explained the Addo campaign aligns with Welsh Government's wider safety messaging, which aims to guide responsible behaviour.

LvW shared the recovery workshop feedback with members, firstly thanking all for their input, of which every single comment has been taken into consideration, highlighting regional nuances but explaining similar feedback was found in all regions. Of the eight themes, NW Wales feedback matched the Mid region in their prioritising of the themes. Skills, collaboration, innovation, reliance and interdependencies were the common factors rising from a total of over 800 responses. LvW noted overlaps in the themes; many interventions can't happen until connected factors are resolved.

LvW added that other things had come up since; Lateral Flow testing and vaccination passports. Over tourism keep coming up and we possibly need to use the phrase tourism balance to ensure benefits are seen by all. This is still seen as a bridge back to our strategic plan. We continue to meet with colleagues from other home nations to resolve any issues around re opening of the sector to ensure messaging is as simple as possible.

JJ thanked LvW and noted that there was no mention of Mental Health in the recovery plan (in respect of stakeholders), he added that the word over tourism was indeed negative and had brought about a lot of anti-tourist rhetoric and finally there was uncertainty of marketing funds going forward in light of Brexit and the forthcoming elections. LvW agreed mental health was important and would be addressed in the formal recovery plan as it had come up in the recovery planning sessions. With regard to anti-visitor rhetoric we acknowledge the need to work with media and move forward especially following the press headlines. But, we need to understand that other UK DMOs are experiencing the same, in the Lakes (and other areas) local communities are worried about the return of tourism. Marketing hoping to have budgets confirmed next week. We hope to go back to 'Year of Outdoors' and 'This is Wales Check in' as soon as possible and to add we have unused content from 2020 ready to go.

MB stated that the sector are expecting a bumper season, but wondered if there any information on a vaccine passports. LvW suggested we added the topic of Vaccine Passports to the next Forum agenda. The latest piece on consumer sentiment has just been published.

RW added some thoughts from Llandudno and agreed there was a flow of bookings but nothing dramatic. RW wanted to flag that Micro businesses need support and not be left with little financial support. Micros tend to bounce back quicker, are more agile, and spend in local supply chains. Micros help with destination appeal, independents define an area and give a sense of place. LvW wanted to be clear that Micro business are very important to Wales and our strength is with small independent offers and we certainly promote those experiences on our website. ST agreed with LvW, it is something our visitors seek out. We are not involved with planning the next scheme of funding. LvW added that Addo was all about supporting local businesses. MB added Micro business were integral to the Wales brand and we need to reflect the importance of these small independents.

CD wanted to flag the issue around attractions and the fact the fact that group bookings were a problem in 2020 and we need to get ahead of this problem in 2021 once they are able to open and ensure consistency of the offer for inbound operators. CO agreed with CD and we need consistent approach and guidance and we need 8 week advance notice of re-opening.

LvW empathised with the situation. CD stated that the situation is being articulated well and fed through to the tourism Task Force.

Helen Pye –Fly Camping & associated management issues

Helen presented on management issues including Fly camping. They are working in conjunction with Cyngor Gwynedd and Bangor University. There was a discussion in AIRE5; are they wanted by communities, who develops them etc and the data being developed by the LA will held inform decisions.

SNP will have pre booking for cars from 8 April and additional buses every 15 minutes to Llanberis and looking at extra buses in the Ogwen area.

AFW from Gwynedd added that the research that they were undertaking on social media resulted in 12k of responses in the first 24 hours. They were also working with local providers and national bodies to try and understand the issues and seek solutions for the problems.

JJ stated that it was good to see plans in place but requested traffic not be diverted from entering the park via the A470 and Betws-y-Coed to the A55. HP stated that she would look into the issues

NEXT FORUM

Date TBC