

## Visit Wales – North Wales Regional Tourism Forum

23rd April 2020 – Virtual (online) Meeting

<b>List of attendees representing the following organisations:</b>
Chair Tourism Forum
Cyngor Gwynedd
IOACC
CCBC
CCBC/NWEF
Chair DMP Conwy
Denbighshire CC
Chair Destination Denbighshire
Flintshire CC
Chair Destination Flintshire
Chair Destination Wrexham
Wrexham CBC
SNP
NWT
WLGA
IOACC
Continuum/Greenwood GUEST
Joint Chair ATA
GUEST of ATA
GUEST WATO
Visit Wales representatives
<b>Apologies</b>
Chair Destination Gwynedd
NWT
Visit Wales representatives

### **Welcome & Introductions – Michael Bewick**

MB welcomed members and wanted to thank everyone for joining this first virtual Forum. He assured members that through his attendance at the weekly COVID-19 Tourism Task Force meetings their concerns and those of the sector were being heard at the highest levels of WG.

MB welcomed Jason Thomas who thanked members for their ongoing support during these difficult times. JT gave an overview of how far we have travelled as an industry in such a short space of time and that tourism was one of the first industries to feel the hit of COVID 19 and would be one of the last to recover. He informed members that he sympathised with their concerns, recognising that there are gaps in funding support and that WG are working hard on recovery planning to support the industry when the times comes. However WG had were delivering on a Loan scheme though the Development Bank for Wales and the recently launched Economic Resilience Fund grant.

### **Grant / Loan Support – Rhidian Morgan**

RM provided an update on the support mechanisms available to businesses and encouraged all to seek out information on business grants / loans support, all available on Business Wales website: <https://businesswales.gov.wales/coronavirus-advice/>

RM also responded to questions submitted in advance. And re iterated that WG were quick to respond to cash flow issues and established the ERF and DBW loans in addition to other schemes. RM stressed the importance of applying immediately for the Welsh Government Economic Resilience Funds due the scale of current applications already submitted.

Tourism is unique in the fact that it is seasonal and urged business to apply for ERF grants.

RM confirmed that Visit Wales Micro Small Business Fund & Wales Tourism Investment Fund are currently on hold to new applications, any applicants who are in receipt of grant offers will be honoured.

### **Marketing / Recovery Planning – Mari Stevens**

MS responded to a number of questions and stated that the Visit Wales current strapline 'Visit Wales – Later' has been the only focus of the VW marketing campaign. The recovery plan would take its lead from Public Health and wider WG policy before VW could soften the messaging. There was still concern in several communities that people were still visiting. But we will look at softening the messaging when the time is right

MS added that VW would be returning to the recently launched Action Plan where community, Byd a Bro and social supply chains would be become even more important post lockdown, and that working with the sector was imperative.

SJ agreed that communication with LA and communities would be needed before we started pro-actively marketing.

HP wanted to thank WG for listening and responding to the situation. The NP were looking at how other global destinations were handling recovery and we need to be cautious of 'over demand' once the lockdown is over and the effects that this would have on communities. CO stated that this could be an opportunity to start moving people way from the 'honeypots'

JD added that she had been working with BALPPA (The British Association of Leisure Parks, Piers and Attractions) on policies and social distancing practices that may come into force once attractions re open.

In response to concerns of people still visiting north Wales RH said we must remember that the regulation are in force until 26<sup>th</sup> September and thanked the LAs for the part they have played in enforcement through their Environment departments.

Regarding re-opening attractions / venues, RH indicated that there could be no clear advice at this time as to when and how restrictions might be lifted but that thinking around this was a core activity at present at a Wales and UK level. He said that many businesses were already thinking about this and feeding in their thoughts around plans for opening with social distancing measures in place which would be very difficult in the visitor economy context.

### **General Tourism Policy – Rob Holt**

RH advised members that all of the issues raised through the members questions Visit Wales were aware of but it remained extremely useful to have them and encouraged the industry to maintain the flow of information and communication with Visit Wales and Business Wales in order to feed up the issues to Ministers at a Wales and UK level.

With respect to the funding of DMOs RH clarified that Wales does not have a Coronavirus (COVID-19) Destination Management Resilience Scheme like Visit England for DMO support but these organisations are encouraged to apply via Welsh Government Economic Resilience Fund for support.

The question of funding for Zoos RH explained that that WG colleague's in Animal Welfare were writing to licenced Welsh Zoos to ascertain level of need and in the meantime ERF funding was available.

WG were in discussion with major Welsh Tourism Businesses but not as specific key assets.

Insurance company issues were raised and RH explained that the FM had written and Minister for Economy & Transport is meeting with the Insurance companies to discuss the issues directly and asked that any specific issues

be fed in. These included; business interruption, vulnerable groups, and empty properties.

With respect to planned investments, WG have repurposed funds but were still working with live projects. RM stated that DBW was a potential source of funding for any new projects at this time.

RH stressed that Holyhead Port was important not only to Wales but to the UK, Ireland and N Ireland and recognised the difficulties being faced by ferry companies and the cruise industry.

MB invited any questions.

JM asked if funding was still available for those you still wanted to invest, RH stated that funding was still in place for current project but re iterated that the WTIF fund had been repurposed. RM stated that Development Bank of Wales could be a source of funding at this time.

The issue of the revised guidance in relation to self-catering accommodation and eligibility for the Grant 1&2 line to business rates was raised strongly by a number of members. RH was well aware of the concerns and said the aim was to ensure that only bona fide businesses accessed the support but he recognised the view that the criteria set a very high bar which many genuine s/c businesses might not be able to meet. He noted that Local Authorities have discretion on the matter and invite LA's to comment. SP stated that worried owners were advised to submit the info they had and then to discuss worries directly with the council through their business advisors.

With respect to the NW Growth JR (through RH) reported that it was still being developed but now taking account of current situation but including the Tourism Skill Academy.

MT was concerned for those attractions who operate using volunteers, many of whom are vulnerable people and how they would be effected once we move into a recovery period. RH agreed it was concern not only for heritage attractions in particular but also the events sector who also relied on volunteers.

## **OPEN DISCUSSION**

CO stated that they were looking at sustainable transport solutions and links to the North West of England and Key North Wales destinations. SJ suggested CO speak with Lee Robson at Transport for Wales.

Jo Corke updated members on surveys and collaboration the Research & Insights team have been undertaking. JC has been leading on tourism business surveys taking place on a fortnightly basis and the results of which fed to Tourism Management Board alongside the findings of regional and local surveys of the tourism sector. The team have also been collating the latest industry and consumer data from across the world but owing to the unprecedented circumstances, information is fluctuating widely and changing on a weekly basis. The team plans to move onto concentrating on renewal and recovery plans through identifying key sources of consumer

<p>and industry data, undertaking insight pieces and using comparative analysis over the next few weeks.</p> <p>JD stated that we need assess the confidence of the market and the desire for people to visit. JC said that VW were looking at 'intention' and 'sentiment'</p> <p>JM was interested to know how STEAM figures would collected under the present circumstances. JC suggested it was discussed at the next Research Partnership meeting which is due to take place in May.</p> <p>JD wanted to finish on a positive note and despite these unprecedented times it was giving her and others time to see how we can operate smarter in the future.</p> <p>MB thanked everyone for their attendance</p>	
<p><b><u>AOB</u></b></p> <p>There was no AOB</p>	
<p><b><u>Date of next meeting:</u></b></p> <p>The next virtual meeting will take place 20<sup>th</sup> May invite to follow shortly.</p>	