

Visit Wales - South East Wales Regional Tourism Forum

12 Jan 2021 – 10:30 to 12:30

Virtual Meeting (online)

List of attendees representing the following organisations:
Heritage Tourism & Events Ltd (Chair)
Bridgend County Borough Council
Monmouthshire County Council
Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council
The Royal Mint Experience
Cardiff Hoteliers Association
Newport City Council
Merthyr Council
Vale of Glamorgan Council
The Lion, Treorchy / Treorchy Chamber of Trade
Celtic Manor
Cardiff City Council
Parkway Hotel & Spa
Caerphilly County Borough Council
Aneurin Leisure
The Angel, Abergavenny
Wye Valley AONB
Monmouthshire Cottages
The Hide at St Donats
Zip World (Tower)
Visit Wales representatives
Llechwen Hall Hotel & Spa
Museum Wales
Town & Country Collective

Chair Welcome & Introductions – Philippa George

The Chair welcomed members to the forum.

Member update – Paula Warren, Hide at St Donats

PW presented members with an overview of her business, Hide at St Donats <https://www.hide.wales/>. PW guided members through the glamping, accommodation and experience offerings and their development. PW delivered insights to producing a dedicated press/media webpage with which to direct agencies and freelancers to easily access high quality images and information. PW also shared tips for reducing fixed costs during the difficult lockdown periods.

PG thanks PW for her enlightening presentation and commented on the savings to be gained through insurances and similar contracts. Julian Hitchcock added that memberships and insurances are a source of savings but also frustration.

Rob Holt – Tourism

RH commented on the difficulties stemming from the infection rates and resultant lock-down, however, this is met with support from Local Authorities on delivering the local grants. RH highlighted the sector specific support has been rolled out effectively, as will the new fund opening on Jan 13 at midday. <https://businesswales.gov.wales/economic-resilience-fund-erf-sector-specific-fund>

Rhidian Morgan – Finance

RM explained the eligibility checker for the forthcoming sector specific fund has been available since Christmas, however from lessons learned in previous funds, potential applicants are advised to submit an application as soon as possible. RM described the scope of the fund and also reminded members that quotes are not required for this fund and therefore a more straightforward application. RH added this scheme of funding was created with input from industry bodies and explained there will still some areas to explore e.g., the impact of Brexit and State Aid. RH added further that the Economic Resilience Fund (ERF) 4, is still in development and at the same time Welsh Government discusses the issues on continued VAT reductions and furlough scheme with the UK Government.

Adrian Emmett asked whether balance sheets would be scrutinised in the sector specific funding process, RH explained the guidance asks for turnover information (not balance sheet information). FAQ states: 'The turnover drop should be in comparison to the same time period last year (from the 4th December 2019), or if you are a new business which started trading after that date then a 6 week period in the current financial year.'

AE and JH also queried stock-write off eligibility to which RM explained the fund applied to a 6-week period. Alyson Tippings enquired about funding eligibility for those businesses under construction / development, RH suggested these new businesses would not be able to demonstrate a change in turnover and therefore ineligible.

RH also highlighted the wider policy picture, which has been dented by a drop in optimism, particularly in the events sector, and relies on improvements in a sustained reduction in infection rates. RH continued to explain the roll-out of the vaccine is not simple as are recovery planning, which will include a focus on mental health solutions and statutory registration.

Lucy Von Weber – Visit Wales Marketing

LvW explained marketing resources have been limited due to reallocation of team members to funding priorities. However, recovery planning is ongoing (in collaboration with VisitBritain partners). Responsible visitor charters, a voucher scheme (to boost sector trade) and a focus on messages such as mental health are part of the discussion.

Claire Dwight provided members with a travel trade update; links with domestic and global travel operators have been maintained. Like the creative re-positioning of operators, Visit Wales trade promotion has moved online; CD reminded members about the Explore GB Virtual event (registration closing on 15th Jan): <https://trade.visitbritain.com/discover-the-uk/trade-events/explore-gb-virtual-2021/>. CD also asked members to continue sending in product information, news and developments, and virtual content to share with U.K. and international contacts and networks to keep up their interest in Wales. Send in to productnews@gov.wales

Claire Chapell introduced her interim role in leading the product development and marketing functions and reiterated the work underway in recovery planning. CC explained a 12 month recovery plan will be organised in 3-month tranches of work, including members' input in developing a voucher scheme, support packages and mental health support. St David's Day will be a symbolic milestone in terms of a marketing restart and will be focused towards markets in Germany, North America and Japan. Future positioning will align Wales' offering with the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act, i.e. enhancing ADDO communications and invigorating the Year of the Outdoors.

PG thanked LvW, CD and CC for their input and for Welsh Government's recognition of the importance of these industries.

Jo Starkey – Visit Wales Research

JS presented research findings with members, explaining from the outset the challenges faced in following trends in such changeable conditions. JS asked for the presentation to be shared with members.

RH asked members for an indication of future bookings, which received a mixed response of strong and cautious demand. JH explained business to business bookings were not emerging, potentially due to increased comfort in online communications. JH also expressed concern in employee stamina when returning to roles which require high levels of physical activity. LvW explained member information will be invaluable in developing the tourism recovery plan.

AOB - Chair

Paul Rees announced NVQ training (Catering, Hospitality, ILMs, and Business Admin etc) are FREE under Upskilling@Work until 31st Aug 2021. This is for Employed or Self Employed people. For further information please email paul.rees@cymoedd.ac.uk

Closing remarks - Chair

The Chair thanked all for their contributions and suggested a meeting later in February (to coincide with future reviews).

Date of next meeting: To be confirmed.