

## Visit Wales - South East Wales Regional Tourism Forum

22 July 2021 – 2pm

Virtual Meeting (online)

<b>List of attendees representing the following organisations:</b>
Heritage Tourism & Events Ltd (Chair)
Bridgend County Borough Council
Blaenau Gwent Council
Monmouthshire County Council
Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council
The Royal Mint Experience
Newport City Council
Merthyr Council
Cardiff City Council
Miskin Manor Hotel & Health Club
Caerphilly Council
Monmouthshire Cottages
The Hide at St Donats
Town & Country Collective
Adventure Smart UK
Celtic Manor
Valleys Regional Park
Bike Park Wales
The Vale Resort/ Hensol Castle
Dwr Cymru Welsh Water
Visit Wales representatives

## **Chair Welcome & Introductions – Philippa George (PG)**

Philippa George (PG) welcomed all guests including new member, Martin Astley, Director of Bike Park Wales.

## **Feedback from Chair (PG)**

PG highlighted pressing issues which all in the industry are likely to face, including staff shortages and the situation arising from the pinging situation (calls for individuals to self-isolate through the NHS app). PG also suggested the proposed tourism tax is a current topic of concern throughout the industry.

## **Local Authority feedback**

**Bridgend:** Alice Brown (AB) explained accommodation in Bridgend is busy, including the biggest provider, Trecco Bay Holiday Park which has been operating at peak capacity since reopening. AB suggested Trecco Bay is a significant asset to the area and increasingly so as further easing of restrictions happen.

In terms of destination management, AB summarised the successes in the Porthcawl area, which is experiencing a very busy period. Bridgend Council has employed visitor stewards to ensure visitors have a positive experience, and a new bus service launched in May has proved popular. AB also reported the water sports facility at Rest Bay is benefiting from this busy period. AB then pointed to the recruitment challenges across the sectors, and explained only seven of a proposed twelve visitor stewards were recruited due to these challenges.

In terms of events, the June Forest Festival and Street Food Circus in Merthyr Mawr was well attended (<https://www.forestfeastival.com>). The same response is hoped for the Between the Trees festival in August, the Elvis Festival in September and the Dogs Trust Mini Trail next spring. The Royal Porthcawl Golf Club was due to host the Royal Women's Golf Tournament, however this has been rescheduled to 2025.

**Merthyr:** Returning from maternity leave, Lyndsey Handley (LH) is pleased to have reconnected with industry stakeholders and their projects. LH explained all accommodation providers are extremely busy and enquires from new accommodation providers are being received, however some providers have voiced concerns about demand in the shoulder periods. Lucy Von Weber (LvW) suggested contacting Ed Ryan, Regional Engagement Manager to discuss grading opportunities with new providers. LH explained Merthyr Council is developing a strategic recovery plan, which includes support for the tourism industry. LH also announced a drive towards more outdoor activities and trails, which coincides with a summer campaign to push the national cycle networks. LH then commented on a surge in new entrants to the accommodation sector; those looking to reopen or for grants for new accommodation providers.

**Blaenau Gwent:** Alyson Tippings (AT) also commented on high levels of accommodation bookings, with Norm Longley featuring an excellent report in the Rough Guide publication. Most attractions have reopened but many have found this difficult due to the volume of restrictions and decreasing volunteer capacity. Restaurants are also busy, however not all visitors have realised booking is essential and have missed out on a fuller destination experience.

AT highlighted the Steel House festival in late July, which is fully booked. The recent hot weather has been ideal for the festival set up, and the forecast thunderstorms are welcomed by tradition.

However, most other events in the area have been cancelled and the town centres seem to be quiet, which Blaenau Gwent Council is addressing. AT also shared positive news of a recent successful travel trade event led by Kim Colebrook, development of virtual heritage tours and the launch of a destination management plan, which is now being implemented.

**Rhondda CT:** Nerys Royal (NR) announced a draft tourism strategy, which was opened to stakeholders for comment and received positive feedback. The draft strategy is currently being scrutinised. NR explained the Welsh Coal Mine Experience, Pontypridd Lido and Penderyn Tours have reached full capacity, and although the Zip World Coaster is popular, the heatwave is causing the ride some technical difficulties. Similar to the other regions, NR reported that accommodation providers are also full. Lastly, NR explained the Gravity Family Bike Park construction is nearing completion: <https://www.inyourarea.co.uk/news/work-to-deliver-bike-park-progressing-well/>

**Valleys Regional Park:** Phil Lewis (PL) announced the funding for the appointment of new team member, Meg Donnan was achieved through a Welsh Government grant and European Social Fund. Additionally, the social media company, Equinox has been awarded a contract to manage social media marketing until 2023. PL drew attention to a new map showing the Valleys Regional Park and its links to neighbouring assets. To develop such links further, PL hopes to work with Sustrans to join up the discovery parks across the valleys, which will create 180 mile cycle network. PL hopes to share these plans with Dawn Bowden MS, as the project will require investment.

**Cardiff:** Faye Tanner (FT) echoed concerns about the skills shortages, although difficult this situation has been alleviated somewhat through the Council's Back into Work department helping with Skills and Recruitment. FT highlighted the busy restaurant sector, which has months of advance bookings without the availability of walk-in options.

FT promoted the Summer In The City event taking place in July and August, whilst Visit Cardiff is focusing on the school holidays and future plans for a Christmas campaign. Future planning also includes the meetings, conference and events market, which benefit from an overhaul of delegate information procedures and a campaign in September to target the domestic conferences market. Finally, FT shared information about Cardiff Castle's admission free entry policy, a new attraction (Black Tower Tales), and the development of 3D castle tours.

## **Member updates**

### **Stephen Leeke (SL) – Hensol Castle Distillery**

Stephen Leeke announced the Hensol Castle Distillery experience is open for tours: <http://www.hensolcastledistillery.com/>

### **Paula Warren (PW) – The Hide at St Donats**

Paula Warren announced that The Hide at St Donats is to feature on Sandy Toksvig's Extraordinary Places (a Channel 4 television programme), which has a reach of 1.4 million viewers. PW added that a recce will take place in early October, which will include the gin experiences St Donats Castle. Lastly, PW explained that although the producers have received a proposal, if members had suggestions for their recce to contact her: <https://www.hide.wales/>

### **Paul Williams – Celtic Manor**

Paul Williams announced the Celtic Manor and Celtic Connections new construction project is progressing ahead pace and available for bookings: <https://www.celtic-manor.com/>

## **Martin Astley (MA) – Bike Park Wales**

Martin Astley highlighted the launch of a new cycling experience in April 2021. The new trails are aimed at beginner riders, which has not expanded the offering to riders of all abilities, beginner, and intermediate and advanced. The new beginner trails are coded green, the same system as a ski resort: <https://www.bikeparkwales.com/mountain-bike-trails-wales>

## **Visit Wales updates**

Steffan Roberts (SR) provided members with policy updates:

The move towards alert level zero will be announced at the review on August 7. Those adults fully vaccinated in Wales has reached 85%, the success of this programme will contribute to proposed moves towards alert level zero. SR added that there will be a greater emphasis on advice and guidance as opposed to restrictions, and bespoke risk assessments will be a legal requirement to ensure organisations take reasonable protective measures. SR also highlighted a proposed move away from sector specific guidance to core alert level zero guidance. However, until the decision on August 7, face coverings indoors will remain a legal requirement. If conditions allow after August 7, face coverings in hospitality settings will not be necessary, however the Test, Trace and Protect (TTP) scheme, and ventilation requirements will remain. SR highlighted the importance of self-isolation to break the chain of transmission and suggested all should follow the TTP rules. However, depending on the levels of transmission leading up to August 7, self-isolation is proposed to end for those who have been vaccinated. SR then announced the visitor economy stakeholder group are due to meet next week and continue represent the wider economy.

<https://gov.wales/written-statement-nhs-covid-19-app-close-contact-notifications-and-self-isolation-advice>

SR also gave a funding update summary:

The Economic Resilience Fund deadline ends on Tuesday 27 July. Beyond these emergency funds, future proposals include funds aimed at business recovery and development. SR explained in brief the process behind the proposed tourism levy, which will require between two and three years to arrive in statute, and will involve full engagement of the industry. The levy will be a tool for local authorities, to apply at their discretion. PG expressed relief to learn about the timescales of the tourism levy, which would be a blow for struggling businesses if applied sooner.

Lucy Von Weber (LvW) shared a marketing update with members:

LvW presented examples of the Addo marketing messages, which thanks visitors for doing the right things: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rb\\_ErFurgQg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rb_ErFurgQg). LvW explained forthcoming paid digital marketing activity will centre on mask wearing rules in Wales, and partner work with the Countryside Code is currently in place to combat disruptive behaviours, e.g. inappropriate BBQ use and so called dirty camping. LvW then shared details of the partner work with Adventure Smart UK and the Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI), which aims to reduce avoidable outdoor activity incidents: <https://businesswales.gov.wales/tourism/stay-safer-outdoors>. Lastly, LvW announced details of a public relations campaign to support and inspire people to enter tourism and hospitality careers, which aims to encourage people to apply for vacancies.

## **AOB – Chair**

Julian Hitchcock (JH) expressed concern about fees issued by Vale of Glamorgan Council for businesses displaying signs and providing outdoor seating. SR was unaware of these changes but agreed this is an area which requires further exploration, particularly as Welsh Government are encouraging outside trading due to lower rates of COVID transmission. **Action: Ed Ryan has sent clarification of the fees to JH.**

JH also sought clarification about reluctant mask wearing, SR acknowledged the challenge, particularly as businesses have an obligation to uphold the regulations. However SR suggested refusing service might motivate people to wear masks. LvW also suggested pre-event information might prime behaviour, however JH explained even with a personal presentation of the rules, many ignored them. **Action: Ed Ryan has sent clarification of bar service rules to members.**

Amanda Rosenberg (AR) also raised mask wearing rules and suggested through extensive discussions with trading standards, concluded that people are allowed to receive bar service if they social distance. SR clarified that this applies only to those events which are regulated: <https://www.ukhospitality.org.uk/page/WalesGuidance>. **Action: Ed Ryan has sent clarification of bar service rules to members.**

AR also praised the KickStart recruitment scheme through which, 15 new employees have been recruited. AR hopes the new employees will continue after the initial six month period, however this depends on travel provision and other factors. AR invited members to make contact if they wished to discuss the experience of the KickStart programme. JH also commented on having success with the KickStart programme.

## **Closing remarks – Chair**

After over three years as Chair, PG announced her resignation and thanked all members for their support during this time. PG then encouraged all members interested in the Chair position to contact her to discuss the role.

**Date of next meeting:** To be confirmed.