

Minutes from S.E. Forum meeting 8 June 2022

Attendees

Fiona Wilton - Chair	Alice Brown – Bridgend CBC
Edmond Ryan - Visit Wales	Nerys Royal – RCT CBC
Claire Dwight - Visit Wales	Martin Astley – Bike Park Wales
Mari Lowe – Valleys Regional Park	Paul Williams – Celtic Manor Resort (CMR)
Sally Walters – Dwr Cymru	Sarah Higgs – Parkway Hotel
Phil Sykes - Aneurin Leisure	Kerry Jennings – Parkway Hotel
Julie Heaven - Aneurin Leisure	Kevin Hire – Chepstow Racecourse
Virtual Attendees	
Antony Bolter – Caerphilly CBC	Rhidian Morgan – Visit Wales
Jo Nugent - The Angel Abergavenny	Kerry Thatcher – Visit Wales
Lynsey Handley - MTCBC	Rachel Cilliers - Rock UK
Julian Hitchcock - Town and Country Collective	Alyson Tippings – Blaenau Gwent CBC
Stephen Leeke – Vale resort	

Chair Introduction

FW welcomed both physical and virtual attendees and thanked them for attending.

Apologies for absence

Due to the high volume of apologies these were not read aloud or needed to be recorded.

Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes were agreed.

Matters arising from the last minutes and not already on the agenda

None

NDR CHANGES - Discussion

RM – NDR order released on the 14th with a written statement from the Finance and local Govt. Minister stating that it would come into effect from the 1 April 2023. This will be under constant review to avoid unintended consequences.

AB - concerns about those properties which would never be residential – can only let for 28 days solid and not allowed to become a tenanted let (by planning law).

FW - There is no more guidance – the professional association of self-caterers is on the case with this. Body of evidence being gathered and need to be some exceptions to this; will be instances (reasonable things) where there should be an exemption. Likely those things will go to the rating authorities in local authorities if an exemption option is agreed.

Other query is timeframe of the year when it applies – when does the year run from/to? Fiona has received her valuation agency papers – have to fill it in within 56 days as isn't same as normal accounting. Dated from the date on the letter e.g. for Fiona it's May to May. Challenging if coincides with a busy time for business.

People are very dissatisfied with the process as well as the decision to enforce it and some won't be able to trade up to the full period required.

What happens if you don't meet the legal requirement.... You are moved from business rates to normal domestic rates and LA could be allowed to charge up to 300%. Research shows that within a year c.34% of businesses might drop out.

LAs will have people calling and emailing – really upset and feeling they are being destroyed by their own government. If that number do go out of business, there will be a knock-on effect to other hospitality and attraction businesses. Starts from 14 June 2022

RM – Planning constraints have been acknowledged in the Written statement but this Forum is a solid mechanism to feedback into the system via Fiona.

Stephen Leeke – What is the backstop position? Do we know what each LA is going to do? Some e.g. Pembs are charging 100% surcharge – West coast, and North west coast may go for the full amount.

RM – it's at the discretion of the LA. One example – number of businesses in a certain area are fewer in number so it's not worth them having a team to work on this.

FW – The object is to address the loss of family properties and capable of becoming family homes. Argument in west and central Wales are ones which can't become other houses. Argument – lot of anecdotal but question is could the property become a family home. Need real data.

Could be a skewed market and non-level playing field. If you have to close a S/C property, that style of accommodation is being penalised whereas glamping and caravan parks not impacted and can pick up their loss of business.

Aneurin Leisure Caravan sites and glamping sites – asked that the lobbying doesn't result in the caravan parks being penalised and suggests it's handled carefully to avoid there being an unintended consequence where they become impacted.

As FW understands it there has been no piece of economic research done to show the impact of this legislation through the knock-on. You all have STEAM figures and FW asked for the daily amount and noted the impact of the business. No one seems to have looked at what will happen to the STEAM figures. FW intends to ask for it more formally through VE Forum.

WTA apparently haven't the resources to do such a piece of research. Further information can be seen on wta.org and case studies there.

Stephen - is this a case that this is a data piece for Wales which should be an ask to VW to undertake this research. FW agreed.

RM – this order is to address an issue and the Primary objective is to address the 2nd home issue in Wales. This is not our policy area but if there are unintended consequences it is so important that what is being experienced as a sector is addressed and fed back. Over the next weeks and months that can be fed back into the system through the proper channels such as this Forum.

FW – Can members gather the information, through the forum and asks all for feedback.

RM suggests that common themes are identified and that amalgamated response is put together.

Route will come through the forum and the VE Forum

TOURISM LEVY

Tourism levy – consultation goes live in Autumn. Spending on tourism by LAs is discretionary. FW's fear and also expressed by others is displacement spending e.g. gaining via levy and could decide to put less money aside to spend on Tourism, as will rely on levy. For example, having a park and ride system from Chepstow Racecourse to Tintern (where there are parking challenges) could be paid for by levy which FW thinks is a good idea as long as the LA core staffing and budget is retained. FW wants LAs to be alert to this possibility.

EDUCATION REFORM

Education Reform – FW read out a statement. Looking at the impact and options of redistributing the school year. Had been thinking about the impact potentially on pricing and demand. But will have an impact on the workers who perhaps switch between education sector and work in hospitality over holidays – will reduce that pool of workers.

Alice Brown said that having the chance to discuss things like this in the forum and that things like the NDR point and the short call which happened helped to understand the significance of the issue, rather than just having things like this as an email.

Alyson Tippings – went along to an education reform session with a break-out and largely people from education sector and felt chair was a little disparaging to the tourism sector and felt that the education sector would have the final say.

RM – this sector is not the policy lead. Suggests have the discussion and funnel through the VE group and to start doing this in advance of the consultation period – as soon as possible.

Alyson – awful lot of modelling has already been done and several different ideas of what might happen and suggests that getting hold of the slides and share the models.

FW – Minister's meeting of VE Group is 3rd week of June. Fiona suggests we get feedback as soon as possible and Fiona will gather that information.

FW – concerned that as a tourism business on the border could be an opportunity for visitors due to variable holiday periods but could impact on staffing.

Anthony - Tourism and hospitality are fishing in same pond as education for staff.

RESEARCH

See the update from Research team to be circulated.

Research team also asking for feedback – attractions, accommodation, destinations:

Discussion below around research and visitors figures:

SL - New attraction Hensol Castle distillery – off to a good start but no yardstick in terms of previous year. Golf courses – Vale will do record numbers this year.

CMR – seeing same in terms of high numbers.

Welsh Water – seen a drop in visitor numbers compared to 2019 (was a good year); Sally thinks better not to just compare with that one year and look at the 3-year average up to 2019. Sally thinks could be spend per head is up but footfall is down. One attraction down 25% compared to 2019. Is it site specific/pan-Wales?

Racecourse and Ffos Las – general admission in pre-books down on previous but seeing people arriving on the day. Hospitality (high end spend) is doing well. More expensive on the day. Thinks good idea not to just compare with the one year i.e. 2019.

Parkway Hotel – lost corporate and now fully catering for leisure (new treatment rooms). F & B looking good. Haven't got accom fully up. Have increased room rate to convert business but losing people to different hotels. Put prices up to compensate for revenue.

CMR – Paul talking anecdotally. Business picking up. Rates higher. Biggest issue is staff recruitment.

Fiona – has good bookings well in advance but at the price set then which is an issue as costs increasing. Are we going back to fuel surcharges era of the 70s?

Accom at Cwmcarn being planned but would appreciate professional view on whether staycation boom over. Have some thoughts on future investment and return on capital – how achievable is it?

Staycation – some think there is a culture change happening because of the overseas travel challenges, especially last minute bookings.

Alice – Trecco Bay – are classing their entire year as peak season.

Vale Resort – says not gone away this year, doesn't see it as flash in the pan as seeing high demand.

2023 – Parkway Hotel think it's short lived but can see some of their customers and regular guests are now saying they can't wait to go abroad.

RM mentioned some key points from the UK consumer tracker research.

TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE FORUM

Have undertaken a process to design a new TOR and elements of the TOR were considered and fed in and ongoing discussions around this

UPDATE FROM FORUM MEMBERS

Hensol Castle – accommodation opened. Have 23 rooms. Gin Attraction going really well – distributed in Co-op central England, supermarkets west Wales, in most stadiums. Opportunity for others to stock it.

Bookings strong in the leisure centre. Bookings in Cardiff are looking strong – good numbers for last month.

Valleys Regional Park – key thing is working towards last part of their funding and Mari is trying to ensure more of a base and Mari keen to get feedback on what members feel is needed from them.

Martin from Bike Park Wales – seen a big shift this year. First time in 9 years of trading can make a booking for next year a week in advance (normally fully booked around a fortnight ahead) but have grown capacity significantly which has narrowed the booking window. But they are trading well, they will likely hit 100k visitors in 2022. Hoping to develop on-site glamping but planning discussions – reducing number of units but improving quality.

CMR – golf and leisure bookings. Conf and events. ICC Wales had busy few months – Cyber UK event. Brick Live lego event. Graduations. Easter they opened Ty Milford Haven in time for easter hols.

Bridgend – in terms of visitor numbers McArthur Glenn biggest day visitor attraction in area – footfall down but spend up. Seen a bigger number of tourists (beyond a 90 minute radius). Rest Bay watersports centre doing really well. Could do with expanding size. Just finished snoopy dog trail in Porthcawl (extended from Cardiff) which was really positive. Missed something about an event here. Looking into campsite provision and catering for watersports clients. Don't think they have the right accom to service their needs. Working on new Dest Management Plan but taking a bit more time.

Nerys Hughes– DMP in development. Had workshops of what they'd like to see in the plan.

Aberdare Festival – 4k people more than usual. Shortage of food stalls due to lack of availability of food stall providers. Big Welsh Bite in August – again they're finding they have about half the number of stalls than would expect. Worked with Royal Mint Experience – also seeing a decline in footfall but more people turning up on the day. Seen a big increase in groups which is positive, and also seen by the Welsh

Coal Mining Experience. Set up a hub for free members to engage with them and each other. Peer to peer for AirBnB businesses – contacting them individually to see if they should be there, checking in on them.

Welsh Water – representing Llandegfedd and also Lisvane and Llanishen reservoirs and new visitor centre being built there. Increasing product on sites.

Parkway Hotel – new treatment rooms really well received. Weddings pre-COVID and last minute weddings now being booked in at relatively short notice. Just done their latest event – tribute night.

Chepstow Racecourse – full race meeting card for the whole year. Launched racing in Wales initiative – Bangor-on-Dee/Ffos Las/Chepstow – encouraging them to come racing in Wales. Presenting in the Senedd next month. Seeking support. Welsh Racing Awards. 3-day racing event – 2 day in Chepstow and 1 day Ffos Las – first time ever in Wales.

Rachel Cilliers – turning away bookings due to staffing. Income up but just hoping can recruit for more for next year.

Antony Bolter – hoping for levelling up fund money. Improving marketing capacity in collab with Southern Wales group. Shares everyone's concerns about skills and limiting growth. Keen to support colleagues with prosperity fund applications and careers work.

Lyndsey Handley – positive accom sector - in U.K.'s top trending stays for Airbnb along with Prestatyn and had good feedback. Dest Management – council signed off economic plan and they've recruited 20 new members and next Dest Management group and looking at 3-year destination action plan. Creating a tourism business forum but more of a working delivery group and have a lot of businesses signing up. Merthyr West one of largest developments and submitted a planning application – showcased likely facilities to public in advance of planning. Lot of developments for accommodation e.g. Bike Park Wales. Merthyr Rising this weekend – great opportunity. Latest round of tourism grants. Doing a lot of marketing. Working on an adventure map for the summer.

Alyson Tippings – events held at start of year all been really high in attendance. Steel House looking for a bumper year. Paid attractions had really good start but anecdotal feedback around news of cost-of-living issue has seen some drop off (for indoor family attractions). Looking forward to the future celebration of NHS anniversary. Working on the prosperity fund. Opened 5G 360 degree projection facility, with capacity for up to 50 people. Developing a destination plan for 2020-2025.

Wales Tourism Week – came as a bit of a shock seeing it on the Friday in the VW e-newsletter and by Monday had booked in 3 visits. Staffing and skills theme for this year – one in Abertillery where staff had been trained. Tredegar Arms where they'd retained all their staff; 3rd Park Brynbach and featured their adventure activities.

MARKETING UPDATE – see paper with links.

Stephen Leeke (and Fiona echo'd) asked if following on from FM's comment since Wales qualified for World Cup what our plans were to maximise the opportunity. CD – can't give plans today but can say that we are working on a plan to do all we can and seeking some additional support, to do something at a Cymru Wales brand level across all areas (Stephen asked if would include trade & invest; CD said yes) – as we've done with Euros and other similar opportunities – to maximise on the increased profile from it and will be able to update in future.

Stephen – can this go on the September agenda – FW – Yes.

SKILLS/RECRUITMENT CAMPAIGN

KT – recognised long term need to address the perception about working in tourism and hospitality. Long term aim is to highlight the career ops of the sector, and they'll be treated well, highlighting the positives of working in the sector. With the industry attracting people and improving the job offers. Look at the slides and the film. 6 case studies showcasing real people working in the sector and highlighting the wide variety of jobs. Have a 3 minute film – what's great at working in tourism and hospitality and good to show at careers fair and do get in touch with KT. VW have developed a toolkit and Kerry's contact details and content – everyone to refer to.

AOB

Don't forget to send anything in about the rates review, tourism levy, education reform.

Date of next meeting – needs to be the same week as the other fora around Wales.

FW would like not to have the hybrid version – would like it to be face to face.