



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

## South East Wales Regional Tourism Forum

28 February 2023 (10.00am – 12.10pm)

Caerdydd 1 & 2, Cathays Park WG office

### Minutes

In person attendees: Chair – **Fiona Wilton** (Monmouthshire Cottages), **Clare Dwight**, **Rob Holt**, **Clare Carew & Rebecca Rees** (Visit Wales), **Antony Bolter** (Caerphilly CBC), **Hugh Murray** (Porthcawl Surf), **Claire Hamer & Rhodri Davies** (Museums Wales), **Lynne Richards** (Newport Council), **Paul Williams** (Celtic Collection), **Gaynor Thomas** (Cardiff Council)

**Guests presenters:** **Hamish Munro** (Caerphilly Council), **Kate Mann** (Cowshed), **Val Hawkins** (Mid Wales Tourism), **James Berzins** (TXGB)

Dialling in: **Rhidian Morgan & David Stephens** (Visit Wales), **Nia Hollins** (Vale of Glamorgan Council), **Alyson Tippings** (Blaenau Gwent Council), **Stephen Leeke** (Vale Resort), **Alice Brown** (Bridgend Council), **Rebecca Clay** (Visit Dean Wye Tourism Association), **Lyndsey Handley** (Merthyr Tydfil Council), **Paula Warren** (The Hide at St Donats), **Rob Nolan** (Cardiff Airport), **Julian Hitchcock** (Town and Country Collective), **Amy Doore** (RSPB)

Declined: **Rachel Cilliers** (Rock UK), **Nicola Edwards** (Monmouthshire Council), **Jo Nugent** (Angel Hotel), **Karen Matthews** (Exi Cardiff), **Sarah Higgs** (Parkway Hotel), **Paul Rees** (College Cymoedd), **Tim Howell** (Parkdean Resorts), **Julie Heaven** (Aneurin Leisure), **Phil Lewis** (Valleys Regional Park), **Paul Donovan** (Escape Routes), **Vanessa Russell** (Celtic Collection), **Kevin Hire** (Ffos Ias Racecourse), **Beth Meade** (WMC), **Martin Astley** (Bike Park Wales), **Michele Hunt** (RSPB), **Sally Walters** (Dwr Cymru), **Paul Brandwood** (Royal Mint), **Adrian Cole** (Caerphilly Tourism Association), **Phill Sykes** (Aneurin Leisure), **Marion Mohammed** (Holiday Inn Cardiff), **Kerry Jennings** (Parkway Hotel), **Kim Waters** (Abergavenny Food Festival), **Stephen Davies** (Penderyn distillery)

### 1. Welcome & Introduction from Chair

- 1.1 FW welcomed attendees both in person and dialling in. At the last meeting it was noted attendees that weren't engaging with the Forum would be followed up and those not responding will be removed from the list of invitees altogether. However, representation is still needed from the smaller businesses, the Forum is well covered by larger establishments but there is a gap with SMEs.
- 1.2 FW again expressed her intention to step down as role of Chair by the end of 2023 and encouraged Forum members to self-nominate or put forward others for the role. It would be helpful if there was a Deputy chair, who would naturally step into the role or cover when needed.

- 1.3 The minutes from the previous meeting in November were circulated after the meeting, with no amendments noted these have been finalised and added to the Tourism Zone on the Business Wales website.
- 1.4 Following the sad news of the passing of the First Minister Mark Drakeford's wife Clare. The Chair sent a condolence note on behalf of the South East Forum members.
- 1.5 FW also alerted members to a Welsh Government survey and consultation that will be of interest:
  - Outdoor Inland Swimmers Water Survey
  - Bathing Water Designation ConsultationThe links were sent to members on 23 February but the closing date is 1 March to respond to the Bathing Water consultation.
- 1.6 Two pieces of emerging legislation which have been brought to the attention of this Forum are the Tourism Levy and Reform of the School Year. FW has asked policy leads to present back to this Forum when there is new information available and possibly combine a webinar update.
- 1.7 FW asked Forum members, from Local Authorities in particular, to keep an eye on their self-catering members and to report back to the September and December meetings on the numbers closing, especially as a result of the 182 nights rule. Thoughts about the economic impact effect on each local area of this will be appreciated. **Action**

## 2. Overview of the planned activity at Caerphilly Castle

- 2.1 Hamish Munro, Placemaking Programme Manager at Caerphilly Council and Kate Mann, Associate Director at Cowshed gave an overview of the ambitious Caerphilly 2035 Placemaking Plan. This is a bold and innovative blueprint for the future of Caerphilly town centre. Work is progressing at pace and Hamish ran through a presentation deck featuring artist's impression of the future site. Cowshed have recently been appointed by the Council to undertake a broad engagement strategy for the Placemaking Plan and to let the Forum know how they could provide feedback.
- 2.2 The Plan is to develop Caerphilly as a destination, to encourage longer spend and dwell time. As part of the Plan there is room for a 60-80 bed hotel in the town centre. The team wanted to gather feedback and insight from the industry about potential attractions and businesses that could go next to the hotel in the surrounding area. KM mentioned community workshops and RR said that something could be facilitated at a future Forum or with interested members outside of the Forum meetings.  
  
**Action:** *KM would get in touch with further information and HM / KM would be invited back to the September Forum meeting to present an update on the project.*
- 2.3 Questions were asked about project costings and HM said that Caerphilly Council has also recently been successful in Levelling Up Funding for the Leisure Centre, this coupled with improved train links would also make this a more attractive destination.

HM said there was also a number of updates happening to Caerphilly Castle through CADW; including renovation work, upgrades to the Great Hall and a new visitor centre and café. This was contracted to finish before the end of the calendar year.

### 3. Visit Wales update

- 3.1 RH said events were back up to full pace but with the added complication of fewer suppliers in a post covid world. The events strategy has been in place since July 22 and an events group is now operational and meeting regularly, chaired by Steve Hughson with twelve attendees. The team are currently reviewing the KPIs. There are two new funds under development: Sector development fund and Sustainability fund. These would likely go live in April and further information would be shared with the Forum members when available. There is a healthy programme of events and a number have already taken place this year, there is a continued push for business events.
- 3.2 NH asked whether the dates for the large 2023/4 events mentioned could be shared with the trade. RH said in communicating too widely there is risk that certain accommodation providers could capitalise on this and raise prices. We've seen incidences of this recently with Liverpool hosting Eurovision. RH said with any large event being brought in there is always a conversation with the LA to ensure reasonable pricing. GT said there is a commitment in Cardiff between the hoteliers and venues to not fleece customers, however there are certain groups that don't go through this avenue.
- 3.3 RM said there has been a change in Ministerial portfolios and Dawn Bowden has now taken over responsibility for the tourism portfolio. She is very excited about the added responsibility (alongside her existing responsibilities for Sport, Heritage, Culture and Creative) and is keen to meet stakeholders at the earliest opportunity. She will be meeting the four chairs of the regional partnerships shortly and will chair the next Visitor Economy Forum (VEF) on 6 March. FW hopes to invite her to attend a future Forum.
- 3.4 VW is now looking at the Business plan 2023-24 to finalise funding priorities for next financial year with a £10.6m revenue and £5m capital budget. Priorities will include supporting the sustainability of the sector, marketing programme, skills development, grading and cruise development in line with their strategy, Welcome to Wales.
- 3.5 The Sustainable Tourism Wales programme, which was initiated in the last few months will continue into the next FY. RM also shared information about the Development Bank of Wales - Green business loans.
- 3.6 The next round of Brilliant Basics has just been launched and following stakeholder feedback, this fund will run over two financial years. The £5m fund will support small-scale infrastructure improvements in key destinations. The fund is open to LAs and NPAs with maximum grant of £300k available. In addition to BB there is also the Wales Tourism Investment Fund (WTIF) available.
- 3.7 The Statutory Licensing scheme for all visitor accommodation providers in Wales consultation opened before Christmas and will run until 17 March. Feedback to date on the consultation has been good, approx. 800 responses so far, with a range of views on the way forward. There has been a very high response rate from the Self-Catering sector, and we would like to see more responses from the Serviced sector

and Caravan sector to ensure we have a balanced view from the industry. Members asked to encourage their networks to respond before the deadline.

- 3.8 The analysis of Licensing responses will be done independently, the report on findings will be available in early Summer, when next steps will be decided on. The consultation will shape the policy.
- 3.9 Welsh Government colleagues have been having constructive discussions with other nearby nations on their approach to Licencing / Registration / Certification and are considering their best practice whilst developing the policy for Wales. Any questions, please email Statutory Licensing team: [StatutoryLicensing@gov.wales](mailto:StatutoryLicensing@gov.wales)
- 3.10 The formal consultation on the Tourism Levy ended before Christmas with over 1500 responses including those from Forum members received. These are currently being analysed by Welsh Treasury and next steps will be confirmed in the coming weeks.
- 3.11 CD gave a presentation on marketing that will be shared after the meeting. Statistics were also shared with the Forum and CD said we are now seeing a shorter booking window and that the Year of Trails has been resonating with the audience.

#### **4. Tourism Exchange Great Britain (TXGB)**

- 4.1 Visit Wales have licensed Tourism Exchange Great Britain (TXGB) to make the platform available to the tourism industry in Wales and the TXGB Cymru Wales platform is up and running. Welsh businesses and regions are currently being on-boarded, with some already taking bookings through this online marketplace. To ensure there is effective distribution opportunities through Visit Wales there are regional contractors appointed with Mid Wales Tourism covering the South East region.
- 4.2 James Berzins gave a presentation that will be shared with the minutes. There was a query around the value of engaging with attractions that are free to use. JB said there is value in using this for bookable products on site. For example, tour guides at CADW sites is something being explored. RC queried the online marketplace and JB said this was a feature that is being piloted in Japan and has been well received. JB said he was happy to run through a Q&A session with targeted groups. CD said following the meeting the assets would be shared and case studies will be developed.

#### **5. Sector updates / AOB**

- 5.1 A number of sector updates have been received in written format and will be circulated after the meeting. The Chair asked for any Wales wide updates or further sector updates to be brought to the attention of the Forum.
- 5.2 FW concluded the meeting by thanking attendees for their input and reminding attendees they are advocates for their sector, so messages should be taken back from today and shared with colleagues and attendees should proactively bring forward thoughts from stakeholders. Messages from today will be taken forward to the VEF.

- 5.3 FW reminded all to make every effort to attend or to send a deputy if this was not possible and said attendance will be monitored moving forward in accordance with the TOR of the Forum.
- 5.4 The next meeting will take place on 7 June (online).