



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

South East Wales Regional Tourism Forum

11 December 2023 (10am – 12.30pm)

Online

Minutes

Attendees Chair – **Rachel Cilliers** (Rock UK), **Ceri Jones**, **Nathan Richards**, **Heledd Owen**, **Claire Carew** (Visit Wales), **Paul Brandwood** (Royal Mint), **Lyndsey Handley** (Merthyr Tydfil Council), **Alyson Tippings** (Blaenau Gwent CBC), **Nia Hollins** (Vale of Glamorgan Council), **Phil Lewis** (Bridgend CBC), **Rebecca Clay** (Visit Dean Wye Tourism Association), **Stephen Davies** (Penderyn distillery), **Claire Hamer** (Museums Wales), **Beth Meade** (WMC), **Kate Gardner** (National Trust), **Hugh Murray** (Porthcawl Surf), **Martin Astley** (Bike Park Wales), **Sally Walters** (Dwr Cymru), **Julie Heaven** (Aneurin Leisure), **Fiona Wilton** (Monmouthshire Cottages), **Kerry Jennings** (Parkway Hotel), **Julian Hitchcock** (Town & Country Collective), **Paul Rees** (Coleg y Cymoedd), **Lisa Burnell** (RCTCBC), **Stephen Leeke** (Vale Resort), **Nathasha Joyce** (Cardiff Airport), **Michele Hunt** (RSPB).

Guests/Presenters: **Gareth Berry & Stephen Whitlock** (Cardiff Capital Region).

1. Welcome & Introduction from Chair

1.1 RC welcomed attendees to the meeting

2. Overview of Cardiff Capital Region and future direction

2.1 GB/RW presented on the work of CCR, incorporating the Northern Valleys Initiative, outlining the LAs involved and giving an overview of funding addressing the regional challenge, including tackling economic disparities, boosting growth, enhancing innovation capability and capacity in the region, decarbonizing our environment by 2050 and improving the physical and digital infrastructure within the region.

3. Visit Wales Update

3.1 HO thanks RC for her involvement in the recent Economic Summit.

3.2 HO updated on **Wider Welsh Government Business:**

Financial / Budget

The Forum was alerted to the challenging financial situation post UK Autumn Statement (on 22 November) and told them to expect to see difficult spending

choices and inevitable budget reductions in the WG draft Budget for 24-25 that will be published on 19 December.

Roadshows

Thanks were extended to everyone for their participation at the recent VW Roadshows. They were extremely well attended and a success from Visit Wales' point of view. The aim of the roadshows was to outline Visit Wales' positive prospects of future opportunities across marketing, development and events, and there were important conversations had around wider policies, in particular 182-day rule, which have been fed back to Ministers.

School Year Reform

Members were made aware of the consultation that has been recently been launched by the Education Minister looking to reform the school year. The main proposal at this stage is to shorten the summer holiday period by one week (from the start of the holiday period) and add a week at the beginning of October half term.

The Education team is looking to establish a stakeholder group to work closely alongside them in developing the policy. A number of members have already been contacted, including the Chair. Consultation will run for 12 weeks from 21 November and everyone is encouraged to present their views to gain an understanding of the impacts, both positive and negative, for the visitor economy.

Statutory Licensing

An update is due on the Statutory Licensing Scheme Bill. A written statement will be issued (around 13 Dec) that will outline the next steps. An incremental approach is being taken to implementation, starting with a registration scheme.

3.3 HO updated on Marketing:

Campaigns

The focus is now on the 2024 campaign which has fresh, new creatives, showing people enjoying Wales. There is a new shoot this year in North Wales, Portmeirion and the Ffestiniog Highland Railway. The backing track is Adwaith's *Ar Lan y Mor*. The new ad will be live from Boxing day onwards, on all major linear channels as well as on streaming services and on demand/catch up.

Based on insights about viewing habit changes, a shift is being seen (especially in the older age bracket) towards watching TV on demand and on devices rather than traditional linear TV. Therefore, more of the marketing budget is being spent on these platforms. VW is one of the first brands to

advertise on Disney+ which is a great opportunity to get Wales in front of new audiences on this platform.

As part of the 2024 new campaign there will be OOH in London, underground, overground and a key roadside spot in January for 2 weeks. There are also media partnerships with Tripadvisor, Mumsnet, Walk/Rambler's magazine and Conde Nast as well as influencer marketing in March.

Travel Trade

Visit Wales hosted a very successful Discover Wales event in and around Cardiff in early October for almost 30 major inbound tour operators - responsible for bringing in thousands of international visitors to the U.K. from all over the world. The tour operators took part in a two-day familiarisation visit which included key attractions such as Llancaiach Fawr Manor, Nantgarw Chinaworks, Ogmere Castle and Cardiff Bay. They also participated in a networking evening at The Royal Mint and a Business to Business workshop at The Parkgate Hotel, Cardiff, with 30 Welsh tourism suppliers. 100% of the tour operators surveyed plan to feature and sell more Wales holidays and 100% of the Welsh suppliers were 'very satisfied' with the event.

PR and Media

Lonely Planet recognised Wales Trails in their Best in Travel for 24 List – first time they have included a sustainability category and the focus is on Wales as one of the world's first countries to legislate for sustainability and features the South West, referencing the improved rail links coming for 25.

National Geographic has placed Wales in their "Cool list for 24" highlighting the high quality distillery products/venues (Penderyn and In The Welsh Wind specifically).

Last week the PR team presented an update to all 22 VB international markets at the 'PR Connect' event. We led with: 'Award Winning Wales' (particularly the Lonely Planet and Conde Nast Accolades) and recent Film and TV productions (House of Dragons, Welcome to Wrexham, Sex Education, Dr Who 60th Anniversary and new Dr).

The following international group press trips are planned for 2024, exact dates tbc:

- Wales Literature Trail incorporating the Hay Literary Festival – 20 May – 26 – into Manchester out of London/Bristol/Cardiff – traditional media.
- Hay Festival as a stand alone event - 24 - 26 May – mixed - traditional media and influencers as there is no itinerary as such.
- Coastal Trails – Highlights of the Wales Coast Path – May 11 - 16 (or a few days either side) trad media.
- LGBTQ+ Cardiff Pride – 21 June – 23 June – set dates – influencers and traditional media.

- Sustainable Wales by Trails – within the first two weeks of July – traditional media
- Adventure Trails – everything wild and outdoors – last week of September – influencers.
- Food & Drink Trails – last two weeks of September – mixed traditional and influencers.
- Film & TV Trails & Iris Film Prize– middle two weeks of October – traditional media.
- Leaf Peeping/Cosy Autumn in Wales - first week of November – influencers.
- Christmas in Wales – first week of December – traditional media.

Content and Social

A new content strategy has been introduced, with accompanying action plans for improving content on Visit Wales, Croeso Cymru and Wales.com. For social, on average we issued 95 posts per month across all channels from Apr – Oct (excluding shares and retweets), and followers and engagement numbers across all channels has grown over the past 6 months. Total audience currently stands at nearly 1.7m (5.5k new followers since April 2023).

New Croeso content – Ysgwrn, community pubs, Eisteddfod and more. Croeso social channels have experienced consistent growth – current total audience stands at 12.6k (11% growth since April 2023). We’ve reached 10k followers on Croeso Instagram. Huge spike in impressions in September due to Owain Glyndŵr post on X being shared widely.

New Visit Britain campaign is filming TV locations across the UK. VW will be working with VB through Creative Wales to have locations from Wales linked to filming TV, featured in the campaign. Ideas for locations are welcome as these are still in discussion stage.

Members’ views around the balance between domestic and international marketing would be very welcome.

Themed Years

‘Year of Trails’ continuing through 2024. 2025 theme yet to be finalised. Views will be sought from stakeholder in January 2024.

3.4 CC updated on Tourism Development:

Sant Ffraed House, Abergavenny

Project to upgrade and expand Sant Ffraed House into 5 Star

Accommodation and luxury Wedding Venue. WTIF support £2.063m (£1.95m loan & £113k grant) for a £2.9m project creating 44 FTE jobs.

3.5 Next year will see the re-introduction of the VW Tourism Awards, alongside a National Conference. Roadshows will take place again in 2025.

4. Update on Valleys Regional Park

4.1 PL gave a presentation on the Valleys Regional Park which included a development timeline, an overview of investment across the 12 sites, and 'next steps.' PL expressed confidence in support from WG going forward, and highlighted the excellent partnership working between LAs, particularly in terms of marketing one another's sites.

5. Sector updates

5.1 RC thanked members for sending in their sector updates and asked that those outstanding be sent to NR by CoP on 15 December 2023. The updates will be collated and circulated with the draft minutes.

5.2 RC mentioned some of the key highlights from the updates received and invited their authors to expand upon the positive points made.

5.3 RC asked members to share some of the challenges they are facing, in order for her to be able to represent the Forum at the upcoming Visitor Economy Forum. The following points were raised:

School Year Reform

- Late finish in December means families can't spend time enjoying the run up to Christmas. Impact upon visitor economy with less money spent at shows, activities and events.
- Shorter days and poorer weather in October would mean less visitors in Wales. Many people might opt to go abroad instead. An extra week in May would work better.
- CC clarified that the proposal is for the additional week in October to be at the beginning of the current half term.
- RC encouraged members to think about how the changes might impact them and to feed back.

182 Day Rule

- Lag period due to timing of VOA assessments means that impact won't be seen for some time - up to a year or so to see the full impact and to see the numbers of properties discontinuing as holiday lets.

- Rural local authorities likely to see bigger impact as their bed stock profile tends to be more skewed in favour of non-serviced self-catering accommodation.

Other

- Pressure on budgets.

6. Closing Remarks and AOB

6.1 KT from VW has provided an update on skills/training/recruitment, including information on funding available until 31 March 2024, for a range of courses for tourism & hospitality businesses. **Action: NR to share slides with draft minutes.**

6.2 PL mentioned an idea around 'miners' fortnight' which had been discussed at a Cwmpas Community Tourism Hack. He suggested inviting Victoria Mann from 'Near Me Now' to explain the idea, at the next meeting in March. **Action: NR to communicate with RR on her return.**

6.3 The minutes of this meeting will be circulated and agreed in advance of the next meeting. If you could send any final written updates for the sector update document to both NR and RR by CoP 15 December.

6.4 Date of the next meeting to be confirmed on RRs return. SW offered to host the meeting at Lisvane Reservoir. If there is anything you'd like to update the Forum on or anything you'd like to see covered at the next meeting please RC or RR know.

6.5 A reminder this Forum is to share the views from your sector and to take back the messages from today.

Actions:

1. *NR to share presentation slides with the draft minutes, along with contact details for Gareth Berry/Stephen Whitlock (CCR).*
2. *NR to communicate with RR on her return re: inviting Victoria Mann (Near Me Now) to present at the next meeting.*