

**South West Wales Regional Forum**  
Minutes from Thursday, 6 February 2020  
Ffos Las Racecourse and Conference Centre, Trimsaran

**Present**

George Reid (GR)	Carmarthenshire Tourism Association
Jacqui Davies (JDa)	Clydey Cottages
Zoe Wright (ZW)	Folly Farm
Nic Beggs (NB), Chair	Area Manager, Freedom Leisure
Lucy Wonnacott (LW)	Milford Port Authority
Huw Francis (HF)	National Botanic Gardens
Freya Knibb (FK)	Oakwood Theme Park
James Parkin (JP)	Director of Delivery and Discovery, PCNPA
Jayne Rees Baines (JRB)	Pembrokeshire Tourism
Jane Lewis (JL)	Regional Learning Partnership
Paula Ellis (PE)	Group General Manager, Retreats Group
Neil Kedward (NK)	The Grove, Narberth
Sophie Evans (SE)	Tourism Marketing Group
Stephen Crocker (SC)	Tourism Swansea Bay
Andrew Campbell (AC)	Chair, Wales Tourism Alliance
Adam Smith (AS)	Village Hotel
Paul Renfro (PR)	WATO / POCG
Gina Gavigan (GG)	WTSWW

Mike Cavanagh (MC)	Pembrokeshire CC
Steve Hopkins (SH)	Swansea Council
Huw Parsons (HP)	Carmarthenshire CC
Karleigh Davies (KD)	Neath Port Talbot BC

Philip Abraham (PA)	Visit Wales (VW)
Lucy von Weber (LvW)	VW
Helledd Williams (HW)	VW
Peter Francombe (PF)	VW
Jane Donald (JD)	VW
Michael Groves (MG)	Economic Infrastructure, WG

**Apologies Received**

Melissa Knight	Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water
Tim Brace	FBM Holidays
Kevin Davies	Gwesty'r Emllyn Hotel

**1 Introduction / 2 Forum Business and Election of new Chair**


Nic Beggs (NB) opened the meeting by congratulating Paula Ellis on her election to Chair then gave a brief explanation on the process for selecting the Forum Vice Chair.

NB introduced the Agenda for the meeting and suggested that, at the next Forum, the topics for discussion should be Food Tourism and Public Transport and Infrastructure. VW agreed to invite representative from Food Tourism, GWR and Transport for Wales to the next meeting.

**Action: VW to invite speakers to next meeting**

**VW**

<p><b>3 Tourism Action Plan Update</b></p> <p>Peter Francombe (PF) gave an overview of the new Tourism Action Plan 2020-2025, after thanking the Forum (and wider industry) for their invaluable input. He explained the focus on sustainable tourism, communities and wellbeing and on growing tourism for the good of Wales. The Plan and all supporting documents are available on the Tourism Zone.</p> <p>PF stated that Visit Wales had recently announced a new £6 million Brilliant Basics fund, with projects needing to be delivered by March 2022.</p> <p>He revealed other areas being explored as part of the plan including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Integrated Place Making – channelling investment towards a small number of strategic destinations, potentially one area from each of four regions</li> <li>• Visit Wales led projects eg the first project to be scoped is based on the 'Paradore' model</li> <li>• regional revenue projects likely moving away from a grants based approach to procurement</li> <li>• the Quality Assurance /grading service becoming free of charge from April 2021</li> <li>• a formal skills partnership being developed with their first meeting in Feb this year</li> <li>• a focus on a product based approach moving forward.</li> <li>• the Regional Forums continuing with suggestions for one community / open meeting per year</li> <li>• free attendance at International Events (for partners with appropriate product)</li> </ul> <p>PF mentioned the organisational redesign and restructuring within Visit Wales which will take place in order to successfully deliver the Plan.</p> <p>This provoked active discussion regarding funding, rounds and likelihood of annual calls and the sharing of information and communication with the wider tourism industry.</p> <p><b>Action</b>  <b>Tourism Associations to contact VW to arrange funding 'roadshows' if required</b></p> <p>Lucy von Weber (LvW) gave a brief update on The Year of Outdoors campaign with the ethos of the campaign featuring more 'real people' doing 'real things' addressing seasonality, spread and spend with focus on out of season promotion (whilst not excluding peak) with VW helping to direct visitors away from pinch points using responsible messaging and influencing visits to the right locations at the right time.</p> <p><b>Action: VW to make copies of the Action Plan available</b>  <i>(update: members were messaged on 13<sup>th</sup> Feb. to ask if they required hard copies)</i></p>	<p><b>TA's</b></p> <p><b>VW</b></p>
<p><b>4 Digital Infrastructure</b></p> <p>Michael Groves (MG), Programme Manager Digital Infrastructure gave a brief overview of the current £15m 6yr funding programme entering its final two years having supported approximately 6000 businesses with bespoke tourism workshops taking place and analysis of economic measure being undertaken with Cardiff University.</p> <p>He described a number of mechanisms available for assistance including the wider scheme at <a href="https://bit.ly/37Ls4hq">https://bit.ly/37Ls4hq</a></p>	

<p>the gigabit voucher scheme at:  <a href="https://gov.wales/go-superfast/gigabit-broadband-voucher-scheme">https://gov.wales/go-superfast/gigabit-broadband-voucher-scheme</a>  and the access broadband Cymru scheme at  <a href="https://gov.wales/go-superfast/boost-your-broadband">https://gov.wales/go-superfast/boost-your-broadband</a></p> <p>MG stated that there were designated digital taskforce teams within Local Authorities with funding for community infrastructure and connectivity projects contacts being:</p> <p>Regional lead - Gareth Jones <a href="mailto:garethjones@carmarthenshire.gov.uk">garethjones@carmarthenshire.gov.uk</a>  NPT - Adil Pirmohamed <a href="mailto:a.pirmohamed@npt.gov.uk">a.pirmohamed@npt.gov.uk</a>  Swansea - Phil Holmes <a href="mailto:phillip.holmes@swansea.gov.uk">phillip.holmes@swansea.gov.uk</a>  Carmarthenshire - Noelwyn Daniel <a href="mailto:ndaniel@carmarthenshire.gov.uk">ndaniel@carmarthenshire.gov.uk</a>  Pembrokeshire - Lee McSparron <a href="mailto:lee.mcsparron@pembrokeshire.gov.uk">lee.mcsparron@pembrokeshire.gov.uk</a> and  Ceredigion - Arwyn Davies <a href="mailto:arwyn.davies@ceredigion.gov.uk">arwyn.davies@ceredigion.gov.uk</a></p>	
<p><b>5 Business Events</b></p> <p>Heledd Williams (HW), Head of Business Events gave an overview of her role and outlined the growth potential for Business Events within Wales outlining how SWW businesses could become part of the Business Events sector. She gave details of the new Business Events 'Hero Campaign' - running from April - with 38 operators initially identified and gave details of key events in the coming year for those industry stakeholders wishing to become involved.</p> <p>A copy of the presentation given by HW (attached), and Forum members were actively encouraged to engage with all industry stakeholders to highlight the opportunities available in this sector.</p>  <p>MeetInWales - business events update</p> <p><b>Action: All members to share information on Business Events with their networks</b></p>	<p><b>ALL</b></p>
<p><b>6 Tourism Association and Member updates</b></p> <p>JP gave a brief overview of the current position on a potential new DMO model for Pembrokeshire with PCC adopting a new plan for establishing a trade led organisation underpinned by public sector funding. He mentioned the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Pembrokeshire Coastal Path and the positive news that the Wales Coast Path management / marketing by PCNPA, has been extended.</p> <p><b>Pembrokeshire Tourism</b>  JRB reiterated the information shared by JP regarding positive movement and ongoing DPP work relating to the DMO. Membership remains stable with attempts to attract new members by holding relevant events including the recent Supplier2Buyer, the Tourism Summit and World Host Training</p> <p><b>Carmarthenshire Tourism Association</b>  GR stated that membership was growing slowly with functions being undertaken by minimal staff and voluntary Directors. Generally forward bookings seem slow with short lead in times. The regional awards identified (and awarded) quality product with strong contenders going forward to the NTAs. Member concerns remain consistent regarding: digital inclusion, rural Wales infrastructure, the proposed tourism tax, compulsory regulation or lack thereof and farming diversification in the light of Brexit and the lessening in direct</p>	

farm payments. He announced that he is standing down from the role of Chair of the Association.

**PR**

Brief update on behalf of WATO and PCF: facilitating and upskilling sector on responsible actions regarding environment and sustainability with further sector specific training events planned. Adventure Smart Wales Campaign still relevant and activate. Keeping watchful eye on progress of WG reform processes with regards to access and Countryside rights of Way (CROW).

**LW**

Ongoing programme of events and activities with encouraging feedback from visitors, boat owners and accommodation/floating hotels. A planning application has been submitted for a 100 bed hotel and multi-use venue.

**GG**

Exciting times with continuing interest from BBC Natural History, National Geographic in Skomer Island it being only Welsh reserve in the Countryfile Magazine Awards Reserve of the Year along with nomination for National Tourism Awards.

**KD**

Stakeholder events ongoing attracting positive feedback. New website launch mid-March with VW RTEF Funding resulting in 7 separate stakeholder / experience groups changing perception of the County - some portion of funding being utilised on legal advice on packaging and regulations including a case study which will be shared with industry. Work being undertaken on Master Plan for Afan Forest Park taking into account changes in the mountain bike market.

**HF**

Positive report with both visitor numbers and revenue up and business events up by 60% with ambition to convert buildings to accommodate up to 200 delegates. The park was experiencing its 4<sup>th</sup> consecutive year of growth with the new Regency Project and 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary year events providing the opportunity to continue this trend.

**PE**

Due to present on business and skills gaps at S E Forum later in month. Currently standing on Board of People First, actively engaged forging links with College and University particularly regarding skills. The Retreats Group is a gold supporter of Duke of Edinburgh Scheme and will be hosting event on 25<sup>th</sup> March, members of the Forum are welcome to attend. Twr Y Felin Hotel is reporting a significant increase in room occupancy and restaurant bookings in January, and 20 new rooms are ready to come online increasing capacity. Excited to represent Region in NTA as best Hotel and Penrhiw Priory as best B&B.

**MC**

The Cultural Centre in Haverfordwest has achieved upwards of 300k visitors (over 50% more than expected) with hopes for National Gallery loan of 'Degas' for Pembrokeshire. The previously mentioned DMO work was accepted at Cabinet and formally agreed with PCNPA with new body functions (in discussion) including; destination marketing, trade support and training and research and advocacy.

**ZW**

Hugely positive and massive media reach regarding first baby rhino born in Wales (and his status and importance in captive re-introduction programme). Negotiations ongoing with 'The One Show' re announcing name live on air. Recent coverage has been phenomenal with interest from various sources including The Times, The Sun and mentions on 'Good Morning' (estimated reach of 26.9m). Visitor numbers up 20% in Jan (compared to last yr) with positive impact of settling post-election. Holiday Park launched in December with 50 bookings for the Touring Park already taken (and it not yet being built!). Best Visitor

Attraction nomination to NTA acknowledged. Thanks to VW for support through media channels. Positive and successful ongoing links with Pembrokeshire College with all their animal care being taught, on sight, at Folly Farm.

**JDa**

Bookings increased in Jan (although still slightly behind), half term full. Launching well being campaign - unplugging from world. New partnership with dynamic pricing – anticipating interesting results.

**FK**

Introduced herself as Marketing Executive. Park currently closed with opening new season date 6<sup>th</sup> April, and, 2020 recruitment drive already launched. New ticket structuring with season pass and new ride all planned for coming season.

**PF**

Thanked members for all their commitment and work towards finalising nominations going forward to National Tourism Awards (NTA) and confirmed date as 6<sup>th</sup> May with venue now ICC Wales.

**SE**

First meeting attend, introduced herself. Have had very good year, acknowledged short term lead into bookings (as other operators, s/ c trend), however, upsurge in bookings end Jan with commitment to bookings in advance which may reflect more stability politically (election and Brexit). More flexibility being shown by property owners acknowledging change in booking patterns and more willingness to offer short dates. Long Weekend continues to expand with Holland and now Belgium events now in calendar.

**GR**

Own business continues to be refurbished with positive outlook for coming season. Currently closed.

**MK**

(forwarded to Chair in advance). TAD funding application submitted and awaiting response. Currently recruiting for Visitor Attraction Manager and Visitor Experience Manager. Opening planned for summer 2020 with pre-opening fam visits, launch event themed 'Year of Outdoors' for VIPs & public hoping for August. Key attractors include: extended visitor centre & café, watersports, fishing, walking trails, kids playground, bike hire, 14km mountain bike trails for all abilities, pump skills track, dog friendly, corporate team building packages with meeting rooms and multi-function space, camping & glamping area along with ample cars and coaches parking with electric charge points.

**SH**

Swansea Council are currently undertaking research / bedstock survey (with VW contribution). Trade survey being undertaken with TSB. Imminent announcement re 150 room hotel with contractors on site and 3500 capacity arena on track for opening in Autumn/Winter 2020. Some city-centre disruption during on-going works but short term considering expected impact of overall improvements and benefits to the city.

**NB**

Freedom Leisure continues to manage Swansea Council Leisure Centres delivering a £6m refurb across 7 sites to offer some of the best gym facilities in Wales, with high tech spec and modern leisure product. Membership is growing. Development (in city) has had an impact with 10-15% decline in business creating ongoing challenges.

The previous Tourism Partnership has some remaining funding available and will be looking to invite projects to access the funding in the near future.

**NK**

Routescapes, TPIF funded project is being represented at a UK in-bound Event today, enquiries are at record level and conversion rates positive for locations across UK. The Grove is undergoing renovations with the original wing being refurbished ready for end March, revenue remains steady, winter has been good, seasonality is softening in impact. Overall forecast for 20% growth. Restaurant doing very well with best winter to record. Noted international impact of Coronavirus, with 'nervousness' a possible potential problem.

**AC**

Also noted comments and VB concerns re impact of inbound international and, particularly, Chinese market due to Coronavirus. Will be consulted on re Tourism Tax in February with recognition / acceptance for need regarding statutory registration - 462% growth in Airbnb in Pembrokeshire - regulations around quality assurance and registration would be positively received. Wales Tourism Week is 4<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> May with Senedd Reception on the 7<sup>th</sup> and Christina Rees, Shadow Sec. sponsored reception in Westminster.

**JL**

Skills Plan in last year of 3yr plan. Continued issues within sector on perceptions of industry / jobs. Leading on City Deal skills funding. Farm diversification into crop / raising of 'other' animals offering opportunities for different uses of land. Surveys and invite to events ongoing.

**HP**

Very positive PR including Sunday Times Top 20 places to visit. Cultural heritage £1.6m spend project ongoing between W Wales and Ireland with 3 partners from each area. Road Cycling project targeting international, high spend via Easyjet, Wanderlust and Instagram with travel trade being targeted direct in the Netherlands and attendance at the London Bike show. CCC are bidding again for a Tour of Britain stage in September 2020. Newly refurbished gym at Carmarthen Leisure Centre. Due to open 2021. Attractor (TAD) project ongoing with Museum, hostel and outdoor arena underway at Pendine.

**AS**

Reported December as very good month, January started flat (and behind last year) resulting in tough month. Leisure market very good with more members. Business and meetings market flat – looking forward to arena opening and business opportunities. Swansea development positive for city and surrounding region too.

**7 AOB**

The Tourism Tax was very briefly discussed with the same ongoing concern recognised regarding call for evidence on its need, the intricacies of its management i.e. who will collect it and who it will directly effect.

The chair of the new Tourism & Hospitality Skills Partnership will be announced shortly.

It was agreed that food and rail / transport be the key items on the next agenda with VW to pursue invitees with, if time allowed, sustainability and the green key badge / initiatives.

**Action: VW to invite appropriate colleagues / representatives**

PA formally thanked Nic Beggs for his commitment to the role of Chair, for his wide and positive representation of the Forum and his continuing effort to push forward industry affairs and interests and welcomed Paula Ellis into the role.

**VW**

**Next Meeting:** Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> June, Village Hotel, Swansea

