

Visit Wales - South West Wales Regional Tourism Forum

21 May 2020 – Virtual (online) Meeting

Attendees

Paula Ellis – Chair
Adam Smith – Vice Chair
Eluned Morgan – Minister International Relations and the Welsh Language
Lord Elis Thomas – Deputy Minister Culture Sport and Tourism
Jacqui Davies – Clydey Cottages
Tim Brace – FBM
Nic Beggs – Freedom Leisure
James Parkin – PCNPA
Neil Kedward – Seren Collection
Matthew Evans – Event Wales
Andrew Campbell – WTA
Gina Gavigan – Wildlife Trust
Steve Hopkins – Swansea Council
Karleigh Davies – NPT Council
Mark Hillary – Dwr Cymru
Simon John – Cawdor Collection
Melissa Knight – Dwr Cymru
Zoe Wright – Folly Farm
Lucy Wonnacott – MHPA
Jayne Rees Baines – PTA
David Beany – CTA
Stephen Crocker – TSB
Paul Renfro – WATA
Mike Cavanagh – Pembrokeshire CC
Francis Jenkins – Swansea Council
Huw Parsons – Carmarthenshire CC
George Reid – Glangwili Mansion

Visit Wales

Jason Thomas – Director, Culture Sport and Tourism
Rob Holt – Deputy Director, Culture Sport and Tourism
Rhidian Morgan – Head of Tourism
Lucy Von Weber – Head of Marketing
Joanne Corke – Head of Research and Insights
Phil Abraham – Regional Engagement Manger

Apologies

Kevin Davies – Cawdor Collection
Jane Donald – Regional Engagement – Visit Wales

Welcome & Introductions – Paula Ellis Chair

Paula Ellis (PE) welcomed everyone to the virtual Forum and thanked members for their attendance and on-going support. PE welcomed Eluned Morgan – Minister International Relations and the Welsh Language and Lord Elis Thomas Deputy Minister for Culture Sport and Tourism to the meeting and thanked them for their support of the industry through the current crisis.

As Chair PE reminded members that it's their responsibility to share newsletters, forum minutes and summaries of discussions at Forum meetings with the wider industry to ensure all messaging from the Welsh Government reached as many businesses as possible.

Lord Elis Thomas - Deputy Minister Culture Sport and Tourism

The Deputy Minister for Culture Sport and Tourism (DMCST) thanked members for their invite to address the Forum and took time to explain how Welsh Government internal structures were working innovatively to create solutions in this time of crisis for the industry.

DMCST outlined the importance of the Forum and the weekly COVID-19 Tourism response group which the SWW Forum Chair attends as key in informing Welsh Government decisions making during this crisis and thanked the industry for their detailed feedback of the situation 'on the ground'. DMCST update the forum on the current position with funding and outlined that a across sectors approach to support was likely to continue in the near future rather than any specific Tourism schemes.

Finally DMCST reminded members that Tourism was a foundation sector within Welsh Government and all efforts were being made to communicate issues for businesses to influence decisions made in terms of future support.

Eluned Morgan – Minister International Relations and the Welsh Language

The Minister (MIRWL) addressed the Forum, and thanked PE for her leadership during this time and the sector for their understanding of the challenges facing the Welsh Government. MIRWL re-iterated that feedback from the industry in terms of the impact of COVID-19 on the sector are understood across government, and that regular meetings are held with Visit Wales to allow MIRWL to feed into the cabinet and First Minister.

MIRWL informed members that Wales has created a number of support schemes for industry that were unmatched in other parts of the UK and but recognised long term support was required and it that would need UK government to lead.

MIRWL stated that on current public health guidance there would be no possibility of Tourism businesses opening immediately however, this situation was constantly being monitored and the recently announced 'Unlocking our Society and economy: Wales' roadmap' was intended to initiate conversations around the reduction in lockdown measures with all stakeholders including communities in order to build trust. All decisions would be made through a public health lens.

MIRWL was fully aware of need for additional support for the sector due to it being hit the hardest but this would be subject to budget, it was re-iterated that as a Government we are following the science in respect of this crisis but the intention was to give a 3 week lead in time when it was deemed safe for lockdown measures for Tourism activities to be reduced.

Jason Thomas – Director Visit Wales

Jason Thomas (JT) thanked Ministers for their on-going support and attendance at the Forum and stated that the potential 3 winter's scenario the industry was potentially facing was being communicated across the whole of the Welsh Government.

JT took time to set the Welsh Government position at this point in time, with Visit Wales working flat out with UKH and WTA leading to publish draft guidance to start a conversation with the industry on what safe working and re-opening looks like based on a public health approach, he re-stated that currently there is no provisional date set for the industry to open. JT reiterated the intention was for a minimum 3 week lead in to amber zone of the Traffic Light system under the 'Unlocking our Society and economy: Wales' roadmap' document.

JT thanked the industry and Ministers for their support and said he looked forward to an open dialogue with members during the meeting.

PE thanked both Ministers and Jason for addressing members and providing clarity to a number of issues.

Joanne Corke – Head of Research – Visit Wales

Joanne Corke (JC) gave members an update on how research was influencing the response of the Welsh Government in the current crisis.

JC led a discussion with members in respect of the current research methods being used by Visit Wales and other industry bodies, how these methods could be improved and future plans to capture information such as consumer sentiment going forward. JC thanked members for all the information that had shaped current research and those who had undertaken specific surveys and shared the results with Visit Wales.

JC talked about evidence of needs going forward and a discussion paper which had been tabled at the Wales Tourism Research Partnership meeting the previous day. JC invited members to comment on any gaps as we move forward and any mechanisms (not just research) they have for understanding and tracking community sentiment around visitors and to feedback ASAP

Members Questions

Grant / Loan Support – Rhidian Morgan

Q1. Will the Welsh government provide funding opportunities for destination management (particularly steps that will be required to help manage overcrowding/over tourism hotspots which would threaten an increase in the R rating) and destination marketing campaigns to boost recovery when the time is right? In terms of the latter, the resurgence grant funding during foot-and-mouth, which was matched on a 3 to 1 ratio by industry (public sector putting in 25% and industry 75%) was highly effective at the time and had a clear return on investment. In this case, given the enormous impact on industry, a higher intervention rate may be necessary. (Mike Cavanagh – Pembrokeshire County Council).

Rhidian Morgan (RM) stated that the WG was aware of the potential issues that could be created in Destinations due to lifting of lockdown measures and asked MC to consider what funding elements would be required in the case of a reduced lockdown.

A discussion took place amongst the Forum regarding advanced messaging for Visitors, physical visitor management interventions. It was recognised that due to staff resource all areas (such as beaches) could not be micro managed therefore concentrating on key 'honey' pots and visitor and community messaging may be the potential solution.

Q2. Are there any plans to extend the grant fund to cover businesses who pay council tax and not business rates who have so far not been covered by any of the available funds (not including loans). This is a gap that hasn't yet been addressed, but covers a significant number of micro businesses in the sector. (Jane Rees Baines – Pembrokeshire Tourism)

RM stated an Extension to ERF was announced yesterday and more details will be available to the industry in due course. The VW newsletter would include full details of the Ministers announcement.

Q3. There was a mention by Ken Skates on 13/05/2020 daily briefing about extended support for the tourism and hospitality sector as it is likely we will be the last ones out of lockdown – are there any additional details on this? (Jayne Rees Baynes – Pembrokeshire Tourism).

Response as above.

Q4. Can we have an updated statement on the different sectors allocation of funding from Welsh Development Bank fund and the Resilience fund (George Reid – Glangwilli Mansion)

RM explained to members there were currently over 7000 SME and Micro Business applications within the ERF scheme. Current figures suggest there is a 15% rejection rate mostly on the basis of eligibility and cost.

With regards to sector specific benefits there is no detailed data available at the moment but we estimate in financial terms that the amount of grant providing to Tourism businesses is higher than the annual Visit Wales budget.

Q5. Why is it taking so long to set criteria and allocate funds from the outstanding £100 Million? Do we have a timescale for this much needed cash to find its way into the economy? (George Reid, Glangwilli Mansion)

RM told members that a next phase of the ERF fund has been announced and details will be available soon. There has been a requirement to review the recent scheme and any gaps before announcing the new one hence a slight delay. Current figures suggest that for all ERF offers to businesses only 50% have been accepted at this time (this is as low as 41% in Tourism). RM reminded the Forum that this was a very resource heavy process and staff from all over the WG are being re-purposed to deliver the scheme as efficiently as possible.

Q6. Quite rightly the focus of public sector financial support is Covid-19 at present, but are the TISS and other tourism scheme still live and is there an update as to the Brilliant Basics funding applications? (Huw Parson – Carmarthenshire County Council).

RM stated that the Brilliant Basics fund had been paused with no likely hood of it being re-started in the medium term as budgets have been repurposed into ERF. In terms of WTIF (formally TISS) there is still a minimum budget available and a live pipeline of projects. It is hoped to re-instate the full scheme but this will be dependent on budgets.

Members asked if there was a possibility of re-purposing Brilliant Basics to meet Destination Management needs created by the current crisis, RM stated this could be considered

Policy – Rob Holt

Q.7 Will the Welsh Government be following the British Government on announcing a date for the proposed reopening of the hospitality industry? If not will there be a

road map announced for the proposed reopening and if so when? Will Visit Wales be producing a marketing plan in line with the proposed reopening of Welsh hospitality to capitalise on the Stay at home holidays that people will be looking to take instead of going abroad? (Adam Smith – Village Hotel)

RH re-iterated the words of MIRWL that there are no plans to add dates to the roadmap currently. LVW mentioned that the marketing question would be covered off later in the Forum.

Q8. Some of the research carried out for traveller's post Covid-19 indicates many will be attracted to rural and spacious areas that have accommodation and attractions that can demonstrate a level of sanitisation and where social distancing can be achieved. It has been reported that Visit Britain are seeking to develop a form of guidance/assessment to promote quality/safety for tourist attractions/accommodation in relation to Covid-19. Are Welsh Government part of this UK discussion or are we seeking to implement our own and is the thinking to be a self-guidance scheme or to the level of a kite mark? (Huw Parsons – Carmarthenshire County Council)

RH told members that there are discussions with VE,VS and TNI taking place around the development of a 'standard' and Visit Wales are fully engaged in those discussions.

Q9. Are there any plans to reduce VAT or make changes to the way Businesses Rates are calculated to help tourism businesses in the long term following the crisis? (Kevin Davies – Gwesty y Emlyn)

The Welsh Government continues to lobby the UK Government on issues such as VAT and Business rates.

Q10. Will the Welsh government support and resource the implementation of a kite mark to give visitors reassurance that accommodation providers and attractions are implementing all the necessary steps to keep people safe? (Mike Cavanagh – Pembrokeshire County Council)

See answer to Q8

Q11. Will the Welsh government consider championing an additional bank holiday to boost the tourism industry, be it in the autumn or potentially St David's Day as a means of kick-starting the new season? I recognise it's a UK government decision and there is an economic cost to doing so. Potentially consider just as a one-off to boost 2020/1 or as a pilot in 2020/1 and evaluate the impact. (Mike Cavanagh – Pembrokeshire County Council)

RH stated that the provision of Bank Holidays was one for the UK government and the issue has been raised.

A member's discussion around the potential for a St Davids Day Bank Holiday there was strong support for the suggestion and PE urged members to write to her to support this if they felt it aided the industry.

Q12. Can it be ensured that any guidelines issued in Wales to accommodation providers for cleaning/Covid-19 safe measures reflect the fact a huge % of businesses in this sector are micro-businesses i.e. not just guidelines achievable for large hotels or large venues. Measures required are going to need to be

achievable to ensure businesses re-open, if too punitive/expensive to implement businesses may just stay closed until 2021. (Jane Rees Baines – Pembrokeshire Tourism).

RH said UKH and WTA were leading on development of sub sector guidelines and the intention was to consult the industry on the drafts via the forums.

Q13. Businesses really need dates, or at the very least, an indication of which businesses will be able to open under which phase in the traffic light system. Can you commit to telling us when this level of detail might be forthcoming? Businesses in England are at an advantage because they are planning to reopen at the beginning of June or beginning of July according to which sector list they fall into. Jersey Zoo and Fota Wildlife Park are already open, paving a way for zoos in England to open from July 4th and possibly earlier if these test cases and the lobbying by our member organisation BIAZA are successful. (Zoe Wright Folly Farm)

See MIRWL opening statement.

Q14. Please can it be recognised that attractions in Wales, particularly in the South West region, do not rely on holidaymakers or draw day visitors in any large numbers from England? In Folly Farm's case only 30% of our visitors are holidaymakers and 5-8% of those are domestic holidaymakers from South East Wales, the rest of our audience is domestic day visitors, primarily from within an hour's drive. It's important that any wording in the traffic light system for lifting restrictions makes allowances for regional differences rather than keeping us all closed as a sector. (Zoe Wright Folly Farm)

JT stated that at the moment WG is not looking at a regional approach to lifting restriction it will be an all Wales basis as per roadmap to recovery, 3 weeks is the notice period again based on health messages.

Q15. Welsh government is now talking about the benefits of being outdoors and the fact Covid-19 may die off more quickly in sunlight, at the point people are allowed to visit parks and gardens for leisure, outdoor attractions should be also be permitted. Can you please consider not adopting the wording England had regarding "ticketed outdoor venues" as outdoor ticketed attractions are better placed, to manage numbers through requiring pre-booked tickets and settling capacity limits, and have more staff present to manage social distancing is being observed than parks and gardens? (Zoe Wright Folly Farm)

DMCST told members he was raising the Animal Welfare issues at cabinet level and JT mentioned we are aware that outdoor attractions could be looked at differently in terms of time lines due to their specific circumstances.

Q16. Can we have an update about touring parks opening with closed facilities? I read (admittedly in 'The Sun') that touring parks in England are demanding to be open as they will be in Wales from 1st June? (Zoe Wright Folly Farm)

RH stated this is not true and re-iterated that members should always check the WG landing page for COVID-19 as correct information is shown.

Q17. What will be the immediate impacts on tourism in Wales resulting from leaving the EU at the end of the year? (Andrew Campbell WTA)

<p>Both the Minister and Deputy Minister told the Forum that Tourism related Brexit issues such as implications on staffing and entry requirements for UK are still being fed into UK Government.</p> <p>Marketing – Lucy Von Weber</p> <p>Q18. Do the Welsh government intend to have frank conversations with specific communities and community leaders regarding the damaging narrative of ‘English stayaway’? Not necessarily at this moment but thinking about a time when the lockdown is due to be lifted and we need to repair damaged relations with visitors. (Mike Cavanagh – Pembrokeshire County Council)</p> <p>LvW shared a power point presentation with members on the current Welsh Government approach to marketing, the rationale behind #stayhome and #staylocal messages and the potential for future campaigns.</p> <p>LvW stated that VW were working closely with all areas of the Welsh Government in terms of current messaging along with the industry and wider communities. Current research was suggesting there will be a large latent demand for getting outdoors and this would need to be considered going forward both in terms of marketing and Destination Management.</p> <p>LvW re-iterated that this was a rapidly changing situation and at the moment public health concerns were the priority, as and when this changes members will be informed. It was agreed that copies of the presentation would be shared by Visit Wales.</p>	
<p><u>Any other businesses</u></p> <p>Discussions on Destination Management, consumer sentiment, Welsh Government messaging and proposed lockdown reduction operating models took place during AOB. JT re-iterated all the issues raised would be communicated at Senior level and with Ministers and would help shape the Welsh Governments response to the crisis going forward.</p>	
<p><u>Chair / Closing Remarks</u></p> <p>PE thanked all members for their positive attitude towards discussions and thanked both Ministers for attending and playing an active part in the Forum. She urged members to share details of discussions and the Visit Wales newsletter where possible.</p>	
<p><u>Date of next meeting</u></p> <p>TBC</p>	