

South West Wales Tourism Forum (Virtual/Online)

Minutes, Wednesday 14 October 2020

Present

PE, Chair: Retreats Group
AS, Vice Chair: Village Hotel
JD, Clydey Cottages
ZW, Folly Farm
TF, The Grove
SC, TSB
GG, SWWWT
KD, NPT CBC
MH, Dwr Cymru
LW, MHPA
AC, WTA
HF, NBGW
RR, Bluestone NP Resort

TB, FBM
JP, PCNPA
ME, Tourism Marketing Group
PR, WATA
SH, Swansea Council
HP, Carmarthenshire CC
GR, Glangwili Mansion
MS, Call of the Wild
AW, NRW
JL, RLP

Visit Wales

MS, Deputy Director Marketing
LvW, Head of Marketing
RM, Head of Tourism
JC, Head of Research and Insights
JD, Regional Engagement Team

CC, Marketing Manager
PA, Regional Engagement Manger
JS, Tourism Research
AS, Regional Engagement Team

Apologies

HP, Celtic Holiday Parks

<p>Welcome and introduction</p> <p>Paula Ellis (PE) welcomed Members and thanked them for their continuing support. She outlined the agenda and introduced the topics for discussion and re-iterated previous appeals for issues to consider at future meetings.</p>	
<p>Economic Resilience fund Phase 3</p> <p>Rhidian Morgan (RM) introduced the third phase of the Economic Resilience Fund. An £80m fund with £20m ring-fenced for tourism and hospitality following on from the rescue phases of ERF 1 and 2 this fund is aimed at supporting projects can demonstrate transition through the current pandemic.</p> <p>The grant is open to micro, SME and large businesses. It is a revenue fund with some match funding requirements for the larger business end but it is discretionary. The funding needs to be defrayed before the end of the financial year (31 March 2020). Applicants will need to sign up to the ethos and principles of the Economic Contract.</p> <p>All appropriate criteria and details are available on the Business Wales site and the eligibility checker is live. RM strongly advised using the checker as soon as possible so that when the scheme opens for applications w/c the 26 October businesses are able to apply - it is vital that strong applications are received promptly and he urged partners to share this detail with stakeholders as a priority.</p>	

The eligibility checker can be accessed here:
<https://fundchecker.businesswales.gov.wales/erfphase3>

The Business Wales site is the first point of access for all current [funding](#).

George Reid (GR) stated that there were concerns that the criteria, again, excluded many micro businesses and queried support for smaller businesses having been inundated by CTA members asking for clarity in this respect.

RM explained that the criteria had been carefully considered and that with some micro businesses it was difficult to determine their status (i.e. if not registered for VAT or at Companies House), it was not intended to imply that businesses below the threshold were not valuable to the industry and that hopefully, at least some of those may be eligible for assistance through the Non-Domestic Rate Grant currently being managed via the Local Authorities.

Discussion followed and questions including whether this was additional funding, whether the funding would be 'first past the post at application' and whether the money could be 'carried over' into the next financial year when things may be more settled were raised by members. RM responded that this phase 3 is a residual amount from the originally declared £150m ERF and that the applications would be considered and awarded to those businesses with clear project focus moving forward through the pandemic with some due diligence taking place to support this. Monies must be spent within the financial year to end March 2021 but that there are budget talks and spending reviews taking place all the time attempting to consider schemes going forward.

Marketing

Lucy von Weber (LvW) began by strongly advising all partners and their stakeholders to sign up to and bookmark the Visit Wales bulletins as they contain all relevant information and with the situation changing daily, the *current* situation:
businesswales.gov.wales/tourism/coronavirus-covid-19-bulletins

She commented on the positive impact of the Good to Go scheme (5000 businesses signed up) and the Addo film which has been re-edited and continues to use a 'visit safely' message. Marketing is effectively on hold with many staff moving into other strategic delivery teams. The outdoor message is still relevant but active promotion is in a 'holding' position supporting a safe and responsible note. The 'escape the everyday' campaign (by the x4 Visits) is still running. She went on to highlight the asset content, toolkits, images and urged businesses to make full use of these.

There is still positive news and good PR via Lodestar and the National Geographic Traveller articles in place. B2B work is ongoing as is work with the Travel Trade. She confirmed that grading will be free from April 2021.

LvW addressed the query raised (in advance) by Jane Rees Baines regarding the negative press and possible outcomes following the Simon Calder social media statements. She noted that there had been some very positive social media both from Simon and Stacey Solomon in the same week with one B&B's social media following rising from 4k to 143k in 72hrs and their property being full well into Autumn of next year. She went on to say that Simon Calder has always been a supporter and 'friend' to Wales but that he does have the right to reply and was, obviously, very offended by some of the response. She explained that contact has been and will continue to be maintained with him in the hope of enticing him back and that, with the fast moving pace and 'short memory' of social media, the incident will soon be overshadowed as it was with the Donald Trump tweet.

Policy and Q&A

Mari Stevens (MS) explained her role within Visit Wales and Rob Holts new focus within Major Events.

MS was asked if there is a strategy in place covering the next 12mths as some members felt the industry is lurching from crisis to crisis with clarity sought on when we may come out of lockdown. MS responded that the focus was on public health, on improving the test, track and trace system and on re-opening and staying ready for next year. The second Autumn wave of infection had maybe hit earlier than expected and taken government by surprise. WG is focussing budget to priority areas but that Ministers have confidence in this sector and its ability to act in a safe manner and that the issues of how to support those that are able to stay open remain.

There was some discussion over the reported use of 'R-rate' versus 'per 100k population' and subsequent confusion. Jo Corke (JC) explained that there is a whole series of data and several matrices being used currently and that the rate per 100k may refer to those at a local level and the 'R-rate' at geographical levels.

It was mentioned that 'local lockdown rules' are confusing. LvW referred to the comprehensive advice available on the WG web pages with each area listed having a breakdown and FAQ's relating to them at gov.wales/local-lockdown She stated that FAQ's for tourism and hospitality are due to be released imminently and would be available on-line and via the business update newsletter.

There was a query re testing and rapid and cheap tests being available in some European countries and whether this might pose some solution in Wales. MS responded that WG is working to increase the test, track and trace capacity, that the 'app' is now working more efficiently than in the rest of the UK and that, ultimately, the tests only give an instant measure of the here and now and the visitor may well give a different result if tested even a few days later. LvW added that the government (UK) have announced the creation of a Travel Taskforce which will accelerate work to develop options for testing and how it could be introduced at gateway airports and ports setting out recommendations for how the UK can support the recovery of international travel.

Long term post COVID issues

PE began a short discussion on what the industry feels would be the Forum ambition post COVID. The major issues still remaining in the long term that still need discussion and lobbying – items to focus on in the coming year.

They were identified as:

- connectivity
- infrastructure
- sustainability (and the right growth in the right place / pressure on community and the environment)
- the skills gap
- rate / VAT and business rate relief (although, during this crisis things have changed in the short term they will likely remain long term issues)

PE asked MS whether the strategy and the 'plan on a page' were still being considered. MS stated that they are more valid than ever still looking to balance good growth with a holistic view driving seasonality and spreading the benefits. She went on to say that the opportunity to attract high spend domestic visitors is increasing with, for example, high quality self-catering, distinctive and experiential breaks being sought as overseas breaks become less likely with Wales being in a very good position to attract that custom not forgetting that repeat and loyal visitors offer phenomenal opportunities.

<p>PE went on to suggest a possible census of what the Members feel are the main issues and using these for agenda points going forward, to look at how we can make time on the Forum worthwhile. That the collective knowledge is a huge resource which could be shared not only in the SW but in the other regions too.</p> <p>Phil Abraham (PA) stated that there are similar exercises taking place pan Wales and a joint approach would be useful.</p>	
<p>AOB</p> <p>Jo Corke (JC) gave a very brief overview of the current research with findings from UK survey (to end wk 2 Oct) available. With the latest barometer (up to 3 Aug) due to publish week after next. Research are working closely with the Event Task Force and considering collating important data on on-going redundancies sighting the need to capture data effectively as some, particularly from smaller businesses, may be missed.</p> <p>Report on the VB website with findings from the UK Consumer survey period 28th September-2nd October with findings noting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a deterioration in public mood and weakening of domestic travel intentions • 18% of adults saying they <i>have been</i> on a U.K. overnight trip in September • a notable dip in confidence to be able to take a domestic trip in the coming month • a fall in those intending to take a domestic overnight trip in October to 10% of UK adults and • first findings on Intentions for overnight domestic business trips <p>PA explained that Visit Wales is obliged to repeat the GDPR, language preference and accessibility questions posed some time ago. It is even more appropriate now as there are new members. A note re same will follow shortly and we would be grateful if you could respond.</p>	
<p>Vice Chair - Closing Remarks</p> <p>Adam Smith (AS) thanked everyone for attending and reiterated main discussion points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ERF phase 3 and the links shared and the urgency regarding accessing the eligibility checker • the NDR local lockdown funding • promoting positive messages for the long term as the situation continues to remain uncertain • the Forum looking forward and beyond C-19 to highlight and keep key issues and challenges on the political agenda • that we actually celebrate each other and the continuing robust adaptation to constant change, that we concentrate on C-19 in the short term whilst continuing to look forward to the medium and long term • that we look to having the next Forum early in January (with possible interim end November) <p>PE reiterated previous, repeated, requests for agenda items from the Members (appreciating that the last few meetings have been overtaken by the c-19 crisis) as per previous item.</p>	
<p>Date of next meeting: Wednesday, 27 January 2021 (tbc)</p>	