

South West Wales Tourism Forum

Minutes, Wednesday 19 May, 2021

Present

PE, Chair: Retreats Group
AS, Vice Chair: Village Hotel
JD, Clydey Cottages
JP, PCNPA
GG, SWWWT
HP, Celtic Holiday Parks
LW, MHPA
MH, Dwr Cymru
AC, Wales Tourism Alliance
ME, Tourism Marketing Group
FK, Oakwood Theme Park

JL, Regional Learning & Skills Partnership
GR, Glangwili Mansion
PR, Wales Activity Tourism Organisation
HF, NBGW
RR, Bluestone NP Resort
ZW, Folly Farm
MS, Call of the Wild
ET, Visit Pembrokeshire
SO, Carmarthenshire CC
SH, Swansea
KD, Neath Port Talbot CBC

RS, RNLI - speaker

Visit Wales

Steffan Roberts – Deputy Director – Tourism Development
Claire Chappell, Deputy Director - Marketing
Lucy Von Weber, Head of Marketing
Rhidian Morgan, Head of Tourism Development
Jen Velu, Tourism Research
Kerry Thatcher, Partnerships Manager
Sue Thomas, Business Development
Jane Donald, Regional Engagement Team
Ceri Jones, Regional Engagement Team
Ed Ryan, Regional Engagement Team

Welcome, Introductions and Opening Remarks

PE welcomed Members and thanked them for attending during a pivotal week for the sector in terms of re-opening.

PE emphasised strongly the current crisis facing the visitor economy as a result of the skills gap within the tourism & hospitality sectors.

On behalf of the Forum, PE wished to express extreme gratitude to Lord Dafydd Elis Thomas for the tremendous work he did as Deputy Minister for Culture, Sport and Tourism and also their thanks to Eluned Morgan.

PE expressed her disappointment that Tourism had not been recognised and included in one of the titles given to the new Welsh Government Ministers. PE feels that the C-19 Emergency Tourism Taskforce had done much to raise the profile of the tourism industry and that this has not been reflected in the new Cabinet titles.

Introductions and update VW

Steffan Roberts, Deputy Director, Tourism Development

- Steffan is Deputy Director of Tourism Development. He is new to the role and was previously Deputy Director for Culture & Sport and also worked within the Finance Portfolio based in Aberystwyth.
- He emphasised that the meeting was an opportunity to listen and understand both the short and long term issues and to look at solutions in going forward.
- The Welsh Government Recovery Plan for the visitor economy has now been published and is available here [Recovery Plan](#)
- Steffan informed members that Tourism sits within the new Economy portfolio and emphasised that Tourism will be a very important part of that new portfolio. Having the Skills department within the same portfolio will be of benefit in addressing key issues.
- Wales is currently at Alert Level 2 since Monday 17 May. The current plan is to move to Alert Level 1 in June however the 'Indian variant' is causing some concern and may possibly delay this.
- The latest funding packages are open for applications and Steffan encouraged members to take a look at the [eligibility checkers](#) on the Business Wales website and to forward any specific queries to the team.
- Steffan introduced Ceri Jones the new Regional Engagement Manager for SW. Ceri is returning to Visit Wales following a career break.

Claire Chappell, Deputy Director, Marketing

- Due to time constraints and a busy agenda, Claire informed members that a detailed Marketing update would be distributed by e-mail to all Forum members.
- She emphasised the benefits for Tourism in being part of the Economy portfolio and that Visit Wales will be looking to get the recovery plan top of the new Ministers agenda.
- Claire updated the forum on discussions being had at a UK level – this included spreading benefits across all UK regions and joint working on respective recovery plans. Visit Wales is also pushing for a share of voice in Visit Britain Marketing Campaigns.
- VW will now be pulling together a Task & Finish group to drive forward the actions within the recovery plan.

PE added that the 4 Regional Fora chairs would seek to extend an official invitation for the new Minister to join the next Regional Fora meetings in October.

Looking Ahead

PE began the discussion by informing Forum members that her term as Chair will be coming to an end beginning of 2022. She emphasised the need for collaboration on the major issues impacting the industry and asked forum members for their input on what they feel the issues are and which are priorities going forward.

Huw Pendleton (HP) emphasised that skills is a huge issue for them. They have been advertising positions for 4 weeks and are unable to open fully as they are unable to employ Chefs. He added that Furlough had distorted the market.

Adam Smith (AS) added that the skills gap is really difficult to address. It has always been hard to attract and retain people however it has become much harder.

Andrew Campbell (AC) expressed regret on behalf of the WTA that there will be no Minister with tourism in their title in their title. AC added that this would have given the industry the recognition it deserves.

Discussion followed on the current issues being faced in terms of recruitment and PE thanked everyone for their contributions and handed over to Kerry Thatcher (KT) to provide an update on Skills.

Skills Update – Kerry Thatcher, Partnerships Manager

- Visit Wales works closely with WG Skills Division to ensure the industry is considered when new programmes etc are being developed and that the importance of the sector is recognised.
- Visit Wales role is a signposting role – ensure businesses can find relevant information on support – [Business Wales Tourism Zone website](#)
- Work with stakeholders, industry, Careers Wales (links with schools etc), JobcentrePlus, Springboard and others to identify issues and possible solutions;
- VW work with Regional Skills Partnerships which are tasked by WG to analyse and influence the provision of skills in 3 regions, N, SE and SW & Mid;
- Visit Wales provides secretariat for the Wales Tourism and Hospitality Skills Partnership – this is an Industry led Partnership chaired by Sharron Lusher. The Chairs of the Regional Fora are attending the next meeting of the Partnership to be held tomorrow (20 May).

A discussion followed on the need to change perceptions of the industry and the need for a recruitment campaign for the sector to help build positive PR and to address the skills gap. PE concluded by emphasising the need to act quickly. She added that businesses are struggling to re-open as they don't have the staff. She emphasised the need for big initiatives.

RNLI and Water Safety

- Roger Smith (RS), RNLI Lifesaving Manager provided a valuable presentation on the work of the RNLI in the region and their new Water Safety Ambassador Scheme to support and spread information on water safety.
- The RNLI are now looking to recruit Ambassadors. RNLI will provide all the information and training required. The scheme currently has 40 businesses on board and is proving very successful.

PE thanked RS for his presentation and a number of forum members offered to distribute the information. The RNLI slides to be forwarded after the meeting.

Research

Jen Velu (JV) gave an update on the main tourism surveys, forthcoming publications and future work areas. Presentation slides distributed following the meeting

AOB

Statutory Registration

PE has been in contact with Glyn Roberts and there is nothing further to report at this stage.

Chair Nomination and Voting Process

PE reiterated her intention to step down from Forum Chair (2yr position coming to end beginning 2022) with consideration being given to time frame and likelihood of election (following previous round) for completion October 2021 and new Chair for first meeting 2022.

Jane Donald (JD) informed Members that Visit Wales would contact them via e-mail with information regarding Chair nomination and the voting process in the coming weeks.

A round table update from Forum Members followed:

- PE informed Members that the 20 new rooms at Twr y Felin Hotel are now complete;
- Huw Pendleton informed members that the retail side of the business was buoyant but that the touring side was currently very quiet;
- Zoe Wright said that Folly Farm are now fully booked at weekends and over the half term break. They may be able to increase capacity however currently running at 75%. Many of the students they had working with them during the busy season have moved on to work in other sectors. The new Sloth enclosure at Folly Farm has just opened. The Touring Park at Folly Farm is proving very successful and they have just been selected to be part of the reality TV programme The Perfect Pitch. They are also adding an additional 6 lodges to their offer next Easter;
- Emma Thornton – incredibly busy – focussing on welcoming visitors back and ensuring they have a first class experience. From a PR perspective they have seen significant interest which is very encouraging and exciting. Currently working on a number of press visits;
- Freya Knibb – Oakwood currently running at a reduced capacity and taking a cautious approach to re-opening;
- Mark Hillary – Lllys y Fran Visitor Centre and new facilities to officially open in June;
- Paul Renfro informed members that Adventure Businesses have been impacted as they are not yet able to open to residential groups. He added that England has clearer guidance on when and how businesses can re-open to residential groups, and as a result Wales is losing groups to England;
- Gina Gavigan – Skomer Live will return in July. It has been lovely to have lots of recent national and international media coverage. Natural History and others booked in for filming over coming weeks;

- Sarah Owen updated members that Carmarthenshire CC are currently promoting the opportunity to lease the “Caban” at Pendine Sands. Caban is the purpose built accommodation / café developed as part of the TAD project;
- Huw Francis – National Botanic Gardens re-opened end of March. Visitor numbers currently down 60% on previous years. They have recently refurbished the café/restaurant.
- Mark Soanes added that demand is high at the moment however capacity to deliver is low. They have a lot of seasonal employees who have not returned and this is common across the sector. Seasonality is still a major issue for them;
- Jacqui Davies – demand is very high. They have found that staff are anxious about re-opening. They are taking a cautious approach and are also facing recruitment challenges;
- George Reid added that the conversation around skills has been discussed for a number of years and called for a recruitment campaign for the sector to help build positive PR for the sector and to address the skills gap. He also suggested WG consider introducing new Bank Holidays in Wales on 1 March and also in October/November as a mechanism for boosting shoulder season demand for the sector.
- Andrew Campbell added that WTA are pushing for changes to British Summer Time. He also added that Employment is a huge issue and that the sector should consider the older demographic and getting those that have left the sector to return.

A discussion followed on Skills and PE added that she has previously asked how members of the Skills Partnership are elected and feels strongly that the private sector needs to be fully represented. **(KT to respond to PE)**

There was also a request for an update on The National Tourism Awards and when / if these will be held.

CC added that Skills is included as a major element of the Tourism Recovery Plan and a recruitment campaign is one of the things currently being discussed. VW will provide an update at the next meeting.

Closing remarks – Adam Smith, Vice Chair

AS updated Members on recent exciting developments in Swansea including the Swansea Arena. The city is developing as a fantastic Gateway to the West. He emphasised the need to focus on the skills gap in the sector and the need for collaboration. He echoed the need for a recruitment campaign for the Tourism & Hospitality sector and for the removal of date restrictions on Furlough.

Date of next meeting: 6 October 2021