

Fforwm Twristiaeth Rhanbarthol De Orllewin Cymru South West Wales Tourism Forum

Minutes, Monday 20 June 2022

Present

GR, Chair: Glangwili Mansion
JP, Vice Chair: PCNPA
KD, NPT Council
SO, Carmarthenshire CC
JD, Clydey Cottages
FK, Oakwood
SB, Carmarthenshire TA
HP, Celtic Holiday Parks
PR, WATO/PCF
AC, Economic Ministerial Advisory Board
ZW, Folly Farm
EB, Retreats Group
LW, MHPA

Visit Wales / Welsh Government

Heledd Owen, Deputy Director - Marketing
Sue Thomas, Head of Business Development & Cruise Wales
Jane Donald, SW Regional Engagement
Ceri Jones, SW Regional Engagement

Welcome, Introductions and Opening Remarks – GR (Chair)	Action
GR welcomed forum members to the meeting and thanked them for attending. GR informed members that several last-minute apologies had been received.	
Terms of Reference update – GR (Chair) GR thanked members for their feedback on the ToR following the last meeting. The 4 Regional Chairs presented an updated version to Welsh Government who have requested that the ToR are amended to align with the ToR for the Visitor Economy Forum. The Chairs will meet with Welsh Government colleagues over the next few weeks and will present the ToR at the next meeting	
Visit Wales Update – Heledd Owen, Director of Marketing HO introduced herself to members and began by outlining the areas that she intended to cover as part of the update. The focus would be an update on WG policies which are currently at various stages as well as touch on the VW business plan, a Marketing update, the recent debate which has been in the media on the branding of Wales and also the World Cup. HO welcomed questions after each policy update.	

Reform of the School Year

- HO advised that this piece of work is a Programme for Government commitment and is also included as part of the Collaboration Agreement with Plaid Cymru. The work is being led by the Minister for Education and Welsh Language and will look at how the school year is structured in the future. This piece of work is at an explorative stage, and we expect a statement on this soon with a consultation anticipated towards the end of 2022. We are currently also in discussion with the team leading on this policy area regarding a workshop in the coming weeks for all Regional Fora Members. We will share further information as soon as we have a confirmed date.

ZW emphasised the importance for detailed consultation with the industry and the need for thorough engagement with the tourism sector on this work. As an attraction they have concerns on the implications this could have on staffing as well as the potential loss of revenue.

NDR/ Council Tax Premium

- HO then provided an update on the changes to NDR / Council Tax premium. The technical consultation finished in April and the process concluded with an announcement from the Finance Minister a few weeks ago. The maximum level at which the LA's can set council tax premiums will also be increased. WG colleagues are currently considering exemptions to the premium. As part of the Co-operation Agreement with Plaid Cymru, WG are committed to taking immediate action to address the impact of second homes and unaffordable housing in communities across Wales. Currently, properties that are available to let for at least 140 days and actually let for at least 70 days, within a 12 month period, can be liable for non-domestic rates rather than council tax. The change will increase these thresholds to being available to let for at least 252 days and actually let for at least 182 days.

JD emphasised the negative impact this could have on Self-Catering businesses and has concerns that some could go out of business with the increase in the number of days they have to be let. For example, large properties that target families – if they are let every weekend and every school holiday it will still be difficult for them to reach the 182 days and if they don't reach that number of days and they could be forced to pay the increased Council Tax. It is very concerning for many self-catering businesses. JD also said she feels that the conclusion on the NDR policy was not the option favoured by the industry.

HP added that he feels the increase to 182 will be problematic. From his discussions with other businesses, there is a lot of supply currently and a number of businesses reporting sparse bookings. HP added that he is aware of businesses that are selling their properties before the full effects come in. The policy has been introduced in order to help with the housing crisis but HP does not believe it will.

JD added that a number of properties including her own are restricted by planning conditions which prevents long term let. She emphasised the need to make sure these businesses are exempt from the premium.

JP agreed and added that this was feedback the PCNPA have received from the Farming Community, many of which have diversified to offer self-catering accommodation. Many of these places are not suitable for long term let. The voices of these business owners need to be heard.

GR feels that having read the Regulatory Impact Assessment and the other related documents, they do not reflect the decision taken by Welsh Government on this policy. GR added that at the Visitor Economy Forum meeting with the Minister tomorrow he would be asking for this policy to be put on hold and for an Economic Impact Assessment to be undertaken. He would like to see a Task & Finish Group established to look at this. GR added that he believes there are flaws in the consultation process. GR will send the consultation summary with the minutes.

JD added that she has the responses provided by PASC (Professional Association of Self Caterers) and will also circulate these to members.

Tourism Levy

- HO advised that Welsh Government has confirmed that a consultation on proposals for a visitor levy will launch in Autumn 2022. We welcome all views in understanding what would work well for Wales and encourage everyone to contribute to the consultation later this year. The Welsh Government's Programme for Government, and the Cooperation Agreement between the Welsh Government and Plaid Cymru both contain commitments to introduce legislation to enable local authorities to raise a levy on tourism. HO emphasised that the levy represents an opportunity to raise additional revenue for local authorities enabling them to manage services and infrastructure which makes tourism a success. The team leading on the policy attended the last meeting of the forum and Visit Wales are working closely with them. Minister for Finance is leading on this policy. HO finished by welcoming suggestions on the best way to consult with the industry on the levy e.g. regional consultation events, webinars.

JD commented that she feels that it is again bonafide businesses that will be impacted by this policy. She feels that this will be a bed tax and that we will be penalising overnight stays. JD emphasised that firstly we need the registration scheme in place otherwise we are penalising bonafide businesses.

HP added agreed with JD and added that he feels this will put Wales at a disadvantage in terms of competing with other destinations. He said that destinations like Pembrokeshire already have a competitive disadvantage as the cost of getting to the destination is high. HP also asked how the levy would work with privately owned caravans and holiday cottages that let to friends and family renting directly? Will the owners pay tax? And how will the proposed tax be collected?

AC introduced himself to members. AC is former Chair of WTA and now Chair of Vaughan Gethin's Ministerial Economic Advisory Board. AC expressed that he is sympathetic to the concerns being raised by members however emphasised that they are high level decisions that are included as part of the Welsh Government's Programme for Government, and the Cooperation Agreement between the Welsh Government and Plaid Cymru. AC encouraged members to discuss the tourism levy with their LA councillors as powers to raise a tourism levy will be discretionary for each LA. He added that he has been a 100 days in his new role as Chair and although some of the policies

fall outside his brief he continues to wave the flag for tourism and lobby appropriately. AC also highlighted the damaging storylines around the branding of Wales which had recently appeared in the media. The visitor economy sector as a whole are collectively responsible to sell Wales as a nation. AC concluded by saying that the current rates system which is the responsibility of the Westminster Government needs to be reviewed.

GR congratulated AC on behalf of forum members on his recent appointment.

GR concluded the update on the levy by querying if consultants had recently been appointed to look at aspects of the work. HO was not aware of this and said she would query and come back to GR with a response.

Marketing Update

- HO began by saying that it is to be expected that media will find interest in comments from someone in Wales on the marketing of Wales as was the case in terms of the Welsh Affairs Committee follow up stories.
- The 'Croeso' Campaign has just gone live. This is part of our efforts to support the tourism and hospitality sector following the Covid-19 pandemic. As you will be aware, we don't normally advertise on TV this time of year, so this is a departure for us and is in response to the unprecedented nature of the recovery following the pandemic. We are specifically promoting paid for products and also hospitality to boost support for businesses across the country. HO advised that VW would take a flexible approach to messaging over next 12 weeks and will dial up activity as necessary, i.e. based on insights from things like the next Business Barometer and Consumer Sentiment wave, as well as taking into account industry feedback on performance. Alongside the Croeso campaign we have refreshed [Addo](#) for 2022.

EN: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VcK8swBubhk>

CY: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KUH7O4qnrFk>

- HO said that WG/VW are in early discussions on the World Cup and how we can make the most of the huge opportunity. They are currently working through a lot of the logistics. There are lessons to be learnt from FAW, particularly in their use of the Welsh Language.

JP added that he does not believe Wales has a branding issue based on the recent half term visitor numbers – Pembrokeshire has been very busy.

GR congratulated VW on the latest adverts and asked if we could update on the discussions on Cardiff hosting Eurovision Song Contest 2023. HO added that the BBC are leading on this and we are waiting to hear what type of venue they would require.

Statutory Registration

- HO advised that we are exploring a statutory registration / licensing scheme for accommodation. Again, it forms part of the Plaid Cymru Cooperation Agreement. We commissioned a piece of work to start engagement with key stakeholders, explore options and give us a steer in terms of a way forward. Work is at an early stage. Advice is currently being drafted to inform next steps.

GR emphasised the need for proper interpretation of the data on the upcoming consultations.
JP added that on the tourism levy the National Parks in Wales would not benefit financially.

Members Updates (we asked members for a written update in advance of the meeting. Those received have been circulated with the minutes)

Karleigh Davies – Neath Port Talbot Council:

- The Brilliant Basics funded works at Aberavon Seafront are now complete, the project created a new fully accessible changing place and refurbished the existing public toilet provision at the Aquasplash facility. The project also made improvements to access pathways at the site.
- We have been successful in securing funding to deliver improvements to public facilities and EV charging points in Margam Country Park through the latest round of Brilliant Basics.
- The Valleys Regional Park funded works at Afan Forest Park Visitor Centre are now complete and include a new adventure play area, increased car parking capacity, refurbishments to public facilities, interpretation, lighting, 3 camper van electric hook up points and EV charging. The lease of Afan Forest Park Visitor Centre (including the campsite) was recently tendered, we are currently working with the successful operator to open the centre in readiness for the summer season.
- We are working in partnership with Natural Resources Wales to develop a masterplan for Afan Forest Park as a visitor destination, we will be releasing an online survey in the next few weeks to gain the views of visitors on what improvements or investments they would like to see.
- We are working on levelling up proposals for the Neath Constituency which will focus on tourism and heritage infrastructure. As part of this we have developed a 'Vale of Neath Heritage Corridor' plan (further consultation to take place) which identifies strengths/weaknesses and actions to take the Vale of Neath forward as a natural and built heritage led visitor destination.
- We have commissioned a 1,200 sample visitor survey across the county this summer, the results will feed into the new Destination Management Plan which will be prepared during autumn 2022.
- Our Dramatic Heart of Wales destination marketing campaign is continuing, all agreed outputs have been met. We will be working on plans for follow on/new campaigns in the autumn, this will be informed by consultation undertaken during the compilation of the new Destination Management Plan.

Sarah Owen – Carmarthenshire County Council

- Carmarthenshire have been successful in securing Brilliant Basics funding for Burry Port. The work will include improvement works to the car parking including accessible zones, enhancing cycling provision at the site, daytime campervan and motor home parking and parking for watersports users and commercial fishermen.
- The Carmarthenshire Rural Tourism Campaign is going really well – 11million reach to date.
- Carmarthenshire have a new Cabinet Member for Tourism, Gareth John and also a new Leader Darren Price.

GR emphasised the importance of establishing a relationship with Councillors. They will ultimately have the decision whether or not to raise a tourism levy within their Local Authority.

Sioned Bannister – Carmarthenshire Tourism Association

- General feedback from CTA members is that they had a very good Easter. Forward bookings are however not as busy as they have been but are steady and not concerning.
- Members are however concerned about the changes that are potentially coming down the line and the possible impact on their business. It is a difficult time for many businesses and a number are considering selling up.

James Parkin – Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority

- The Pembrokeshire DMP is being reviewed and they are currently consulting on this.
- Pembrokeshire Tourism Awards have recently been announced.
- Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Members have changed. If any of the forum members would be interested in inviting the PCNPA members to visit your business, please contact JP.
- Pembrokeshire also been successful in applying for Brilliant Basics Funding. The main focus of their funding is improving access to the coast.
- There are currently exhibitions at both Waterfront Gallery and Oriel y Parc.
- PCNPA currently have issues on Coast Path maintenance, this is largely due to staffing issues.
- They also have high profile visitors coming to Pembrokeshire very soon but can't share any more information at this stage.

Lucy Wonnacott – Milford Haven Port Authority

- Ty Hotel opened in April and the hotel has better than expected occupancy levels.
- Very pleased in that the hotel has just been awarded 4* by the Visit Wales Quality Assurance team.
- The hotel is owned by Milford Haven Port Authority and managed by the Celtic Collection.

AOB

CJ added the £2.9m Brilliant Basics fund for 2022-23 will be shared among 18 projects across Wales that will help deliver small-scale infrastructure improvements in tourism locations across Wales. Of the 18 projects, 6 are in the SW.

GR reminded members if they have any items they would like to see included on the agenda for the next meeting to please let him/Visit Wales Regional team know.

GR concluded the meeting by emphasising the need for meaningful consultation on the upcoming policies and that he would take forward all the concerns raised at the meeting today and raise them at the Visitor Economy Forum with Minister for Economy tomorrow.

Date of next meeting: To be confirmed