

South West Wales Regional Forum

Minutes from 20th September 2019, LC Swansea, Swansea,

Present

George Reid (GR)	Carmarthenshire Tourism Association
Nic Beggs (NB), Chair	Area Manager, Freedom Leisure
Paul Stone (PS)	Oakwood Theme Park
Paula Ellis (PE)	Group General Manager, Retreats Group
Stephen Crocker (SC)	Tourism Swansea Bay
Andrew Campbell (AC)	Chair, Wales Tourism Alliance
Neil Kedward (NK)	The Grove, Narberth
Adam Smith (AS)	Village Hotel Club
Sarah Owen (SO)	Carmarthenshire County Council
Karleigh Davies (KD)	Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council
Lucy	Milford Port Authority
Melissa Knight (MK)	Welsh Water
Tim Brace (TB)	FBM Holidays and Pembrokeshire Tourism Association
Steve Hopkins (SH)	Swansea Council

Apologies Received

Jacqui Davies	Clydey Cottages
Zoe Wright	Head of Marketing, Folly Farm
Paul Renfro	WATO / POCG
James Parkin	Director of Delivery and Discovery, PCNPA
Huw Francis	National Botanic Gardens
Dennis O' Connor	Pembrokeshire Tourism Association
Kevin Davies	Gwesty'r Emlyn Hotel
Gina Gavigan	WTSWW
Rob Holt	Visit Wales

Apologies not received

Mike Cavanagh	Pembrokeshire County Council
Glenn Hewer	Bluestone Resort
Jane Lewis	Regional Learning Partnership
Tom Beynon	Three Cliffs Holiday Park
Matthew Evans	Tourism Marketing Group

1 Chair Introduction

- Nic Beggs welcomed everyone and updated on the current state of the industry from recent business reports indicating an overall 79% of business had reported a same or better summer trading period than previous year
- NB informed the forum members of his invitation to meet with the Minister
- NB discussed the feedback from the last meeting and how this had been reflected in the agenda for today's discussions i.e. exclusive discussion time for members and Visit Wales joining us part way through the morning. Individual slots for members to update on their tourism knowledge and business prospective

The Role of the Forum – Further Discussion

Forum Review

NB updated the group on member feedback that could not be with us today due to the change of date, summary of these are as follows:

- Members list should be reviewed, those in attendance agreed. NB to circulate list. It was also agreed that members should consider business leaders who they may like to see invited to the forum and advise the Chair in advance of the next meeting
- Agenda needs to come from Forum Members – this again was agreed with those in attendance. NB was asked to add National Awards to the next agenda
- Member should all update the forum each meeting – this was agreed and trialled at this meeting with good feedback overall. It was agreed to keep this format in place for future meetings
- Exclusive member time on agenda at future meetings to discuss industry concerns
- Forum Members all felt the need to raise the profile of this group. Some discussion around how we should do this. Further work required by members at next meeting
- Attendance to these sessions crucial – contribution also vital from all
- Group feel closer and more connected to Visit Wales than ever before

George Reid and Stephen Crocker introduced a discussion paper of their thoughts on the future direction of the forum. It was agreed this would be circulated to members for review and feedback at the next forum in December.

Further discussion was had as to the main aims of the forum, feedback was mostly positive about the forums current work but others felt there was a need to change. It was agreed that NB would put a few key questions together for members to answer in advance of the next forum to help establish the key focus / aims of the forum.

*Action : NB
Action : All
Members*

*Action: All
Members*

*Action: NB
to add to
agenda*

*Action: GR
to send to
NB for
circulation*

Action: NB

Minister Meeting

NB agreed that he would take the following areas of concern to the minister at a meeting on the 26th Sept:

- Concerns over the Tourism Sector Deal – progress and direction confusing
- VAT & Business Rates still putting good businesses under undue financial constraints which do not allow them to invest in their future development
- M4 – we know what the decision is, what is the alternative now being considered?
- Tourism Tax – what does it actually mean, what are the details?
- Skills / future team members – still a key focus for the industry
- Tourism Industry needs a much higher profile within Government given the revenue it creates and staff it employs
- Tourism Budget for Visit Wales is not sufficient to compete internationally or domestically

Action NB

Visit Wales Update – Kate Clark and Lucy von Weber

Kate Clark circulated the Visit Wales 'Plan on a page' and gave a background to the reports sent to Forum members before the meeting and the amount of feedback and consultation carried out by VW both externally and within WG in relation to the formulation of the plan. She thanked Forum member for their feedback into the process and stated that the level of feedback received was above the norm for Government consultations.

KC introduced the key themes of the Action Plan and the highlights of the 'Plan on a Page' as being:

Grow Tourism for the good of Wales (still Economy Based) but also in a sustainable and socially responsible manner with the key goals being; Economic Growth, Environmental Growth, Cultural Wellbeing and Health Wellbeing. She stated the offer for the new plan is set under 3 main headings:

Outstanding Natural Landscapes

Creative Culture

Epic Adventure

Priority will be given to 'Value over Volume' in terms of visitors. KC and LvW gave detail around individual areas of the plan and key markets and delivery mechanism for delivering the aims recognising that measure and targets for performance relating to the plan were still being set.

Still looking at targets: how do we capture the wider benefits such as health?

Following the detailed explanation of the plan KC and LvW opened the floor to Forum members for their views.

Members were generally positive in terms of the condensing of the VW plan onto 'one page' as a call to action in terms of the industry but many felt that the plan was not bold enough in terms of its language or commitment to sustainability or the environment.

There was a strong feeling that economic growth, although critical, did not provide the industry with a 'mantra' to get behind and a more fitting goal such as becoming a 'Green Destination' would be more suitable.

Forum members wanted more detail around the 'one voice' suggestion for the industry and direct ability to shape policy and a discussion around this ensued. AC felt strongly that the Welsh Tourism Alliance was being unfairly criticised for a lack of engagement and VW officials assured him this was not the case.

General points from members - over and above the previous comments - were as follows:

- Wording should be stronger, and targets must be hard (don't be afraid to fail). There is a lack of ambition by just stating Economic Growth, what does Wales want to become as a destination
- Tourism Tax should not be considered although some member felt that more detail on any proposals were needed before this could be discussed
- WG needs to create a stronger business environment
- Tourism is still not being represented strongly enough at a national level
- What resources will be put in place to deliver the plan?
- The plan should be something the next generation can buy into

Following a lively discussion KC and LVW told members that the plan was designed to be fluid to reflect industry and visitor trends and then set out the next stages for the completion of the document.

NB urged members to consider the document in detail and if they had further comments to pass directly to VW.

Member updates

PE: a good summer season with an increase in International Visitors to the Retreats Group

SO: excellent new STEAM figures for the county, Sarah also gave an update on Intereg Celtic Routes funded project

SH: the New Digital Arena development in Swansea is underway, as a Local Authority Swansea are going through internal scrutiny to get tourism as a policy commitment. The Skyline project for Kilvey Hill is still moving forward, and there is positive activity at Hafod Copper works with Penderyn Distillery

ZW: *(provided an update in writing as she was unavailable to attend)* visitor numbers at Folly Farm were down but revenue was up

NB: a mixed season due to the good weather

NK: a very good summer at the Grove with the new casual dining going well with more international guests than previously

TB: like for like bookings for FBM were up 10% with forward bookings looking good for next year with very little discounting. Saundersfoot development going well. Tim also provided an update on the work to create a new DMO in Pembrokeshire

KD: decline in mountain biking figures in Afan Valley, Karleigh provided an update on the proposed Afan Valley resort and the new Neath Port Talbot place brand and clusters project. A multi million pound investment in Cefn Coed Museum has been announced

L, Milford Haven: – reported a successful Summer Festival campaign including a fish festival, street food festival and beer festival. The new floating hotel rooms are now in place and creating interest

SC: TSB membership drive going well. Tourism Awards in November with 1800 nominations to date. Businesses on Gower are reporting an average year. TSB are running an event with Development Bank of Wales to discuss investment. Planning policy is still an issue in Swansea

AS, The Village Hotel: had similar occupancy to last year 94% in August, however, room rates not as strong as last year. Not a strong enough corporate market and less large events in the City

PS one 'After Dark' cancelled due to weather, numbers up generally, gate spend up, on site spend up. New attraction open. Lots of Irish visitors in July along with an increase in Dutch visitors. The park is also 20% up on school bookings.

AC: ask him to email you his update. PTA membership level 285

GR: CTA is now Director led due to costs and this is working well with each Director covering a sector, currently the association has 180 members. Glangwilli Mansion had mixed year but a definite increase in overseas visitors some staying for 2+ weeks

MK, Dŵr Cymru: Llys y Fran - a new contract is being signed for work to start end of the month with a planned opening date of summer 2020. Melissa gave information on the National context for Dŵr Cymru with work ongoing to repositioning from reservoirs to lakes which can be used for activities as internal water masses very important for visitors along

with Dark Sky products and mindfulness and wellbeing. WW has an open water policy with a controlled environment to attract swimmers with triathlon attractions in the future.	
AOB - Useful dates 15 th Oct - Superfast Broadband Training, Swansea Marriott 8 th Oct - Visit Wales Roadshow, S4C, Carmarthenshire	
Next Meeting date agreed: 5 th December, provisional location Grove Hotel, Narberth	
New Year Meeting: 13 th Feb 2020 - 9.30am start - date and location to be confirmed	