

**Mid 01-02(min)**

**Meeting of the Mid Wales Regional Committee**

**Date:** Friday 1 February 2002

**Time:** 10.30am

**Venue:** Y Tabernacl, the Museum of Modern Art Wales, Machynlleth

**Attendance:**

<b>Delyth Evans, Chair</b>	Labour	Mid and West Wales
<b>Cynog Dafis</b>	Plaid Cymru	Mid and West Wales
<b>Glyn Davies</b>	Conservative	Mid and West Wales
<b>Mick Bates</b> (Item 1 only)	Liberal Democrat	Montgomeryshire
<b>Nick Bourne</b>	Conservative	Mid and West Wales
<b>Kirsty Williams</b>	Liberal Democrat	Brecon and Radnor

**Committee Secretariat:**

<b>Julia Annand</b>	Committee Clerk
<b>Stephen Thomas</b>	Deputy Clerk

**Apologies:**

<b>Elin Jones</b>	Plaid Cymru	Ceredigion
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**Substitutions:** None

**Declarations of Interest : None**

## **Introduction**

The Chair thanked Mr & Mrs Lambert for agreeing to host the meeting in Y Tabernacl.

## **Feedback from previous meetings**

- The Chair said that following the meeting on 2 November in Aberporth where the Strategy for Older People was discussed, the Committee received a letter from Jane Hutt AM, the Health and Social Services Minister, thanking it for its contribution, and ensuring that the comments of the committee would be taken into account when formulating the strategy.
- Following the meeting on 7 December in Brecon, the minutes and the papers on the discussion on the Welsh language would be incorporated into the Culture Committee's review. Mrs Lawrence has also written to the Chair thanking the Committee for including an agenda item on car parking in rural towns.

## **Agenda Item 1: Discussion session on the tourist industry in Mid Wales**

### **Organisation**

#### **Mid Wales Partnership**

Representatives:

Edgar Jones, Chair, Mid Wales Partnership Tourism Working Group

Dee Reynolds, Regional Strategy Director, Mid Wales Regional Tourism Partnership

The following key points were made in presentation:

- An aggregated estimate for the Mid Wales region for the first six months of 2001 showed an overall drop of 10% in spend, equating to losses of 550,000 visitors and £17million in revenues.
- Tourism dependent businesses in Powys have declared losses amounting to £46m in turnover since February 2001.
- The impact of foot and mouth extended beyond the economic; the social impact in terms of stress, isolation and frustration has been overwhelmingly evident.

- Since the confirmation of Foot and Mouth in Mid Wales more than £5million has been allocated to the region by the National Assembly but this has not been enough to compensate businesses and individuals for losses.
- Amongst the barriers to recovery were the public perception of burning pyres of cattle. The lack of clarity in terms of State Aid rules applied to Foot and Mouth support funds has also been restrictive and has had an impact on the degree of support that public authorities have provided in hardship assistance.
- A recent meeting of the Mid Wales Partnership identified the need for greater integration of strategies and programmes by all public agencies as being the key to moving forward. In order to assist this integrated approach, the Mid Wales Regional Tourism Partnership and the Mid Wales Partnership are in the process of establishing a joint Task Group to serve both bodies.

The following points were noted in the subsequent question and answer session:

- The Chair agreed that the issue of State Aid was an important one and needed to be addressed at an Assembly level.
- In response to a question about how the available help is being communicated to businesses, Edgar Jones responded that every rate registered business was sent an application form for rate relief and Section 2 grant aid. He was aware that some businesses did not apply for grant aid, but was content that the communication processes were not at fault.
- Mid Wales Partnership and other agencies will continue to monitor the effects of Foot and Mouth on the tourist industry.
- In response to a question about the timing and effect of the transition of Mid Wales Tourism from a public to a private organisation during this time of crisis, Mid Wales Partnership agreed that it was difficult to implement a regional tourism strategy whilst undergoing considerable change.

## **Welsh Development Agency**

Representatives:

John Williams, Head of Regional Development

Sioned Rees, Regional Development Manager, Welsh Development Agency, Mid Wales Division

The following points were made in presentation:

- Mr Williams said that there was a lack of confidence in the tourist industry. In particular, issues surrounding state aid needed to be resolved. State aid should not be seen as a

barrier to investment in the tourist industry.

- At the Mid Wales Partnership meeting on 4 January 2002, Professor Peter Midmore of the University of Aberystwyth advised that the number of jobs at risk from the impact of foot and mouth in Mid Wales was 520. However, Powys County Council believes the figure is higher than this.
- The Foot and Mouth crisis has made the retail sector throughout Mid Wales recognise the importance of tourism and visitor spends to their businesses.
- There was concern that the events surrounding September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 in the United States would result in a significant reduction in overseas visitors, both to Wales and the UK as a whole.
- The additional resources made available to the WDA under the Rural Recovery Plan for Community Regeneration will be targeted at those rural communities which have been most affected by Foot and Mouth. Priority will be given to supporting activity which helped promote social and economic regeneration and for events that attract new visitors to Mid Wales and increase confidence in the tourism sector.

The following points were noted in the subsequent question and answer session:

- In response to a question about whether supporting new festivals would endanger those shows and festivals already in existence, the WDA said that the funds made available under the Rural Recovery Plan were specifically intended for innovative festivals and joint marketing of events. They were not intended to be used for income lost by shows and events cancelled as a result of Foot and Mouth. They were prepared however to discuss the principle with the National Assembly.
- The WDA encourage local communities to come up with new ideas for cultural tourism and have provided support to existing festivals wherever possible.
- In response to a question about what the WDA were doing to promote local food companies, the WDA's representatives replied that they were working closely with the Agri-Food Department and also looking at finding solutions at a community level.
- It was suggested that tourist packages combining local attractions with accommodation, should be put together, encouraging co-operation not competition.

## **Mid Wales Tourism**

Representatives:

Bob Morgan, Director of Marketing

Richard Griffiths

The following points were made in presentation:

- The future of Mid Wales Tourism is uncertain as from April 2002, the company will lose its core funding from the Wales Tourist Board.
- The Wales Tourist Board has now established a new organisation, the Regional Tourism Partnership, which will be contracting out much of the Wales Tourist Board's activity.
- Richard Griffiths stated that Mid Wales Tourism had an excellent record of delivery, but both the organisation and the industry as a whole had gone through a traumatic eighteen-month period.
- The Foot and Mouth crisis, with national images of burning pyres, has had a lasting effect on individuals and it has sometimes been difficult for the industry to see how to fight back.
- The high value of the pound was another factor affecting the tourist industry in Wales. Holidays abroad currently provide relatively good value for money. The industry is very cautious and uncertain and is looking for reassurance from the Assembly and the Tourist Board. Mid Wales Tourism is also looking for reassurance as to its continuity as an organisation.

The following points were noted in the subsequent question and answer session:

- Several members expressed concern about the future of Mid Wales Tourism and voiced their opinion that the organisation needed to be safeguarded. Particular concern was expressed about the possibility of a three to six month gap between the letting of new contracts. The Chair proposed that she write to the Wales Tourist Board informing it of members' concerns.

Organisation

**Celtica**

Representative:

Peter Jones

The following points were made in presentation:

- Celtica made a profit during the first two months of the Foot and Mouth crisis but the profit margins soon dropped after the message was spread that the countryside was closed. The town of Machynlleth was very quiet during this period and Celtica's visitor figures this year are down by 9%.
- Mr Jones felt that no strong national body directly represented the tourist industry's interests during the crisis. He believed that a viable Tourist Alliance should be established to represent the interests of bodies such as Celtica, independent of the interests of government agencies.

- If there was a new outbreak of the disease, Mr Jones was not convinced that anything would be done differently.
- Mr Jones indicated that he would like to see the Wales Tourist Board offer more comprehensive managerial information provided at least at a Regional Partnership level. He felt that such information was vital for sound, future investment to develop a competitive tourist industry.
- Celtica has an important role to play in the field of education. In consultation with local schools, it has developed an education package designed to aid many aspects of the curriculum. However, visiting schools must pay for their visit, unlike visits to the National Galleries and Museums of Wales which from April 2001 have been provided free of charge. Mr Jones believed that such a situation does not provide a level playing field and asked the Assembly to provide financial support to attractions such as Celtica.
- Mr Jones found it disconcerting to work in an industry where language and culture are considered to be secondary. He felt that in purely commercial terms, the Welsh language was one of the most powerful criteria available to differentiate Wales from its competitors. It should be compulsory for businesses involved in the tourist industry to offer a bilingual service.

The following points were noted in the subsequent question and answer session:

- In response to a question about the success of Celtica, Mr Jones said that Celtica was not as successful as it could be, but that there were schemes in place attempting to remedy this.
- Mr Jones felt that as a nation we don't provide enough of our traditional culture to the indigenous population, let alone to visitors. Many visitors to Celtica have asked about the availability of traditional cultural evenings. It was important to share the culture and the language and Celtica were working with Menter a Busnes on this.
- The Chair concluded the session by saying that the evidence would be passed to the Economic Development Minister and that she would write to Wales Tourist Board expressing concern about the points raised by Mid Wales Tourism.

## **Agenda Item 2: Discussion on the arts in Mid Wales**

Organisation:

### **The Arts Council of Wales**

Representatives:

Ellen ap Gwyn

Bryn Jones

The following points were made in presentation:

- There has been a 23% increase in funding of the arts in Mid Wales this year. 15% of that increase has gone to bodies already in receipt of grant-aid funding.
- Lottery funding in Mid and West Wales is higher than in other regions. The total spend to date stands at £24, 247, 690 with a total of 1077 awards/grants.
- Some of the capital grants awarded in the region include:
  - Aberystwyth Arts Centre, which has received increased funding for staffing.
  - Theatr Mwldan has received £1.6 million for a major development programme.
  - Theatr Brycheiniog and Oriel 31 in Newtown have received grants for refurbishment.
- Grants to key events such as the Brecon Jazz Festival and Sesiwn Fawr in Dolgellau have also been increased.
- As part of the development of the five year arts development strategy, Ellen ap Gwyn stated that the following areas were under consideration:
  - A network of arts development officers funded by the Arts Council and working across the region.
  - More support for the traditional artforms.
  - Increasing opportunities for young people to experience the arts when they are not in school.
  - Greater audience development.
  - More support for small and medium sized businesses such as craft businesses.
  - Arts forums on a county level.
- Ellen ap Gwyn concluded by stating that the arts in Mid Wales were entering a new era of increased funding and strengthening of decision-making at a regional level.

The following points were made in the subsequent question and answer session:

- The appointment of community development officers was a priority for the Arts Council of Wales and that process would begin shortly.
- Bryn Jones agreed that the transfer of the Wales Film Festival from Aberystwyth to Cardiff was a huge loss to the region, but that there was still considerable activity in the area on the film front.
- In response to a question about whether ACW was working closely with the WDA on a cultural tourism strategy, Ellen an Gwyn replied that partnerships were developing on a national level through Cymru'n Creu; she hoped that these would continue on a regional basis.

Organisation:

## **Y Tabernacl**

Representative:

Ruth Lambert

The following points were made in presentation:

- The first priority of cultural institutions in Wales must be the language and culture of Wales, yet Machynlleth Tabernacle Trust are given no public funds to educate the public in Welsh language and culture. The Trust urgently requires funds for headsets for translation.
- The indigenous population of Wales is host to a wealth of talent in the fields of music and poetry, but such artists need more funding to develop. Mrs Lambert requested that the Assembly channel funds directly to arts practitioners.
- Cultural Tourism is very important in offering alternatives to other forms of recreation. Mrs Lambert felt that the Wales Tourist Board had not done enough to promote cultural tourism in Wales.
- Galleries of Wales and Festivals of Wales should receive official funding. Concern was expressed that some funded galleries were not prepared to co-operate with non-funded galleries in case they lost their privileged status.
- There should be a fairer method of funding arts venues. Since its existence, Y Tabernacl has relied on donations from individuals and charitable trusts. Funding for the Gwyl Machynlleth Festival is also precarious and ACW contribute very little to this event.
- It should be a condition of the grant award that the Welsh National Opera tour more widely throughout Wales.
- Mrs Lambert concluded by asking the Assembly to recognise the important contribution made by the Museum of Modern Art, Wales and the Gwyl Machynlleth Festival.

The following points were noted in the subsequent question and answer session:

- Several members commented on the success of the Museum of Modern Art and Y Tabernacl and the wonderful facilities they provide.
- Galleries needed to find more imaginative ways of working together; there was a danger of exhibitions being shown by too many galleries in Wales. This activity needed to be brought under the umbrella of Galleries of Wales.
- Marketing was the main way forward for cultural tourism in Wales. The Museum of Modern Art is home to images of Wales that could travel throughout the world.



- The Chair thanked contributors for an interesting session.

### **Agenda Item 3: Open Microphone session**

The following points were noted:

- Sue Gittins of the Ramblers Association pointed to the enormous contribution that walking and rambling make to the tourist industry in Mid Wales. Walking is sustainable, fits in well with land management requirements and has huge potential for marketing. She made a plea for greater resources to be put into the Public Rights of Way network.
- Arfon Hughes of Menter Iaith Maldwyn said that Machynlleth with facilities such as Celtica, the Owen Glyndwr Centre and the Centre for Alternative Technology had the potential to be a cultural and linguistic centre on a world-wide level. Powys needed to be rebranded as "Powis". In terms of the arts, more attention needed to be paid to organisations and events such as Cerdd Dant and Noson Lawen. There was also a need to build new audiences for indigenous culture.
- Harry Evans, Chair of the Owen Glyndwr Centre said that 2004 will mark the 600<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of the Welsh Parliament in Machynlleth. He stated that there were plans afoot to refurbish the old Parliament House and the historical centre currently based there. This would be an expensive process, but was an integral part of Wales's heritage and as such he appealed to the Assembly, the Wales Tourist Board and the Arts Council of Wales for financial support. He applauded Y Tabernacl as being one of the best developments to have occurred in Machynlleth in recent years.
- Geraldine Hopkins of Montgomeryshire Community Drama Association appealed for more funding to be put into amateur and voluntary art and hoped that the Assembly would encourage ACW in this direction.

### **Agenda Item 4: Minutes of the meeting held on 7<sup>th</sup> December**

These were agreed without amendment.

**Next meeting:** the next meeting will be held in Knighton on 8<sup>th</sup> March.

**Committee Secretariat February 2002**

