

# Cross Party Group on Tourism

## Meeting minutes 19.05.20

**Date:** 19.05.20

**Time:** 1630

**Location:** This was a virtual meeting held on Zoom

**Chairs:** Suzy Davies MS and Andrew Campbell (Director of Pembrokeshire Tourism)

**Secretary:** Mia Rees (Senior Advisor to Suzy Davies MS)

Support from Adrian Greason-Walker (Policy Advocate at the Welsh Tourism Alliance)

### Attendees:

BH & HPA	Helen Charlesworth Joan Clark Annie Ridgeway Ros Pritchard OBE
THE CARAVAN & MOTORHOME CLUB	Emma McQuillan Fiona Bowers
HISTORIC HOUSES	Jane Harvey
MID WALES TOURISM	Val Hawkins Rowland Rees-Evans
NORTH WALES TOURISM	Jim Jones
PLANED	Iwan Thomas
RETREATS HOTEL GROUP	Paula Ellis
CARDIFF METRO UNI	Sheena Carlisle Louise Dixey Heini Jones
WASCO	Clare Hallett
MILFORD WATERFRONT	Lucy Wonnacott Clare Stowell
WAVA	Ashford Price
NORTH WALES HOLIDAY COTTAGES	Barbara Griffiths
PEMBROKESHIRE TOURISM	Jane Rees-Baynes
DEPT MINISTER FOR CULTURE, SPORT AND TOURISM	Dafydd-Elis-Thomas MS
VISIT WALES	Rob Holt
DIRECTOR FOR CULTURE, TOURISM AND SPORT – VISIT WALES	Jason Thomas
Carmarthenshire Tourism	George Reid
UK Hospitality	David Chapman
Brecon Beacons TA	Laura Thomas
Mid and West Wales	Neil Hamilton MS
Llyr Gruffydd MS Office	Mabon Ap Gwynfor
South Wales Central	David Melding MS
Rhun Ap Iorwerth MS Office	Heledd Roberts

## **Apologies:**

- Llyr Gruffydd MS
- Mark Isherwood MS
- Simon McGrath, The Camping & Caravanning Club

## **Agenda**

**Introduction: Suzy Davies MS and Andrew Campbell, Wales Tourism Alliance (WTA)**

**Deputy Minister for Culture, Sport and Tourism, Dafydd Elis-Thomas MS and Visit Wales**

- **Detail on support provided to date and its effectiveness in closing the gaps**

**Discussion & Questions**

- **Opportunity for those to raise issues and gaps which have not been covered**
- **Looking ahead: Re-starting the Tourism Industry**

**Summary and closing: Suzy Davies MS and Adrian Greason-Walker, WTA**

## **Meeting Minutes**

**Introduction from Suzy Davies MS (SD)**

- SD welcomed all those in attendance to the first virtual meeting of the CPG on Tourism
- SD explained how the meeting would run and requested that everyone's microphone was muted unless they were speaking. Questions were encouraged in the chat box.

**Welcome from Andrew Campbell (AC)**

- Welcomed everyone
- Thanked the Welsh Government (WG) for their engagement and support to date
- Noted that these are difficult times for the industry
- The sector will continue to work collaboratively with the WG
  - There is currently weekly Friday meetings with representatives from across the sector and WG
  - The Industry is keen to know when the WG proposes to allow the industry to restart.

**Deputy Minister for Culture, Sport and Tourism, Dafydd-Elis-Thomas MS (DET)**

- Highlighted the challenge and moral issues we face at the current time
- DET said they would resist giving dates until scientific evidence allowed the WG to do so.
- WG needs to look at access to Wales, from within Wales and beyond
- There is a lot of difficult emotions tied up with the issues

- Stated that tourism is the main engine of renewal for the Welsh economy
- Need to look at the current situation through a public health lens first
- Service tourism must be protected
- Wales must be seen as a safe place to visit

### **Rob Holt (RH), Visit Wales**

- Thanked the WTA and those from the tourism industry for engaging in discussions with the WG throughout the crises.
- Tourism was the first industry hit - including the events and hospitality sector
  - It will be the last to be fully open and running
- Appreciated the UK Government's furlough scheme and the WG's Economic Resilience Fund (ERF)
  - A "good number" of tourism businesses have applied to the EFR
- However, WG is "very aware" of the "gaps"
- There will be further round of ERF funding
  - Ken Skates MS (Minister for Economy, Transport and North Wales) will announce more information in the next "couple of days"
- Every decision is viewed through the lens of safety first
- Reflection on the First Minister's announcement
  - Tourism is mostly in the 'Green Zone'
  - Some parts are in the 'Amber Zone'
  - WG is working on the guidance for when the sector will be able to start opening whilst recognising that they do not have all the answers
- Work is moving onto planning for the recovery

### **Questions and Discussion**

Questions from SD:

- What role are smaller tourism businesses having in feeding into the WG's work?
- Support for businesses who are not VAT registered.

Question from Jim Jones:

- Concerned that businesses were not consulted over the business rates fund.
- Gaps include: Self-catering accommodation, those who do not pay business rates and Zoos (e.g. Colwyn bay Zoo and Anglesey Zoo)

#### Questions from the chat box:

Jim Jones: We are concerned that the private sector were not involved in drawing up the eligibility criteria, neither meets the UK Gov. or the Welsh Government goals or indeed the sector's needs. Virtually every other Council in England & Wales just got on and paid it. How much additional cost and time has it taken to stop money being paid in to a desperately weakened tourism sector?

Barbara Griffiths: Agreed with Jim Jones - many small self-catering businesses who are approved for SBRR are still being turned down.

Joan Clark: All funding very gratefully received - thank you - it has provided a lifeline. Short of a miracle, tourism will effectively have three winters- any plans to address please? Potentially no meaningful income for caravan parks until Easter 2021.

Laura Thomas: Reports of both self-catering properties who pay themselves through the furnished lettings and B&B who are not paying business rates who have been hit and not received grant support.

Adrian Greason-Walker: Deputy Minister mentioned emotions, we need to be very wary of the language we use particularly in relation to locals and our audience over the border, clear tensions are arising that need to be managed. That use of 'language' applies to both Welsh Government and the industry. Do we need to gradually move from stay home to a charm offensive? Clear messaging will be needed as we move forward.

George Reid: The VAT inclusion criteria has eliminated so many micro businesses. Can this be removed?

Barbara: the insistence on 2 years of accounts is preventing newer businesses from being given the SBRR grant, even if they have been running for over a year and qualify under VOA requirements.

Andrew Campbell: Many businesses are voicing strong concerns about the lack of dates within the Recovery Plan. Can we expect to see dates emerging in the near future?

### **Questions answered by RH and Jason Thomas (JT)**

- Recognised that there was gaps in the financial help and that there will continue to be gaps
  - All four tourism Ministers are meeting bi-weekly and feeding their local concerns into the UK level
- Will take feedback to high level discussions so please tell them
  - The more specifics the better
- It is challenging to consult with the whole sector due to pressure on officials
  - The focus from the beginning was to have something in place
  - Focus to consult on bigger industry bodies was recognised
- If those attending have examples of amendments that can be added to the current scheme then let them know
- There was a decision made to make the schemes business wide rather than sector specific
  - But there is a desire to refine the support available
- VAT inclusion criteria: Choices and difficult decisions were made, but WG have recognised the VAT issue and it is being looked at.
- Concerns over a "Third Winter": Officials are every aware of this and are looking to consider support when needed.
- RH confirmed that all of the issues that were raised in the discussion, officials were aware of and have been raised.
- Local authorities are working at getting money out to businesses
  - SD raised the issue that some LAs spent the majority of their discretionary fund on the damage caused by the flooding earlier in the year.
- The UK Government's furlough extension announcement last week was welcome
- Officials understand that the UK Government are looking to extend their self-employment scheme
- Before businesses can re-open – staff and consumer confidence is key
- The WG is working on a cross UK Government scheme to help rebuild confidence
  - Discussions are happening this week to nail down the details

Questions and points from Joan Clark from the BH&HPA

- Appreciate the Government support
- Concerned about the 'Three winters' effect
- The caravan and holiday parks industry is writing guidance on re-opening and the measures need to ensure staff and customer safety, but its "quite and monster" of a task
  - All guidance needs to be sensible and pragmatic
- There is need for positive messaging around 'second homes' (including caravans)
- Rowland Rees-Evans (also BH&HPA) added that there is a need for politicians to get behind the industry and vice versa – currently politicians are 'siding' with the locals
- Ros Pritchard (also BH&HPA) added that there are businesses in the community that are supported by tourism even if they are not specifically tourist businesses – DET agreed

### **Questions and discussion in the chat regarding local responses and second home confusion**

Clare Hallett: The shocking talk on some of the local Facebook pages regarding the resistance to 'outsiders' potentially visiting is extremely worrying, because we are afraid this might become the accepted opinion of visitors.

Barbara: the trouble is most of the population do not distinguish between second homes and holiday lets. Needs to be clear differentiation.

Louise Dixey: Has research been undertaken in Wales generally or at the LA level on the difference between the economic impacts of 2nd home ownership versus holiday lets as well as the associated social impacts, both positive and negative to inform policy and messaging to communities?

Laura Thomas: Rob - great to hear, can we feed those local good news stories from our areas into you? We have noticed negative talk on the local social accounts - so we are putting a why tourism is good for your community/ tourism facts together too, to start drip feeding on our social accounts over the coming months

Lucy von Weber: Laura, please do - we'll be raising it at Forums and also going out via industry comms, but feedback from associations will be invaluable to get a robust list together so that we can highlight them and use them in messaging context as discussed - thank you

"We don't want to fight the communities!"

### **Answer from DET on second homes and local responses**

- Very keen to give assurance on this
- We need to provide the highest quality service and guidance
- Personally feels very strongly on the issues surrounding this area – particularly for those businesses in the 'Amber Zone'
- There is a very clear difference between second homes which are private and those that are part of the industry
- The focus of this crisis remains on of public health and he will not give dates for when sectors will open in advance and will not set targets
  - There will be announcements but not dates

JT added:

- The initial message was clear: "Visit Wales, later"

- When the messaging changes officials will be mindful of the shock to the industry and their relationships with local people
- “Visit Wales, later” will continue to be the message for now
- JT also recognised the ‘ripple effect’ of the tourist economy
- JT is having a call with the wider sector – For example the Chief Veterinary Officer has raised with him the issue of Zoos
- The impact on the wider retail sector and communities are linked

**George Reid (GR) discussed the survey undertaken with Ashford** with the first survey taken before the financial support was announced and the second after.

- There was more positivity in the second survey, but there was still concerns that businesses wouldn’t last until the end of the summer with no trade over their key period.
- GR called for there to be a register of tourism businesses – statutory registration.
- GR also raised the idea of some businesses being able to open up ‘bits’ of their businesses but not all of it
  - For example parts of the caravan sector could open sooner due to the ease of social distancing
- GR praised Carmarthenshire for getting grants out quickly

RH responded:

- Research is key
- WG has boosted their research

JT responded:

- There are wider concerns about the effects of opening caravan parks
- “Non shared accommodation” is in the ‘Amber Zone’

### **Further comments from those in attendance**

Paula Ellis

- Discussed self-catering, opening before other sectors. But in hotels catering is a challenge
- Communication is important.
  - There is a lack of communication with the small SMEs
- Guidance needs to be sent out to those who are communicating incorrect information

Ashford Price

- Raised concerns about rushing a return to normal business due to the effect it could have on the reputation of the sector
- The sector has a moral duty to its staff and wider society

Neil Hamilton MS

- Raised the issue that the route we have chosen means that we will have to wait for a vaccine
- Reflected on the effect of the current financial support will have on the deficit
- Suggested that we look at Sweden as an example of a country with other policies
- “Overwhelmingly the population isn’t effected”

### **Other comments and questions in the chat – Opening up and guidance**

Barbara: because a lot of businesses already have bookings, without dates or an indication as to when accommodation will open up, we are struggling to know what and when to cancel bookings as we go forward. People need more notice than just about a week.

Clare Hallett: Clear guidance as soon as possible for any changes we in self-catering will need to put in place, is absolutely to be wished for. There are so many rumours which are just adding to the anxiety level of many operators

Barbara: agreed Clare

Paula: We need to provide tools to industry businesses to ensure we offer collaborative messages about how and when we can open safely to protect public health and the long term economy.

Laura Thomas: Totally agree Paula.

Clare Hallett: Absolutely agree too, Paula.

Barbara: Even an indication as to when we definitely will not be able open would help.

### **Closing comments from Adrian Walker (WTA)**

- Doves or Hawks? It is all a judgement call
- There is pressure in the industry
  - Particularly in those parts of the sector who think their businesses are 'less risky'
- We have to sell the important role of tourism to local communities, social as well as economic values.
- Also need to evaluate what have we learnt from this experience, so that we can assess and make sure mistakes are repeated and that we don't simply return to where we were before. Raised the issue of genuine economic stability
- Thanked WG for their engagement
  - Not everything has been plain sailing and the WTA had not always seen eye to eye, but through open debate we had usually come up with a joint solution and this needs to continue.
- Thanked Suzy Davies MS for chairing the meeting.

SD closed the meeting and thanks all those who attended.

End of meeting