

# Cross Party Group for Shooting and Conservation

Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2015  
Ty Hywel, Cardiff Bay  
6.30pm

## **Attending**

Angela Burns AM– Chair  
Ken Skates AM – Deputy minister for Culture, Sport and Tourism.  
William Powell AM  
Russell George AM  
Mark Isherwood AM  
Andrew RT Davies AM

Rob Holt – Visit Wales  
David Chapman – British Hospitality Association  
Gary Ashton - BASC Director for Wales  
Derek Williams – BASC Country Officer for Wales

Stuart Burns – Office of Angela Burns  
Rachel Evans– Countryside Alliance  
Ann Evans – Bettws Hall

## **Guest Speakers**

Gwyn Evans – Bettws Hall  
Anthony Rosser – Lake Vyrnwy Hotel  
Andrew Grainger - Scottish Country Sports Tourism Group

## **Secretary**

Esther Wakeling BASC

## **Apologies**

Lyndsey Whittle AM

## **Welcome**

Angela welcomed everyone to the meeting.

## **Annual General Meeting**

The Annual report and financial statement were presented to the group and approved.

Election of officers

Chair – Angela Burns was nominated by Rachel Evans and seconded by Gary Ashton. Angela Burns accepted the position

Secretariat – Esther Wakeling (BASC) was nominated by Stuart Burns and seconded by Rachel Evans. Esther Wakeling accepted the position.

## **Matters arising from last minutes**

None

## **The focus of the meeting was ‘Shooting – How to boost tourism income in rural Wales’**

### **Guest Speakers**

#### **Gwyn Evans – Bettws Hall**

Gwyn told the group about his agricultural upbringing and the route he took to get in to the shooting business. He inherited a farm, but due to financial pressures and the prospect of foreclosure by his bank, he diversified from livestock farming into game rearing in order to continue in business.

He began by rearing birds on his own farm and then rented a farm next door to shoot over and he explained that the business grew over time into the business it is now.

Today Bettws Hall employs 140 FTE with a turnover of £11.5m. They hatch game birds for their own shoots and supply other shoots as well which are contract farmed by neighbouring farms until they are 7 weeks old. Bettws Hall support 42 farms in this way by supplying all the equipment they need.

Bettws Hall now own 8 sporting estates of which 6 are in Wales.

In 2000 the business was struggling to meet their guests’ expectations for high quality accommodation locally so he converted some of their farm outbuildings into 5\* accommodation and now all aspects of the business are under one umbrella.

In 2003 they also bought the Brigands Inn and the associated shooting rights.

Bettws Hall business is aimed at the most wealthy 0.5%. Less than 2% of the people shooting at Bettws Hall are from Wales. Approximately 30% are overseas visitors and the remainder are predominantly from the South East of England. The average spend of people shooting at Bettws Hall is £2,500 per person per day.

Mr Evans described a normal shooting party as needing 15 beaters, 8 loaders, 10 pickers up, 2 shoot staff, 6 full time staff in the Brigand Inn, a chef and 2 waiting staff. He further explained that on most days during the season there was an average of 6 teams per day and that all the people employed were local and he did not have any overseas staff.

Mr Evans estimated that 600,000 people in the UK shoot and that 2/3 of the land in the UK has some connection to shooting and conservation, which is of benefit to all wildlife including songbirds. He wanted the group to know that the industry as a whole could be valued higher than the UK sheep industry.

Derek Williams asked Mr Evans to explain his model for outsourcing his breeding programme.

Mr Evans explained that as the number of birds reared at Bettws Hall increased it became more difficult to manage disease and as a consequence mortality rates of the poults. They now offer local farmers a price to rear each bird and each farm houses a certain number of chicks. Consequently the survival rate is now 96.5%. Bettws Hall supply all the equipment and birds and the contract farmers get an additional bonus if they achieve a survival rate of 90% or above.

Mr Evans went on to tell the group about his marketing budget which was 2% of turnover and approximately £100,000 was spent on direct marketing each year.

Mr Evans wanted the group to pay particular attention to the fact that most of his clients were from abroad and so any money they bought with them and spent in the economy was 'new money' which had not previously been circulation in the UK economy.

### **Anthony Rosser – Lake Vyrnwy Hotel**

The Lake Vyrnwy estate is one of the oldest shooting estates in Wales, with a history of grouse shooting, which ceased several decades ago. The estate has 24,000 acres of shooting and 11,000 acres of fishing. The 4 star Hotel, which has received a Visit Wales gold award for tourism and an AA Rosette for its restaurant, employs 83 people.

Half of all the supplies bought by the Hotel are locally sourced, with an estimated benefit of £240,000 to local businesses.

Mr Rosser stated that as the only significant employer in the area he felt a huge personal responsibility to the community stating that "We find ourselves with the huge responsibility of being the primary economic driver for a significant chunk of rural Wales; without the hotel there would be little else."

This year, the Estate and Hotel sporting revenue will generate a significant income between mid-October and late January and Mr Rosser impressed upon the Group that shooting was critically important in sustaining his business out of season. Without the additional sporting income that shooting brings to the hotel out of season they would not be able to keep all the staff in employment all year round. He

described shooting as one of the cornerstones of his business, and fundamental to its survival.

However, the benefits of being open all year round extended beyond retaining staff in full time employment, meaning those employees had money to spend in the local economy year round as well, as it also placed the Hotel in a strong position in relation to marketing for the traditional tourist season.

## **Andrew Grainger - Scottish Country Sports Tourism Group**

Mr Grainger told the group that he was the Project Coordinator and began by outlining the work of the group, which was established in 2004 initially attracting government funding. The current board consists of

- Visit Scotland
- Association of Deer Management groups
- British Association for Shooting and Conservation
- Scottish Enterprise
- Scottish Gamekeepers Association
- Scottish Land and Estates
- Scottish Natural Heritage
- River and Fisheries Trust of Scotland.

The Scottish Country Sports Tourism Group (SCSTG) is one of the most successful and longest running public / private partnerships in Scotland.

In Scotland 40% of the country is upland, home to deer and large numbers of game birds. There are many salmon rivers and freshwater lochs. Overwintering, migratory waterfowl and waders number in the millions. Although many of the quarry species have both 'open' and 'closed' seasons to actively manage the natural resource and the environment it is possible to participate in country sports 365 days of the year.

Country sports contribute more to the Scottish economy than do wildlife watching, cycling, adventure activities, water sports, snow sports or horse riding - country sports account for around 10% of spend on nature based tourism in Scotland.

Mr Grainger presented some high level facts about country sports tourism;

- It is worth £155m to Scotland's economy annually
- 270,000 trips and 910,000 visitor nights are generated by country sports tourism annually
- 60% of Scottish country sports tourists live in England
- Country sports visitors stay in Scotland 6 nights longer than the average tourist.
- Much of this tourism business occurs in the late autumn and winter when hotels and B&B's, particularly in rural areas, would be quiet if not empty.

From research the Scottish Experience was seen by many visitors as being one of the attractions of taking part in country sports in Scotland. They valued Scottish culture and heritage and the opportunity for visiting historic sites and attractions.

Mr Grainger explained that the purpose of the group is to promote participation in and Development of Country Sports Tourism in Scotland.

Country Sports Tourism in Scotland is promoted through social media with a following of over 5.5m in 'Shoot in Scotland', an annual magazine publication. They also circulate a quarterly e-newsletter to 3,500 subscribers, produce an annual newsletter and attend game fairs, industry meetings and seminars.

This is supported by a dedicated website [www.countrysportscotland.com](http://www.countrysportscotland.com) which receives 8,500 unique visits each month, connects potential customers to shoot providers, sporting agents, sport friendly accommodation, fishing guides and clothing and equipment suppliers.

To help develop country sports tourism in Scotland the group hold B2B meetings and run Excellence in Country Sports Customer Care Courses.

The Scottish Tourism group operate on around £50k per annum with staff of just over one FTE. 50 % of this funding comes from private contributions and the other half from website subscriptions.

## **Questions**

**William Powell – How well served are you in Scotland by the education sector?**

*Andrew Grainger* – We are well serviced by training, we offer training in customer service but other agencies are also involved – we have found that good customer service is the key. Ghillie and Keeper courses are available at a range of colleges in Scotland.

*Gwyn Evans* – We take in 6 staff direct from higher education per year – with 4 from Harper Adams and 2 from Cirencester.

*Anthony Rosser* – We have one apprentice at the hotel, who spends half their time on shooting and the other half on duties within the hotel.

**Ken Skates – What else do the visitors do while in Scotland?**

*Andrew Grainger* – Our research has shown that they take part in predominantly Golf and visiting heritage sites.

**Ken Skates – What about horse racing does that seem important to your visitors?**

*Andrew Grainger* – not in our experience

**Andrew RT Davies – There is a need to upskill our workforce – what have you done to help youngsters start?**

*Andrew Grainger* – we don't take responsibility for that but education about customer care needs have been overlooked and we deliver training to change that.

**Andrew RT Davies – Has the RDP been used to help financially?**

*Andrew Grainger* – Skills development Scotland fund 50% of the course delivery costs.

*Gwyn Evans* – We looked at the options available to us but we have decided to look at developing a scholarship at Cirencester college. In terms of staff development we mostly promote inward promotion and have found that by moving people up the employment ladder they feel some ownership and responsibility for the company. We also have a young workforce.

When promoting Bettws Hall we used a worldwide approach to get our brochure out, and there is no rivalry between shoots throughout the world – we all help each other out. It is Gwyn belief that we need to focus on the international market.

**Ken Skates – Do you work with agencies in the USA for example?**

*Gwyn Evans* – No, but we do work in partnership with Holland and Holland and have just sold three pairs of guns worth £600,000. International money spent in Wales is new money for the economy.

In the summer we use our lodges as holiday lets and they are staffed in the winter by the Hatchery staff.

**Russell George – I would be interested to know about the financial benefit to the wider economy.**

*Gwyn Evans* – 3000 people come into the area and not all of those stay with us at Bettws Hall they are staying and spending elsewhere in the locality. Without shooting the Brigands Inn would have to be boarded up.

**Angela Burns – What is BASC asking for?**

*Gary Ashton* – we are looking at three different stories. Scotland has a more cohesive approach and we could also give you examples of smaller providers. There is an opportunity here to work more closely with Visit Wales, especially given that next year is the 'Year of Adventure'. We would like to link hotel and restaurants into shoots and carry out more overseas marketing while linking other tourism activities together with shooting.

*Gwyn Evans* – We need to move people from population centres into Wales so ultimately it has to be about the marketing – we may not have broadband but we have amazing countryside! Shooting needs to be fully integrated into all aspects of tourism in Wales.

*David Chapman* – The British Hospitality Association are doing some research - Hotels are not an isolated business – they are of course linked into the supply chain.

AOB – there was no other business

Date of next meeting - TBC.

Angela closed the meeting and thanked everyone for coming and wished them a Merry Christmas.