

# Monmouthshire Destination Partnership

## Microsoft Teams Meeting 10am Wednesday 26th October 2022

### Minutes

#### 1. Attendance

Kim Water (KW) CEO Abergavenny Food Festival (Chair)  
Nicola Edwards (NE) Destination Manager, MonLife, MCC  
Matthew Lewis (ML), Environment & Culture Manager, MonLife, MCC  
Kevin Ford (KF) Destination Marketing Officer, MonLife, MCC  
Ian Saunders (IS) Chief Operating Officer, MonLife, MCC  
Sue Kingdom (SK), Secretary, Chepstow Chamber of Commerce  
Vivien Richards (VR), Tintern Business Forum  
Fiona Wilton (FW), Chair of South East Wales Tourism Forum, Monmouthshire Cottages  
Sara Burch (SB), Cabinet Member for Inclusive and Active Communities  
Paul Griffiths, Deputy Leader, Cabinet Member for Sustainable Economy  
Sandra Rosser (SR), Clerk, Abergavenny Town Council  
Rebecca Rees (RR), SE Wales Regional Engagement Manager, Visit Wales  
Meirion Howells (MH), Town Councillor, Usk Town Council  
Rachael Geddes (RG), Humble by Nature & Dean Wye Tourism Association  
Hannah Jones (HJ), Head of Economy, Employment & Skills, MCC

#### 2. Apologies for absence

Tracey Evans, Abergavenny & District Tourism Association  
James Woodcock, Business Insights Manager  
Jo Nugent, Abergavenny & District Tourism Association (ADTA) & Caradog Hotels Ltd  
Catherine Wood, Town Clerk, Monmouth Town Council

#### 3. Minutes of Meeting 10/03/2022

- Raglan Castle VR information circulated
- Status of Abergavenny High Street & closures circulated
- Status of Monmouth Festival checked (cancelled for 2022)
- Accepted as true record of meeting by all

#### 3. Visit Wales update

- RR recently appointed as Regional Engagement Manager for South East, replacing Ed Ryan. Role sits within the Tourism Development Team (regional fora, funding, marketing team, events etc).
- RR provided a Brilliant Basics update.
  - NE asked when information about next round of Brilliant Basics funding will be available
    - RR thinks it'll be next year. Conversations have started.
  - Conversation developed around need for capital funding to be more strategic and for project timescales to be more than one year.

- PG agreed to feedback to WG the need for longer periods to deliver capital projects but emphasised that LAs are at the bottom of the decision-making chain
- Resource Efficiency Campaign. Launching November and running for 6 months to help tourism businesses better manage resource consumption / costs.
  - Free to access, no cap on numbers.
  - Pilot this year. Mainly tips and toolkits.
  - KW asked if there are any benchmarking / targets for this
    - None specifically at the moment, as it is just a pilot.
    - Case studies will be involved. RR to share when she has more detail.
- RR gave a rundown on the Visit Wales channels & tools
  - Visit Wales Asset Library (<https://assets.wales.com/>)
  - Grading (currently free)
  - Consumer newsletter and social channels
  - Industry newsletter and webinars
- Contact [productnews@gov.wales](mailto:productnews@gov.wales) if you have any new products you want VW to promote
- Can find all the information on the above on the Business Wales website.
- FW asked about the enhanced population grant and if MCC receives any money from this.
  - RR will look into it internally
  - SB says it is an element of local government support. Will also look into it.
  - FW would like it looked into for Tintern re summer months.
    - VR endorses this

#### **4. Welsh Government consultations - Visitor Levy, Statutory Licensing, Reform of the School Year – challenges and opportunities**

- FW has seen a lot of cynicism from businesses about the consultation for the visitor levy (as business rate threshold changes went ahead despite significant objections during consultation)
  - Accommodation businesses very worried about proposals for the visitor levy and feel it's unfair that it will most likely only apply to staying visitors when day visitors are the ones causing most of the problems (while not contributing much in the way of benefits to the destination).
  - Most of Wales does not suffer from the same levels of over-tourism as Snowdonia.
  - WG is asking accommodation businesses to help design and implement a tax they do not want.
  - Could be in favour of a visitor levy, but not the one being proposed. Levies are usually only applicable to non-domestic visitors, or at specific localities where there are problems of overtourism e.g. Amsterdam rather than the whole of The Netherlands.
  - Lots of uncertainty about what the money will be used for
  - Some have suggested congestion charge style cameras around Snowdon would be more appropriate.
  - If people have to pay more to stay overnight in Wales, there is concern that they will choose to stay in England and day trip into Wales instead (especially relevant to places on the border like Tintern).
  - Will circulate feedback from industry engagement sessions when available
  - In other places where a visitor levy has been introduced, taxes paid by businesses are lower and revenue generated is hypothecated for destination improvements

- Each Welsh local authority has discretion on whether to take advantage of delegated powers to introduce visitor levy
  - Bridgend CBC raised concerns at the consultation event about the risk of subsidy control challenges
- KW – Could be positives if money is used to develop / improve the destination for visitors
- PG – Thanked Fiona for information shared and advises as many interested groups to respond to the consultation as possible.
  - Worried that assumptions about the outcome of the consultation will affect investment decisions now
  - Long term project. Will be 3 years of research followed by a legislative process which takes 2 years after that. So even if Monmouthshire does introduce a visitor levy, it won't be implemented for more than 5 years.
  - Considers local discretion / flexibility very important in design of levy
  - Not overly concerned about potential State Aid risks.
- NE – WG want to design the levy to be as simple as possible to keep administration costs down and to make it as easy as possible for visitors to understand
- SB – Agree with PG that this is a long-term process.
  - Doesn't want to do anything that'll reduce visitor numbers to Monmouthshire or put people off.
- FW – concerned that it's impossible to implement a visitor levy fairly without statutory registration being introduced first. Trade are supportive (in principle) of statutory registration to level the playing field for businesses and want to make sure it's introduced before any levy, not at the same time, or after it.
- SB – Second home ownership is difficult to quantify and various departments are working on establishing what is a second home, AirBnB, primary residence etc.
- SR – Asked if community and youth involved in consultation?
  - FW has seen representatives from YHA and Scouts at consultation events.

## **5. Partner updates – business performance, impact of changes to business rate thresholds, staffing etc**

VR – Some food & drink businesses in Tintern planning to reduce hours or to close over winter months because of energy costs (including Christmas period). VR creating a spreadsheet of specific responses from businesses about winter opening. One or two employers are laying off staff as well. Energy and increased operating costs are the main reasons for this, plus fuel prices (more difficult to get staff in Tintern as price of travelling to work increases).

- NE - F&D makes up around 20% of tourism revenue so very concerning.

RG – Sales at Humble by Nature very slow at the moment, which is very different from last year. Due to rising costs there will be fewer courses and events next year, and increased numbers of people on courses.

- Less courses, less tutors, less days.
- Know from Food and Drink networks that several businesses have closed down because of increased operating costs. Others have had to go from full time staff to zero hours contracts. Less demand in market because of cost of living crisis and operating costs increasing.
- 5 emails this week promoting 20% off discounts, which is indicative of the situation.

- Series 3 of Escape to the Farm filmed but unsure of broadcast date (awaiting confirmation from Channel 5).

SB – Wonders if the negative publicity on water quality in the Usk and Wye rivers is putting off visitors.

- RG thinks there has been a massive impact.
  - Always documentary crews around.
- FW. Kayaking guests have asked about it. Very aware of this. Don't think it has affected accommodation bookings yet but has definitely affected local spend with activity providers
- FW - Concerned about knock on effects of F&D businesses not opening over winter. Abersoch have a rota of businesses that are open. Wonder if Tintern could do something similar. Visitors go all over Monmouthshire to eat.
- KW – People very worried about it. Salmon numbers down from 12,000 to 200 fish from the 80s. Managing water quality in the Wye very complex as it comes under the jurisdiction of Natural Resources Wales and the Environment Agency (as well as numerous LAs).

KW – Good year for the Abergavenny Food Festival (good weather helped). Moved to an advanced booking only model for the Festival. Has worked out a lot better than hoped in giving security (e.g. In case of bad weather). Happy to take questions or help if needed.

- BBC2 did a documentary about the festival that is going out in January.

MH – Talk of a revival of Usk Chamber of Commerce (even if it doesn't have this name). Usk struggling like every other town, but fortunately not too many empty shops at the moment. Lots of uncertainty though as to what will survive going forward.

SR – ADTA moving away from paper to an online presence. Would like an interactive map. Would like some feedback on this. Growing connections with businesses.

- Asked if town maps could be upgraded
  - NE - town maps updated fairly recently (when TIC moved into town hall) and don't have particular reason / budget to update them but happy to discuss.
  - KW suggested Alwyn, and SR is going to contact him.
  - SB – Active travel team producing town maps, focusing on walking / cycling routes.

FW – Tintern based self-catering accommodation. Has had a good summer but facing a poor November. Had people cancelling because they can no longer afford to come (and seemed genuine). Spring bookings also very poor for this time of year. For the first time they are considering closing in January / February. Even if they could sell the dates, not sure if they can afford the winter fuel bills. They are now seeing people bringing washing with them and putting a load on as soon as they arrive in the cottages. If people can't find anywhere to eat locally, then marketing becomes tricky. May / June / July not so bad. FW is worried about not achieving the 182 nights needed for new business rate eligibility (usually sells over 300 days). For the first time they are considering no longer operating self-catering accommodation.

## **6. Destination update – destination performance, Shared Prosperity Fund grant applications**

NE provided an update on destination performance

- Encouraging signs of recovery in 2021. Economic impact of tourism increased to £182.79 million (up 122% on 2020, down 28% on 2019). Visitor numbers increased to 1.5 million (up 180% on 2020, down 35% on 2019). FTE jobs supported by tourism increased to 2,336 (up 45% on 2020, down 25% on 2019).
- Staying visitors provide the lion's share of the benefits in terms of revenue generated and jobs supported. Tourism in Monmouthshire remains very seasonal with the majority of visits (and spend) between April and September.
- Monmouthshire's visitor profile includes a high proportion of older independents and retirees (who according to the visitor sentiment tracker survey are the people most affected by the cost of living crisis)
- People will undoubtedly be 'looking for more free things to do', which is concerning given that day trippers contribute less overall and have the potential to cause more issues at (free to visit) honey pot sites like the Sugarloaf

SB – Asked about promoting Monmouthshire to overseas visitors

- NE explained that marketing activity targeting overseas visitors and travel trade was undertaking collaboratively as part of the Southern Wales Tourism Partnership and through close working with Visit Wales and Visit Britain

KF provided an update on Visit Monmouthshire marketing activity

FW – Really appreciates what Visit Monmouthshire does. Through her role as Chair of SE Wales Tourism Forum she can see how much this team does compared with other LA tourism teams.

MH – Asked about the potential for more journalist / influencer campaigns supported by Visit Monmouthshire. Felt that the Shop Local social media influencer campaign last Christmas was particularly useful.

- NE – Last year's Shop Local campaign was funded with WG hardship grant. If we have any opportunities like this in future we'll be in touch (and appreciate all feedback about effectiveness of our campaigns).

Destination update presentation to be sent out.

## **7. Any other business**

NE – Still need to identify a vice chair of the Partnership and to review the terms of reference (ToR). NE to share link with minutes.

FW – Expressed concern that there's no dedicated tourism minister at Welsh Government (tourism falls under / between 'economy' and 'culture and sport'). Asked for MCC to feedback to WG the importance of a dedicated tourism minister.

## **8. Next meeting**

FW – Recommends date is before the next Regional Tourism Forum meeting, so first half of February (before half term) would be ideal. NE to circulate a date.