

Monmouthshire Destination Partnership
Microsoft Teams Meeting 2pm Thursday, 10 March 2022

Minutes

1. Attendance

Kim Water (KW) CEO Abergavenny Food Festival, Chair

Nicola Edwards (NE) Destination Manager, MonLife, MCC

Matthew Lewis, Environment & Culture Manager, MonLife, MCC

Kevin Ford (KF) Destination Marketing Officer, MonLife, MCC

Cath Fallon (CF), Head of Economy & Innovation, MCC

Frances O'Brien (FoB), Chief Officer, Enterprise, MCC

Meirion Howells (MH), Usk Town Council

Fiona Wilton (FW), Chair of South East Wales Tourism Forum

Laura Thomas (LT), Brecon Beacons Tourism (BBT)

Jo Nugent (JN), Abergavenny & District Tourism Association (ADTA) & Caradog Hotels Ltd

Sandra Rosser (SR), Clerk of Abergavenny Town Council

Ruth Waycott (RW), Wye Valley AONB

Wayne Lewis (WL), Brecon Beacons National Park

Aaron Reeks (AR), Caldicot Business Group

Ed Ryan (ER), Regional Account Manager, Visit Wales

Libby Warwick (LW), Jam Creative Studios

2. Apologies for absence

Tracey Evans, Abergavenny & District Tourism Association

Sherren McCabe-Finlayson, Monmouth Chamber of Commerce

Sue Kingdom, Chepstow Chamber of Commerce & Tourism

Rachael Geddes, Wye Valley & Forest of Dean Tourism

James Woodcock, Business Insights Manager

3. Welcome & Minutes of Last Meeting (KW)

KW welcomed the group. Hopeful we can soon meet up in person. Wants the group to be a voice that feeds into the complexities of the economy & health of the county (both human & natural).

Minutes of the last meeting

NE - Destination plan review was delayed because of Covid, and review process restarting now. The destination survey is the first stage of this review.

4. Destination survey results and Destination Plan review – KF & NE

KF went through the results of the Destination Survey (conducted Sept – Dec 2021 with separate surveys for residents, visitors & local businesses).

Action – PowerPoint presentation to be shared with the group with the minutes.

Q&A

- ER asked 3 questions:
 - About 'lack' in the weakest offer
 - KF explained that it was picking up use in sentences (eg. Lack of public transport, lack of shops)
 - Whether Visit Monmouthshire will respond to businesses who are not on the website
 - KF – Yes, to those who are not anonymous / relevant to Visit Monmouthshire
 - About the geographic spread of visitor responses and not many from Devon / Somerset and if there was a reason for this.
 - Survey link was shared on social media and focus was on reaching businesses & residents for this particular survey. NE added that we didn't reach as many visitors as we'd have liked, so could be a sample size issue. Aim to introduce this as an annual survey, so will be looking to businesses to help share the survey link with visitors in future.

KW agreed that the sample size is small and looks forward to seeing this survey continue and how things change over time.

KW asks if there are specifics regarding public transport.

- KF – Most stuck to single sentences but did receive some specific responses (eg. Car parking, lack of train / bus interchange, not enough public transport). Today's presentation just an overview though.

KW mentioned the bus tracking service and feels this should be more widely promoted.

FW – Tintern has wholly inadequate parking. Good bus service, but too infrequent. Wonders if potential tourism levy money could be put towards a park & ride service.

NE – Tourism levy will be discretionary so up to individual LAs to decide whether they make use of the delegated powers.

FW – Might not be much resistance if people knew where tourism levy went (Eg. Funding public toilets / infrastructure / Visit Monmouthshire)

MH – Active Travel / public transport crucial for any town.

KW – Bus travel in the Wye Valley almost an attraction in itself.

Next steps

NE explained the next steps in drafting the revised destination plan.

5. Destination partner recovery plan updates – All

Sandra Rosser (Abergavenny Town Council)

- Set up a monthly events meeting pulling together a calendar of what is happening (eg. Hazel Clatworthy's Library of things).
- Conversations about a new town map.
- Platinum Jubilee plans via many groups. Food Festival back in September. Race Across want to bring a cycling event in September (looking for a large checkpoint venue and start point).

Wayne Lewis (BBNPA)

- Abergavenny TIC is settled in new location in town hall (box office to come). Wayne thanked all the partners (MCC, Abergavenny Town Council & ADTA) for their continued support.

Laura Thomas (Brecon Beacons Tourism)

- Signing off printed guide for destination (circulated in the TICs). Taken out advert in Welcome to Monmouthshire guide. Brecon Beacons Digital guide continuing this year. Upping social media presence after Covid reduction. Any events happening, let Laura know.
- New photo bank available - <https://brand.breconbeacons.org/login>

Meirion Howells (Usk Town Council)

- New Digital information board installed next month.
- Owen Davies been in touch regarding the Smart Towns initiative. Footfall counters going in the town.
- Events - Community picnic on the 3rd June for the Jubilee. Beacon lighting on the Thursday night (near scout hall) with bagpipers & drummers. Charity casino night. Market starting Sunday 13th March. A monthly market (1st Wednesday, 2nd Sunday, last Saturday of each month) in the old recycle centre in Usk
- Usk improvement plan adopted, prioritising safety along the main road.

Fiona Wilton (Tintern)

- Tintern doing 'ok' despite flooding, Covid, road closures. Some businesses lose up to £10k a week when road closes. Dog Friendly Tintern has been successful, although struggle with dog waste bins.
- Latest issue regards closure of Wireworks Bridge. Wireworks bridge owned by Gloucestershire Council and links Tintern to the Greenway. Bridge closing at start of May for several months despite objections from many businesses and residents. This is added to the diving centre (NDAC) closure in Chepstow (at the other end of the Greenway). Last season lots of people previously parked at diving centre, then cycled to and from Tintern. Estimate diving centre & bridge closures will cost village 300-400 visitors a day. The Greenway route has also improved parking issues.
- Covid changed perspectives in Tintern, as residents realised the value of visitors and the multiplier effect.

- Re. possibility of bike hire setting up at the Old Station, Tintern. FW thinks cyclists could go from Brockweir to the Greenway, but ML says this not really practical as they are on public rights of way. FW - Parking issues at Old Station as well suggests it's not really an option.
- ML mentions that GCC have said the bridge works have to be done now. The bridge is not safe so would need to be closed anyway (even if works were not being carried out).
- Self-caterers have a good level of business, but on-costs have rocketed. Lots of postponed business from Covid, so bookings taken at previous prices but costs have gone up a lot. Worries about business rates.
- ER – Asked about why the NDAC closed. NE responded that it has been turned into a research centre. Owners of NDAC have planning application in for development of lodge park at Livox Quarry in Wye Valley.
 - FW – Concerns in Tintern about access from Livox to Tintern along the A466 road given the potential number of lodges proposed.

Jo Nugent (ADTA). (Related via NE)

- Reprinting the brochure and working with Carol Williams from BBNPA on Itineraries for the town. Website had a rejig.
- Concern about indefinite closure of Cross Street during the day. Good to know if permanent.
 - ML suggests it is still subject to a final decision.
 - **(ACTION)** NE promised to get a situation update and advise group.

Kim Waters (Abergavenny Food Festival)

- Food Festival going ahead in 2022.
 - 2020 was virtual and 2021 had limited numbers, and they learnt a lot from both about giving people a good experience rather than a crowded experience.
 - April 3rd is go live for some aspects (Stroller Tickets & Party at the Castle), early May for the rest of the tickets.
 - Issues around costs rising for suppliers (petrol, fuel, energy, generators). Modifying festival for the future.
- Attended a meeting with Bees for Development. Very impressed with them. (Bee Festival - <https://www.visitmonmouthshire.com/whats-on/monmouth-bee-festival-p1632641>).

Nicola Edwards (Visit Monmouthshire)

- New website live in early January. Encourages all to check their entries or ask if they don't have an entry. Businesses / event organisers can also add their own events to the website (<https://www.visitmonmouthshire.com/information/submit-your-event>).
- Digital Asset Management system also being developed, will share link when we've uploaded all the images and videos.
- Creating new content for website, social media, newsletter that aligns with interests of Visit Wales economic recovery personas.
- 2022 Welcome to Monmouthshire bedroom browser printed on 15th March. Distributed directly to serviced accommodation, and limited number will be circulated from the TICs to other businesses.
- Group press trip being organised of 3-4 journalists for 9th / 10th April. Group Travel working with other SE Wales authorities and Visit Wales to organise the Coach Tourism Association AGM & Fam trip (21st – 23rd May). Staying in Newport but developing itineraries across the region. Showcase at event to link businesses with group buyers.

- Final bit of news is Brilliant Basics submitted for £250k of capital funding for improvements to welcome, orientation & wayfinding signage at key arrival points, and resurfacing & line marking of lower wireworks carpark in Tintern. Received invitation to submit full application by 31 March.

Ruth Waycott (Wye Valley AONB)

- Three cycling routes have been developed and will shortly be published.
- Wye Valley River Festival has been handed to a new community group. Last week of (27th May to 5th June).
 - Confirmation from Visit Wales of 3 years' worth of funding for this (meaning the next three festivals).
- New Wye Valley walk website will be going live.

Ed Ryan (Welsh Government)

- Believes the Brilliant Basics application is solid and fits Brilliant Basics well and wishes luck with next round.
- Worked with Ruth regarding Wye Valley River Festival. Is part of the events schedule with the Visit Wales events team.
 - Believes funding isn't for next three years, but next three biannual festivals (so 22, 24, 26).
- Approached by Cathy Green from AFF about press coverage for AFF, and meetings set up with Rob Holt
- If anyone has new information they want Visit Wales to share, recommend getting in touch with productnews@gov.wales.
- Attended meeting about 'Wales on Rails', regarding connecting whole of Wales. Launch was today (10th March) with 12 heritage railways.
 - KW – mentioned that it would be good to have a direct train from Bristol to Abergavenny.

6. New immersive AR experiences at Raglan Castle – Libby Warwick (Jam Creative Studios)

LW explained their role in creative immersive Augmented Reality (AR) experiences at Raglan Castle. They're part of a DCMS project called 5G Wales Unlocked (<https://www.5gwalesunlocked.co.uk/>) looking into benefits of rolling out 5G across rural areas. Jam Creative (<http://jamcreativestudios.com/>) working on two parts of the project, tourism use case & education use case.

Tourism use case is creating immersive AR to bring virtual characters to life.

- Pick up a free iPad and explore the castle.
- Map on iPad explains where to go for interactivity.
- Castle created virtually. 5g allows them to have a better experience than previous AR experiences.
- Recreated Fountain Court.
- Interactivity as well.
- See video for more - <https://spaces.hightail.com/receive/onaNo7vo9A>

- Good feedback so far, although also need the custodians to be proactive in making the iPads more accessible.

Q&A

- KW asks if there is a food angle at all, or anything they can promote it with?
 - No food angle,
 - **(ACTION) LW will send out the promotional material to NE to circulate**
- MH asks about where funding is from & if they have worked with any other castles
 - From the Department of Culture, Media & Sport as part of a large UK wide 5G network project.
 - Have also worked with Caerphilly Castle, and want to work with Tretower Court.

7. Terms of Reference

KW – Will go out to attendees to discuss the ToR for this forum. KW feels that the group should have a voice on issues such as the natural environment.

NE – Revised ToR available. Recommend everyone looks through and feedback.

8. AOB

FW – Acts as chair of South East Wales Tourism Forum but would like a more collaborative voice with Visit Wales at this forum, with more voices on this. Eg. VW have ideas for what grant money can be used for, and Monmouthshire should be a voice as well. Encourage everyone to send info to NE.

- First priority – Consultation on school holiday dates changing (potentially going from 6 weeks to 3 in summer). Could be unintended consequences (eg. To tourism).
 - An online consultation to come, encourages everyone to take part when it does.

NE – Look to change how meeting invites sent out so people are not blind CC'd in, in order to allow participants to network outside of the meeting.

- Agreed by all

ER – Asked if Monmouth Festival is going ahead

- Cancelled according to the Monmouth Beacon but will confirm.
- **(ACTION) – KF to check if going ahead.**

MH – Usk Open Gardens going ahead this year (25th – 26th June)

9. Date of next meeting

KW – Suggests three meetings a year (eg. January / May / October) to try and avoid when people are most busy.

- FW – Next South East Wales Tourism Forum is on the 18th May, so logical to have this meeting before that, so anything raised here can be raised at that.
- NE – So will meet next at the beginning of May. Dates to be circulated. If anyone has ideas for the agenda, please let NE know.

- FW - Suggested that 2pm or 3pm is the best time for a meeting, in the middle of the week.

ER – Asks if likely to go back to face to face?

- KW would like at least 1/3 meetings to be in person.
- NE – Aim for the May one to be in person.