

Enterprise and Business Committee

Inquiry into Tourism

Engagement event with stakeholders

Llechwedd Slate Caverns, Blaenau Ffestiniog – Thursday 18 September 2014

Purpose

The aim of this event was for Members of the Enterprise and Business Committee to hear the views and experiences of local tourism businesses.

The event was split into three groups, each consisting of local tourism businesses and Assembly Members. Group 2 consisted of the following people:

Attendees: Rhun ap Iorwerth AM (Chair)
Keith Davies AM
Rachel Evans (Countryside Alliance)
Meurig Jones (Portmeirion)
Ceri Thomas (Cadw)

Barriers to Growth

- Although stakeholders felt that Visit Wales was doing a good job, the scale of Government spending on tourism elsewhere in the UK makes it difficult for Wales to compete. Glasgow alone has the same marketing clout as the whole of Wales. The shortfall in funding for marketing was especially significant because the challenge for Wales is to get tourists to visit for the first time; experience shows that they tend to return thereafter.
- A lack of joined-up working between local authorities was sometimes a problem. An example from south Wales was Penderyn whisky, which is situated in Rhondda Cynon Taff but is just a few miles from Merthyr; it cannot get a sign there because it is in a different local authority area.

- On the subject of signage, it was mentioned that New Zealand allows tourism-related retailers to have road signs, which works well. We could also do more to signpost play areas for children, which are important for families on holiday.

Infrastructure

- Transport was another barrier to growth, particularly in this region. For example, it was difficult to persuade tourists in Llandudno to make the journey across to Portmeirion because the roads were seen as inadequate.
- Not enough was being done on the A55 to promote the tourist industry. The road carries huge numbers of people travelling to and from Ireland and there is an opportunity to interest them in Wales. A tourist map of the A55 would be useful, showing the various attractions along its route.
- WiFi and mobile phone network coverage continue to be problematic for tourism businesses. Customers now take connectivity for granted, but some of the areas of Wales that are strongest for tourism are weakest for broadband and mobile signals.
- Rail connections to London were a strength for north Wales, with a good service from Euston. It would be useful to introduce something like the Oyster card, though, so that visitors to Wales could use a single ticket to travel in different areas and on different modes of transport.

Marketing Wales

- It was felt that Wales's history could be used more prominently in promoting tourism. Normandy, for example, was very effective in tying tourism to the historic WW2 sites along its coast. This was another way in which Wales might attract visitors, with many of our tourist destinations being rich in historical interest.
- Welsh literature could also be used to promote tourism.
- Food was another attraction we could make more of, with agri-tourism being hugely successful in places like Italy.
- Some recent advertising campaigns had tried to show that there was more in Wales than people realised. It was suggested that it might be better to focus on our known strengths.
- There was a general need for more advertising, especially in the north.
- We could do more to market Wales abroad and attract overseas visitors.
- The attraction of activities for tourists visiting Wales was often underestimated; for example, angling-based tourism was worth £150 million to the economy, and shooting was worth £75 million, but these were not featured in our advertising campaigns. We should look at ways of packaging

these kinds of activities into a programme that would keep tourists in Wales for a week or more.

- There was praise for the Ten Top Attractions advertising campaign in North Wales, which had been successful in promoting the region – even if there were now 14 attractions in the top 10! However, this kind of campaign needed to be picked up by the likes of Visit Britain and promoted at a UK level.
- One suggestion was that the Visit Wales website should be themed, so that people can find destinations and activities grouped together appropriately.
- The panel were concerned at the loss of the regional tourism partnerships, and keen to know more about how they would be replaced.

Major Events

- Wales has hosted many major events in recent years. How much of a boost do such events give to tourism? It was felt that the Ryder Cup generated interest in Wales during the build-up to the event, but not thereafter. The Welsh Open golf tournament, for example—which was hosted on the Ryder Cup course at Celtic Manor—has been discontinued just four years later. The fact that we hosted the Ryder Cup rarely features in our advertising these days.

Business Support

- This was seen as one of the most valuable ways the Government could support the tourism industry. For example, Portmeirion had been looking at ways of better informing visitors about the history of the site, and would benefit from a visitor centre at the entrance where tourists could learn the basics. Government could help to add value to tourism businesses by supporting that kind of project, and by streamlining the planning process where appropriate.
- Similarly, the Government might be the right kind of agency to help produce and promote maps of the Ten Top Attractions.
- Small businesses often have particular difficulty in accessing support from the Government or EU, and this was something that might usefully be looked at.