

**Notes from the Online Accommodation Tourism Industry Meeting**

**Thursday 11 March 2021**

**Present**

Fiona Errington, VisitWiltshire; Billy Grimes, VisitWiltshire; David Andrews, VisitWiltshire; Andrew Keeling, Hotel Solutions; Jane Howes, Meadowbank House; Paula Portier, Rollestone Manor; Kate Waldron, Park Farm Barn; Nigel Stanley, Beeches Farmhouse; Trisha Legg, Home Farm; Christophe Dumeige, The Old Bell; Tim Pollard, Old Rectory; Nicky Wragg, The Green Dragon; Martin Edwards, The Red Lion; Nicola Oyston, Green Hill Farm; Lance Kierle, Whatley Manor; David O’Connor, Grasmere House; Sue Williams, Whatley Manor; Aimee Hancock, Caboose; Lesley Wood, The Old Bell and Malmesbury; Dale Naug, Grasmere House; Sara Buttle, Butte Farm; Suzanne Candy, Olivemead Farm.

**Welcome**

Fiona welcomed everyone to our first Accommodation Industry Meeting of 2021 and introduced our guest speaker Andrew Keeling from [Hotel Solutions](http://www.hotelsolutions.org.uk)

**Andrew Keeling, Hotel Solutions**

The slides from Andrew’s presentation are included with these notes.

Hotel Solutions are consultancy partnership who specialise in working with DMO’s and Local Authorities to help them realise the potential for hotel and visitor accommodation in their area and how they can better support their accommodation sector. Hotel Solutions have worked with VisitWiltshire on a couple of previous studies; the latest one coming during the recovery period after the Salisbury poisoning.

Since the recent crisis took hold, Andrew has started monitoring all the research intelligence and commentary on how the COVID crisis is effecting the Accommodation to produce his regular updates ‘From Survival to Recovery’, which VisitWiltshire have shared in our regular newsletters. You can see the latest update [here.](http://www.hotelsolutions.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/COVID-19-FROM-SURVIVAL-TO-RECOVERY-UPDATE-9-MARCH-2021.pdf)

Focusing on the Positives

* Roadmap for recovery is encouraging for accommodation businesses to be open from May
* Consumer confidence is improving with the latest announcement and success of vaccination programme;
  + 46% believe the worst has passed – this was only 8% in December
  + Things will be back to normal by;
    - 50% - end of September
    - 80% - end of the year
    - 95% by 2022
* All evidence is pointing towards a Staycation boom, once accommodation can start reopening. There is a lot of pent up demand, which along with the fact people won’t be able or want to go abroad and the economic climate means more people will be staying local for holidays. A real opportunity for Wiltshire to capitalise on this and impress
* There has been a good chance to re-set and make any necessary changes to come back stronger

When might things get back to normal?

* Evidence shows we are set to see really strong bounce back for rural destinations from the summer onwards, bookings are already coming in for these destinations
* There is a new and increased interest in cultural and historical sightseeing
* Urban destinations may continue to struggle for a while
* These three observations stand Wiltshire in good stead as it plays in to all 3 of these observations

Which Markets will come back first?

* Returners – people who are still cautious and are most likely to go back to places they have been to before, and also to offer support to the places they know and love
* Explorers – people who are looking for new and different experienced
  + These are two very different markets but both will be crucial in recovery, and messaging and marketing will have to be adjusted accordingly for each
* Close to home staycations – reflects the cautionary nature of people taking their first holiday since the pandemic
* VFR and Family get togethers – people have been away from family and friends for over a year potentially so a lot of demand from this
* Workations – people who are working remotely and from home are looking to combine work and leisure in one trip
* Outdoor Enthusiasts and Golfers
* Dog owners - if you are dog friendly accommodation, make it clear. There has been a huge increase in dog ownership
* Millennials – much more confident than the older generations to return to travel. However, what they look for may be different to your usual demographic
* Coach Holidays – surge in bookings from older people who have received their vaccinations

Which Markets will take longer to recover?

* Weddings – a lot have been put forward to 2022, however there will be an opportunity for smaller outdoor weddings
* Conferences – may never get back to where it was as businesses get used to moving online. Hybrid meetings may become more popular (mixture of people in the room and via video)
* International – highly dependent on travel restrictions and vaccine programmes, but likely it won’t start to recover until 2022. Sentiment shows that people want to travel overseas as soon as they can, which is good news for the inbound market, however it may mean that the ‘Staycation Boom’ may not be sustained after 2021
* Corporate – companies getting used to working remotely will slow the recovery of this market considerably and will take a while to get to pre-COVID level. This also happened when the recession hit in 2008 and will be worth looking at the lessons learned from this period
* Major events

Which Accommodation types will bounce back quickest?

Similar to the summer it will be non-service accommodation in rural destinations that will recover the quickest. These types of accommodation in Devon and Cornwall are already full for the summer, which may present Wiltshire with an opportunity, along with it being a quitter destination.

Which changes are here to stay?

COVID has accelerated a lot of trends that we were seeing already, these include;

* An almost total shift to online looking and booking for breaks/holidays – these means that your website needs to be up to scratch and optimised for various devices (particularly phones) and online booking must available. Digital marketing channels and social media more important than ever
* Contactless technology and reduced interaction with staff. Using this technology is a good way to communicate with guests and to upsell
* Exercising & Wellbeing and ‘Getting Outdoors’ –worth bearing in mind and capitalising on if you can
* Increase concern for the environment and sustainability – what can you do to make your business more ‘green’ and if you do anything, make sure you promote it
* Spending time with family and friends – an already growing market will now have an even greater demand
* A higher demand for experiences. What can you add into your offer?
* Value for money – more about adding value to your offer and providing extras rather than discounting your prices

Reassurance

Clear that people are still nervous about going away and are still actively looking for reassurance on hygiene and cleanliness. Especially looking for reassurance on the website detailing what has been done, clear signage and instructions at the property; want to see social distancing and sanitisers in place. Above all they want staff and owners to adopt a serious and careful approach but with warmth and understanding.

VisitBritain has extended the duration of the [We’re Good to Go](https://www.visitbritain.org/business-advice/were-good-go-industry-standard?utm_source=vbve_enews_03_02_2021&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=vbve_03_02_2021) industry standard programme for the next few months to help support the industry by increasing consumer confidence in taking domestic holidays. If you haven't signed up for this scheme yet, we would highly recommend it. They have also produced a new promotional film that you can see [here.](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NNXZlvoKt74)

Flexible Booking Terms – ideally in the form of a full refund, voucher or free rebooking. This needs to be clear to customers at the booking stage

Reassuring locals – managing your visitors and engaging with your local community to show them what you’re doing to keep everybody safe

Questions

*What’s the sentiment for international visitors wanting to return to the UK?*

It will come back, and UK will be one of the first destinations people will feel comfortable in visiting again as they are so far ahead in their vaccination programme. Not all markets will come back at the same time. USA may be one of the first.

*What’s the picture overall in regards to investment in accommodation product?*

Has been surprised at how much it has continued and new projects are still being proposed and delivered. Investors are seeing this as a real opportunity, with the pent up demand. The investment is a across the board, not just non-service accommodation.

*If the international doesn’t come back, but outbound tourism done will they then turn to Winter Sun holidays in October\November time?*

There is always a market that will look to winter sun, so it will be worth focusing on the markets who will want to stay in the UK during those months for example; family and friends, empty nesters, outdoor enthusiasts and dog owners. If there is a time to develop a discounted offer or adding value it will be at that time of year.

*Will the trend moving forward be for smaller weddings as people have been forced into this mind-set, or will the big wedding return?*

Andrew feels that people will want to get back to the bigger, more traditional weddings as soon as possible. A trend for outdoor weddings has accelerated.

*What are your predictions for the domestic market in 2022? Will people abandon the staycation and head overseas in greater numbers or does the domestic market have a chance to succeed in 2022?*

There is a new market switching to staycations and short breaks, which was growing anyway from the empty nester and outdoor markets and it will be key to focus in on this market as best as possible. However, there will inevitably be a pent up demand for traditional overseas summer holidays.

If you have any questions for Andrew you can reach him at[andrew@hotelsolutions.org.uk](mailto:andrew@hotelsolutions.org.uk)

**VisitWiltshire Update**

**Wiltshire Tourism Recovery Plan**

VisitWiltshire have been working on a draft Tourism Recovery Plan for the county. The draft has been included with these notes. Please do take to read through it, and if you have any comments please let us know by sending them to [Billy](file:///C:\Users\billy\Desktop\Accommodation%20Meetings\Billy)

**Marketing**

* We have aligned our winter online content with the VisitEngland, Escape the Everyday at home campaign. This is on the website social media, e-newsletter and PR. Fiona Errington has recently given a radio interview to BBC on this topic.
* Currently all our messaging is pushing towards planning for a future stay and virtual visits, creative things to do at home and positive news stories. We recently have been showcasing our favourite towns and villages in Wiltshire on Social Media.

Please keep us up to date with any relevant content we are currently looking at, especially Easter. We have dedicated pages for [takeaway/delivery food and drink](https://www.visitwiltshire.co.uk/blog/read/2021/01/whats-open-in-wiltshire-food-and-drink-takeaways-b472), click-and-collect shopping, virtual events or online activities, community support schemes, accommodation for key workers, [outdoor spaces remaining open](https://www.visitwiltshire.co.uk/blog/read/2021/01/whats-open-in-wiltshire-gardens-and-open-spaces-b474) or similar

* Recently a page has gone live on some new content on the growing [‘workcations’](https://www.visitwiltshire.co.uk/ideas-and-inspiration/holidays-and-short-breaks/wiltshire-workcations) trend, in advance of restrictions being eased. If you have a strong offering for visitors looking to work remotely during their trip, please let [Helen](mailto:helendalton@visitwiltshire.co.uk) know.
* We have worked our content plan around the reopening map and have started off with publishing a Wiltshire’s reopening road map blog and FAQ’s blog. As the roadmap and more things begin to open we will publish more content.
* We are currently reviewing our Wiltshire 2021 campaigns and are looking at a Wiltshire food and drink campaign (postponed from 2020), a City campaign, spring/summer Escape the Everyday campaign and a Wiltshire Residents’ Week campaign when restrictions are relaxed.
* As part of our DEF funding we will be running a paid for Escape the Everyday Great West Way campaign. This will run from early March and run for the rest of the month. Activity includes paid for digital (Native advertising, Programmatic display and video), paid for social (Facebook, Instagram), video, a lead generation competition, organic social, newsletters, new content, distribution of consumer itineraries and our travel magazine, press and PR, and influencers. Wiltshire will feature heavily in all of this activity. VisitEngland are working with content partners as part of this campaign – Buzzfeed and NewsUK and we have just supplied them with content for this and their website, including listicles.
* We have also secured Wiltshire content in VisitEngland’s £5m domestic marketing campaign through the Great West Way being one of VE’s lead campaign propositions. (Buzzfeed and Uk newsstands – The Sun and The Times)
* We have recently secured a great feature on Marlborough in [Britain Magazine.](https://mcusercontent.com/4f19fb7ce76ee0800348d53d5/files/b166431e-6da8-4a3e-aa9e-c88527cf779c/066_067_Marlborough.pdf) This features in the same issue as a competition the Great West Way is currently running to win 4-night canal boat break on the Kennet & Avon Canal with a chance to explore Wiltshire. You can see the details of the competition [here.](https://www.britain-magazine.com/competitions/greatwestway/)

**Website and Digital**

* Our website had around a third less traffic in 2020 as a whole compared to 2019. Organic traffic is increasing
* Since the roadmap announcement on 22 February, the type of content being looked at on the Wiltshire website has shifted – if we compare the final week in February to the week before, traffic to the accommodation pages on the site has increased by 50%. Traffic has also improved to the blog, 'explore' and 'plan your visit' but has fallen to 'things to do', 'what's on' and 'food and drink'.
* We continue to send out our monthly newsletters and the consumer newsletter mailing list currently stands at 118k opted-in subscribers, 3.5% more than at the end of 2019, with an average open rate of 12.5%. Please let us know if you have anything you’d like to include in these.
* 2021 content is changing and evolving as the pandemic changes, we will continue to review our online content depending on the situation. The reassurance/safety messaging and updated partner product information including ‘Good to Go’ and ‘Know Before you Go’ prove to be invaluable during the pandemic.
* VisitBritain has extended the duration of the [We’re Good to Go](https://www.visitbritain.org/business-advice/were-good-go-industry-standard?utm_source=vbve_enews_03_02_2021&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=vbve_03_02_2021) industry standard programme for the next few months to help support the industry by increasing consumer confidence in taking domestic holidays. If you haven't signed up for this scheme yet, we would highly recommend it. They have also produced a new promotional film that you can see [here.](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NNXZlvoKt74)
* Pre re-opening don’t forget to check your content on our website, it will be important to highlight any changes and safety measures you have in place. New photos/videos etc will also help freshen up your listing. Also check links for bookings – if you want direct bookings we can link directly to your booking page or if you want availability showing we can link through to OTA’s – any queries please let [Fiona](mailto:fionaerrington@visitwitshire.co.uk) or [Helen](mailto:helendalton@visitwiltshire.co.uk) know. It would also be good to know if you’ve engaged with or are looking at TXGB.
* If anyone would like to do a guest blog or provide information for a ‘Spotlight On’ please let us know and also forward on any offers etc. as we would like to populate our [Special Offers](https://www.visitwiltshire.co.uk/special-offers) pages before re-opening

**Social Media**

* Overall followers on social media have increased by 6% since the start of the year, and now stand at just under 65k.

**Print & Brochure Distribution**

* Production of our 2021 Publications is now in its final stages. We are repurposing content for our 3 main publications for 2021 and producing digital versions and including interactive video content. We are hoping that these will be ready for distribution by Easter.
* We are repurposing some video content and producing 3 new videos along the timeless themes. These will be used within the digital publications.
* Great West Way guide to the Kennet & Avon Canal is now at the printers.

**Training**

We are running a series of online training seminars – So far we have run courses on Instagram, Email Marketing and Creating Engaging Content and we have an Intermediate Google analytics course scheduled for Thursday 18 March. Look out for details on courses in our regular partner newsletter. If anyone doesn’t get the partner newsletter please let [Billy](file:///C:\Users\fiona\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\INetCache\Content.Outlook\MZ4LA5G3\Billy) know.

**Groups and Travel Trade**

Although everywhere is shut this is a very busy time for planning for the trade, so we are doing a number of online meetings/exhibitions including; Excursions, Britain and Ireland Marketplace and Explore GB

We’re currently updating the GWW and VW Travel trade directory please forward any new content that we could use.

**VisitWiltshire Advice Page**

There is a [COVID-19 advice page](https://www.visitwiltshire.co.uk/partners/advice) on the VisitWiltshire website for businesses. The page details the latest government guidance, information from travel authorities and some useful resources. We are regularly updating this page with the latest information.

The page also includes the latest research carried out by VisitEngland/VisitBritain and the details of the various grants, loans and support for businesses being provided by the government. You can also follow us on our [@VisitWiltsBiz](https://twitter.com/VisitWiltsBiz) account for more updates.

We have also set up a [Brexit advice page](https://www.visitwiltshire.co.uk/partners/advice/brexit) along similar lines, and will be adding any relevant news, research and insights to it as and when we get them.

**Priorities for 2021**

Please let us know if you gave any suggestion or requests on the following;

* Is there anything that you would like to see us doing more of?
* What would you like to see us focus on?
* Where should our priorities be? (Digital/Online/Booking functionality?)

**Update from Businesses**

* There seems to be a mix of trends in forward bookings, with some partners reporting a busy May/June and quiet summer, and some other reporting the opposite.
* In regards to weddings, most 2021 bookings are postponed bookings from 2020 with new booking and enquiries slow for this year
* Some businesses are holding off on re-opening until 17 May, as the costs to implement measures and investments for outdoor dining are too high for just one month’s trading
* Professional Association of Self-Caterers (PASC) has recently updated their guidance on cancellation policies which some partners may find useful. These can be found [here.](https://426dad06-dd67-4020-82b8-e449f800e1b5.filesusr.com/ugd/e7cf6d_5da51e2130614aa581e6d930d6e5f36b.pdf)
* A new trend has risen called **‘Hedge Bet Booking’** where people are taking advantage the risk free booking and booking a number of holidays before cancelling all but one at the last minute