



Notes from the Online Wiltshire Association of Visitor Attractions Meeting

Tuesday 16 June 2020

Present

Fiona Errington, VisitWiltshire; David Andrews, VisitWiltshire; Billy Grimes, VisitWiltshire; Helen Dalton, VisitWiltshire; Bernard Donoghue, ALVA; Peter Wragg, VisitWiltshire Board Chairman; Fiona Spear, Wilton Shopping Village; Tony Field, The Rifles Museum; Nikki Rowe, Vintage Classic; Rick Henderson, REME Museum; Jen Edmondson, Bowood House & Gardens; Jo Atkins, National Trust; Joanne Johnstone, Amesbury; Katie Fairfax-Ross, The Merchant's House; Judy Dain, Vaughan's Cookery School; Susie Brew, Pewsey Vale Tourism Partnership/Wilton Windmill; Meryl Browning, St Thomas's Church; Kate Barker, Salisbury Museum; Caroline Lowsley-Williams, Chavenage House; Jenny Low, Berkely Castle; Dan Brod, Beckford Arms; Ali Jarvis, Ludgershall Town Council; Janine Hunter, The Chapter House; Graham Snook, Crofton Beam Engines; Wendy Brown, Amesbury; Rufus Pollard; Abbey House Gardens; Matthew Johnson, Salisbury Escape Rooms; Hannah Grigson, Army Flying Museum

Welcome

Fiona welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced Bernard Donoghue, the Director of ALVA, who will be starting the meeting by sharing advice and discussing challenges for re-opening and plans for recovery. There will be an opportunity for Q&A at the end of his talk.

Guest Speaker - Bernard Donoghue, Director, Association of Leading Visitor Attractions (ALVA)

Bernard started by discussing the regular consumer sentiment reports that ALVA is putting together. These are being regularly put together to gauge the public's feelings about visiting attractions again.

You can see the latest sentiment report [here](#).

The first finding highlighted was that originally 41% of people said that they would be happy to visit an attraction again, but not for a few months. However, as things have begun to ease these numbers have become lower and are predicted to continue to decrease.

However, the things that people are most concerned about have not changed. The biggest concern is toilets as it is an intimate, enclosed public space. However, the feedback received so far on attractions that have already opened their toilets has been mostly positive. Visible monitoring and cleaning seems to be the key.

The next biggest concern is Food and Beverage, another intimate space with a number of contact points. Once again, current feedback has been positive with attractions who have introduced 'grab & go' systems.

The current research shows that people have confidence in front of house staff to do the right thing and be safe; however they don't have confidence in other members of the public to behave in the same way. The news stories of queues outside shops and busy beaches have contributed to these feelings.

The research also shows that visitors want the fact that they have been through difficult times and painful experiences. This can be done by being a bit more flexible (e.g. allowing food from outside for picnics etc). This may prove slightly costly at the time; however it will encourage repeat visits.

Bernard then moved on to what has been learned so far from the attractions that have already opened in the UK and further afield.

The general trends so far show that attractions have now moved to online pre-booking and are generally running at around 20% capacity.

One example is Kew Gardens, which opened on Monday 8 June. On a normal Saturday they would have around 20k visitors, but first day of opening they sold 2k tickets. 1,800 of these tickets were sold to members. They did have a number of no shows, 40% of which were members.

This seems to be a trend being set. Members are less used to booking ahead, but used to visiting regularly. So they may be more likely to book and then decide against it at the last minute because of the weather. The lesson here is to over compensate on your ticket allocation to members.

'Visitor Information' pages on websites are now receiving a lot more traffic than usual, so it is important that these pages are up to date and the changes to the way you are operating is clear. An effective and cheap way to do this is to produce a video, walking people through what to expect when they visit and any major changes. Attractions that have done this are seeing up to 90% of people who visit watching these videos. It also relieves pressure and time on staff that will otherwise have to explain procedure and details to everyone who visits. Some examples of other attractions that have done this include;

Painshill Park – <https://www.painshill.co.uk/visiting-painshill-covid-19-pandemic/>

Swiss Museum of Transport - <https://www.verkehrshaus.ch/en/visit/latest-information.html>

ALVA research shows that they expect the first visitors to attractions to be older people, but this is the same group that want the most advice and guidance before visiting. So clear but substantial information that can be given in advance is crucial and will also be beneficial to you

There is also evidence that dwell times are going to be shorter than normal. This is because of pre-booked time slots, but also because visitors are feeling less confident to use public toilets. So the length of their visit and distance they are willing to travel is going to be more dictated by their bodily functions.

The emotional impact on both staff and visitors is also expected to be huge. For staff, they have been in lockdown and in many cases furloughed for 3 months, so returning to work could have a number of effects on them. There may also be a rift caused between those who are back at work and those who are not, this will need to be managed carefully.

In regards to visitors, they will have been longing to visit their favourite places for a long time, and some will just be happy to be going outside and seeing other people.

Bernard then moved onto advice about PPE and Social Distancing

The use of PPE is not mandatory, but will be perceived and expected as the absolute norm. So far, most front of house staff have been wearing masks and in some cases gloves/ Food and beverage staff all wearing masks/visors and gloves.

Been observed that a good proportion of visitors have been wearing masks, but has been dependent on the method of arrival. Those who came on public transport are more likely to be wearing protective gear than those who came in their own vehicles

In regards to the potential reduction in the physical distancing from 2m to 1m, Bernard had recently been in a 24hr consultation on the matter and is expecting a decision imminently

A reduction in the physical distance will have a transformative effect on the economic viability of re-opening and will make a huge difference. However, even though social distancing is being largely adhered to at attractions, it will be dependent on how people react this week with retail re-opening. If people do not act responsibly the 2m rule will remain for longer.

Research has shown that people are looking to staff to ‘verbally police’ social distancing and be seen doing so. This will make them feel safe and re-assured against other members of the public.

The floor was then opened up to questions for Bernard

Rick Henderson, REME Museum – Are attractions checking temperatures of visitors on entry?

There's currently no data on this and no ALVA members have introduced this. It is requirement in the Netherlands, and has been widely accepted and obeyed.

Janine Hunter, The Chapter House –The impact of the social distancing being reduced may have a negative economic effect as most places would have introduced signage with 2m. Will there be enough time between the announcement and 4th July?

Advised to not order or make any signage with 2m rule until at least Friday when the announcement is predicted to be made.

Matthew Johnson, Salisbury Escape Rooms – As an Escape Room, operating with any form of social distancing will be impossible. Will they be able to operate with same household groups, or ‘social bubbles’?

Expecting new guidance from the government on ‘responsible re-opening’ this week. Hopefully there will be more clarity on this. Prediction is that households and ‘social bubbles’ will be treated as a single group or entity.

The VE Accreditation Scheme is also expected this week. Details can be found in the PowerPoint [here](#).

Katie Fairfax-Ross, The Merchant’s House – When can Museums and Galleries re-open?

The guidance is 4th July, but it is down to the individual museum to decide when they are ready to re-open

Dan Brod, The Beckford Arms – Are there any signs of further financial help from the government?

Yes there is however unsure what this will be and how it will look.

All the measures so far have been economy wide. One of the main focuses of the industry at the moment is to lobby for tourism specific package. The industry will need an extension of the furlough scheme and more grants/loans.

The tourism/hospitality industry was hit first and hardest and will take the longest to get back to normal. DCMS are putting together a package that will hopefully be accepted by government. Bernard is confident there will be some sort of Tourism specific package.

Dan Brod, The Beckford Arms – Do you have any advice for businesses that may have past links to slavery, in the current climate?

The fact that attractions have been doing more digital/virtual activity, they have now opened up to a new younger demographic. Advice is; tell your history as truthfully and openly as possible. Do not whitewash your story, as people are likely to find out at some point.

Tony Field, The Rifles Museum – Is a COVID-19 deep-clean necessary?

Bernard feels that it is necessary, even if it is for merely cosmetic reasons. Strongly recommended to do it and make a big deal about what you have done to install confidence

VisitWiltshire can provide names of products and companies which can help with this.

Jen Edmondson, Bowood House & Gardens – Any updates on Weddings?

Guidance has just changed this week and numbers who can attend weddings and funerals have increased slightly.

Historic House have been leading the campaign on weddings and are the best resource for updates on the matter.

David Andrews, VisitWiltshire – Is there any inside knowledge on the quarantine situation?

The 14 day quarantine has been an issue of great controversy and discussion in recent weeks between government and the industry.

90% of inbound tourism to the UK is for less than 14 days. ALVA have requested more detailed information on how 14 day quarantine is scientifically useful

Only 4% of Brits are planning an overseas holiday in 2020. In a normal year domestic tourism makes up about 80%, this year it will be closer to 95%. Domestic tourists will be the ones to save the industry, specifically those within 15 miles of you as people become more ready to spend money locally. So it is important to appeal to this audience at least for 2020.

VisitWiltshire Update

Support

- VisitWiltshire are currently sending out e-newsletters (minimum fortnightly) that are providing updates on government, tourism industry and local authority activity and their current marketing strategy and calls for content. You can see the latest newsletter [here](#) and if you aren't already subscribed, you can do so [here](#).
- VisitWiltshire has set up an [advice page](#) on the website, which details all the latest Government advice and support available, along with useful information and links from various tourism authorities.
- VisitWiltshire's [Twitter Biz](#) account is also a great place to stay up to date with the latest updates. If you don't follow the account already, please do.
- VisitBritain/VisitEngland have set up a [page](#) dedicated to the latest support available, from funding to looking after employees at this difficult time. It is reviewed and updated regularly
- As the first plans for re-opening are now in place, can partners please check your product pages on the website and let us know of any amends that you'd like to make i.e. any changes to opening times, booking process, change any images, changing content to include safety/reassurance messaging. Please send any changes to [Billy](#) or [Helen](#).
- Although a number of the VisitWiltshire team are on furlough, please do get in touch with any issues, queries or updates. We are here to help and will happily pass on any enquiries to local authorities on your behalf. It's always best to contact [Billy](#) in the first instance

Update on Visitor Economy Working Group

- DCMS is producing the top line guidance on what businesses need to do in terms of undertaking a risk assessment of their business and implementing cleaning and social distancing regimes that allow them to operate safely
- The Industry is producing a series of detailed protocols for different business types across the sector which takes this top line guidance and tells businesses how to operationalise it
- VisitEngland is developing a system whereby businesses can, on lodging their risk assessment, get a Mark that can be used to show customers that they are operating in accordance with Government guidance

This week we can expect;

- the UK Government publish its guidance for the safe reopening and operations of the whole of the visitor economy, including heritage sites, museums and galleries, indoor attractions etc.
- confirmation by the UK Government that indoor attractions such as museums and galleries, historic houses and stately homes will be able to open to the public from 4th July

Green Spaces Guidance Update

The Green Spaces guidance has been updated to take account of the changes to the rules covering animal attractions (animal attractions range from zoos and safari parks through to wildlife centres

and farms where visitors can interact with the farm animals). The updated guidance states that indoor attractions and activities where people come into contact with other people, surfaces or animals (for example, children's play areas and petting farms) must stay closed.

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-on-accessing-green-spaces-safely>

Guidance for secure and safe reopening

- Deeson have put together a handy '10 ways to make your visitor attractions website COVID secure'.
<https://www.deeson.co.uk/blog/10-ways-make-your-visitor-attractions-website-covid-secure>
- VisitBritain are releasing a series of webinars drawing on expert insight from within VisitBritain/VisitEngland and across the travel industry, offering practical advice for tourism businesses and valuable data-led insight from global teams. The programme will start with **Spotlight on Inbound and Domestic Research and Insights** on Tuesday 30 June. You can see the full programme [here](#).

Marketing

- The main focus of our marketing is now moving away from virtual content and more towards encouraging visitors to plan a future trip to Wiltshire. See our dedicated page [here](#).
- VisitWiltshire have started to promote a message of responsible travel to potential visitors. We have set up a specific web page [here](#), which asks visitors to Find Space and Respect Wiltshire, Stay Safe and Protect Wiltshire and Enjoy Wiltshire. Partners are welcome to use the wording and copy, or adopt this approach in their content free of charge
- We are going to be putting together a series of blogs as places start to open up. We have published our first one on shopping this week
- We are also going to be running Competitions to keep Wiltshire at the front of people's minds and get them dreaming of a future visit. We are putting together a special "This Time Next Year" competition where we will be giving away a trip to Wiltshire in Summer/Autumn 2021, and will promote it across all our digital channels. If you would like to offer prizes please contact [Fiona](#) or [Helen](#).
- VisitWiltshire are still sending out their monthly consumer newsletter, if you have anything you would like us to include (e.g. vouchers, offers, online events) then send them to [Helen](#)
- We have been running a number of Social Media virtual twitter campaigns. The last one was on Friday 12 June and themed around history and heritage. Partners can see the campaign and retweet by visiting our twitter [page](#)
- We are working with VE on the national certification scheme. Still awaiting government sign off, but should be going live June 18. You can see a PowerPoint to explain the scheme in more detail [here](#).
- VE have confirmed their main initial recovery will be a £4m domestic campaign and they're finalising it now, we will be pushing out content in line with this

Great West Way

- This week Great West Way launched an advertising campaign targeting responsible travellers for the Great West Way®. You can see the press release [here](#). The adverts are

being displayed on 4 digital screen sites in London. Promoting planning future trips, getting off the beaten track and the rural landscapes with messaging; ‘Don’t follow the herd’ Be Curious, Be Responsible. The images include Wiltshire with North Wessex Downs and the Kennet & Avon Canal. Full details can be seen at GreatWestWay.co.uk/responsibletravel.

- Monthly consumer newsletters are still being sent out

Recovery Planning

VisitWiltshire are looking at 3 planning windows for recovery

- Immediate window; Easing. May to July –focusing on virtual journeys, social media and plan your visit
- July to December: Opening. Focus on reassurance and open spaces
- 2021 - looking ahead will depend how the next few months go
- 2020 Survival - 2021 Recovery- 2022 Growth

What you should be thinking about now;

- Review your web content and find new ways of telling your own business story.
- Look at images – do they need changing? Photos with crowds may not be best practice – review how people are interacting in the photos
- Check your product pages on Visit Wiltshire website for content and images. Update us with any operational changes
- Create new partnerships and engage with local suppliers.
- Focus on building your email lists – lead generation
- Work on a new piece of “big content” for your re-opening – needs to reassure visitors and build in flexibility to booking terms, social distancing and hygiene measures. Needs to welcome visitors and be inspirational. Messaging needs to be clear and simple.
- Think about videos – walking visitors through the new normal!
- Value / Pricing - is there anything you can include for added value? Encourage direct bookings and offer early bookings incentives. Manage demand
- Check your Google Local search maps are up to date – do you have new opening times or ways to book
- Audiences - Who are you talking to? Who is likely to travel? Initially will be more local markets/doorstep visitors. Look at how you can win the hearts and minds of local residents (within 30 mins – 1 hour drive time). How can you appeal to the groups who are more likely to visit early on e.g. Families, Intergenerational groups and Millennials

An update from attractions that have already opened

Old Sarum/Stonehenge – English Heritage

- Old Sarum open, all tickets pre-booked, the vast majority of which were members
- Overwhelmingly positive feedback so far – people really happy to be back

- People appear to be using it as an opportunity to meet up with friends for the first time
- 41 sites to open on 4th July – including Stonehenge
- Currently pushing message to not visit Stonehenge for Solstice

Jo Atkins – National Trust

- Slowly been opening sites, including Lacock, The Courts and Stourhead. Ticket only, 95% visitors have been members
- Demand has been incredibly high. Tickets are going on sale Friday morning for the week ahead and selling out almost immediately. Even found people selling tickets on EBay!
- Feedback has been mostly positive so far

Best place to see which English Heritage and National Trust sites are open;

<https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/days-out/regionsouthwest/south-west>

<https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/reopening/#section1>

Dan Brod – Beckford Arms

- Advises those who don't have open spaces to wait as long as possible to re-open after 4th July to gauge the feelings of the public and let confidence grow.
- Trends in Europe show it has taken a few weeks to get busy again

Jen Edmondson – Bowood House & Gardens

- Gardens and grounds now open to season ticket holders only. On the first day of opening they had 400 visitors
- Limited WC facilities, which are cleaned 4 times a day and constantly monitored
- Response has been overwhelmingly positive – only a few negative comments from people requesting money back as certain facilities not open
- No date for when they will be open to the public yet

Fiona Spear – Wilton Shopping Village

- First shops opened on Monday, with more opening gradually over the next few days
- First day was steady
- Pop up kitchen opening up in July – allowing people to have picnics in grounds etc
- Seeing how things go over the next couple of weeks

It was agreed that sharing emails of those who attended today's meeting would be useful. You can see the attendee list with email addresses [here](#). If you didn't attend but are happy to share your email address please let [Billy](#) know and he will add it to the list.

If there is anything we can help with or you have any queries or content please don't hesitate to get in touch.