



**Notes from the Online Wiltshire Association of Visitor Attractions Meeting
Tuesday 21 July 2020**

Present;

Fiona Errington, VisitWiltshire; Flo Wallace, VisitWiltshire; Billy Grimes, VisitWiltshire; Nicola Ferguson, Swindon Designer Outlet; Jane Thomas, Stonehenge; James Rodliff, Stonehenge; Jen Edmondson, Bowood House and Gardens; Kate Barker, Salisbury Museum; Nikki Rowe, Vintage Classics; Eva Stuetzenberger, National Trust; Belinda Richardson, Marlborough; Tony Field, The Rifles; Meryl Borwning, St Thomas' Church; Rachel Wheeler, Marlborough College Summer School; Alana Wright, National Trust; Gordon Howsego, Salisbury Escape; Jo Atkins, National Trust; Hannah Grigson, Army Flying Museum; Graham Snook, Crofton Beam Engines; Katie Fairfax-Ross, Merchants; Joanna Johnstone, Amesbury; David Dawson, Wiltshire Museum

Welcome

Fiona Errington welcomed everyone to the meeting, introduced the panel and structure of the meeting.

Fiona started the meeting by highlighting some of the key points from the latest ALVA Sentiment Report. You can see the whole report [here](#).

- Those previously claiming that they would revisit 'as soon as the opportunity arises' appear to be true to their word, with 21% of the market (around 8.5m adults) claiming to have already visited since re-opening
- Among those visiting attractions since re-opening, reaction to safety measures has been fairly good, although nervousness among visitors to attractions which were only allowed to open recently is apparent
- Around half the attractions-visiting market remains stubbornly cautious. Main barrier is lack of confidence in attractions' ability to control distancing, led by concerns over fellow visitors compliance
- There is strong evidence that the 'We're Good to Go' mark will have a much-needed, major positive impact upon visit confidence and almost a quarter of the market already claim to have seen this mark
- There is clear and increasing demand for a full visit experience to be available on re-opening, with significant proportions not visiting if services and facilities were to be closed. Opening with mitigation measures is better than keeping closed
- As indoor attractions re-open, high anxiety in the market remains around them – especially toilets, catering outlets, interactive visit elements and events. Demonstrating

and communicating safety measures pre-visit will be even more critical than for outdoor attractions

- Two-thirds of the market would feel more comfortable about visiting an attraction if masks / face coverings were compulsory, a significant growth since June and reflecting wider public opinion and growth in use in recent weeks.
- Attractions located in tourism hotspots, perhaps more than ever, need to keep local residents onside as they seek to attract summer visitors – 71% of residents in these areas would rather visitors stay away

Wiltshire Association of Visitors Attraction Panel

Stonehenge – James Rodliff, Operations Manager

- Started planning for re-opening as soon as they knew they had to close – tried to wind down in a way that it would be easy to wind back up again
- Have found it difficult to find elements of government guidelines that were relevant to them, but have definitely benefitted being part of a bigger organisation in the English Heritage as they have been able to share learning
- A lot of things that Stonehenge does operationally are currently impossible, mainly being the shuttle bus from the Visitor Centre to the stones. Opened a new walking route across the landscape.
- Had to try and imagine and second guess how things could work once they were allowed to re-open and felt that it was important to not take too many things away from the experience and most of the aspects of the visit have been able to re-open in some capacity
- Have used large, colourful, clear and consistent signage – well received
- Toilets on the site are large so, haven't caused too many issues
- Have installed a one way route around the site, but important to avoid areas of conflict where people can break the rules or get confused
- Are currently operating at their winter opening hours
- Have kept staff and volunteers as up to date as possible and the majority of them are back now, including volunteers over 70 in the last week or so
- The capped numbers have been working well and are currently under review to increase them
- Have managed to make the site almost entirely touch free
- Overall the take up and feedback has been good. The confidence installed in staff and volunteers is now paying off. Have had a lot of feedback along the lines of 'you have thought of everything'
- Visitor numbers have been good and hoping to exceed trade back soon

Stonehenge - Jane Thomas, Marketing Manager

- Usually the main aim is to get new visitors as there isn't much repeat business, as it's on peoples bucket list to do once. Normally 50% of visitors are international and 80% are on some kind of holiday
- Refocussed targeting to domestic only

- Pulled all outdoor advertising before the lockdown and now all advertising is digital because of its agility to adapt to the mood of the nation and for budgetary reasons.
- Currently have been focussing on using 'non-busy' imagery and key words that emphasises 'space' & 'outdoors'.
- Have had to communicate clearly what has changed, to manage expectations. Have included what to expect on the homepage - <https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/stonehenge/>
- The south-west in general is proving to be extremely popular as a destination for staycations so hoping to capitalise on the passing traffic
- Currently weekends are much more popular, which is usual for this time of year – targeting social media to increase weekday traffic. Always been an issue.
- Can now promote Stone Circle Experience, which is normally fully booked well in advance but now has availability. This is beneficial for press visits and as a key selling point.
- Feedback has been very positive, with people feeling comfortable, safe and enjoyable
- Membership sales for EH looking generally positive across the sites

Nicola Ferguson, McArthurGlen Swindon Designer Outlet

- Fortunately have 20 centres in Europe which have already re-opened so have been able to take on a lot of learnings from them
- Starting planning re-opening as soon as lockdown announced
- Were able to open a couple of weeks earlier than they anticipated
- Have lost 10 brands due to going into administration, with 8 brands still waiting to re-open
- Huge facilities management operation and risk assessment undertaken to ensure that both staff and customers would be safe and feel reassured – as an entirely indoor centre, had to be conscience that visitor maybe more concerned about visitors
- The number one question when re-opening was, 'are the toilets open'
- There is currently just one of two entrances open and carefully counting how many people are coming in to make sure they don't go over capacity. Have reached capacity a couple of times over the weekends.
- Dwell times are much shorter, which means queues are normally around 20mins and they managed to increase the capacity after the first 3 weeks, in line with the brands increasing their own capacity
- Have produced a huge amount of signage – primarily around health and safety
- Currently operating at reduced hours, but will be increasing them next week, and hoping to be back to usual hours by next week
- Food and Beverages brands now mostly open, initially as takeaway only. Became an issue as it meant people would sit and eat it in the centre
- Have felt that the mall is big enough to not have a one way system, but have removed most of the indoor seating but being gradually re-introduced where needed and done so safely
- Whole team has been watching people closely to observe their behaviours and how the current procedures are operating. This means they have been able to change and refine operations regularly; eg introducing a speedy queue for disabled visitors, or for people who have just had to pop back to the car
- Have tried to minimise touch points wherever possible
- Playground still closed – hoping to re-open next week with an hour a day for deep clean

- Footfall is currently down by 50% which is what was expected. Spend has been very strong
- Have had a very cautious approach to marketing with a focus on reassuring visitors
- Marketing budgets have been significantly cut, but media advertising (TV, Radio, paid social and paid search) is all now starting again
- Messaging is now moving from 'safety first' to a more 'business as usual' approach
- Have signed up for the Eat Out to Help Out campaign
- The introduction of compulsory face masks for shops will either put people off going shopping or encourage people even more

Jen Edmondson, Bowood House & Gardens

- The house & garden only opens seasonally and was closed when lockdown was announced, however everything was in place ready to go e.g. marketing, season tickets and a new attraction
- Kept in touch with season ticket holders as regularly as possible
- Initially opened at the end of May to season ticket holders only, and were getting around 200 visitors a day. This allowed time to see how things were working and if anything needed changing or adapting operationally
- Two toilets opened, cleaned 3 times a day
- Handed out copies of map which highlights where is open and closed
- Operations and Estate Managers have managed to prepare well in advance and so far no big challenges have arisen
- Opened for day tickets on 20 July. Currently not limiting number of adults/seniors/young adults, but are restricting numbers of children to 50 a day and allocating timed sessions in the adventure playground – this will continue throughout summer holidays. Doesn't apply to season ticket holders
- First two weeks of ticket sales have gone well
- Food and drink starting to open, however people are still allowed to bring their own picnics
- All groups have now cancelled, and probably won't be picked up until next year. Around 50% have cancelled and 50% have postponed until next year
- Have restricted access and installed hand sanitiser in adventure playground
- Everything is being renewed on a daily basis
- Focus on marketing has revolved around staying in touch regularly with mailing list and season ticket holders. A large proportion of their visitors are from within an hour's drive anyway
- As many social media posts as possible
- Have included pages on website, 'welcoming you back with confidence'.
<https://www.bowood.org/welcome-back-house-gardens/>
- Have achieved the Good to Go certification
- The hotel has provided a bigger challenge both during and after lockdown;
 - o Have introduced the ability for people to have breakfast and dinner in their room
 - o Booking required for dinner
 - o Spa re-opens on Saturday – but only for residents who will have to book a time slot
 - o Golf course has been very busy
 - o July = 35% capacity. August = 50% capacity
 - o Had a lot of bookings for afternoon tea

The question of 'no-shows' was put to the group;

- Stonehenge have seen about 10% no shows, but only from EH members
- Bowood said it is too early to tell
- Lacock (National Trust) – started at 20% a day, but since last week between 5-10% since the start of the summer holidays.

The question of the VAT reduction was also raised and whether businesses will be passing on the saving to the customers. Nobody present was planning to do this.

Update from VisitWiltshire

- 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.
- 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
- If you have been awarded the "We're Good to Go" mark, please let us know so we can add it to your product page. It would also be great if you could tweet about it with an image of your certificate and tag @VisitWiltsBiz
- If you have any thoughts on attraction specific financial support you would like us to lobby for on your behalf (similar to the Eat Out to Help Out scheme), please do let us know by contacting [Billy](#).

VisitBritain Webinars

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.

<https://www.visitbritain.org/visitengland-business-recovery-webinar-programme>

Latest Announcement from the Chancellor

The Chancellor announced a hugely significant series of measures specifically to support the tourism economy, notably a reduction in VAT from 20% to 5% for the attractions, accommodation and hospitality sectors. The Treasury estimates that the value of this measure alone is worth £4billion, the greatest single financial package of assistance for any part of the economy. You can see the guidance [here](#) and more information on which attractions are eligible [here](#).

The announcement also highlighted;

- A new **Eat Out to Help Out discount scheme, which will** provide a 50% reduction for sit-down from Monday to Wednesday every week throughout August 2020. You can see the latest guidance on this [here](#). You can find out how to register [here](#).

If you have registered for the scheme, please let us know and we'll update your page and add you to our dedicated Eat Out to Help Out page.

- A bonus scheme for firms to **re-employ furloughed workers**. An employer who brings someone back off furlough, and keeps them in a job until January, will get a £1,000 bonus.
- A new **£2 billion Kickstart Scheme** to create **fully subsidised jobs**. Businesses will be given £2,000 for each new apprentice they hire under the age of 25

From the 1 August, if prevalence remains around or below current levels, the Government will take the following steps:

- Enable the restart of indoor performances to a live audience, in line with COVID- 19 secure guidelines, subject to the success of pilots that are taking place as soon as possible.
- Carry out pilots in venues with a range of sizes of crowds, particularly where congregating from different places, including business events. The pilots (some of which will begin late July) will be carefully monitored and evaluated to inform future decisions on any further relaxation of the rules.
- Enable wedding receptions - sit-down meals for no more than 30 people, subject to COVID-19 secure guidance.
- Exhibition and conference centres are allowed to show small groups (of up to 30 people with social distancing requirements) around to view the facilities and plan future events and to enable Government-backed pilots to take place. They should not be open fully to host events more widely.

What is the maximum size for a tour group?

The latest advice on group sizes can be found [here](#). As of 17 July – this guidance states that it is against the law for gatherings of more than 30 people to take place in private homes (including gardens and other outdoor spaces). However, businesses and venues following Covid-19 secure guidelines can host larger groups. This is also the case for events in public outdoor spaces that are organised by businesses, charitable or political organisations, and public bodies, provided they take reasonable steps to mitigate the risk of transmission, in line with Covid-19 secure guidance and including completion of a risk assessment.

To be aware that all those responsible for looking after and managing groups will need to take into account the different policies and capacity levels at hotels, attractions, bars, restaurants and events etc. We have been made aware that some hotels are not taking groups at the moment, partly for logistical reasons but also due to the potential risk of having to deal with a group having to self-isolate at the hotel due to a suspected Covid-19 case. We also understand that some tour guides are

putting strict limits on the number of guests they can guide and that some attractions have opened for individuals but are not as yet accepting group bookings.

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
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- Our content is now moving into recovery stage and we have new messaging around responsible tourism Find Space Find Time - Time to Enjoy Wiltshire
 - Our page [Visit Wiltshire Responsibly](#) page includes safety and reassurance messaging and highlights VisitEngland messaging of Good to Go and Know Before you Go. We are repurposing one of our films with this messaging and hope to go live this week or early next week.
 - We have a page dedicated to [Good to Go](#). If you have been awarded the "We're Good to Go" mark, please let us know so we can add it to your product page. It would also be great if you could tweet about it with an image of your certificate and tag @VisitWiltsBiz
 - We are signposting to open businesses via a series of [blogs](#) we have ones for activities, attractions, places to stay and a shopping safely and responsibly blog.
 - We're continuing to run our Monthly consumer newsletters and now using the recovery content.
 - Fiona had a call with VisitEngland on their autumn campaign that they are planning to launch before August bank holiday. We will provide more detail in due course.

Great West Way

- Great West Way launched a 'Don't follow the herd' advertising campaign targeting responsible travellers. Promoting planning future trips, getting off the beaten track and the rural landscapes with messaging; 'Don't follow the herd' Be Curious, Be Responsible. This also includes 'Know before you go' and 'Good to go' messaging.
- Our Great West Way marketing is now moving into the recovery stage, with our content focusing on reassurance and re-opening. As part of this we are looking at updating the digital version of the travel magazine and food and drink map with reassurance/safety messaging including 'Good to Go' and 'Know Before you Go'. We are developing our suite of maps with a Great West Way guide to the Kennet & Avon Canal.
- Monthly consumer newsletters are still being sent out
- Our application for 2020/21 Discover England Funding is currently with VisitEngland who we expect to confirm funding in time for campaign activity to begin in September. Our bid is for £225,000 campaign, primarily focused on the domestic marketing, supported by international and domestic travel trade and PR activity. VisitEngland are also looking at how successful DEF-funder initiatives will feature in their £5m domestic marketing campaign. We'll circulate further details of proposed marketing activity and how Ambassadors will be included once we've had confirmation from VisitEngland.

Update from Businesses

After going around the room for an update from attendees, here are the key points;

- General response and number of bookings has generally been good and feedback from visitors positive
- Picnics are proving popular with many visitors bringing them along to their visit. This may show that people are still apprehensive about visiting pubs and restaurants
- Most places are not currently doing guided tours
- Number of places are running reduced opening hours