



Notes from the Online Wiltshire Association of Visitor Attractions Meeting Tuesday 9 February 2021

Present;

Fiona Errington, VisitWiltshire; Billy Grimes, VisitWiltshire; Bernard Donoghue, ALVA; Helen Dalton, VisitWiltshire; Gavin Worrall, Great West Way; Alexandra Bradbury, Iford Manor; AnnMarie Newbigin, St Peter's Church; Belinda Richardson, Marlborough Town Council; Carl Griffiths, GoSkydive; Catherine Doody, Malmesbury; Chris Bolt, Crofton Beam Engines/K&A Canal Trust; Christopher Kerr, Wilton Windmill; Claire Selman, Chippenham Museum; Emma Sykes, Wiltshire Museum; Gavin Barrett, Salisbury Escape Rooms; Fiona Spear, The Guild; Hannah Grigson, Army Flying Museum; James Dwyer, Salisbury Plain Safaris; Jane Thomas, Stonehenge; Jen Edmondson, Bowood House and Garden; Joanne Johnston, Amesbury; Lorna Matthews-Keel, Salisbury Chequered History Guides; Luke, GoSkydive; Melissa Barnett, Chippenham Museum; Mercedes Picard, English Heritage; Meryl Browning, St Thomas's Church; Nikki Rowe, Vintage Classics; Rachel Wheeler, Marlborough College Summer School; Rick Henderson, REME Museum; Roz Mitchell, Salisbury Cathedral; Shane Brennan, Salisbury Cathedral; Susie Brew, Vale of Pewsey

Introductions

Fiona Errington welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced the guest speaker, Bernard Donoghue, Director of the Association of Leading Visiting Attractions (ALVA).

Update from Businesses

A number of the meetings attendees offered a brief update on their current status and their initial plans for recovery. Here are the key points that arose during the discussion;

- Easter, appears to be the date that most attractions are working towards to re-open. This is the first week in April.
- Businesses trying to get on with as much work as possible, whether updating websites, developing new product or building/refurbishment work
- A few places have received funding/grants from various places and putting this to good use on improvements and product development
- Museums are working on developing online lectures and events which have proved very popular throughout the lockdowns

Guest Speaker – Bernard Donoghue, the director of [Association of Leading Visitor Attractions](#)

ALVA's Latest Recovery Tracker is available to view [here](#). The research is hugely insightful, comprehensive and valuable, measuring the changing public mood about the nature of the UK epidemic, and to gauge the effect on people's optimism of the vaccine programme

2020 visitor numbers for ALVA numbers will be published in March. VisitWiltshire will distribute these to all partners once they are available, so WAVA members can gauge how well they did against other attractions around the country.

What ALVA learned last year?

- Sentiment Research done last year, and has now been repeated (see above). This exercise was crucial last in highlighting the thing that would give people the most confidence and reassurance was social distancing and masks wearing being policed by front of house staff. This helped attraction prioritise what they were doing in regards to re-opening and operating under restrictions
- Research showed that visitors had total confidence in attraction staff doing the right thing and as much as they could to keep people safe, but had little confidence in the other members of the public adhering to the rules. This feeling has heightened further this year, and maybe cause more hesitation and caution amongst public
- Outdoor attractions (parks, gardens etc) will be the first beneficiary of Lockdown being released or return to the Tier System
- Predicts there will be an explosion in the 'experience economy'. People have realised that what's most important to them is spending time and creating memories with family and friends with things you can't really 'put a price on'. An example of this is that the TV programme over the last year that has had the biggest increase in viewing figures is 'The Repair Shop' on BBC. The focus of the programme is on the value of memories and experiences with people and places.
- Secondary evidence of this, is a survey ALVA did just before Christmas of all their members who have an online shop to find out what the best sellers were during lockdown, here are the top 7;
 1. Jigsaw Puzzles (sales have increased by 38% 2020, to £100million)
 2. Gardening
 3. Baking
 4. Board Games – old fashioned ones like Snakes & Ladders and Monopoly etc (nothing with a battery)
 5. Local History Books and Maps
 6. Animal Adoptions
 7. Cocktail Making Kits and Shakers
- This shows that people have gone back to basics and looking for simple fun and leisure.

What are ALVA asking Government for;

- Indoor and Outdoor Attractions should be able to open at the same time as non-essential retail. Attractions pose no more or no less of a risk to the public than shops do. Since March; not one single confirmed case of transmission of COVID-19 between staff and visitor, visitor to visitor, visitor to staff. All plans and changes made to make attractions safe have worked, and the effect is there for all to see
- Last year ALVA won from Treasury the commitment to reduce VAT on Visitor Attractions and Accommodation from 20% to 5%. Any attraction that applies VAT to their tickets has benefitted from this. This has been very successful, however only for a very limited time as attractions could only open, and sell tickets for a short period.

ALVA want the VAT reduction to continue for at least the rest of 2021, ALVA are optimistic on this

- Continuation of Business Rates Holiday, businesses haven't been open for long enough to generate enough income to pay the full rates of business. The current business rates were set on 2015 property prices at the height of the market and therefore a distorted valuation. Long term there needs to be a thorough re-evaluation of business rates
- Putting cash in to VisitBritain to do overseas marketing in principally the EU and North America to get some international visitors back. Also, needs a strong domestic marketing campaign. We can't take Staycations for granted. There is expected to be an upsurge in overseas holidays, especially amongst those who have been vaccinated however there will still be a large demand for staycations for those who wouldn't have been vaccinated or don't feel safe to travel abroad. There also needs to be investment in City Centre Recovery, as they have been hit the worst.

What shall we be doing and focussing on this year;

- Online Activity – over the last year attractions online content and activity was 'creative dynamite'. This meant that people could go online and create a wish-list of places to go when things re-opened. Provided permission to those who wouldn't visit attractions physically, to do so virtually and build up their confidence to come and visit in person when they are allowed to do so
- A number of museums and galleries have reported different demographics coming to visit than to those who they had pre-pandemic. This shows that there is a great opportunity to increase the number of visitors coming to attractions
- Do things differently – if there was ever a time to be innovative and to take risks it is now. 'Don't let perfect be the enemy of good'
- Sanitise your site but don't sanitise your visitor experience – make it safe and clean, but make sure not to go overboard making it dull and clinical efficiency. People have a pent up desire to come and spend time and money with you, don't undermine and overthink it.
- Scotland and N. Ireland's two principle banks have recently reported that they have never had such a large amount of money in deposit accounts before. People are spending less, and there is a big chunk of disposable income out there for you to take advantage of
- Don't forget why you are doing this – you provide the backdrop for people's happiest memories and learning experiences. There is a bigger demand for this than ever

ALVA are optimistic about the recovery this year, a lot of it will be 'flat-lining' for the first 2/3 of the year, but will see a significant increase in staycation, day trips and overnight trips from around September onwards.

Believe we won't see more than 55% of the visitor attraction being vaccinated until September.

Questions for Bernard

- Anticipated that September will be the first point possible for event days when more than just groups of 6 will be allowed?

- ALVA hopes so, but so much depends on the 'roadmap' outlined by government on 22 February, where we will hopefully find out when national lockdown will end and whether the Tier system will come back into play. Sense is that we will be living with degrees of social distancing and restrictions until September, and then we will be back into the colder more dangerous months so social distancing may increase at the point. The issue isn't so much the number of people, it's their behaviour.
- How can we make the most of "local"? Day trips etc? If we go back into Tiers people may not want to travel far within the UK?
 - When it comes to the domestic markets, there will be two that will be most crucial
 1. Hyper-local – within an hour's drive. Cultivating local market to reclaim your local community. Could create a local tour or making the most of local history enabling people to get to know where they come from better
 2. 1-2 hours commute – reclaiming your city/town. Becoming a tourist in your own town, giving explicit permission to people to treat their own town/city/county differently
- If you are reliant on other things being open e.g. local food and drink, is there any sense of how the rest of the economy is going to open up?
 - Rumour that pubs will be allowed to open but not to sell alcohol – not true
 - Hoping Food & Drink will open around Easter weekend. This is because the reduction in VAT, ends on March 31 a day before Good Friday. Most visitor attractions make up to 15% of annual income in that Easter week.
 - Bernard thinks bars and restaurants will be open to open at Easter but with massively lower capacities, and still takeaways only. Won't be more comprehensively open to around May
- Do you have any thoughts on accommodation? Are people going to be more geared towards the self-catering and camping options, or will Hotels still be a viable option as well?
 - AirBnb – significant proportion of AirBnb rentals in city centres have changed from AirBnb to long-term rental properties as the market just wasn't there
 - Take up for self-catering, B&B, Holidays Parks, Camping and Caravanning etc has been phenomenal. People feel safer in a place they are cleaning themselves. The non-hotel sector will do very well this year.

ALVA are holding a number of Webinars that our Attraction partners may find useful in planning for recovery. All of the Webinars will be taking between 12noon and 1pm and the link is the same for all. <http://bit.ly/ALVARecovery21>. The schedule is;

- Wednesday 17th February: Membership retention. Speakers include the National Trust, Historic Environment Scotland and Chester Zoo.
- Wednesday 24th February: Digital Marketing. Speakers include Digital Visitor, Royal Academy and the Royal Albert Hall.
- Wednesday 3rd March: Retail. Speakers include Callum Lumsden of Lumsden Design and Paul Ogburn, former Director of Retail, Tate Enterprises.

- Wednesday 10th March: F&B and Event Hospitality; Speakers include Steve Chandler, MD of RA Venues, and Tracey Astles, Sales Director RA Venues.

Update on VisitWiltshire/Great West Way Activity

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.
- Recently a page has gone live on some new content on the growing '[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](#) know.

Please keep us up to date with any relevant content we are currently looking at, Mothers Day and Easter. We have dedicated pages for [takeaway/delivery food and drink](#), click-and-collect shopping, virtual events or online activities, community support schemes, accommodation for key workers, [outdoor spaces remaining open](#) or similar.

- 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 March. 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 recently secured a great feature on Marlborough in [Britain Magazine](#). 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](#).

Website and Digital

- Our website had around a third less traffic in 2020 as a whole compared to 2019. Organic traffic is increasing
- 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 [Helen](#) know if you have anything you'd like to go into 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](#) 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](#).
- You can now also personalise your certificate with your business name. If you have previously registered with the scheme, you can go back in and insert your business name and have that on your certificate.
- Pre re-opening don't forget to check your content on our website as it may have changed. It is important to make sure that all the content including opening times and prices are up to date. If you would like to refresh the photography on your page, remember you can have 6 photos for a silver partner and 10 for gold and all photos must be landscape. Gold partners can also include video on their product page. If you would like to make additions or changes to your page please contact [Billy](#) or [Helen](#).

Social Media

- Overall followers on our social media channels have increased by 6% since the start of the year, and now stand at just under 64k.

Print & Brochure Distribution

- Production of our 2021 Publications is now under way. 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. If you are interested in advertising in any of the 2021 publications please let [Billy](#) know
- We are repurposing some of our existing video content and producing 4 new videos along the timeless themes. These will be used within the digital publications.
- Great West Way guide to the Kennet & Avon Canal is progressing. The plan is for this guide to be printed by the Spring.
- The main Great West Way map and food and drink map will also be updated in the coming months .

Training

We have recently held a couple of free online training course in the last couple of weeks, Instagram 101 with Naturally Social and Email Marketing with Brighter Side. We are planning on offering a few more over the coming weeks and currently putting this together. If you have any suggestions or requests for subjects you would like us to cover please let [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](#) 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](#) account for more updates.

We have also set up a [Brexit advice page](#) 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?)