



## **Minutes of the Twenty Fifth Annual General Meeting of Mid Wales Tourism held at Plas Talgarth Resort, Pennal on Friday 9<sup>th</sup> December 2016**

**Present:** Anne Lloyd-Jones, Chairman  
Rowland Rees-Evans, Ceredigion Director  
Neil Bale, Powys Director  
William Moeran, Meirionnydd Director  
Ian Rutherford, Co-opted Director  
Valerie Hawkins, MWT Chief Executive  
Martin Davies, MWT Accountant  
32 Members of Mid Wales Tourism

### **1.0 Introduction and Welcome**

Retiring Chairman Anne Lloyd-Jones welcomed members, life members, Directors and MWT staff, to the 25th Annual General Meeting of Mid Wales Tourism. Mr Chris Ainsworth, General Manager Plas Talgarth Resort welcomed everyone to the venue.

### **MWT Annual General Meeting**

#### **2.0 Chairman's Address**

Retiring Chairman extended her thanks to all members, Directors, Chief Executive and MWT staff for their support over the past fifteen years. She also thanked MWT's specialist PR officer, Duncan Foulkes, and thanked retiring Directors Tony Bywater, William Moeran and Calum Milne for their service to the Board.

During her time as Chairman, MWT had faced a number of challenges and significant change, including Foot and Mouth and the demise of the Wales Tourist Board. She expressed satisfaction that rate relief secured after Foot and Mouth was still in place, although how long it would continue would be subject for future debate. The Wales Tourist Board had provided a focus for the industry and tourism remained one of Wales' most important sectors.

Meeting the challenges and opportunities the industry had faced had been a collective effort over the years. A public and private sector workable model would have to be found and implemented going forward. MWT was here to support and help its members; the more the company promoted the region, the more tourism businesses would benefit. Individual members also benefited from bespoke support and advice in what was becoming an increasingly digital age.

The Chairman expressed every confidence that MWT would rise to future challenges and reiterated her thanks to everybody, including her husband and family, for their support over her time as Chairman.

#### **3.0 Minutes of the 24th Annual General Meeting**

The minutes of the twenty-fourth Annual General Meeting of MWT held at National Library, Aberystwyth were presented. Approval of the minutes as a true record was proposed by Adrian Greason-Walker, seconded by William Moeran and unanimously accepted by the members present.

#### **4.0 Adoption of the Annual Report for the Year 2015/16**

Val Hawkins briefly summarised the report, acknowledging the continued hard work of the staff at MWT. No questions were presented therefore adoption of the Annual Report was proposed by

Ian Rutherford, seconded by Rowland Rees-Evans and unanimously accepted by the members present.

#### **5.0 Adoption of Accounts**

Accounts for the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> July 2016 were presented and Chairman formally thanked Accountant Martin Davies, Aberystwyth, for his work throughout the year. No questions were presented. Adoption of the Accounts was proposed by Adrian Greason-Walker, seconded by Ian Rutherford and unanimously accepted by the members present.

#### **6.0 Appointment of Accountants for Ensuing Year**

The appointment of Mr Martin Davies, 8 Bro Nantcellan, Clarach, Nr Aberystwth, SY23 3PH as Accountant for the ensuing year was proposed by Anne Lloyd-Jones, seconded by Rowland Rees-Evans and unanimously accepted by the members present.

#### **7.0 Appointment of Mr Rowland Rees-Evans as MWT Chairman**

The appointment of Mr Rowland Rees-Evans as MWT's new Chairman was proposed by Anne Lloyd-Jones, seconded by Neil Bale and unanimously accepted by the members present.

#### **8.0 Appointment of Mr Meurig Jones and Ms Sharon Peake-Jones as Gwynedd (Meirionnydd) Trade Directors**

The appointment of Mr Meurig Jones and Ms Sharon Peake-Jones as Gwynedd (Meirionnydd) Trade Directors was proposed by Ian Rutherford, seconded by Rowland Rees-Evans and unanimously accepted by the members present.

#### **9.0 Appointment of Mr Dylan Roberts as MWT Co-opted Director**

The appointment of Mr Dylan Roberts as Co-opted Director was proposed by Rowland Rees-Evans, seconded by William Moeran and unanimously accepted by the members present.

#### **10.0 Appointment of Mr Owen James as Powys Trade Director**

The appointment of Mr Owen James as Powys Trade Director was proposed by Rowland Rees-Evans, seconded by Ian Rutherford and unanimously accepted by the members present.

#### **11.0 Appointment of Ms Louise Lloyd as Ceredigion Trade Director**

The appointment of Ms Louise Lloyd as Ceredigion Director was proposed by Rowland Rees-Evans, seconded by Ian Rutherford and unanimously accepted by the members present.

#### **12.0 Any Other Business**

There were no issues raised under any other business.

#### **13.0 AGM Close**

Chairman thanked members for attending and declared the AGM closed.

### **MWT Members Forum**

#### **MWT Focus for 2017 – Rowland Rees-Evans and Val Hawkins**

New Chairman **Rowland Rees-Evans** expressed his thanks to retiring Chairman Anne Lloyd-Jones. He said that he didn't know how he would fill her shoes. Anne had been Chairman for nearly sixteen eventful years, during which time central funding had been withdrawn, Foot And Mouth had struck, Tourism

Partnership Mid Wales had formed and disbanded and the Wales Tourist Board had become Visit Wales. The '07/'08 banking crisis and slow economic growth was still being felt but MWT was still here. As Chairman he now had Trump and Brexit to look forward to!

RRE reiterated what a privilege and an honour it had been to work with the retiring Chairman and offered MWT Life Membership as a gesture of thanks and recognition. Anne was delighted to accept this. Val also gave her personal thanks to Anne. As retiring Chairman she was presented with flowers and Portmeirion vouchers. The Chairman also extended his thanks to retiring directors and welcomed all new board members.

The Chairman set out his vision for MWT going forward. He explained that MWT was a not-for-profit organisation and here to help and share ideas. He ran through the objectives of the company, namely:

- To represent the interests of tourism operators and to provide services for them
- To assist in the promotion and development of the tourism industry in Wales
- To encourage the development and promotion of tourism in ways which are compatible with the need to protect the environment
- To promote Mid Wales as a region for holidays, business, travel and conventions directly and in conjunction with other organisations in the United Kingdom and overseas
- To engage in commercial activities to support the foregoing objectives.

Membership remained vitally important. The message for businesses was 'invest to save'; invest in the cost of membership for savings and discounts on a range of support services.

With the growth of technology MWT could always look to improve and he welcomed thoughts from members. He said the organisation was good at lobbying and helping to influence for the betterment of tourism in the region. The market was changing, with an increased use of smartphones and iPads. To illustrate the point he reported that Hoseasons had witnessed a 130% increase in bookings made on iPhones. Research from Google had found that we touch our phones more than one thousand times per day. It was important to be smarter about how we engage with customers.

The Chairman said he was looking forward to the challenges and opportunities the organisation and the wider industry now faced. The long term effects of Brexit weren't known but tourism businesses may benefit in the short term from the weakened pound and an influx of international visitors coupled with stay-at-home UK visitors. However, inflation and rising costs were an issue. Businesses were at the mercy of the UK Government and the public sector was also being faced with increasing austerity measures. Ceredigion Council had experienced cuts of £30 million over the past three years and increasingly grant funding was no longer available. However, on a positive note he felt the quality of businesses was getting better.

Chief Executive **Val Hawkins** recalled how MWT had come into being in 1991 around the same time that she had started her own tourism business in Powys. In 1999 she joined the staff at MWT and reiterated how the company was here to help new and longstanding members.

2016 highlights included rebranding the Bedroom Browser and extending the campaign with Tear off Maps and promotion on the Show Me Wales app which provided added value for advertisers. A new collaboration had been established with Pear Distribution for branded leaflet stands. MWT had also attended the International Festival of Business event in Liverpool. Over the past two years the company had worked hard to develop services for members, including new website builds. This would set the direction for work going forward.

Val also introduced the Mid Wales Media Hub and Heather Mitchell, Project Co-ordinator. She explained the ongoing project, funded by VisitWales, was about supporting collaborative media activity across four Mid Wales destinations; Ceredigion-Cardigan Bay, Dyfi Biosphere, Cambrian Mountains and Mid and North Powys. She also thanked Duncan Foulkes and Owain Betts for their help and expertise on the project.

For 2017 there would be a focus on membership, one to one sessions and additional chargeable services. More work would be done on social media and on more regular members meetings. She

introduced new member of staff Claire Owen who would be leading on membership recruitment and development in her new role. The company planned to hold a conference in March 2017, to replicate the successful conference in 2015. Val explained how there were different types of membership; business, community, commercial and corporate, and how it was important to continuing strengthening links with all sectors. The members' website [mwtcymru.co.uk](http://mwtcymru.co.uk) had gone live in the past week and she encouraged everyone to take a look.

During 2016/17 significant investment had also been committed to re-develop MWT's two new visitor-facing websites: [visitmidwales.co.uk](http://visitmidwales.co.uk) and [showmewales.co.uk](http://showmewales.co.uk). The new Show Me Wales site, which had also gone live in the past week, supported the company's aim to grow membership in other regions out of the company's core mid Wales area. The site had been built by the team at NVG and was fully responsive, with a fresh look and feel. The new [visitmidwales.co.uk](http://visitmidwales.co.uk) website would be live in Jan/Feb 2017 and include new features such as the ability for visitors to shortlist favourite items and a wealth of visitor information. The website was the primary destination sell for the region.

In other activity, the Bedroom Browser would pick up the VisitWales theme of legends in its design. The ShowMeWales app had been upgraded for iOS10 and further upgrades are planned for early 2017. The Wales Trails app was still available. MWT's involvement in the FairbookingUK initiative remained a priority to help encourage visitors to book direct rather than through higher commissionable channels such as Booking.com. The new MWT websites would feature a section for groups and venues, to cater for this important market. Widgets had become increasingly popular for members to feed accommodation, events and attraction details across their own websites. Val thanked Julian Burrell for all his help during the year, developing visitor itinerary and events information.

Challenges and opportunities included:

- Membership – How do we grow our membership and what can we do better?
- Marketing focus – local, regional, Pan Wales, overseas, niche markets, travel trade
- Public and / or private sector partnership working & collaboration

MWT Priorities for 2017 were for discussion:

- Maintain Best Value Membership
- Keeping in Touch / MWT Conference / Local Meetings
- Regional Marketing -more focus on individual businesses or destination sell
- Campaigns e.g FairBooking, Groups & Tours
- Press & Media
- Representation

## **2017 Trends, Opportunities and Challenges – Members and Directors Open Discussion**

A broad ranging discussion about MWT's priorities followed the presentation and members raised the following questions:

- Steven Jones, Gwynedd Council - Do you monitor traffic to the websites so content meets search demand?

Val Hawkins explained that MWT has a depth of monitoring across the sites, for the destination pages and for individual businesses. This raised the question of whether the company should support the level of destination information the site has, or should our sites focus more on individual member listings. She felt the destination sell was important as this helps to attract visitors to the region but it was something the membership could debate and consider.

Steven explained that the VisitSnowdonia website did not have an online booking facility and stressed the importance of converting visitor enquiries into actual bookings. If businesses do not have fully responsive websites then the potential booking could be lost. Rowland agreed that it was essential for businesses to think about the customer experience. Val reiterated that MWT provide responsive website builds for MWT members.

- Steven Jones, Gwynedd Council – Could MWT integrate events data where possible into Gwynedd's Visit Snowdonia website?

Val said absolutely; this could be done via widgets.

- Steven Jones, Gwynedd Council – What booking system is used on MWT sites?  
Val replied that it was Guestlink. Enir Pritchard, Dinas Camping said she found Booking.com easier to use. Val said that commission on Booking.com was an issue and reiterated that visitmidwales.co.uk was commission free. Rowland said that he charges 10% more on Booking.com to allow for this. However, there was an issue with guests cancelling a week or two before they were due to stay and re-booking as they saw it advertised cheaper elsewhere and had recently switched to advanced payment option for online bookings. Steven said it was important to learn from the likes of Booking.com. Rowland said that Hoseasons were now working with them.
- Ian Rutherford, King Arthur's Labyrinth and MWT Director – Can MWT put pressure on Guestlink to improve the system? Anne Lloyd-Jones said she had always been happy with it and finds it very easy to use.

Val explained that MWT was relaying members concerns to Guestlink, but different businesses used the system in different ways, e.g. updating basic information, e-commerce. Guestlink had done a major upgrade to the system during the previous year and they are a UK wide company. Zoe Hawkins, MWT Digital Projects, reassured Enir that she could use a different booking system on her own website if she wished.

- Rowland Rees-Evans, Chairman – Does anyone have any questions/observations on the economy?

William Moeran said that inflation was a big concern. He had also seen an increase in import costs. Rowland questioned whether Brexit would stabilise things or not. Val said that this would be something to raise at the Wales Tourism Alliance (WTA). Adrian Greason-Walker, Seven Stars Self-Catering and WTA said the price of oil had affected the industry. It would be important to get the fairest deal when new legislation was drafted. WTA members had recently raised the issue of non-domestic business rates & transitional relief. He encouraged people to talk to their Assembly members and MPs. Anne Lloyd-Jones said we should remain positive. Neil Bale said we need to think what we want MPs to do and give them ammunition.

- Rowland Rees-Evans - Is there anything you would like the company to do better or differently? No suggestions were forthcoming. Rowland asked members to complete a short survey form before they left the meeting, asking them to rate the most important things MWT should focus on.
- Rowan Jones, Yamaha Off-road – How many businesses in the room pay extra for specialist digital marketing services? Could MWT have a tie-up with a good local provider so members could benefit from a discount?  
Claire and Zoe (MWT) replied it was definitely something the company could look into. Rowan said that social media and SEO were particular areas where they benefited from extra help. They currently utilised the services of a local Aberystwyth company.

There were no further questions raised. Chairman thanked members for attending and declared the members forum closed.