

Enterprise and Business Committee

Inquiry into Tourism

Engagement event with stakeholders

Llechwedd Slate Caverns, Blaenau Ffestiniog – Thursday 18 September 2014

Purpose

The aim of this event was for Members of the Enterprise and Business Committee to hear the views and experiences of local tourism businesses.

The event was split into three groups, each consisting of local tourism businesses and Assembly Members. Group 1 consisted of the following people:

Joyce Watson AM (Chair)
Suzy Davies AM
Michael Bewick (Llechwedd Slate Caverns)
Jana Jones (Attractions of Snowdonia)
Ceri Cunnington (Antur Stiniog)
Jennifer MacDonald (Welsh Mountain Zoo)

Summary of the main points made

Infrastructure problems

- Mobile phone and broadband coverage must be improved. Nowadays most tourism businesses rely upon online bookings, which are often made using mobile devices.
- North–south transport links need to be improved.
- There is not enough good signage to direct tourists to attractions. However, the situation regarding brown tourism attraction signs has improved.

Visit Wales and Visit Britain support

- Regional Tourism Partnerships were a mixed success. One of their strengths was that they provided an opportunity for tourism businesses from different sectors to get together. However, they seemed to duplicate some of the branding work done by other agencies.
- The transition from Regional Tourism Partnerships to a new model of regional support could be positive, depending on how it is done.
- Research produced by Visit Wales is useful, and helps to create business cases needed for investment. Further impartial research would be welcomed.
- Capital support from Visit Wales (for example, for mountain bike trails) has been very helpful.
- Visit Wales is good at business support.
- Visit Wales' marketing aims are not communicated well with local stakeholders. Local businesses have not been approached to feed into the "Have you packed for Wales?" campaign. Stakeholders were also disappointed that only one attraction from north Wales featured in this advert.
- Visit Wales seems Cardiff-focussed – e.g. local businesses are not made aware of Visit Wales press trips, which they would have been able to help with. A clear point of contact for local stakeholders is required within Visit Wales.
- Visit Wales has insufficient resources.
- Visit Wales should invest further in providing a specifically Welsh welcome at Holyhead port and Liverpool and Manchester airports.
- Local tourism stakeholders do not have a direct relationship with Visit Britain.
- Visit Britain needs to do more to sell distinctive aspects of Wales. Selling Britain in a general sense usually means selling England.

Other Welsh Government support

- Cadw do not seem engaged in tourism in the area, and have withdrawn from a number of local partnerships.
- There does not seem to be sufficient communication within the Welsh Government regarding tourism. This makes, for example, erecting signs to promote tourism businesses difficult.
- Communication between the Welsh Government and local stakeholders should be improved.
- Go Wales and Jobs Growth Wales are both excellent.

Welsh Government growth aims

- Given the rate of growth experienced by tourism businesses last year (approximately 3–4 per cent), ten per cent growth in tourism earnings by 2020 seems achievable, but unambitious.

Other points

- There is not enough tourist accommodation of high enough quality.
- Local authorities seem to appreciate the value of tourism in their area, but are still working out what their role is in supporting it.
- Local authority Destination Management Plans sound overly bureaucratic, and consequently local businesses do not tend to engage with them.
- The outdoor activity sector – and tourism businesses more broadly – help to retain talented young people in the area, and attract further talented people.