



Promoting, developing and supporting tourism in the Wye Valley and Forest of Dean

Chairman's Report 2016

I would like to start with thanking our partners that have directly funded our activity - FoDDC and Forestry Commission for their ongoing financial support, Visit Wales for helping to fund specific schemes such as the current Myths and Legends project, SWTGF and MCC who have directly and indirectly support various projects.

We have also developed better links with our other strategic partners such as Hartpury and Gloucester Colleges who are supporting our initiative to develop better apprenticeships in the sector, the AONB, and more recently Cadw has joined our group of strategic partners. These relationships help us to identify the priorities for the destination and ensure we better work together to align and deliver our objectives.

With limited budgets, we rely on our members amplifying our content, product and messages. We all need to part of the solution...no good saying FB is only for the yooof (it isn't), you need to get on social media, use twitter and Instagram and maybe even snapchat. We have shown time and time again how we can come up with creative, low cost ideas and get them to a wide audience. Check out the publicity behind the recent #deanwyeactivitybloggers weekend with over 100000 people directly connected - big thanks to the team behind the Forest Activity Festival who provided the funding and Helen, Liz and Cat who made the event happen. It was so successful that it has given Maureen a headache - plenty of other sectors now want to see a similar event...if you can find the resources and the money to make it reality then Maureen, Tim and the association will really get behind you - truly a case of "Better together".

We also delivered our 3rd Tourism Forum in January - a brilliant event with some inspired and inspiring speakers, which created a huge profile for our area in the highest levels of the tourism sector - I think it is shame more members don't support - we will research reasons why, but are committed to continuing the event as long as funds allow. If I could recommend one event to attend next year it would be the Forum.

I mentioned membership fees in the Treasurers report earlier. We took the decision to restructure our membership fees before the end of the financial year - bringing in higher rates for larger organisations. We thought long and hard about this decision - did a lot of research and attempted to be as fair as possible. A large proportion of our membership are small, one man bands and were unduly hit by the Association crossing the VAT threshold - ending up with a 20% increase in fees with none of it coming into the organisation. We have held fees for the smaller businesses, while recognising that larger businesses potentially had more to gain from our activity. Not everyone is happy with this move but I am (relatively) pleased to say that less than a handful of businesses have not renewed citing the new rates.

We are often asked by individual members to support or oppose particular planning applications, political campaigns or take a stance on specific issues affecting the area. I would like to take a minute to clarify the Board position on what we do and more importantly why we take that approach with reference to any political positioning etc...

The Board agreed that:

1. The organisation was in place to support, develop and promote the destination and our members. It is not in place to take a public stand on political, planning and political issues, for two reasons:
 - a. As a membership organisation, there would need to be support from 100% of members for the particular issue.

- b. There are not the resources in the organisation to focus in these areas; members are not funding the organisation to take this approach and therefore resources are not focussed in this area.
2. The organisation should however provide individual members or groups of members with available facts, figures and research if required and available; and also with the communication routes to be able to discuss matters with specific interest groups.
3. The organisation will make sure that key requirements in terms of development are included within the Destination Management Plan, which members will be able to refer join specific instances where strategic context is required.

Before I close, I would like to take a moment to remember Brian Deakin - we lost a legend of the Association during the year. Brian was for a very long time the glue that held our organisation together. His many years of input shaped us, and ensured that we have a stable base to move forward from. When I first joined the Board his calm, considered approach and real wisdom really helped me to understand the issues and we all, I am sure will join his family in missing him dearly.

Well, this is my last formal duty as Chair. I will be standing down by the end of May and will ensure an effective handover to a new chair before that time...I am really proud of what the organisation has achieved over the past few years, and how it is set up for the future - particularly with the work that Maureen and her team have delivered - but after 5 years on the Board, 2 as Vice Chair and 2 as Chair it is time for someone else to have a go so I can focus more time on my businesses and family.

We are reliant on both the paid our staff and contractors, but also a huge amount of unpaid, voluntary work from your Directors for which we should be very grateful and I offer them my heartfelt thanks for their efforts. If you think there are any areas that you can help out on, please get in touch.

Ian Officer