



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

Chairman's Report 2015

2015 and the early part of 2016 has seen huge changes for the Association. Following the retirement of both Caroline Anderson and Brian Deakin last year, the Board has worked hard on ensuring a successful transition, and have focused on sharing workload across the full team with members working in functional areas where we can maximise our collective efforts.

It has also been the first full year with Maureen McAllister in her role of Executive Director and we continue to be delighted with her knowledge of the sector, industry contacts and awareness as well as her infectious enthusiasm and sheer hard work. I know our members will join with me in thanking Maureen for all her efforts over the past year.

- Wye Valley and Forest of Dean Tourism has four key functions:
- To represent the local tourism industry at local and national level
- To promote and raise the profile of the Wye Valley and Forest of Dean
- To support members to improve and market their businesses
- To enable member businesses to work together

The Tourism economy is worth £360 million to our destination, providing 8 - 10% of total employment. It is essential we ensure that we continue to work together to deliver against these objectives.

The past year has been full of successes and I would like to share some of the highlights with you:

We have continued to develop constructive strategic partnerships with a wide range of key stakeholders. The relationship with FoDDC continues to be strong with Councilors recently renewing their commitment to part fund our Executive Director costs. There remains a productive partnership with MCC and the Wye Valley AONB, and we are all delighted to have grown our network of partnerships; are pleased to have great new partners in GFirst LEP, Hartpury and Gloucester Colleges - who are helping us to develop apprenticeships within the Hospitality and Tourism Economy sectors and more recently Cadw.

The South West Tourism Growth Fund was a £5 million fund made available to develop the tourism offer in the South West and to try and ensure international visitors travel outside London. The fund had to be planned and spent within 6 months and provided a unique opportunity for the multiple Destination Management Organisations in the area to work together constructively. Through our involvement in the fund we have ensured unrivalled coverage and content in front of international markets - Germany, Benelux, Scandinavia, US and Australia. The legacy of our work within the Growth Fund has really increased our profile and credibility within the South West and also provided future access into Discover England fund - with £40M to be spent over next 3 years.

I can't ignore the amazing success of our various Social media campaigns which have truly been a massive highlight of the year - especially Stormtroopers on the Severn Bore and Forest Awakens. Massive amounts of international publicity have been generated for our tiny organisation - proving once again how much impact we can make with creative ideas and complete collaboration.

We have continued to improve and update the area website. Major development included going live with Freetobook - a move that was designed primarily for visitors to the site (and the destination), to simplify searching for availability and ensuring a quicker and easier booking process. Although there was early concern and resistance from a number of members, the feedback from users, plus the overall number of bookings has been very positive. We have further upgrades planned for the coming year and Maureen will update you on developments.

The membership team has been working on enhancing membership beyond the current offering, including developing a new member website and arranging discounts or perks at other local businesses. We will also be encouraging members over the next couple of months to move onto direct debit and giving you all the option of moving your renewal date. If you agree to sign up to our new direct debit scheme, you will

receive a 10% discount on next year's renewal fees. We wanted to make fee renewal easier not only for us but also for you, and by offering a different renewal date to the current January 1st model, you will be able to choose a time which is best for you to pay.

Full details of the new membership structure will be coming out to you along with details of the direct debit scheme in the next few weeks. You will find that for the majority of you there will be no change in your renewal premiums for next year. We wanted to make the structure simpler as well as more equitable. For this reason, we have kept the current Silver and Gold levels as they are, but added two pricing levels – one for small businesses and the other for larger businesses. For the purposes of our model, a large business is one with more than 4 full time equivalent employees, including contractors and volunteers. If you are unsure whether your business would qualify as a large business, please speak to John Bosley or Maureen who will be able to help you.

We are now at the beginning of a recruitment campaign, so if you know anyone who you feel should be members, then please send their detail to John database. I have met several ex- members recently who have told me that they left the Association because they didn't get enough bookings off our website - if that is the sole reason for remaining in membership we are not doing a very good job of explaining the benefits of membership. Attracting new members is increasingly important to generate additional income so that we can continue the great work of attracting more guests to the area and to your businesses.

I would like to conclude with a few votes of thanks:

Firstly, to our paid team - John Bosley, Lesley and Maureen - all of whom work far in excess of their contracted hours to do the vast number of chores that arise in the day to day operation of our Association. Also to my fellow Directors, plus those co-opted (press-ganged) onto the Board, who give up huge amounts of their time, voluntarily and unpaid to ensure that we don't miss an opportunity to promote our beautiful area. Particularly John Theophilus, who is retiring from business and stepping down from the Board after four years. John has been instrumental in driving through change in our working practices, culture and processes over the past few years. This year he has reviewed our accounting practices, and ensured our finances are accessible and robust as well as providing a strong voice for small businesses. We wish him all the best in his retirement.

2016 and 2017 will continue to provide a challenging environment for Tourism businesses. Local Government support and spending on tourism services will certainly continue to reduce as evidenced by further closures of TICs and cuts in staffing numbers. It will be essential for small businesses to work together, using flexibility and ingenuity to deliver creative solutions - such as our partnership with Coleford Town Council on their new TIC. We have created big waves to date in the Tourism sector with our unique structure of private businesses working together with strategic partners to promote our destination and help members develop their businesses. Thank you all for your support in our successes - past, present and future.

Ian Officer May 2016