



# Wye Valley & Forest of Dean Tourism Association

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## CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2014

I think, looking back, it is safe to say that 2014 is a true watershed year for the Tourism Association. The year started with the Board working hard with the consultants, Bluesail, to produce a plan to take the association forward for the future. It concluded that we needed to create a part-time (3 day a week) post of Executive Director as the association could no longer continue to be run solely on a volunteer basis.

Meanwhile, the Forest of Dean Council decided to outsource its tourism services. The association tendered for the contract and won. A 3-year Service Level Agreement was entered into which was the basis for achieving Bluesail's plan. We interviewed several excellent candidates for the post and selected Maureen McAllister, an experienced tourism professional, and she started in post in September. It was soon clear that Maureen hit the ground running and made several quick successes, both in signing up some prestigious new members, establishing a rapport with others, as well as with the various council and other official bodies.

Our **Post-Christmas party** was held at Clearwell Caves. Over 70 attended, keen to see all the wonderful Christmas decorations at the caves. Other meetings were held through the year at Harts Barn Cookery School, St Pierre Hotel, Bells Hotel, The Old Court Hotel and Kate Humble's Humble By Nature where we had a tour and social evening. We also had a tour of the Butterfly Zoo and presentations by the Federation of Small Businesses, a local leaflet distribution company, on a new Forest Cycle Map, a book of dog walks, and other local events.

**Annual Membership Fees** - The membership also agreed that the annual fees could be increased from £80 to £120 per annum for 2015. It was hoped that this increase would help to finance the ambitious plans that were being made, coming out of the Bluesail Report.

**Website** - Work on Phase 2 of our new site continued through the year with design improvements to the Home Page and the About Us page, amongst other things. New banner ad positions were introduced which generally had a poor uptake, despite having good stats. A Rugby World Cup landing page was added with more planned for other festivals. There were various other additions in line with the new marketing strategies that are coming on line. A new news bulletin was introduced – **WebNews** – with periodic updates on new web features.

The Association was asked to be a sponsor of an Activities Festival held at Speech House field. This was organised and run by the Hoteliers Group but several of our board members were also involved.

**Board of Directors and Advisors** At the AGM, held in June this year, Curt Green, Ian Officer and Fiona Wilton remained on the Board as the shortest standing members. Karen Davies, one of our vice chairs and long-serving committee member stood down. Caroline Anderson MBE, Brian Deakin, John Theophilus were re-elected and David Broadbent, Hari Fell, Neil Hesman Helen O’Kane and Mark Terry-Lush were newly voted onto the Board. Paula Burrows (FODDC), Heather Lilley (Forestry Commission) and Nikki Moore (AONB) were appointed by the Board as Advisors. Caroline Anderson was elected Chairman, Fiona Wilton and Ian Officer as Vice Chairs, and Brian Deakin Treasurer.

**Ros Robertson**, our co-chair, retired after 18 years’ service, first with Wye Valley Tourism, which she founded, and later with the merged Wye Valley & Forest of Dean Tourism Association. She was presented with a painting of Tintern Abbey by local artist, David Day.

**PR and Marketing** Alexandra Marr & Associates worked throughout the year on our behalf, being funded by various further grants, and sent out a regular newsletter to the public from a visitor database supplied mainly from FOD.

3 New promotional pop-ups were ordered for use at shows and any exhibitions, meetings etc.

**Social Media Courses** – MCC provided some funding which allowed Maureen McAllister, as one of her first jobs, to run several half day courses to get a body of members using facebook and twitter regularly. All this aimed at raising the profile of the area and our activities.

**Photo Library** – Last year’s work, funded by the Forestry Commission and FODDC was finally collated and made into an online library, accessible to all members, press and the public. We hope this will continue to be added to and will be a constantly improving resource.

**Visitor Guide** – As part of our commitment under the SLA with FODDC, we were responsible for the first time for producing the A4 Visitor Guide. Its production was completed on time (end December) and its design and content were praised.

**Ross Information Centre** – Following the closure of the VH Visitor Centre, we were able to set up a private sector centre in the newly-opened and new member Mandy Moo’s Café, by the bus station in Ross. It carries our guides and has an internet facility

and equipment to allow visitors to go to our website for accommodation and other information.

**Gloucester Services** opened on the M5. They have been members of the association since we supported their first planning applications and we were excited to see them finally open. They are heavily promoting the Forest of Dean for us and stocking local produce, and all our guides.

**Tourism Award** – Our efforts were rewarded this year when we won the Forester Tourism Business of the Year Award.