

Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee

Inquiry into the Welsh Government's Historic Environment Policy

Response from Edwina Hart, Minister for Business, Enterprise, Technology and Science

Welsh Government Historic Environment Policy

1. Introduction

11. The purpose of this paper is to set out written evidence to the Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee in relation to their enquiry on the Welsh Government's Historic Environment Policy.

2. Summary

2.1. This paper outlines the importance of the Historic Environment to Welsh tourism and provides information on activity undertaken by my officials in Visit Wales and its partners to maximise the value of to the Historic Environment to the Welsh visitor economy.

3. Welsh Tourism and the Historic Environment

3.1. Tourism is one of our key economic sectors, worth £4.7 billion to the Welsh economy each year; the historic environment is an important component of the sector.

3.2. Visitors are looking for distinctive, authentic experiences that allow them to get to know the real Wales. Visitor research shows that having a distinct, authentic Welsh experience is an important factor in influencing trip satisfaction. Our culture and heritage are a core part of what makes Wales appealing to visitors, differentiating Wales and providing a reason to visit.

3.3. In terms of the historic environment, visitor encounters can be either generic i.e. architecture, character of towns and villages, sense of place or landscapes or specific such as visits to heritage attractions, museums, places of worship, heritage railways.

- 3.4. Visitor figures confirm that visits to heritage attractions are amongst the most popular activities undertaken by domestic visitors after general sight seeing/ relaxing. Visiting castles/ historic sites, heritage and interpretation centres and scenic railways are all relatively more popular on trips to Wales than to other parts of the UK.
- 3.5. In the 2011 visitor survey, 38% of domestic visitors cite visiting places of interest and historic sites as a motivating reason to visit Wales, whilst over a third of Overseas Visitors say that visiting historical sites and attractions is their *main reason* for visiting Wales. However, Wales as a destination, and its strong heritage offering, is relatively less well known amongst international visitors and has a strong potential to drive additional visitor growth.
- 3.6. Visitor perceptions of Wales are strong for castles and industrial heritage including railways but our gardens and museums/ galleries are less well known. Overall, Wales suffers from a perception that although Wales is endowed with plenty of natural beauty, there is little else to see and do.
- 3.7. Castles and palaces are top on the list of things that overseas visitors want to see most when they come to Britain. In a recent VisitBritain survey, more than 10,000 foreign tourists were given a list of 18 things that can only be done in Britain and asked to pick the ones they'd like to do most. The top three choices were, in order of importance: to go on a tour of Welsh castles (34%), visit Buckingham Palace (32%) and stay the night in a Scottish castle (29.1%).

Visit Wales Activity

4. Cross Departmental and partnership work

- 4.1. My officials work through the Cultural Tourism Partnership to co-ordinate the work of partners involved in heritage, cultural and tourism development. The Partnership includes a mix of internal and external bodies and it aims to pool ideas for future action and to take forward joint projects.
- 4.2. My department co-ordinates a cross-departmental group that is looking to capitalise on the potential of the designation of Pontcysyllte World Heritage Site through promoting and developing a wider cultural offer in North East Wales.
- 4.3. In relation to European Funded projects, my officials chair and manages the Environment for Growth (E4G) Strategic Steering Group as well as the E4G Strategic monitoring and evaluation group. Cadw are active partners of both groups through the Heritage Tourism Project.

4.4. In addition, my department is represented on the Heritage Minister's Heritage Environment Group (HEG) and contributed to the research study undertaken into the economic Value of Historic Environment. The research estimated that the historic environment sector supports over 30,000 full time equivalent (FTE) jobs in Wales and contributes approximately £840 million to Wales' national gross value added (GVA), which is equivalent to 1.9% of Wales' total GVA.

5. Marketing

5.1. Culture and heritage are an intrinsic part of the Wales visitor offer and therefore heritage tourism product features strongly across all of Welsh Governments' tourism marketing campaigns.

5.2. Since the majority of visitors to heritage attractions are casual and accidental heritage tourists, as opposed to culture and/or heritage being the main purpose of their trip, promoting the attractions to them in the right way is vital if they are to be captured. Marketing campaigns provide reasons to visit and top things to do whilst at the destination, increasingly focusing on social media and PR as well as more traditional advertising and direct marketing approaches.

6. Destination Management

6.1. My department is encouraging the development and promotion of destinations through a destination management programme that is being rolled out across Wales. The destination management approach establishes effective public/private partnerships to identify priorities for improving the visitor experience at particular destination. The development of a destination's heritage assets has featured in many of the Destination Management Plans that have been prepared to date. Monmouthshire, for example, will be developing the following aspects of the visitor offer of the county towns and major villages:

- Castle interpretation and visitor facilities;
- Church and churchyard interpretation and visitor facilities;
- Museums;
- Heritage sites;

6.2. An interesting opportunity for the historic environment sector is how we enhance the experience of some of our heritage attractions/ towns. There is scope to further develop and improve focal heritage towns that have a critical mass of heritage attractions to improve their overall appeal to visitors.

7. Capital Investment

7.1. Through the Tourism Investment Support Scheme (TISS), my department is able to support projects to improve facilities at heritage sites and attractions that contribute to the overall appeal of a destination to visitors. Recent examples of projects that have been funded through this scheme include:

- Cardiff Castle - £25k to restore the view at the entrance to the castle
- Silver Mine Attractions Ltd , Mid Wales - £50k to upgrade all of the existing mines, exhibits and facilities.
- Oystermouth Castle - £238k to help realise a 'conserved heritage attraction with full public access' (part of wider Heritage Tourism project led by Cadw)
- Pontsystyllte Aqueduct - £50k to extend and upgrade a visitor interpretation centre, together with related infrastructure works, at Trevor Basin, in support of the Pontcysyllte Aqueduct and Canal World Heritage Site.

8. Interpretation

8.1. Assisting visitors to understand or interpret the story relating to a place is key to the overall visitor experience particularly at heritage attractions. Digital means are increasingly being utilised to bring sites to life. Moving and interactive elements assist learning, enhance the overall experience and widening the appeal. Digital interpretation (mobile information/ augmented reality/ self guided tours etc) can be very effective method used along side more traditional written methods, first person interpretation and re-enactment.

8.2. My department is supporting the development of digital interpretation at heritage sites and attractions via the European Funded Digital Tourism Business Framework for example using video gaming technology to enhance the visitor experience at key cultural heritage and tourism sites.

9. Future direction for Welsh Tourism

9.1. The Tourism Sector Panel is currently undertaking a review of the Welsh Government's Tourism Strategy. The review will, in part, be informed by new consumer research that has been recently commissioned to investigate the key barriers and opportunities to visiting Wales by UK tourists. This research will help inform how we promote our historic environment alongside other tourism products in our future tourism activity.

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