



## Partners' Meeting 15 March 2022

- Date: Tuesday 15 March 2022
- Time: 11.00 to 13.00
- Venue: [The Speech House Hotel](#)

About 70 partners attended our first meeting of 2022 at the Speech House Hotel, the first to be held for more than two years due to the pandemic. It was good to once more meet fellow partners face-to-face including some who had joined recently or during the pandemic.

Our Co-Chair, Yvette Farrell welcomed everyone on behalf of the board and outlined the programme for the morning. She gave a brief overview of the issues that tourism businesses had faced over the previous two years including how Visit Dean Wye had relied on grant funding to survive and how the input of our volunteer directors had been vital to keep the organisation going.

We started with a short presentation from our host, Naomi Hands, Operations Director at the Speech House Hotel who welcomed everyone to the hotel and went on to relate some of their experiences during the pandemic, including some that were amusing. The hotel has recently had a facelift including the front entrance and bar and Naomi invited everyone to look at the changes after the meeting.

The main presentation of the morning was given by [Tina Veater](#), the owner of [Ignyte Ltd](#). Tina explained that Ignyte had recently been contracted by Forest of Dean and Wye Valley Tourism to handle all aspects of working with partners including maintaining listings, account renewals and increasing the number of partners. Tina introduced her colleague, [Jo Procter](#), who will be Ignyte's main point of contact with partners. Jo will regularly be contacting all partners and following the meeting she had the opportunity to meet many of those present and put faces to the names.

Tina explained that Ignyte are very experienced in tourism and already handle the accounts for a number of DMOs, particularly in the South West. She said that they would be working with partners to improve their listings and ensure they were getting value for money from their partnership. She discussed the reintroduction of partner newsletters which would be sent monthly and mentioned our new website. Tina asked everyone to check their listings to ensure that they are correct and that they had the best possible images. [Tina's presentation can be downloaded.](#)

[Alexandra Sore](#), our Digital Marketing Manager, gave a presentation on the website and our latest marketing campaign. Alex reminded us that we had a major change to our website in October 2020 and urged everyone to "take a look". The website has a better user experience, is optimised for all devices (including mobile), has lots of new copy, better images, online accommodation availability and it is now easier to find each business. Alex gave a summary of the statistics which included that in the past 12 months the website has had 426,707 unique users and 1,186,950 page views, an increase of 20% on the same period for 2019.

Alex next gave an overview of our spring 2022 marketing campaign, *Find Your Freedom in the Forest of Dean*, which was due to launch later in the day. It has five themes:

- **Hidden Gems** draws attention to lesser-known locations and interesting experiences to enjoy in the main Forest towns of Lydney, Coleford, Cinderford and Newent.
- **The Delicious Dean** celebrates the fabulous flavours found across the area, shining a light on some of the best food and drink locations and tasty local produce.
- **Freedom Awaits** connects visitors with nature where they can experience the magnificent surroundings from wildlife spotting to forest bathing.

- **Get Out, Get Active** covers a range of exhilarating experiences for adventurers, from laser tag to caving, and high ropes to cycling.
- **The Crafty Forest** inspires visitors to express their creativity, try their hand at pottery or mosaics, or learn new culinary skills.

The campaign is supported by new videos and new downloadable itineraries. You can [explore the campaign here](#) and also [view the main video](#). Alex asked everyone to get involved in the campaign on social media using the hashtag **#GoFindFreedom**.

The campaign was made possible due to major funding from Forest of Dean District Council and a stipulation was that we could only include businesses and destinations within the Forest of Dean. Whilst this was frustrating to some partners outside of this area, it was stressed that everyone will benefit because the campaign will drive more traffic to our website. [Alex's presentation can be downloaded](#).

Following her presentation Alex introduced Melanie Jones from [Encore PR](#) who have worked with us on the new campaign. Mel explained that it was a national, regional and local campaign targeting everything from travel trade, outdoor, activity, lifestyle and food media. There would be five separate mini-PR launches during March and April covering the five itineraries. The campaign targets those up to a two-hour drive away including the Bristol, Birmingham and Cardiff areas and the South East and London. [Mel's presentation can be downloaded](#).

The final presentation was given by [Tom El-Shawk](#) from [The Forest of Dean Growth Hub](#). Tom explained that the Gloucester Growth Hub was a project started in 2014 offering support to Gloucestershire SMEs. It was created by GFirst LEP with Government and European funding and has now expanded to all districts, including the Forest of Dean, where it is based at Vantage Point, Mitcheldean. They offer online resources, networking events, workspaces, workshops, 1-2-1s and bespoke support. [Tom's presentation can be downloaded](#).

Finally, we had three two-minute business spotlights (a very brief business outline) from:

- Debbie Jones of [The Forest Deli](#)
- Angharad Wrigley from [Hot Tubs Rock](#)
- Shari Vandervelde from [Float in the Forest](#)

Yvette thanked all the presenters for their contributions and all the partners for coming. She also reminded everyone of how hard our volunteer directors work to raise the profile of the area, its tourism offering and help to deliver Visit Dean Wye's objectives. She added that we always need new volunteers to be involved - find out more [here](#).

Yvette encouraged partners to network, say hello to those who had recently joined, meet Ignyte, see the changes at the Speech House Hotel and enjoy the opportunity to chat with fellow tourism business owners in person after such a long time.