



Wye Valley & Forest of Dean Tourism Association

0845 053 1173 ~ info@wyedeantourism.co.uk



CHAIRMEN'S REPORT – Year Ending Dec 2007

This was our first year as the amalgamated Association, combining the Wye Valley Tourism and Royal Forest of Dean Tourism Associations' membership into one group of around 270 members.

We believe this merger has proved incredibly successful so far. We now have both the Forest of Dean Council and Visit Herefordshire as fully paid-up members and Monmouth Council as a member through its three major attractions. We have also recruited English Heritage as a member through Goodrich Castle, and of course, the Wye Valley AONB have been long time supporters.

Attendance at our General Meetings has continued to grow through the year which we believe reflects the membership view that this is a useful way of sharing tourism-related issues and interacting with others.

This year has required a considerable amount of effort by the Committee Members in pulling together the various aspects of both old organisations into one efficient, cohesive body. For the first time, we have found sufficient funds to employ a part time admin assistant and recently we have engaged Kelly Gingell, ex of FOD Council's Tourism Dept, which has smoothed the day-to-day running considerably. As you will all know, we now have a dedicated telephone number for the Association, as well as a centralised emailing system which makes communications easier for members and the public. This obviously facilitates our continuing commitment to the pastoral care of the membership.

We have focused our remaining efforts on marketing. At the very beginning of 2007 we produced one 52-page association booklet for the whole enlarged area containing all the members of the merged association. This was widely distributed and well received.

WVFDTA took the opportunity to promote the area and the businesses within its membership on the Wye Valley and Vale of Usk (Monmouthshire County Council) stand at The Outdoor Show at the NEC

Birmingham. We also had stands at local shows, food and outdoor festivals, and in window displays - in particular at the Abergavenny Food Festival which is the biggest Food Festival in Wales.

From July onwards, preparations were made for 2008 marketing. We have adopted a new formula for our printed material, bringing in for the first time all the Attractions' advertising, which used to be the "Magic" leaflet. So we now have a dedicated accommodation booklet and one for everything to do in the area. Again, for the first time, the area now has an Eating Out Guide, achieved by joining forces with the FOD Council. This guide has been so well received that it was already almost out of print by the end of the year.

We consider the planning and production of these 3 booklets for the 2008 season to be one of our 2 major achievements this year. The other is undoubtedly the complete renewal of the old WVT website. We worked hard to secure match funding from Gloucestershire Business Link and engaged one of our members, Richard Maddrell of Vitalis, to give us a whole new look. Many additional 'free' facilities were very generously added by Richard to make this a very up-to-date site. One of the visible signs of this is the new efficient way emails are delivered to all the membership, allowing us to fulfil our remit of disseminating news, scams, offers etc.

We also secured a £3,000 training grant from Gloucestershire Tourism Skills Network. Half of this was used to train us in the use of our new website. The other half was put to the other exciting new tourism project in the area for this year. Twelve new tourist guides went through a rigorous course at FOD College and we now have a group of 14 enthusiastic guides waiting to show off everything in the area and avowed to try to bring in new business.

We are already planning more innovations to the website for 2008 and will be looking at trying to track the effectiveness of our marketing. We are hoping to pursue showcasing our local food, both producers and users. More cross-border working and co-operation is also a priority.

We hope 2008 will be successful and we will try to ensure the continued growth of the Association.