



# Wye Valley & Forest of Dean Tourism Association

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## **CHAIRMEN'S REPORT Year ending 2008**

We have made a great deal of progress this year in administrative enhancements designed to help the smooth running of the Association. Our three booklets continue to be distributed widely in approx a 50-mile radius of our area.

### Website:

Our 3 booklets – Accommodation, Activities and Eating Out were made downloadable on our website. We now have an active Members Centre and Members Offers which holds all the information the Association is continually gathering for reference and use by its members.

We have put in place a Buy and Sell page, but members need more reminders still to get into the habit of checking to see what is new.

The Association is enforcing our policy of reciprocal hyperlinks and those who do not wish to link back to our site from their own, have had their links from our site turned off.

We also now have a new category – Local Produce.

Later in the year we commissioned a video which was produced, despite appalling weather, and helps sell our area on the internet. It was produced at a very much reduced cost of £2,000 by a local firm, Klikingo.

We are looking closely at how we get involved with Social Media and start to use it as a tool to sell the area and our businesses.

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Membership fee structure We have looked into this to see if it needed updating. A small sub-committee considered all the alternatives and finally agreed that the basic fee should be kept as reasonable as possible but there should be a subsidiary late/rejoining fee of £30 imposed on those who did not pay by the deadline. This would help to cover the costs of constantly chasing the non-payers. Members who then wished to have a higher profile in the advertising opportunities, could pay extra amounts for these. As a result we now have tiered entries in the Eating Out booklet, the Attractions booklet and also the opportunity of limited banner ads on the website. This policy seems to be working well and we brought in approx a further 80% over and above the subscription amount, in advertising fees.

We have also discussed the situation where an individual has two separate businesses and how their membership should be treated. We have come to the conclusion that membership belongs to an individual and that if he or she runs more than one completely separate business then there should still only be a charge for an Additional Category i.e. the membership is for an individual, not a business.

Electronic Payments We have upgraded our fee payment system. The old standing orders were proving more trouble than they were worth so they have all been cancelled but we have entered into a special agreement with a card processing company and we can now take all payments electronically. It is proving very useful both for members and the treasurer in getting funds in on time. Individual members can also have these card processing facilities with a very special deal for TA members.

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The first Eating Out booklet was produced by the FOD Council, with a financial contribution from the TA. It was extremely popular and out of print within a year. This year the Association has been

responsible for the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (which has been put into the format of our family of booklets) and we were able to add a Local Produce section in the back and therefore recruit many local food producers and stockists into membership. This is all part of our drive to try to embrace Local Food as part of the tourism offer. The Forest of Dean Council gave us a grant of £2,000 to help with this publication. It is a good example of the kind of co-operation we are having with the local authority tourism departments, co-operating on marketing, thus avoiding duplication and waste of precious funds.

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Policy on Political Matters As a result of several requests from members to support various causes, planning applications etc, the committee decided to formulate a policy statement that would make it clear that we would not support anything with any political bias. This is because we do not have the mechanism or resources to obtain a majority membership view on such matters, and it is not within our remit.

#### Cross-Border Working:

We have been successful in bringing together the Tourism Depts of Monmouth, Forest of Dean and Herefordshire to run a joint stand at the NEC Outdoor Show in 2009, thus saving budgets and having one larger and more eye-catching stand with a very good cross-border offer for visitors.

There are reciprocal arrangements in place with Monmouth and Forest of Dean which give us half and quarter page ads respectively in their two visitor guides, totally free of charge.

We now have representation on South East Wales Tourism Forum and the Herefordshire Tourism Co-ordination Group of the DMP.

Relations with Herefordshire still have room for improvement. Your two chairmen have had several meetings with the Herefordshire DMP officers, but we are finding it difficult to find common ground to move forward.

However closer ties and links with South East Wales and Gloucestershire are the subject of ongoing talks.

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We started to receive some complaints about the number of emails that members were being bombarded with so we have now instigated a system whereby general information being dispursed is put in a weekly "Digest" email. Anything urgent or of particular importance is still sent out individually but this practice has cut the email traffic down to manageable levels.

We have investigated a group oil purchasing scheme but there is no significant saving any more.

Thanks to the efforts of Alastair Robertson, we have received a grant of £5,000 which is allowing us to produce an A5 booklet and separate section of the website geared to the over 50s market.

Already for 2009, there are more innovations in the pipeline and we hope to continue to extend our facilities for members, as well as providing a major source of information for our visitors, especially in the light of the future uncertainty of Council funded information sources.