

# Herriot Country Tourism Group & Hambleton Tourism Forum



Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> March at Solberge Hall Hotel



**Attendees:** Emma Hudson, Discover Hambleton; Marcia McLuckie, Original Richmond; Clare Allen, Georgian Theatre Royal Richmond; Mark Robson, Leader, Hambleton District Council; Alex Robson, Northallerton Town Council; Ian Ashton, World of James Herriot; Hayley Cooke, Monk Park Farm; Richard Smith, Classic Lodges Hotels; Ruth English, Winnies Yorkshire Delights; Nick Keegan, Wensleydale Railway; John Gallery, Herriot Country Tourism Group chairman.

**Apologies:** Andrew McGuinness, Confederation of Passenger Transport; James Etherington, Kiplin Hall; Caroline Bell, Shepherd's Purse Cheese; Craig Nattrass, Ryedale DC; Jessica Barker, Thief Hole; Colin Badgery, Thirsk Birds of Prey Centre; Linda Furniss, the Stripey Badger Bookshop and Grassington Chamber; Jade McGillivray, Holiday Inn Scotch Corner; Phil Brierley, Monk Park Farm & York House Leisure. Michael and Sasha Ibbotson, The Durham Ox; Janet Deacon, Scarborough & Yorkshire Coast. Sarah Loftus, Make It York/VisitYork; Catriona Mclees, North York Moors National Park; Julie Barker, Yorkshire Dales National Park.

## Meeting Notes

1. Introductions around the table and apologies were noted.
2. Updates were shared around the table and it was good to hear the various developments, activities and initiatives in each. (See Appendix below)
3. Emma briefly updated everyone on the work being undertaken by colleagues in the districts ahead of the changeover to North Yorkshire Council. Janet in Scarborough is leading the initiative to engage an independent consultant to assist with the creation of a destination development plan in line with the changes coming down via VB and the introductions of LVEP's. Emma also updated everyone on the overlapping Discover Hambleton activities that are continuing into the changeover from the districts to the new North Yorkshire.
4. John explained the discussions he has been having with MakeItYork/VisitYork about working together on the International Marketing initiative and circulated copies of this to everyone.
5. The Screen Tourism Initiative is also underway and the first Workshop will be held at the Holiday Inn Scotch Corner Hotel on Monday 20<sup>th</sup> March.
6. This falls within English Tourism Week and the Herriot Group's social media will be focussing on the VisitEngland branding and awareness raising before and during the week (Friday 17<sup>th</sup> to Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> March)

7. Business Plan update – John read through the plan he has prepared with Emma’s help. The aim of the plan is to give the group its own direction and actions whilst also working towards integrating with the new authority and VisitEngland’s LVEP for North Yorkshire. Copied of the draft of the plan were shared with everyone present. Some additional work is still needed to finalise the plan and comments are welcome from steering group colleagues before it is published and shared widely.
8. Discussion was held about the proposed fees for Herriot Country membership and it was agreed that initially the basic membership fee of £75 should begin in April. Additional paid for benefits and initiatives to be offered as we progress the group into the next phase. This would encourage smaller organisations and then larger ones that can afford more could pay as they go. An associate membership rate could be offered to other organisations such as Parish Councils and other organisations that would be likely to support the group’s activities. Part of the future financial recording will be keeping records of support given ‘in kind’ as this should be valued, recognised and be used to demonstrate businesses commitment to the collective effort. This will come into play much more when we are working in the ‘official’ situation on future.
9. It was commented that the website needed to be brought up-to-date and this would help to improve commitment from businesses. John said that the site is growing rapidly and additional support would help. The addition of the VisitBritain TXGB booking engine will assist in upgrading the site’s benefit to businesses and consumers.
10. A communications exercise is underway to connect with various organisations that are important in the future developments of the Group. Subsequent to the meeting, a letter has been prepared and sent to all North Yorkshires MPs including the Prime Minister and the leader of North Yorkshire and City of York Councils.
11. Date of next meeting – to be agreed – it was suggested that this be arranged for a date in May/June once the new North Yorkshire Council is in place and probably quarterly after that. (Note: JG is away from 26<sup>th</sup> March to 24<sup>th</sup> April)

Thanks again to Richard Smith and the team at Solberge Hall for their hospitality.

Appendix. Individual Update Comments around the table

- **Hayley** updated about Monk Park Farms’ developments and upcoming re-opening on Friday 24<sup>th</sup> March which includes a number of new activities including a pig racing track!
- **Richard** at Classic Lodges Hotels explained about investment and improvements at Solberge Hall and other hotels in the group. For Herriot Country Richard has been doing promotions to his 90k plus database of packages to Herriot Country that include entry into the World of James Herriot. A similar closed promotion to Lancaster Insurance customers with the same Herriot Country package. These promotions are producing good bookings.
- **Emma** for Discover Hambleton explained the push promotions for re-openings, Mothers Day, An Augmented Reality Trail is shortly to be launched in Northallerton – a launch event at the Hub in Northallerton will be announced shortly. Peel is the tech company behind it and Bonner and Hindley is their PR company. Music in the markets in Easingwold, Thirsk and Northallerton is about to start. The ‘Tourism Task and Finish Group’ is working on the transition in the local authorities and a brief has been issued for a consultancy to help shape manage the transition. A

brief for new photography and film has been issued. Northallerton is reporting increased coach business into the town following the installation of free coach parking.

- **Alex** for Northallerton explained the new business developments in the town, new public toilets scheme is starting and support for the TIC and Ambassadors programme is underway.
- **Mark** for Hambleton commented on the huge benefit that the coaches welcome initiative has been and other initiatives that have been successful due to Hambleton's support. Hopefully the new authority will honour the free coach parking. The volunteers and the BID were instrumental in driving this forward and increased spending by coach visitors has been noted with coaches coming in from far and wide.
- **Ian** for the World of James Herriot explained the increase in overseas visitors even during the winter period. Major roof works are ongoing. @022 was the World of James Herriot's best year ever and there are more advanced bookings for groups than ever before. Bookings for groups are coming in every day. This is the outcome of all the work done at trade shows and contacting operators on a regular basis.
- **Nick** for Wensleydale Railway explained his role as fundraiser and marketing. Polar Express at Christmas produced 60k visitors over six weeks - the largest outside the USA. PNP is the event company that runs it and want to do more events along the line which are needed to make it work. The railway has 425 volunteers and only eight salaried staff, Nick is doing all the social media and press releases. A national lottery grant helped to improve the product. New visitor experiences including audio and heritage trails and an explorer passport are being introduced.
- **Clare** for the Georgian Theatre Royal Richmond said that their heritage tours have restarted and these attract around 5000 visitors per year. The Spring season has restarted including stand up comedy. Richmond works well together and Welcome to Richmond has three main initiatives i) the Town Ticket which would work better if more coaches came which includes discounts on attractions, ii) Love being local – free entry to attractions for local residents iii) Volunteers get-together which is very well supported and includes volunteer briefings by the attractions and as a thank you event for the volunteers. They work on low/no budget but it works really well. An attempt to start a BID in the town was unsuccessful as there are not enough businesses.
- **Marcia** for Original Richmond Business and Tourism Association and her own Holiday Cottages business explained without using agencies they are 50% full for this year so far which is really good and advanced bookings continue to come in. The Cottages won the prestigious VisitEngland Rose Award last year. The Association has gained funding for permanent banners in the town, the Awards promotion is going very well, and a new shoe shop has opened in town. Richmond 950 has left a legacy of May Fest which is now an annual event, has charitable status and lottery funding is a possibility. Other events include a Musical Promenade at Easby Abbey; the Walking and Book Festival, Swaledale Festival and Richmond Meet.
- **Ruth** for Winnies Yorkshire Delights is here to represent small businesses and the creative arts sector and the markets involvement. Markets are important to visitors and at the moment Thirsk is quieter than Northallerton but there is a move to develop more nostalgic community activities, entrepreneurs and art as an important part of the product in the area. JG mentioned a Thirsk Cultural initiative that Ruth might get involved with. Catherine at Rural Arts is the contact.