

# Spring Conference 2024

## POLICY MOTION

# Supporting the Visitor Economy in Wales

AGREED BY THE WELSH LIBERAL DEMOCRATS CONFERENCE

Conference notes:

- A. That the tourism or visitor economy sector contributed 17.6% of the GDP of Wales in 2019, compared to 10.4% of UK GDP.
- B. That almost 161,000 people, 12.1% of employment in Wales, are employed as part of the visitor economy in Wales.
- C. That Wales offers unique and diverse tourism experiences, from its stunning landscapes and rich cultural heritage to its vibrant cities and thriving events sector.
- D. The detrimental impact of COVID-19, Brexit and ongoing economic challenges on the visitor economy in Wales.
- E. The Welsh Labour Government's plans to introduce the Local Visitor Levy (Tourism Tax) Bill.
- F. The increasing burden of regulation and difficult trading environment faced by the visitor economy created by decisions and legislation by the UK Tory Government.
- G. In 2019, the number of European visitors to Wales was down by 33% and their spend per visit is down a further 24%.
- H. The wider legislative landscape faced by the visitor economy in Wales with the recent reversal of COVID-19 supporting measures reducing business rate costs and Non-Domestic Rating Order 2022, and the planned Local Visitor Levy (Tourism Tax) Bill and Tourism Registration Business Scheme.
- I. The potential impact of wider legislative initiatives such as reforms to the school year.
- J. The vital role of Visit Wales in promoting tourism in Wales but recognises the need for improvements in its operations to better support the needs of businesses within the tourism industry.
- K. Sustainable and regenerative tourism practices are essential to protect the environment and enhance the visitor experience.

Conference believes:

- I. That the tourism sector raises the profile of Wales at both a national and international level.
- II. That small and medium-sized enterprises form a vital part of the Welsh economy, particularly in rural areas.
- III. That the implementation of the 182 domestic rates order is an unrealistic expectation for most SMEs in Wales given the traditional tourist season span.
- IV. Welsh Government should be supporting the visitor economy sector as it seeks to return to business as usual rather than imposing burdensome legislation.
- V. We need a coordinated and cohesive approach to policymaking that considers the needs and challenges of the visitor economy sector in conjunction with other sectors and community interests.
- VI. A thriving visitor economy requires a collaborative approach involving businesses, communities, and government.
- VII. Investment in infrastructure, marketing, and skills development is crucial to attract visitors and ensure Wales remains a competitive destination.
- VIII. Sustainable and regenerative tourism practices, including responsible marketing and green infrastructure development, are essential for long-term success.

Conference reaffirms the Welsh Liberal Democrats' position of support for the Welsh tourism sector, and seek to oppose the Welsh Government's legislative agenda relating to tourism.

Conference calls for the Welsh Government to:

1. Develop a strategy for the visitor economy, focusing on innovation, sustainability, and collaboration. Conduct a comprehensive review of existing legislation impacting the visitor economy sector, with a focus on assessing its collective impact and conducting an economic impact assessment to understand the implications of proposed measures.
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3. Adjust the threshold outlined in the Non-Domestic Rates to better align with the operational realities and seasonal fluctuations experienced by SMEs in the tourism sector, consulting with industry stakeholders to determine a realistic target.
4. Enhance support initiatives aimed at micro-businesses within the visitor economy, providing tailored assistance and resources to improve their awareness and understanding of relevant regulatory changes and business development opportunities.
5. Ensure that Visit Wales operates with increased transparency, accountability, and industry consultation in its decision-making processes. This includes prioritising the recruitment of individuals with significant experience and expertise in the tourism sector.
6. Foster meaningful engagement and consultation with representatives from the tourism industry, ensuring their perspectives and expertise inform policy decisions and initiatives aimed at supporting the sector's recovery and long-term success.
7. Establish a platform for ongoing dialogue and collaboration between the Welsh Government and tourism businesses, promoting transparency, accountability, and partnership in the development and implementation of policies and initiatives affecting the visitor economy.
8. Establish a youth advisory council for the Welsh tourism sector, giving young people a voice in shaping future policy and initiatives.
9. Support the development of youth-led tourism initiatives, such as social media campaigns, cultural events, and eco-tourism projects.
10. Increase investment in infrastructure, particularly in rural areas, to improve accessibility and enhance the visitor experience.
11. Provide targeted support to tourism businesses, including skills development grants and marketing assistance.
12. Lead the development of a national Sustainable Tourism Framework for Wales.