

**National Assembly for Wales  
Rural Development Sub-Committee**

**Inquiry into Rural Tourism in Wales**

Evidence from the Regional Tourism Partnerships in Wales

**Introduction**

The 4 Regional Tourism Partnerships in Wales (RTPs), active since 2002, receive devolved resources and responsibilities from Visit Wales for the formulation and delivery of integrated regional tourism strategies. All local authorities, including national parks, nominate representatives to sit on their respective RTP boards along with a corresponding number of industry representatives competitively appointed. The RTPs formally cover the following regions:

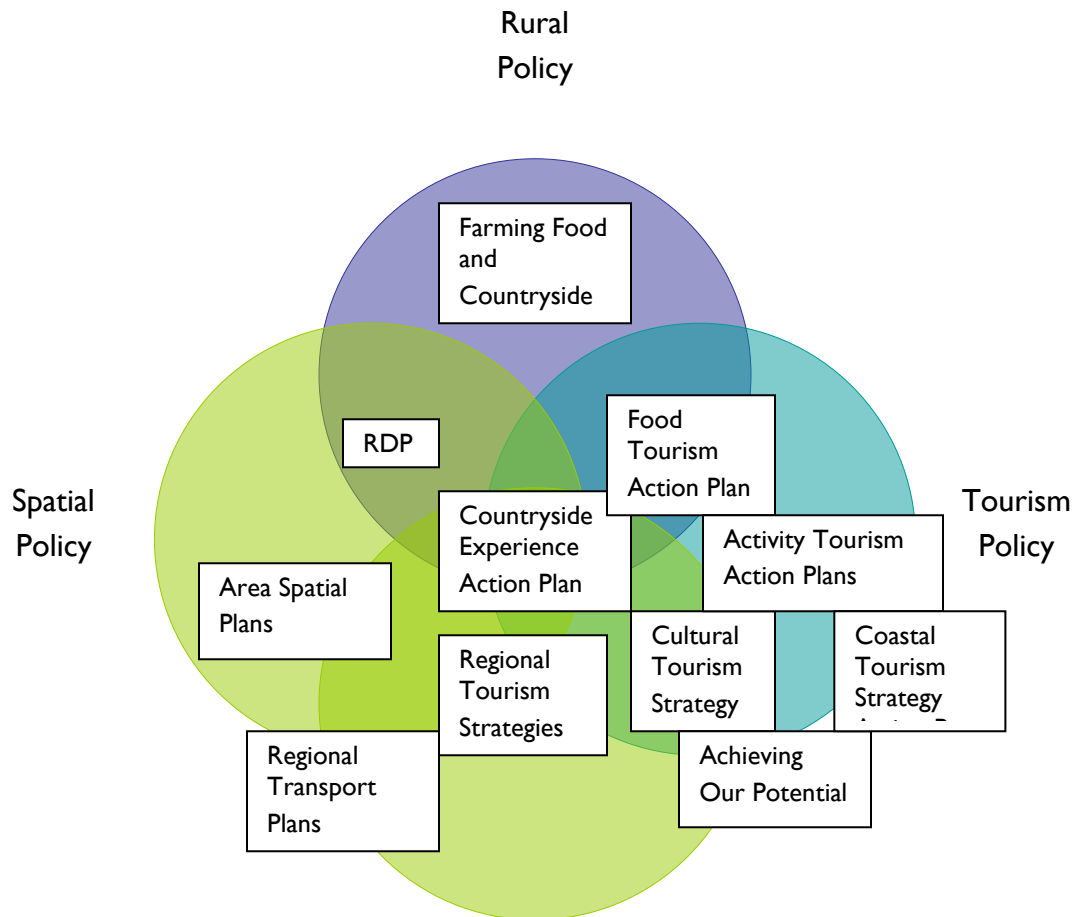
<b>Region</b>	<b>RTP</b>	<b>Local Authority Areas</b>
North Wales	Tourism Partnership North Wales (TPNW)	<b>Anglesey*</b> , <b>Gwynedd*</b> ( <b>Arfon/Dwyfor</b> ), <b>Conwy*</b> , <b>Denbighshire*</b> , <b>Wrexham</b> , <b>Flintshire</b>
Mid Wales	Tourism Partnership Mid Wales (TPMW)	<b>Gwynedd*</b> ( <b>Meirionnydd</b> ), <b>Ceredigion*</b> , <b>Powys*</b>
South West Wales	South West Wales Tourism Partnership (SWWTP)	<b>Pembrokeshire*</b> , <b>Carmarthenshire*</b> , <b>Swansea</b> , <b>Neath Port Talbot</b>
South East Wales	Capital Region Tourism (CRT)	Blaenau Gwent, <b>Bridgend</b> , Cardiff, <b>Caerphilly</b> , <b>Merthyr Tydfil</b> , <b>Monmouthshire*</b> , Newport, Rhondda Cynon Taff, <b>Torfaen</b> , <b>Vale of Glamorgan</b>

LAs marked \* are those traditionally regarded as the 9 'rural' counties of Wales

LAs in **bold** have Local Partnerships, Action Groups and projects supported through Axes 3 and 4 of the Rural Development Programme

Useful for administration and monitoring purposes, these regional and local boundaries rightly prove porous when defining the needs, affiliations and aspirations of both the tourism industry and its markets in respect of how existing and emerging destinations (especially rural ones) are delineated e.g. Brecon Beacons, Wye Valley, Cambrian Mountains, Valleys Regional Park etc. As a consequence the RTPs work closely together and with Visit Wales/ WAG to ensure strategy delivery is 'blind' to administrative boundaries.

## Rural Tourism: Strategic Fit



A number of governmental, national and regional strategies identified above provide the context for rural tourism which arguably sits at the intersection of 3 key policy areas: Rural, Spatial and Tourism. The Action Plan for the Countryside Experience, led by the then Wales Tourist Board, sought to bring together the various policy strands and actors – public, private and voluntary – to deliver the practical and achievable outcomes for rural tourism which the committee is now interrogating, but a lot of organisational and strategic water has passed under that particular bridge since 2004 when the Action Plan was first adopted e.g.:

- One Wales with its commitments to rural Wales, regional tourism development and culture
- Merger of WDA and WTB into WAG

- Split of tourism development and marketing responsibilities (soon to be reversed)
- Destination Management and Marketing Review which seeks to strengthen public/ private partnerships at destination level. Key to this is joint responsibility for the 'customer journey' as outlined in the Integrated Quality Management model. The move to on-line campaign, product and client management helps 'shrink' the communication problems (both time and distance) for rural destinations
- Broadening and fragmentation of the rural 'map' of Wales through RDP and specific measures to support rural tourism. With all but 4 LA areas in Wales having programmes under RDP, and the return of many previously industrial landscapes to countryside uses, Wales is rapidly re-assessing what 'rurality' means. Arguably this is now less to do with environmental quality and much more to do with communications, access to services, seasonality, employment options, housing costs and threats to traditional ways of life.
- Strategic Regeneration Areas and their support for tourism in new 'rural' areas e.g. Valleys
- Visit Wales Strategic Marketing Action Plan (SMAP 2) which will focus on a smaller number of key product areas: Business Tourism; Culture and Heritage; Off-Road Cycling; Walking; Adventure Activities; Fishing; Food; Family Attractions; Sustainable Tourism.
- European Funding for rural, cultural and activity tourism through the Environment for Growth measure e.g. the 7 Coastal and Inland Centres of Excellence; Coast Path; Communities and Nature; Valleys Regional Park;

### **Profile, Volume and Value of Rural Tourism in Wales**

All the LAs in Wales subscribe to the STEAM model. This provides useful trend data at an LA level and supplements the information available at a national level. This suggests that the rural counties account for some 62% of Wales' overall visitor economy and the cash value of tourism in the 9 rural counties grew by 31% between 2004 and 2008 while the growth was 28% in the other 13 LAs. The trend in tourism related employment (direct and indirect) however shows the reverse with a 13.5% increase in the rest of Wales against 11% in the rural counties.

STEAM gives a quantum of £3.7bn to tourism in the 9 Counties for 2008, including leisure and day visits, together with employment generated directly and indirectly of almost 79k. We must remember that much of this (other than for Powys and Monmouthshire) relates to coastal tourism. Recent work from the Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research suggests that the pure 'seaside' aspects of resort-based tourism in Wales support 20,800 jobs.

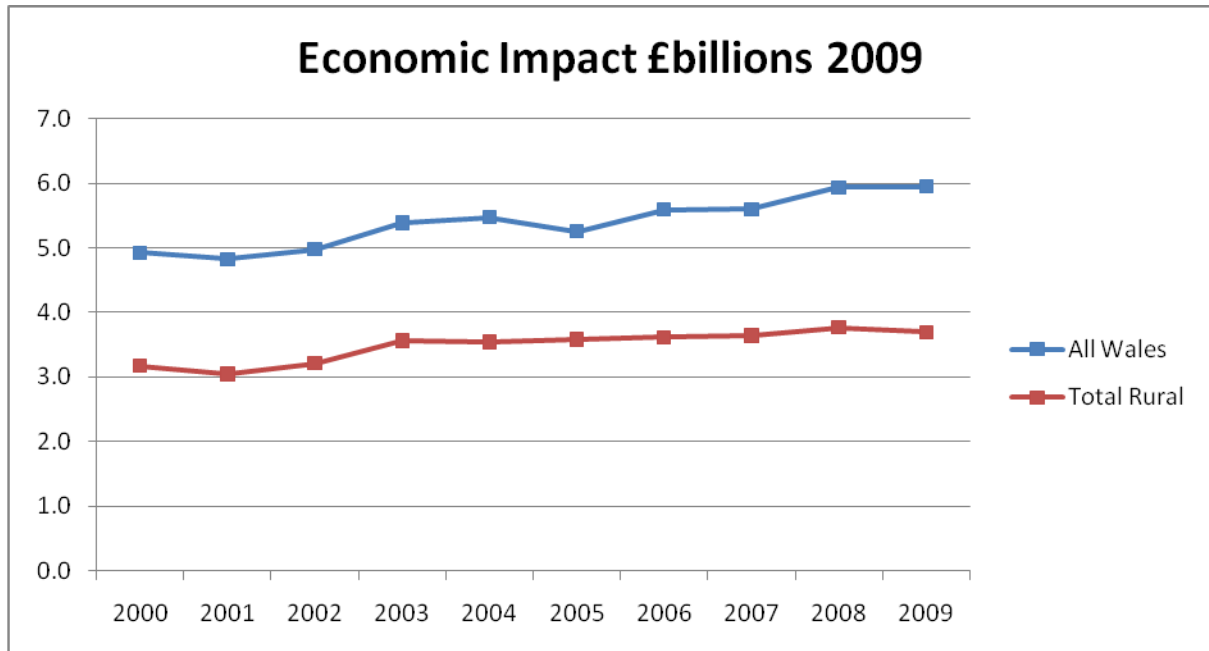
## Rural Wales STEAM analysis

All of the figures in this analysis come from the Welsh Unitary Authority STEAM reports 2000-2009. Unless stated otherwise, all economic impact figures are quoted in £'s 2009.

Prepared by Cathy James, GTS (UK) Ltd, September 2010

### Economic Impact

In 2009, tourism in Wales had an overall economic impact of £5.9 billion. Of this, £3.7 billion (62%) was generated by tourism to rural UAs. Since 2004 the economic impact of tourism in Wales has risen by 9%, with a rise in rural Wales of 4%. Since 2000, the increases have been 25% for Wales as a whole, and 16% for rural Wales.



There has been considerable variation in performance between rural Unitary Authorities, with 04-09 changes ranging from -6% (Denbighshire) to +0.3% (Gwynedd) to +15% (Monmouthshire).

### Tourist days

In 2009, 144 million tourist days were spent in Wales: 90 million (62%) in rural Wales. These can be split into 4 visitor categories:

	Wales tourist days 000's 2009	Rural Wales tourist days 000's 2009
Serviced accommodation	11,709	6,979
Non-serviced accommodation	63,928	54,745
Staying with friends or relatives	11,004	3,657
Day visitors	57,494	24,429

Rural Wales attracts 86% of tourist days in non-serviced accommodation and 60% of those staying in serviced accommodation, but only 42% of day visitors and 33% of those staying with friends or relatives. The last figure is due to the relatively small population of rural Wales. The visitor percentages to rural Wales have not varied significantly since 2000.

As illustrated in the following table, rural Wales has a different visitor profile to Wales as a whole, with relatively more visitors in non-serviced accommodation and fewer day visitors:

	Percentage of visitors in each sector - Wales	Percentage of visitors in each sector – Rural Wales
Serviced accommodation	8%	8%
Non-serviced accommodation	44%	61%
Staying with friends or relatives	8%	4%
Day visitors	40%	27%
Total	100%	100%

### **Employment**

Tourist spend in Wales supported 117,000 full time equivalent jobs in 2009, with 79,000 (67%) in rural areas. Such employment has increased by 7% in Wales as a whole since 2004, but only 3% in rural Wales.

### **Seasonality**

The percentage split of tourist days between the April-September and October-March halves of the year provides a measure of seasonality. For Wales as a whole, the October-March percentage for 2009 was 30%. In 2000 and 2004 the figure was 29%. For rural Wales in 2009, 25% of tourist days occurred in the October-March months. The figure was also 25% in 2000 and 2004. So seasonality both across Wales and in rural Wales has not changed at least since 2000, although tourism in rural Wales is slightly more seasonal than the Wales average.

### **Questions:**

#### **Is support for rural tourism being effectively co-ordinated by the Welsh Government?**

As well as the ‘crowded’ policy arena, as demonstrated by the (simplified) diagram above, individual members of the industry at the sharp end are faced with a sometimes bewildering array of support mechanisms with, in the case of grant schemes, varied intervention rates and arcane boundaries for eligibility:

- Farming Connect
- Flexible Support for Business/ Single Investment Fund (soon to be Tourism Investment Support Scheme)
- Local Investment Fund
- RDP grant schemes
- LA business support
- Regional tourism training opportunities
- Splash fund
- Environment for Growth (ERDF)

### **How could the Welsh Government improve the way it delivers support for rural tourism?**

The recently announced return of tourism development responsibilities to Visit Wales gives an opportunity to better coordinate all support for the sector if it is given a clear lead role for tourism policy and actions across all WAG departments. Similarly the continued involvement of RTPs, in view of their intrinsic stakeholder make-up, at the spatial plan area and local levels and their close working relationships with Local Authorities and across a number of WAG divisions would ensure understanding and reinforcement of that lead role at a local and regional level.

Tourism is not an end in itself, it is a tool (albeit a versatile one) to create wealth, build awareness and image, conserve heritage and cultural assets, enhance communities and deliver sustainable employment. It is therefore vital that the partnership between public, private and voluntary sectors is a genuine one, based on a common understanding of what needs to be done at a destination level.

### **What progress has been made on the actions contained within the various Welsh Government strategies relevant to rural tourism?**

Tourism is recognised as a key economic sector within the economy of rural areas and the opportunities and requirements for developing the benefits of rural tourism have been identified directly and indirectly within a range of broader national and regional strategies and studies. Determining quantifiable progress on actions within various WAG strategies which relate specifically to rural tourism is difficult as most are somewhat generic and apply equally to less rural areas.

Progress on tourism specific strategies such as Achieving Our Potential , Coastal Strategy, Activity Strategies and Frameworks etc. is being delivered and many of the aims and objectives cascaded into regional and local strategies and action plans. This has also been apparent within the Wales Spatial Plan area strategies and specific Regeneration Plans.

However the need for partnership action and delivery by a number of stakeholders at regional and local level especially by the public sector has always been challenging in rural areas and even more so in the current climate. Tourism is often not viewed as crucial to the wider service delivery needs, rural councils with larger geographic areas and small dispersed populations are particularly facing considerable challenges to non statutory functions . In addition, the needs of rural areas for infrastructure and services many of which impact on rural tourism are by nature on a small scale and therefore less attractive for investment of diminishing budgets.

**Have these strategies been sufficiently updated in light of a number of organisational and policy changes over recent years?**

As outlined above the one policy document which seeks to bring together all sectors, actors and policies in this area – the Action Plan for the Countryside Experience – was adopted in 2004 and needs to be updated to accommodate the transformed organisational, financial, political and strategic environment. Area Spatial Plan strategies and studies, e.g Tourism Opportunities Action Plan Framework in Central Wales and Regional Tourism Strategies have also provided ongoing updated priorities .

**Have the organisational changes of recent years assisted in the objectives of the various strategies?**

Organisational change is rarely helpful in the short term as it inevitably demands significant resources – finance, staff time, political energy – to achieve. These particular changes, while having the laudable objective of stream-lining the support mechanisms for business have inadvertently had the impact of divorcing marketing from development and public from private sector. While every sector claims ‘special’ status and the need to be dealt with in a unique way there are a particular characteristics which suggests a unified approach for tourism is most effective:

- Tourism can and does occur in all parts of Wales
- Tourism is only produced at the point of consumption and relies on its customers undertaking the logistics prior to consumption
- Tourism comprises a very large number of very small enterprises which would not necessarily come together to create and exploit brand development and promotion
- While wealth can only be created in the private sector the public sector has a disproportionate impact on tourism’s success ‘on territory’ through planning, transport, environmental management, regulatory services, education etc.

**What contribution has the Cultural Tourism Strategy made to developing rural tourism?**

The Cultural Tourism Action Plan has four objectives:

- To improve visitor access to Welsh culture and heritage – under this objective the Croeso Cynnes Cymreig programme has been developed with the objective of Strengthening the Unique Sense of Place, quality of welcome and the adoption of Welsh phrases by businesses working with customers. The People’s Collection developed by Cymal will undoubtedly improve access to Wales cultural and built heritage on line.
- To improve visitors experience and understanding of Welsh culture. The establishment of Major Events Unit will support and ensure that visitors to Wales are given up to date and comprehensive information on cultural events. The food tourism action plan will help improve perceptions of Wales as a destination where high quality and distinctive food is widely available.

- To raise the profile of Wales and improve the perception of Wales as a cultural tourism destination. Visit Wales has invested in the use of social media website to market and raise awareness of the cultural tourism product across Wales.
- To improve our understanding of the value characteristics and needs of the cultural tourist. Visit Wales has conducted focus groups to research visitor perceptions of Wales' cultural product. Whilst culture is available and accessible in all parts of Wales, the external visitor associates culture more with city rather than country rural areas.

**What is your opinion of the proposal contained within the Farming, Food and Countryside strategy for a reinvigoration of the Adfwyio type of approach to rural tourism?**

Adfwyio worked extremely well because there were:

- A commonly held view of the particular crisis faced by the sector and its consequences (Foot and Mouth and the 'closure' of the countryside)
- A restricted timescale imposed to access support which concentrated minds
- Strong but limited priority themes to the support package (quality and activity tourism)
- Exemplary partnership working between public agencies and with the private sector
- A well tried existing system for processing applications

We would not wish on Rural Wales again the events which precipitated the need for Adfwyio but previous answers suggest the need to sublimate departmental and agency egos to a commonly agreed plan with shared priorities and clear mechanisms for industry engagement.