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**Walsh’s Hotel**

**Thursday 15th August 2024, 10.00am**

**Minutes**

**In attendance:** Richard Mulholland, Rosalind Mulholland,Nicola McCloskey, Anne-Marie McStocker, Dermot Friel, Jamese McCloy, Brendan Adams, Jim Barr, Aoife McGrath, Vanessa Postle, Maria McCann-Russell, Kimberley Madden, Cathy O’Neill, Rachael Harriott, Lara Goodall, Stacey Nelson

**Apologies:**

Kathleen McBride, Jim Quinn, Shauna McElhone, Damien Houlahan, Brian McCormick, Bronagh Duffin, Lindsey Johnston, Sean McEvoy, Roslyn Halferty

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| **Agenda Item** | **Detail** | **Action Arising**  |
| **Apologies & Previous Minutes** | Richard Mulholland welcomed everyone **Proposer:** Brendan Adams / Seconded: Jim Barr  | n/a |
| **Business Development Activities** | Lara provided an update the BeNe event in NL at the end of Sept. It is a 1-day event & 16 meeting with NL tour operators.LG updated that she had caught up with Gwen Beveridge around potential funding, especially to attend Events. She noted that individual cluster members can apply for funding, but the cluster cannot. Gwen is looking into this. LG noted that Gwen is keen to see cluster members at overseas event and has queried why individual businesses are not applying for funding/attending. LG highlighted that she has provided feedback explaining rising costs of attending shows is a key barrier to attending e.g. World Travel Market is around £2k. Gwen has given Lara contacts (Lucia and Fiona) to follow up re: funding for future media and FAM visits to offset the cost associated with providing accommodation for these visits.LG advised the members that she has applied for Weddings on the Island of Ireland.In terms of incoming FAMs there could be up to 6 visits this Autumn / winter. Work will recommence on these in September.LG noted that Visit Belfast gave great feedback following the June visit.Rachael updated on the Irish Business Post media visit. Sara Keating will visit SHHP, Ballyscullion Park, River Bann Tours, The Tap house, Walsh’s Hotel and Friels / Gorta. She emphasized that having Sara as a contact and building on that relationship will be useful going forward. She strongly encouraged making the most of it of the opportunity. RH provided an update on media coverage from the summer campaign: This included Cathy O’Neill and The Emigrants Walk featuring on UTV Life. Cathy advised she had a 50% increase in website visits / enquiries. RH noted that Sara Keating will write a piece focusing on cultural experience. RH finished with emphasising the opportunity of Irish Business Posts’ visit and recommends members preparing a pack for any visits from media to maximise opportunities.Another potential visit is in the pipeline from Jean Curran from Highland Radio (Donegal) Jean is currently on leave but looking at this next week. RH advised there are bids in with Irish news and influencer The Wandering Selkie. RH noted there are 3 competitions running – placement of these is pending. She will update at next meeting. | LG to provide attendees / leads at Amsterdam event.RH/LG to share finalised itineraryRH to update on further media visitsRH to update on competition outcomesLG to follow up with TNI re potential FAM funding |
| **Marketing** | LG advised that website training has started but there are issues with Minus 40. Ann McCadden is addressing training and website parts that were not delivered. Meeting to be arranged after Glenn is back from holiday. SN provided an update on Digital Audits noting that audits have been carried out and intends to meet with individual members to discuss goals and plans for digital spaces and websites. LG noted that the audits showed that there is little to no reference to Loughinsholin online and this is something to address. LG noted the Croga Tours Campaign on LinkedIn. Shauna McElhone has been sharing weekly post created with Stacey to highlight the cluster. Dermot commented these are good and have been noticed. LG noted that the Best in Scotland feature went out – Lara followed up with Kristen to see if there anything came back from this – Update expected in September. This was a B2B focus.LG provided an update on new products. Friels newest product – Gorta Visitor Centre Launch which is scheduled for 5th September. Comms campaign is underway. Advised members to put the date in their diary to attend as all are welcome.LG noted upcoming stories to be included within the comms strategy.* Lough Neagh’s Stories as a new member;
* Walsh’s addition of new rooms are just about completed and could be viewed after the meeting. Kimberly noted there are just a few finishing touches and that the rooms are available for booking online.
* Bronagh at Bakehouse NI is working on a new product which will be launched later this year.
* Ballyscullion Park Book Festival 2025.

**Book Festival 2025**Rosalind updated on dates for next year’s book festival - 10th 11th May 2025 and asked cluster members to note the date. They are currently forming a committee to help with programming and organisation. | SN to continue with website updates where possible prior to second training session.SN will continue digital audits for cluster members and arrange individual meetings.LG/SN/RH to prepare marketing campaign for Friels new visitor attraction launchCluster members to attend launch event if possible. |
| **Training & Skills Development** | Lara provided an update on training; Ciaran Connolly will do an in person “AI in tourism” session 30th September at 10.00am. He is doing a training session in person to be able to demo for everyone. The session will be marketing focused. This will be useful for creating content, translations and a marketing plan.Rachael is working on dates for media and TikTok training.The group would also like a refresher on ChatGPT, Gamma & Canva. | LG to liaise with Rachael Harriot on TikTok and media training. LG to arrange another general AI training session. |
| **Lobbying** | The Meet the Industry event is scheduled for Thurs 26th September and the cluster needs to agree the format and approach. Lara noted that Jamese is kindly showcasing his premises for the event. It will follow a similar format to the event at Lough Neagh Fishery in June23. Lara noted this will be directed to elected members, MLAs and MP level to ask for ongoing assistance. Lara requested input from member about the strategic challenges businesses are facing. She highlight that it is important to demonstrate the positives in the area, eg, the ongoing investment that has been made by the businesses in the cluster. Lara will contact members to update investment figures, recent and planned. Vanessa suggests including jobs created. Nicola suggests using the platform to show how the cluster is feeding into the overall government’s programme of trying to achieve regional balance. Dermot suggested including the NI / Mid Ulster performance figures to highlight the imbalance.Lara emphasized the need for the Minister for Economy to put support tourism on the NI agenda. It was suggested to also invite the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to the lobbying event.Brendan suggested inviting the Chief executive of Mid Ulster council and successful businesses to lobbying event to raise the profile of the cluster to bring in trade. He suggested looking at getting sponsorship.Nicola suggested inviting Conor Murphy to both the Gorta opening and to lobbying event to increase exposure to the cluster and their efforts. | LG to provide plan for Meet the Industry event including guest list.Invites to be sent by LGC |
| **A.O.B** | * Anne Marie has suggested that the Japanese intern student designs and undertakes a marketing campaign for the Asian market as the Lough Neagh Eel product would suit the market. The group agreed with this.
* Rosalind noted that, following Kimberley’s recommendation, they are working with Guest Diary to promote their accommodation.
* Rosalind asked if a festival to celebrate everyone might be a good day – a taster / promotion / not for free over a weekend. Maybe something for next summer to be known better locally so they can spread the word and bring friends and family. Also put lots of visual promotion out there.
* Richard queried the future of Loughinsholin if funding is not approved for LG Consulting after January. Vanessa and Lara assured that council will step in, but not at the same level due to time availability.
* Nicola explained that Tourism NI and Invest NI cannot do anything until there are plans and funding in place, so far the minister has only spoken about tourism but not included it in written plans.
* Brendan suggested considering if there is funding available from other avenues other than the government, Lara suggested the Lottery heritage fund and noted that many of the businesses in the cluster have a heritage element.
* Vanessa suggested meeting HlF – as they have expanded their criteria and are open to applications from the Mid Ulster district. Margaret and Emma could be invited to lobbying event.
* Vanessa noted that council are waiting to hear back about Shared Ireland funding. There is an emerging funding opportunity coming up, maybe September time. Equivalent to what has happened along the coastal areas.
* Nicola queried if a cluster similar to LS exists in the South. She suggesting considering twinning up like Taste Causeway and Donegal. Cork has a famine story which may crossover, and food elements.
* Lara noted that she met Deirdre Burke from the who might have some funding and she
* Vanessa suggested that Tina O’Dwyer might have something to help. Jamese noted that he is currently working with her and could approach.
* Lara asked Rosalind if she can send contact from Cork Fam trip.
* Dermot noted that he had met with David Roberts who said there is transition at TNI and they are reviewing tenure of contracts and funding. There will be a 2 – 3 year plan.
* Lara noted that Linda had arranged presentations with the Directors in early in 2024. Lara asked if Nicola ask Linda to set another meeting up.
* Jamese suggests that the cluster is best supported by Invest NI rather than TNI
* Nicola asked if anyone was applying to the energy grant. It was noted that J&K and Friels are applying.
* Kimberly invited attendees to see the new rooms
* Richard thanked Walsh’s hotel for hosting
 | * Vanessa to send Margaret and Emma’s details to Lara.
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