Tourism chiefs from England and Wales today celebrated the birth of the UK’s first cross-border tourism organisation with a symbolic and historic handshake, before pledging national support and funding for the Wye Valley and Forest of Dean to grow its tourism economy.

Lady Penelope Cobham CBE, chair of VisitEngland, and Manon Antoniazzi, chief executive of VisitWales, came together at Wye Dean 2015, the region’s first tourism forum, organised by the Forest of Dean and Wye Valley Tourism Association (WVFDTA).

Addressing more than 125 local tourism businesses, the two leaders hailed 2015 a pivotal year for the area and highlighted the important opportunity presented by the Rugby World Cup.

Lady Cobham CBE, chairman of VisitEngland, commented: “The Rugby World Cup is the third largest sporting event in the world, you are in the global spotlight and the opportunity is huge so make sure you make the most of it.”

Manon Antoniazzi, chief executive of Visit Wales, added: “Tourism is more important to the Welsh economy than in England. We have to capitalise on the Rugby World Cup and the Ashes because tourism brings real economic benefits to communities.”

“Place Building is critical to achieving our 10% growth target by 2020 as outlined in our tourism strategy for Wales – ‘Partnership for growth’. A planned approach to destination management in Wales, such as the Wye Dean partnership allows local tourism communities to decide what is most important to put in place to maximise visitor satisfaction and to stimulate local support for tourism.”

Lady Cobham CBE, chairman of VisitEngland, added: “It’s an incredible privilege to unveil this unique new cross-border partnership and be invited to speak at the first event of this kind to celebrate tourism in the Forest of Dean and Wye Valley. As more
Brits decide to spend their holidays and leisure time at home, this is a fantastic opportunity to reflect on how domestic tourism is stimulating a growth in business confidence, jobs and economic prosperity across the English regions, a trend set to continue in 2015 with plenty on the horizon to look forward to.”

Maureen McAllister, executive director of the Wye Valley & Forest of Dean Tourism Association, said: “We are honoured that two high-profile industry leaders pledged support to help boost tourism in this region. Tourism is worth more than £300 million to the local economy and 2015 presents many incredible opportunities from sporting and cultural events that will bring even more visitors to the area.”

More than 125 tourism business from across the Wye Dean attended the event at Chepstow Racecourse on Friday, 16 January.

Ends