

Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee

Oral evidence: Promoting Britain abroad, HC 156

Tuesday 5 July 2022

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Members present: Julian Knight (Chair); Kevin Brennan; Steve Brine; Clive Efford; Julie Elliott; Damian Green; Simon Jupp; John Nicolson; Jane Stevenson; Giles Watling.

Questions 342 - 405

Witness

I: Nigel Huddleston MP, Minister for Sport, Tourism, Heritage and Civil Society, Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport.

Examination of witness

Witness: Nigel Huddleston MP.

Q342 **Chair:** This is the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee and this is our second panel today, which is on the subject of promoting Britain abroad. We are joined by just one panel member, which is Nigel Huddleston MP. Thank you very much for joining us.

Nigel Huddleston: Good morning.

Chair: Our first question of the second panel will come from Giles Watling.

Q343 **Giles Watling:** Good morning, Nigel. Thanks for coming. Interestingly, I was recently talking to a Korean MP, and one of his comments to me after one of our meetings was that we do not spend nearly enough on promoting Britain abroad, in comparison to other countries. The Government have allocated £19 million for domestic and international marketing activity. Ireland has announced £33 million. New York City alone has announced £22 million. We do not stack up, do we?

Nigel Huddleston: I don't recognise those figures. The BTA budget is about £41 million and the GREAT campaign spend, of which a good chunk is tourism, is an additional £18.6 million. In terms of core spend, it is a bit higher than those figures that you have there.

However, you are right that, compared to many other countries, that is relatively low. I think the differentiator, though, and where I get some comfort—you have probably had conversations about this with others during the course of these hearings—is that we also get a big bang for the buck in so many other areas. I think London & Partners just spent £9 million. Manchester spent millions on international marketing as well. We get a lot of other areas of the country also doing international marketing spend. It is very difficult to get a good hold of exactly what is spent on international marketing overall.

On top of that, you cannot put a budget on what we just got a few weeks ago, which was all the images and pictures around the world for the Queen's jubilee, or indeed the power of football around the world and all the other things. I hear a lot from international tourism Ministers that they are jealous of the visual impact and other impacts that Britain has around the world. It will not surprise you to know—because when I was on this Select Committee I was saying exactly the same thing—that I would always like us to spend more on international marketing. I think the ROI is very compelling, but budgets are tight and there is only so much to go around.

Giles Watling: That is interesting because what this Korean MP was telling me was exactly that—that we have so much to offer and we are internationally renowned. May I just add theatre to that mix—



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Nigel Huddleston: Absolutely, you are right. By the way, I think that something like 9% of all international visitors here go to a theatre. It is much higher for the London visitors. It is a really important part of our tourism offering.

Q344 **Giles Watling:** Yes, and indeed our international touring efforts, so we draw attention to ourselves.

VisitBritain tells us that we are hugely outspent by our competitor destinations. Can you give some insight into Government thinking on this and why we are not promoting more? You used the term “bang for the buck” just now. I think it is 21 to 1, or something, that we can win, but there must be a certain point at which that figure begins to taper and fade off. Do we have the balance right? What is the Government’s thinking?

Nigel Huddleston: Historically, I would say that, compared to other markets, we have very much not spent the same, but I would genuinely put the warning out there that it is difficult to get a total figure and compare apples with apples on this. For some other countries around the world all their marketing spend is centrally done and they do not have the fragmented nature that we have, with everybody going off and doing things. The US is a bit of an exception because you have individual states spending more than we do. But in terms of other countries, when you add it all together—for example, the Commonwealth games has £21 million of international trade and tourism promotion activity on top of the games—it would be a much more powerful number.

We could always spend more. I will always argue within Government, or rather make the case on economic grounds, about good value for money and good spend. Going forward, I am hopeful that we will be able to put more into international marketing. As I said, some of it is overt but some is a bit more subtle. For example, every time we do a major international sporting event, I am always pushing, “What is the legacy? What is the impact? How are we going to promote this internationally? What is the tourism element to it?” Every single one of those have an international marketing dimension to them.

We have a lot to offer here, as you said. It is not just about promoting our incredible heritage and history, which, of course, is fantastic. It is all the other things. When you look at the international marketing spend on music and festivals, theatre, sporting events and so on, all of which contribute to our global tourism offering, it is a much bigger number. I am not going to pretend that we are not being outspent, and that does concern me, because, as the global tourism market recovers, it is an incredibly competitive field. Everybody is now trying to get international tourism.

The other thing, though, in terms of how we recover is that we have a slightly different market from the rest of the world. It genuinely is different. Some 50% of all inbound tourism spend in the UK is within the



M25. It is London. That is fantastic. It is a global magnet; it does so much, but we have to move forward with a London-plus strategy. I would say that it is not just what we spend, but where we spend it—which markets we spend on and which parts of the country we market and push as well. The reality is that we must spread the tourism offering across the country more and across different times of year—we are still pretty seasonal, and that April through to October period is when we get something like 66%. It is how we spend it as well.

Q345 **Giles Watling:** Would you refute any accusation that the Government are complacent and that we are sitting on our laurels because we have such a fabulous offer that we do not need to promote it as much?

Nigel Huddleston: I can absolutely tell you that the Government are not complacent. From seeing some of the previous evidence session, I hope you have the impression as well that the relationship between Government overall—not just DCMS, but Government—and the tourism sector is probably better than it has ever been before. I am not just talking about DCMS. We have an interministerial group now. A couple of times now we have had 13 Departments together talking about the importance of tourism and recognising what we can do to push it. That has not happened before. The links with so many other Government Departments are strong as well; there are links with BEIS on hospitality, the night-time economy and so on. There is the investment that is going into tourism from DLUHC, with all the levelling up, including the investment, for example, with Southport. There are all sorts of Government Departments focusing on domestic and/or international tourism. Put it all together and it is recognised as an important part of the ecosystem.

It is about not just leisure, but recognising the importance of business travel, conferences and events. Again, we are really strong at that. Visiting friends and relatives is also important. Again, we are a very international country. People come to us from around the world and live here. They have friends and family coming to visit, and they are welcome also.

Q346 **Giles Watling:** If I may say, we have had witnesses telling us that Paris is returning faster to pre-pandemic levels than London. Why is that, and what are you going to do to improve on that situation?

Nigel Huddleston: I have a dashboard every week of where we are in terms of a heat map of who is coming from where in the world. The UK has been slower to recover, and one of the reasons is the one I gave a few minutes ago: London is the anchor of our global tourism offering. When people come to London, they come to the museums, they come to the theatre, they come to a lot of these indoor things—it is not just those things, but a lot of that dominates our tourism offering—as opposed to going to a lounge chair on a beach in southern Europe—

Giles Watling: Or Clacton.



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Nigel Huddleston: Or Clacton. This is the thing; some of this is perception, and we must work on the perceptions of the British tourism offering as well. It is no surprise that some of the tourism offerings that are less outdoorsy and beach-related have been slower to recover.

Q347 **Chair:** I have been to Paris, and I have been to London, but it is not about beaches in Paris.

Nigel Huddleston: They certainly have warmer weather than we have.

Chair: Giles's question was very specific: why have Paris tourism numbers recovered far more quickly than London's? You cannot use the excuse that it is because they have many more beaches than us.

Nigel Huddleston: It is the outdoor tourism offering. Weather has a huge impact, and the reality is that, even in Paris, it is slightly better weather than here.

Chair: London has less rainfall every year than Paris.

Nigel Huddleston: Yes. It is not all weather-related. It is other things. It is also related to the number of flights coming in and out. If you do not have the flights, you do not have the tourists. That mix of what we have in terms of tourism versus tourism, business and VFR, explains a huge chunk of the differentiation between the British and other markets. Parts of the VFR market have come back strongly. Australians, as soon as they were able to travel again, started to come back here, but we have lots of people from eastern Europe who have gone back to eastern Europe and are therefore not coming to visit friends and relatives here, in a way that people from many other parts of Europe are not, for a variety of reasons. Business travel is also big for the UK—again, it is dominated by London—and that is not as big for Paris. The parts of the global tourism sector to recover more slowly have particularly hit the UK economy, because London has persistently and consistently been hit.

Q348 **Giles Watling:** Going back to the final question that I did ask, which you did not quite address, what are you going to do to reverse the trend of Paris recovering faster than we do, to pre-pandemic levels?

Nigel Huddleston: Marketing is one element of that. Where we market Britain, which countries we target, is important. You have probably seen all the stats, but for anybody listening, one figure that I find absolutely amazing is that China is not in our top 10 in terms of total number of visitors, but it is our second biggest market in terms of spend. That issue is not the same for a lot of other countries, by the way, but it is particularly important and strong for the UK. The Chinese outbound market is basically non-existent still, so, again, the impact of all these things on the UK is disproportionately large, compared to many other countries.

In terms of where we go, we need to market where we know there is an appetite to travel, so we should be particularly focused on the US, which



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has recovered incredibly strongly, and GCC, which has recovered strongly, and we should put the marketing efforts where we are going to get the best bang for the buck.

We should also not underestimate all these soft power offerings. That is why we have specifically put money into having the Commonwealth games and having an explicit trade and tourism programme as part of that. All of that costs money, and all of that money is spent. There are lots of programmes other than core spending, and we make sure at DCMS, in particular, that we add these things to every single offering. So, for every event, it is, "Right, what is the international element?"

Giles Watling: I would suggest we spend a little more. Thank you.

Nigel Huddleston: If you write that in your report, I am sure the Treasury will listen.

Chair: I am going to bring in Damian Green. When we come to Julie Elliott's questions, I think we may get to another reason why, frankly, London has not recovered as quickly as Paris.

Q349 **Damian Green:** You paint a very rosy picture of the relationship between the whole of Whitehall and the tourism industry, and I would like to probe that. In evidence that we have received during this inquiry VisitBritain told us that they did not get their budget until the day before the financial year started. As of this time last week, when they were giving evidence, a significant chunk of that budget, on consumer spend, still had not been signed off. That is no way to try to run a business. You have worked in the private sector. If you were told, "You are running this important Department. By the way, we cannot tell you what the budget is until the day before the year starts and we are not going to tell you how you can spend some of it until halfway through the financial year," you would have thought that was sub-optimal, would you not?

Nigel Huddleston: I hope I am not painting a rosy picture, because there are significant areas for improvement still, which is exactly why we initiated the Tourism recovery plan, and exactly why we set up the interministerial group—because we recognise there is a lot more to do across Government. Please do not get the impression from me that everything is fine and perfect and running smoothly. There is a long way to go across Government, and I completely admit that.

A couple of things on the spend. It is very easy for us now, given where we are with covid, to forget that even six or seven months ago we were just going into further lockdown measures and just going into Omicron. I think you would have probably dragged me in front of this Committee to say how stupid we were if we had spent huge amounts of money on international marketing when there was no international travel and when we did not know when international travel was going to recover.



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That is one of the reasons why there was a fair bit of uncertainty over a lot of international spend on tourism, and in other parts of the GREAT campaign, for example—because we were in very uncertain times. As soon as we reached February and knew we were coming out—remember that Britain was one of the first countries to open up—we started spending, £10 million on international marketing on those key targeted markets.

In terms of the dynamics of the spending, we are not the only Department that must go through Cabinet to get approval for marketing spend and advertising. Anything above £100,000 must go through Cabinet as standard procedure.

So some of it is the timing, but you are right that, with some elements of the campaign—not all of it; I think it is about £800,000 or £900,000 out of the £4.6 billion that we are still waiting for—we are still in discussions with the Cabinet Office.

Damian Green: You said Cabinet approval. I assume you meant Cabinet Office approval?

Nigel Huddleston: Sorry, yes, Cabinet Office.

Q350 **Damian Green:** Has anything happened in the past week, or is that £800,000 still sitting in the Cabinet Office—a quarter of the way through the financial year, unapproved?

Nigel Huddleston: I do not want to confuse you, but elements of the marketing are spent by BTA for VisitBritain, and other elements are spent by GREAT on the broader GREAT campaign, of which a chunk is tourism related. Also, that £10 million we spent earlier in the year is banked. We still do not have a conclusion on the final £800,000 or £900,000 for what is called an “always on” marketing campaign, which covers, I think, 21 countries, whereas the GREAT campaign only covers five.

So you are right that we do not have the approval for that. What we do have approval for, and I am not sure what the timing and the dates were, is some of the other things, including some domestic spend and some of the spending on trade and promotion and the business and tourism element. We have approval for some elements, but not all.

Q351 **Damian Green:** It feels to me like an extraordinary piece of centralisation. You are the Minister, you have a bit of a Department to run that is responsible for tourism, and you are the person who is held responsible for it. Yet, further back in the bowels of the bureaucracy—I speak as a former Minister for the Cabinet Office—the Cabinet Office must sign off individual bits of what should be your spending. Is this not frustrating?

Nigel Huddleston: You are raising some broader points about the inner workings of Government, but it is not just DCMS that goes through these processes. If you are asking me whether I would like to spend more and



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to unilaterally decide what I spend the money on, the answer is yes, but I think every Minister who sits in front of you would say that—that would not be unusual.

At the same time, there is a role for the Cabinet Office because they are the ones with a view of what is happening across Government. They can probably identify, and I think have done in the past, where there are perhaps elements of duplication in Government advertising that would be unnecessary. They therefore focus on value for money. They do have a genuine role. We have some experienced people in advertising and communications at the Cabinet Office who can also make suggestions and give advice.

I understand what you are saying in terms of whether this is frustrating. I would not say it is necessarily frustrating as such. It is the process that is there and sometimes it can be slow, but that is Government. We are in discussions still for some of the final bits, but most of the time it works.

For example, during lockdown—during covid—we got very quick approval on things such as not spending money on international marketing, because there was no international travel, and repurposing the money we had for marketing in the discover England fund and putting it into saving DMOs. We got pretty quick Cabinet Office approval for that.

So, they can sometimes move very quickly, and other times we need to keep building the case. But every element, including the private sector, has controls and processes in place so that money is spent effectively.

Q352 Damian Green: Indeed, but I gently submit that not knowing whether you can spend a chunk of your budget a quarter of the way through the year, and not knowing how you can spend it, in a fast-moving consumer market, is not—

Nigel Huddleston: True, but I should probably be clear that, in the spending review settlement, we had a very good idea of what the bucket would be. But the fine details of how it could be spent and when it could be spent could only be addressed very late in the stage. Again, without pointing out the bleeding obvious, that is because the global travel market was still in utter chaos. We could not have got to that detail months before. It was only when we were in the recovery period that we could have confidence about where to spend money. For example, we could have spent millions on China because it makes sense to do so—it is our second biggest market in terms of spend—but if nobody is travelling from China, then we should not spend that money and we did not, and that was a sensible decision. It may have been a late decision, but it was absolutely sensible.

Q353 Damian Green: I suspect that, in the end, you are right that this is a process point. The last point you made is of course unarguable: if people are not travelling from China, don't market there. But I would have thought you could trust VisitBritain to make that decision. They will know



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these things as well as somebody sitting in the Cabinet Office. Yet, these bureaucratic hurdles seem to me to gum it up.

Nigel Huddleston: The point about whether £100,000 should be the point at which Cabinet Office approval is needed is a fair one, and you can imagine that these are the kinds of conversations that we have all the time. It may make sense for it to be higher than that so that certain spend can be done otherwise, but I would be slightly worried. I genuinely suspect that if we did not have these controls in place, Meg Hillier and the other Committee would drag me in there to say, "Why don't you have these controls and processes in place? Why are you letting people spend this money?" We must get the right balance. It works; it can be a bit slow, but it broadly works at the moment. Whether we take a de minimis approach, or what the right level is in terms of requiring central authorisation, is always worth reviewing.

Q354 **Damian Green:** You have just said there is huge marketing expertise in the Cabinet Office, and we have heard about who has to sign off individual campaigns and so on, but I would not necessarily want to go inside the Government machine to find the best marketing expertise, because anyone who is really good at marketing will be working on marketing. Again, this feels like a slightly similar thing: it is pointless control freakery. All Ministers and all officials are guilty of it, but sometimes you need to take a brave decision. Should you not let the people who are doing the marketing say, "This is our marketing campaign," rather than have individual advertisements approved inside the Cabinet Office?

Nigel Huddleston: Again, there is a degree of discretion and change when it comes to visuals and so on there, but I think it is fair and reasonable, particularly with things like the GREAT campaign—or even campaigns that are attached to the GREAT campaign—to make sure there is consistency. We have certain requirements for certain images, visuals and so on, to keep that consistency and that push out there.

You are making a fair point; we need to make sure that the people making the decisions have the expertise and skills to appropriately make those decisions. The people I have interacted with, and I have had quite a lot of conversations with the communications team in the Cabinet Office on this, in particular with the GREAT campaign, have been incredibly professional. They present images, they explain the logic and market research behind things—why x works and y does not—and they do all these contrasting campaigns. There is a fair bit of effort, sometimes bringing in external expertise when required to help with that. So I am pretty comfortable, but I suppose what we are really talking about is whether there is room for a process improvement and, as with everything in Government, I am sure there is.

Damian Green: My underlying point is that if you have arm's length bodies, they ought to be at arm's length, rather than held close, which is what it feels like this is.



Nigel Huddleston: Again, it is public money that is being spent, which I am accountable for and DCMS is accountable for to Parliament. We must have confidence that the process is there, but as with all these things, it is a matter of getting the right balance. Broadly, I have seen it work, but there are always areas for improvement.

Q355 **Chair:** Before I go to Julie, I have one quick follow-up on what you said about flights, flight numbers and getting planes into the country to bring the tourists here. Is one of the problems and one of the reasons why we have had such a sluggish return to international tourism due to us effectively surrendering our place as a global hub for air travel?

Nigel Huddleston: We are still a vital global player. Pre pandemic I think we were the third largest aviation—

Q356 **Chair:** What are we post pandemic?

Nigel Huddleston: We are still recovering. By the way, there is still huge interest from many markets who are looking for spaces to land those flights. We have had the debate over whether there is sufficient capacity and whether we have enough airports. How many years has it taken us to approve the Heathrow expansion, for example? One of the inhibitors is literally the spaces and of course the cost that comes with that. We are a very expensive country in terms of physical infrastructure and building airports. Other countries can do that. The aviation space is clearly—

Q357 **Chair:** I feel as if you are dancing around the question to a degree. For example, when we were in South Korea, they said to us that they had nearly twice as many planes going into Frankfurt each week than they do into London airports. Obviously, we have seen some movement in the costing of London airports in the last week, presumably as a reaction to what I have just outlined, which is the fact that we were still charging pre-pandemic prices in a post-pandemic world. The reality, Minister, is that part of the reason why we have had this sluggish recovery is that our airport infrastructure has not been as reactive as others have been in trying to bring people back into the country.

Nigel Huddleston: We have gone in about a year from having 10% of the volume of people going through—

Chair: So has everyone else.

Nigel Huddleston: No, they have not. Some have. You need to look at the individual airports. It is not surprising that we have had this massive boost in the volume of traffic. A lot of that—this is one of the challenges—is outbound Brits going abroad, getting on a plane, sitting on a beach and coming back, which takes up a huge volume of our capacity. My focus is to bring money into the UK, and the third biggest service export earner is getting overseas people coming here, spending money; that is export revenue. But the airports are also very busy with an incredibly strong boom in outbound travel because Brits have disproportionately travelled



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abroad. One of the first things they wanted to do when the pandemic was over was get on a plane to have a beach holiday. Our tourist proposition is not the same as that, so the nature of the travel and the mix of outbound versus inbound has also had an impact in a way that not every country has experienced.

Q358 Julie Elliott: We have heard overwhelming evidence—I do not think anybody has disagreed—about the disaster that has been ending tax-free shopping in this country. We have heard that from all quarters, all sectors; it has been an absolute disaster. What assessment did the Treasury do of the indirect costs of ending the VAT retail export scheme, such as a fall in the number of tourists coming here? That fall is not negotiable; it has happened. What assessment did they do of that?

Nigel Huddleston: It will not surprise you to hear that this is a question primarily for the Treasury, but I will happily answer it from my understanding, because—

Q359 Julie Elliott: Did they not consult you around this?

Nigel Huddleston: They did consult us, but there was a general consultation; all sectors input into the consultation. It will not surprise you as well to hear that this is a hot topic in the Tourism Industry Council, in all my stakeholder engagements that I have. We do feed in a lot of the evidence, and more is coming through about the potential impact as we recover from the pandemic.

Q360 Julie Elliott: Did the Treasury do an assessment?

Nigel Huddleston: My understanding is that the Treasury did do an assessment, but the reality is they were also constrained by WTO rules. I do not want to say too much here, because this is ultimately a decision for the Treasury. We are consulting with them and we provide information to them from stakeholders. I do not want to come here and speak for the Treasury, but what I can say is—

Q361 Julie Elliott: But this directly affects your area, so I would expect that, as a Government Minister, you would know what the Treasury did and what that assessment said.

Nigel Huddleston: My understanding was that the Treasury assessment was that if we wanted to keep tax-free shopping, the WTO requirements were that we could not differentiate between countries and say, "Let's do a differential thing for GCC", which is huge for international shopping. *[Interruption.]* Sorry, that is the Gulf Co-operation Council, in particular UAE, Saudi and so on. They spend a huge amount on shopping in the UK, as did Chinese travellers. Some countries were particularly high. We were not able, because of WTO rules, to say, "We can see that the tax-free thing is a big deal for these guys" without also implementing it across the whole of the EU. When we left the EU, the decision was whether to apply this globally, yes or no. It was not a matter of choosing individual



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countries. My understanding is that the Treasury assessment was that if we applied this to Europe as well, it would not stack up financially.

Q362 **Julie Elliott:** In ending what we had, and not making it worldwide after the event, when changes would clearly have had to be made, what assessment was made of the impact of tourists not coming here as a result?

Nigel Huddleston: We fed in, as did many other stakeholders saying—

Julie Elliott: I know you did, but what assessment was made and what did that assessment say?

Nigel Huddleston: Clearly that is a question for the Treasury. I do not want to be—

Julie Elliott: No, no. It is in your Department. You will know what assessment was made and what that assessment said, or you should know, because it is—

Nigel Huddleston: No, because the assessment was made by the Treasury.

Julie Elliott: It does not matter who has done it. You would have access to that information. What assessment was made and what did that assessment say?

Nigel Huddleston: We fed in information, as you would expect from the Department. The assessment and the calculations were made by the Treasury. I did have some discussions with, I think, Kemi at the time this decision was being made, as did many others, and there was a lot of lobbying and information flowing in from many MPs who knew this would impact their constituencies. So that information—

Julie Elliott: I am not doubting that. I simply want to understand exactly what impact this has had. What I want to know is what assessment the Government, and you are a member of the Government, made and what that assessment concluded.

Nigel Huddleston: The conclusion of the assessment was that we could not apply this across all countries, because if we included the EU it would not be financially worth while. That was the assessment.

Q363 **Julie Elliott:** That was not the question I asked. I asked what impact making this decision would have on the numbers of tourists coming here. Was that done?

Nigel Huddleston: Again, I am sure the Treasury work on dynamic modelling. They have lots of people who do this, and that is exactly what they would do. It is almost impossible to work out what the impact would be, because, again, these decisions were made about the time we were going into the covid pandemic. We are not in the normal world yet. What I can assure you we are doing is feeding in what we understand the impact is now.



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Q364 **Julie Elliott:** You either do not know or are not willing to say. Can I ask that you ask the Treasury for this information and provide it to this Committee?

Nigel Huddleston: I can certainly ask them to provide what information they can. I will happily do that.

Q365 **Julie Elliott:** The tourism recovery plan did not highlight retail tourism. Why?

Nigel Huddleston: The tourism recovery plan covered a lot of things, but it would never be completely comprehensive. I can tell you that, in both the Tourism Industry Council and my individual stakeholder engagement, the retail side is talked about all the time.

Q366 **Julie Elliott:** Why is it not in the plan?

Nigel Huddleston: One of the reasons is that the tourism recovery plan was primarily focused on policy levers that we could control, or that we have major influence over.

Q367 **Julie Elliott:** Going back to my previous question about getting rid of the tax-free shopping. That is a policy.

Nigel Huddleston: Tax issues are a matter for the Government and for the Treasury.

Q368 **Julie Elliott:** You are a member of the Government.

Nigel Huddleston: Tax matters are matters for the Treasury, so I could not put in the tourism recovery plan promises on behalf of the Treasury. It was signed off across Government, and we could not make tax promises in the same way that I can in the tourism recovery plan. We certainly had discussions about what should be and could be in the recovery plan, but let us go back to the point that these are incredibly uncertain times, and therefore, in terms of doing assessments of changes in taxation and doing dynamic modelling, we would not know what the outcome would be. Now, when evidence is starting to build, we are absolutely providing information and data into the Treasury.

Q369 **Julie Elliott:** Understanding the tourism sector very well as you do—there is no criticism in our evidence sessions, in fact the very opposite, of your understanding of the issues of tourism in this country—do you think that if tax-free shopping was brought back, more tourists would come back?

Nigel Huddleston: It is an element of the proposition, and therefore it could have an impact, particularly on certain countries. But, at the same time, interestingly, some of the countries that have had the strongest recovery are exactly those—*[Interruption.]* If there was a strong business case. I would have to understand what the potential unintended consequences and costs would be on other markets. There is a strong case that, for example, if we were able to differentiate countries, that could be very powerful. That said, going back to what I was saying about



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where we have seen the strongest recovery, some of the countries where we have had the biggest spend and the biggest recovery have been those very countries where part of the proposition has historically also been shopping. It does not seem to have put them off. One of the elements that is always worth mentioning—

Q370 Julie Elliott: We have had very strong evidence that the numbers of tourists—high-value spenders—pre pandemic to now, are down in London.

Nigel Huddleston: They are across the board.

Q371 Julie Elliott: Whereas in Paris and Milan, they are significantly up. The only thing that has changed is the removal of tax-free shopping. The evidence is there. Would you support bringing back tax-free shopping, to bring inward investment from tourists?

Nigel Huddleston: I am gathering information from stakeholders and passing that information on to the Treasury, and there have been some indications that it would help with the value proposition, as would so many other things. It would have to be an across-the-board decision with impact across multiple other countries, and there would be positive and negative economic impacts.

Q372 Julie Elliott: Would you support it?

Nigel Huddleston: Again, it is a matter for the Treasury. What I can say is I will happily make the case on behalf of my stakeholders.

One thing that it is important to mention—we must remember this, because even consumers do not know this—is that you can still get that tax-free benefit if you ship the goods home. It is only if you want to take them with you, and you physically shop. We extended that to the EU in January. There are some benefits.

Q373 Julie Elliott: If people buy something, they want to use it or wear it; they do not want to wait however long to get it home.

Nigel Huddleston: Some do, but some don't.

Q374 Julie Elliott: They might want to buy a lovely outfit to go to the theatre and use it that day. You cannot do that.

Nigel Huddleston: I am in no doubt as to the importance of shopping as part of the value proposition, particularly for certain countries. It is really important, but so are so many other things. If one area is weakened, we must work hard to strengthen the others.

Julie Elliott: And perhaps put right what the Government have done wrong on this issue.

Nigel Huddleston: I do not think I would use those words, but I will always make the case on behalf of my stakeholders.



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Q375 **Chair:** Why do you think that France chose to improve its tax-free shopping offer the very day that we chose to abolish it?

Nigel Huddleston: Again, some of this—I do not want to go into this old debate again—is the dynamics of Brexit and what we decide in terms of policy after that.

Q376 **Chair:** Was the idea of Brexit to make ourselves less competitive?

Nigel Huddleston: Absolutely not, Chair—

Chair: That is what we have just done.

Nigel Huddleston: —and I think you know that, but it was certainly in order to make our own decisions. France uses certain policy levers. In defence of the Treasury, I would say that we did get £37 billion from them in support for tourism, hospitality and leisure during the pandemic, which is considerably higher than in nearly every other country. The Treasury completely recognise the importance of the visitor economy, and they wanted to make sure that we had a strong one when we came back from the recovery.

Q377 **Chair:** Minister, does Treasury understand the multiple when it comes to the visitor economy? The thing is that we save about £3 billion to £4 billion in terms of the amount of money with tax-free shopping, but you could then there are all the extras—the meals, the theatre tickets, the visitor attractions and so on. Do they understand precisely how much that costs in the round?

Nigel Huddleston: I am sure they do, but if you look at all the surveys, and we have a huge amount of evidence as to why people come to the UK, shopping is one element of that mix, but so are many other things. It is very difficult to say, “Here is the hard and fast number of exactly what is lost because of one change in one policy.” What we must do is promote and market the fact that, if you ship your goods home, they are still tax-free, and we have a lot of other things on offer as well. There is no doubt that shopping is an important part of the mix—

Chair: You are doing a really brave job. I get the fact that you do not wish to criticise across Government.

Nigel Huddleston: I will praise the Treasury for the £37 billion of support and I am very grateful for it, as are the rest of our stakeholders.

Q378 **Chair:** No one wishes to hear the stampede of the Treasury in their direction as a Minister, but surely you must feel the absolute frustration at this particular decision. The entire industry, almost uniformly, particularly if you talk to the west end, is saying that it is madness that we have done this and that as a country we have made ourselves less competitive as a result, rather than more competitive, which was the whole blooming idea of Brexit in the first place. We can understand your frustrations, but can you not say that there is a timescale that you have in your mind right now in terms of going to the Treasury and saying,



"Guys, not only has this not worked, but it has backfired spectacularly"? Is it six months, is it 12 months or is it when the Chinese come online and we really feel the impact of this?

Nigel Huddleston: You are almost making the point that I was making earlier. We need to work with the industry to provide the evidence. We have been very clear with them: provide us with the data and the information, and I will be responsible for funnelling that to Treasury. We have ongoing conversations with the Treasury. The Treasury is on the interministerial group for tourism. Again, that has not happened before. That is one of the mechanisms and vehicles that we have to ensure that we send messages to the Treasury, as well as ongoing discussions. I will always make the case within Government on behalf of stakeholders, but as you know full well, and I appreciate your sympathy there, I am not a Treasury Minister and I cannot make promises on behalf of Treasury.

Q379 **Jane Stevenson:** I hate to hammer the shopping point after everybody else, but we have heard so much evidence that even with the VAT you would save on a luxury handbag, you may as well get on the Eurostar, go to Paris, buy it in Paris, spend some more of your money when you get there and come back. I am interested in how as a Department you are going to assess the hotel spend. These are people with a lot of money to bring into Britain. As Julian just asked, what is the timeframe for this, and what sectors are you going to take into consideration in that extra spend?

Nigel Huddleston: You raise both a specific and a broader point. One of the struggles of the sector over the last few years is that it is incredibly fragmented, but we have some fantastic industry bodies now with a great deal of credibility. They are speaking with a clear voice and communicating with Government far more effectively than they have ever done before, and they are providing a lot of verifiable data and information in a way that has not happened before. Still, it is an incredibly fragmented sector.

In terms of how we go forward, you are absolutely right, in that the average inbound tourist spends £700, but for certain countries it is multiples of that. Often, for some of them, that is because they are spending a lot of money on shopping, particularly in the west end, Bicester Village and certain other places. We know that. What we do not have the full information and data on yet, in particular for Bicester Village, because we have not had the recovery of the Chinese market, is exactly what the long-term impact will be. As I have repeatedly said, when the evidence and the information is there—you can never go to the Treasury with, "We are worried about this"; you must go in with cold, hard facts—we will be able to make the case. We have ongoing conversations with the Treasury about this.

I also go back to the point that I would be surprised if we had truly huge volumes of people in the exact scenario you outlined. They will still come to the UK, because shopping is only one element of the great things we



have to offer in the UK. They will come here for our theatres, our tourism, our heritage, our beautiful landscapes and all the other things that we have to offer. We want them to shop as well, but in terms of the number who just come here for shopping—and I am not saying some people do not—it is difficult to work that out, because that data is not easily obtained.

Q380 Jane Stevenson: It is, but we seem to have quite a number of people giving us evidence that visitors might come here because of all the fantastic reasons to visit Britain, but then they might do a stop in Europe. Surely it is better to keep them here than to have them jetting off to Milan.

Nigel Huddleston: I agree completely. As you alluded to earlier, one thing we must understand, and this is one of the problems with the tourism industry, is, how big is the tourism industry, what is the economic impact, what is the GVA, how many people are employed and so on? There is the direct bit, but then there is also the multiplier and the ancillary. Yes, people who come over here are staying in a hotel, but they are also spending money in pubs, bars, restaurants, retail and everything else. It is impossible to capture how much tourism spend there is. We have good estimates and so on. We have places like Harrods that monitor carefully how much is inbound spend from international visitors through credit cards, and it is a phenomenal figure. There are ways to get it, but in terms of aggregating it, the one thing I will say is that we always underestimate the size and scale of the broader tourism industry and how many jobs that are obtained in it, because of the multiplier effect.

Q381 Jane Stevenson: I appreciate that under the WTO rules you must treat every foreign visitor the same, but have you looked at more flexible options around minimum spend, or a certain spend in a store that would qualify, because that could be available to EU tourists as well, to capture those high spenders?

Nigel Huddleston: I personally have not, but those are things that I would expect Treasury would look at. Again, without having been on your side for a while, the hearings that you have had—I have seen some of the comments that have come through—are genuinely valuable. We are still in the recovery phase of the tourism industry. We have a tourism recovery plan, and it has a lot of specific proposals in it, but we will be constantly revising that as we do the recovery. I am genuinely open to hearing what you recommend as a result of what you have heard, and what the Committee would suggest, whether that is directly within my portfolio or suggestions for conversations that I need to have with others. I would welcome that, and I welcome the Select Committee's attention on tourism as well.

Q382 Jane Stevenson: Finally, I am going to admit to the Bicester Village outlet being on my commute home, and sometimes my car randomly turns off if it is Thursday evening and they have late-night shopping. I have not seen a massive push there, whereas a few years ago you would



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have Chinese speakers in every shop. I have not seen shop and ship being pushed. Do you think our retail sector is way behind on that? Surely that should be everywhere—"We will pack it for you, it will look beautiful, you will get it when you get back?"

Nigel Huddleston: I think we are still in a dynamic phase in terms of the visitor numbers. Literally, we have all noticed in the last eight weeks a massive change in how long it takes us to cross the road, who is around us, what languages they are speaking and where they are from. We can all see that we have had a strong tourism recovery, particularly from parts of western Europe, the Gulf and America, and it is also very noticeable who is not here. I suspect, because I think our retail industry is one of the most sophisticated in the world and is very dynamic, that they are all over that, but the timing is not right to push it, because it is not the right market at the moment. I suspect that is the reason, but I will happily talk to them. I think we all know the MP who represents Bicester and Banbury, and I can tell you that she talks to me every day about the issues of Bicester Village and is a fantastic advocate for them. Again, the advocacy of MPs is important in the mix here.

Chair: We may want to think of a different marketing slogan than "shop and ship".

Nigel Huddleston: I think you may.

Jane Stevenson: I liked it.

Nigel Huddleston: I apologise if that came across—

Chair: No, I am just glad you said it properly. Kevin Brennan.

Q383 **Kevin Brennan:** Could I go to Paris and shop VAT free?

Nigel Huddleston: My understanding is you can.

Kevin Brennan: That is interesting to know.

Nigel Huddleston: But you would not want to. You would want to spend all your money in the United Kingdom, wouldn't you, Kevin—probably in Wales.

Kevin Brennan: It is not far to London St Pancras from here.

Nigel Huddleston: I am sure there is nothing that you could get in Paris that you could not get in Wales.

Q384 **Kevin Brennan:** I take it from what you have said that you would like us to include in our report on this subject a coruscating section and recommendation in relation to VAT-free shopping, to overturn this madness. Would that be a fair assessment of your internal monologue?

Nigel Huddleston: I think you are putting words in my mouth. What I said is that it is my job to represent the sectors that sit with me within Government, and I need to have conversations based on data, evidence



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and information. What you have been doing is gathering data, information and evidence, and that will be useful in the conversations that I have.

Kevin Brennan: I am going to interpret that as a yes when we have our discussions about what to include in our report.

Nigel Huddleston: I would never want to steer a Select Committee in terms of what they may or may not include in their report.

Kevin Brennan: We have Ministers in front of us quite frequently and I always find it remarkable as a former Government Minister the extent to which Ministers come in front of us and talk about other bits of Government as if they are completely separate entities from their own Departments. One of the great debates is always about silos within Government, but it seems to have become an art form to appear before a Select Committee and say, "I cannot possibly comment on that. That is a matter for the Government. I am just a Government Minister from DCMS." It seems to me that it is a particular problem in your job. We have talked about the problems that you have with the Treasury, but what about the Home Office? We have heard a lot of concern about the impact of Home Office policy on tourism. You said you have read some of our previous sessions. You will know I have a big bee in my bonnet about school trips from Europe. Were you consulted by the Home Office before the use of ID cards for school trips from Europe was banned?

Nigel Huddleston: We have ongoing engagement with the Home Office. On that point, the thing that I am trying to get across is not that everything is a responsibility of another Government Minister. I am a Government Minister and therefore it is my responsibility, plus, not surprisingly, we also sign up to collective Government decision making, which is the same when Opposition parties are in power as it is when the Conservatives are in power.

The point is that, particularly during the pandemic, the engagement with other parts of Government on tourism and broader sectors has been incredibly strong. There was not a day without me being on the phone to Rob Courts, or previously Kelly; to Paul Scully over at BEIS; and, particularly and importantly, Kevin over at the Home Office. I talk to him all the time, including about many of the issues that you have raised.

Q385 **Kevin Brennan:** I have raised before this issue about the school trips, which are a big part of the economy in my constituency and the constituencies of other Members here from around the country. Coach loads of kids come over from Europe to visit our wonderful country and get a great impression of it, and all that sort of thing. We are told by the sector that this decision—as a former schoolteacher myself, I can absolutely understand why—is pretty devastating to that market for kids coming over to visit from Europe. As I have said before, I do not remember seeing on the side of a bus during the Brexit debate, "Vote for Brexit and we will stop all these schoolkids coming over to Britain,



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spending money in our shops, enjoying our wonderful stately homes, castles and city centres and learning our language." I do not remember that at all. What is the reason for this utterly ideological nonsense?

Nigel Huddleston: Again, I am not going to speak for the Home Office, but I can tell you that we are having ongoing conversations with the Home Office about the particular issues with school trips and English language schools and so on. We have presented the information. It is why we have Emma English from BETA on the Tourism Industry Council, for example. We recognise the huge importance both financially and in terms of long-term soft power of having lots of visitors coming here at a young age and, in particular, learning the English language. It is part of that thing. We do not have to spend as much money as some other countries, because we have all these soft power influences, which means we must make sure that we focus on the soft power in the long term.

ID cards are not a particularly reliable or secure form of identity. I am sure you have had the information from the Home Office—

Q386 **Kevin Brennan:** How many schoolchildren have absconded on school trips to this country and gone to work in some sweatshop somewhere as a result, because they used their ID card?

Nigel Huddleston: I do not think that is the case as such, but it is something like 48% of all dodgy documents seized at the borders are ID cards from EU and Swiss citizens.

Q387 **Kevin Brennan:** These are children coming with their teachers on a coach from Europe, all of whom I can guarantee you will be known to the teachers, and all of whom will be closely monitored to make sure they are safe at all times and that they return at the end of every little period of free time they have on their trip to the bus and go back to their hotel or hostel or wherever they are staying. This is nonsense.

Nigel Huddleston: No, it is a matter of getting the right balance between making sure—

Kevin Brennan: No, it is not about getting the right balance.

Nigel Huddleston: It is always a matter of getting the right balance—

Kevin Brennan: It is just ideology.

Nigel Huddleston: —between completely open borders and making sure that—

Q388 **Kevin Brennan:** It is because the Home Office does not want to distinguish between schoolchildren from our near neighbours and schoolchildren from other parts of the world, because, ideologically, they object to the notion of someone from the European Union being able to travel to this country on any different basis than anyone from any other country around the world where there may be other visa requirements. That is why, isn't it?



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Nigel Huddleston: Respectfully, that is not the reason. I can tell you that is not the tone of the conversations that I have with the Home Office.

Q389 **Kevin Brennan:** What is the reason then? This thing about an ID card is bogus. It is an absolutely bogus idea.

Nigel Huddleston: I think the fact that 48% of seized documents are ID cards does speak for itself.

Q390 **Kevin Brennan:** How many have been seized from schoolchildren on school trips with their teachers from Europe? Can I give you a clue? Probably none.

Nigel Huddleston: We are, again, in conversations with the Home Office. As I say, I recognise, and we recognise, the importance of the youth and the school trips sector and of the English language skills learning sector. It is important. We are looking at options. Group travel is one of the routes, although we are moving towards individual identification rather than group. There are various efforts going on with the Home Office—I am sure you have had evidence from them about where we are going with trying to improve electronic verification and so on—that I think will be hugely beneficial in the long term. At this moment in time, I know it is challenging for a lot of group trips, but we are in conversations with the Home Office. Kevin Foster is very sympathetic.

Q391 **Kevin Brennan:** He is a decent man, but this is ludicrous. VisitBritain has said that it can be devastating for certain parts of the country's tourism offer—for example, Hastings, which Patricia Yates mentioned. Can you please have more than consultations and hold their feet to the fire on this? It is an absolutely extraordinary example of yet another own goal in relation to our image abroad and visiting this country.

When you talk to the Home Office from the Department, can you also tell them that there are other forms of visa that are very important to our sector—to DCMS? I had an email recently from someone who has been trying to make a film in the UK. Basically, because the Home Office have suspended the premium visa service, that person has told me that all they can do now with requests they receive from film companies and musicians coming into the UK looking for immigration support is tell them that the UK is effectively closed for business. That is a devastating statement, but that is what the sector is telling us because of the Home Office's visa policy.

Nigel Huddleston: We have a thriving international film and TV production sector in the UK.

Kevin Brennan: A film worth £14 million is now not going to be filmed in Britain.

Nigel Huddleston: Again, as you know, we do not have the capacity for studio space at the moment.



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Q392 **Kevin Brennan:** Do you welcome the fact that they are not going to make a film here?

Nigel Huddleston: No, I do not welcome the fact that somebody is saying that, but we do have processes. The reality is that because we have left the EU, things are not the same as they were, and we now have different processes. I will happily pass those comments on.

Q393 **Kevin Brennan:** I will send you the details.

Finally, you are also the Minister for Sport. Could you, for the benefit of the Committee and the country, briefly outline the differences between rugby union and rugby league?

Nigel Huddleston: I think you know the codes. I appreciate the point you are making, Mr Brennan. I can assure you the Secretary of State is a huge advocate for all sport, and we are going to have a great rugby league World cup later on this year.

Kevin Brennan: That is massively reassuring.

Q394 **Chair:** I do think it was a speechwriter's issue rather than the Secretary of State's one when it came to the rugby league, and the Government did give a substantial sum of money right at the start of the pandemic to rescue rugby league, did it not?

Nigel Huddleston: Exactly. In fact to many sports—rugby league and rugby union, and credit to Ralph Rimmer.

Chair: Can rugby league now expect more money?

Kevin Brennan: That is what is called a hospital pass.

Chair: We are going to go briefly to Steve Brine and then Clive Efford.

Q395 **Steve Brine:** No doubt you will be watching Wimbledon on the pitch this afternoon.

Can I ask you about the de Bois review? We had Nick, a former colleague, here very recently. He did a significant piece of work for you and gave a very good account of that here before us. You are familiar with the work he has done on destination management organisations and with the way he thinks there is an excessive amount of geographical overlap and territorial competition between them at the moment. His exact words were, "If the Government really want us to stay in Division 1 of tourism and enjoy some growth that is below world average, then do nothing. Continue with the policies set back in 2010. If you want to be in the Premier League, then I believe that coherence, collaboration, accountability and reaching our full potential can be met by empowering DMO structures and the DMOs, who are full of some brilliant people." He said that when he was here a couple of weeks ago. He has talked about the cost being between £20 million and £50 million a year to put us in that Premier League. I guess the question that I have is, why is it taking so long for the Government to give their formal response to Nick's



review?

Nigel Huddleston: I am really grateful to Nick for his review; he did a fantastic job and talked to a lot of people—actually, everybody involved—because he went around the country talking to DMOs all over the place, and there were some fairly consistent messages that came out of it. I will say first that, in terms of his articulation of what the problems and challenges were, I agree completely. It is incredibly fragmented. They are all over the place. They sometimes compete with each other. Some of them are primarily private sector, some are primarily public, and some of them are a mix. Of course, Government did help bail some of them out during the pandemic with some of the money I talked about earlier.

One of the reasons for the delay is that we had the spending review during the period in which Nick produced his report. Not only did we have the broad spending review settlement, but then we went through the internal business planning at DCMS, so we needed to work out what money may be available, and we are still finalising that. I hope to be able to respond formally to Nick's review within weeks.

Steve Brine: Maybe before summer recess? We have a couple of weeks left.

Nigel Huddleston: Again, I cannot promise exactly the date, but we are in a good position to be able to know how to respond, so I need to make sure that we dot the final i's and cross the final t's.

Q396 **Steve Brine:** I think Nick will be encouraged to hear that. One of his recommendations is that the Minister for Tourism should be a Minister of State position or even higher.

Nigel Huddleston: I would never disagree with Nick. Most of you know—I have been on this Committee before and I will probably get a slapped wrist from coms for this—that I find it ironic that we are almost one of the only countries in Europe where tourism is not in the name of a Government Department, despite the fact that it is a huge chunk of the economy. anyway, that is a broader issue for another day.

Q397 **Steve Brine:** We live in hope, because things change all the time. Finally, we had VisitBritain with us when we were in Korea, and Patricia from VisitBritain was here recently alongside Nick giving evidence. I am a fairly simple chap and I do not understand, but why do we have VisitBritain, VisitEngland, Visit Wales, Visit Northern Ireland and then a wider Visit Ireland and VisitScotland. Why do we have all those different layers? Either we have VisitBritain, whose job is to promote Britain, or we have the others. Why do we have them both? There is a lot of duplication.

Nigel Huddleston: I am sure that Mr Nicolson will have a view on this also. There are multiple levels—

Steve Brine: I am sure he would, but at the moment, subject to events,



Scotland is part of the United Kingdom, and therefore VisitBritain.

Nigel Huddleston: There are a couple of things there. First, in terms of operational duplication, layers of management and so on there have been significant moves and changes in the structure of BTA—the British Tourism Authority—to try to bring VisitBritain and VisitEngland operationally much closer together. That has happened over the last few years, and there have been quite substantial changes and I am sure Patricia and Nick talked about that a little bit.

In terms of the roles, VisitEngland is primarily a domestic marketing operation, so promoting tourism within England. VisitBritain is to promote the whole of Britain to the world and also to help with packaging product and supply. They have slightly different purposes and roles that are quite discrete. There could potentially be a conflict of interest if we did not have VisitEngland as well, because, in terms of that domestic promotion and promotion within the UK, there would then be an unfair advantage arguably to Scotland, Wales, Ireland and Northern Ireland, who co-operate together when it comes to promotion, because they have their own thing as well? That would put England at a disadvantage potentially.

The other argument is that in terms of the product offering, the key target markets are different in each of the nations and the scale of the tourism economy is also different in the nations. In fact—again John will be aware of this—the tourism economy in Scotland is bigger than it is in England. Therefore, they may choose to spend different amounts of money, recognising that the tourism economy is of a different scale. So there is a genuine rationale, but operationally it is a lot better than it was in the past.

Q398 **John Nicolson:** I think Steve is right: the message is quite blurred, and often VisitBritain and VisitEngland tend to be synonymous. Even if you look at the packaging, a lot of the stuff they put up for VisitBritain is English images. I think England would probably do a lot better if it was to brand itself more assertively as England, which has a great international reputation, even after Brexit. That is not what I was going to go with, but I am just supporting my colleague.

What I would like to talk to you about is something completely different, and that is world heritage status. How important do you think world heritage status is for these islands?

Nigel Huddleston: I think it is important because we have some amazing product and an amazing history and heritage, much of which is about iconic destinations, both physical infrastructure and buildings, but also, increasingly, about recognising landscapes as part of our heritage. They are getting UNESCO heritage status now, in a way that others have not, and consideration is even being given to moving into intellectual property and so on, which is quite an interesting move. We have a wealth of them here in the UK.



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Q399 **John Nicolson:** I am interested that you mention landscapes, because an important new one is on the horizon, and that is the Flow Country, which would be the first site designated entirely in Scotland for its natural criteria.

Nigel Huddleston: Absolutely, and I applaud those moves in that direction and you will be aware that we are going through a process of identifying potential future sites to be listed with world heritage status.

Q400 **John Nicolson:** And you supporting the Flow Country, aren't you?

Nigel Huddleston: I think the assessment is being made.

John Nicolson: I certainly hope you are, because it is a beautiful and important place.

Nigel Huddleston: I think the Flow Country is on the list, and we are going through a list of future ones now as well. The list does evolve and change, and unfortunately—you are probably coming on to this—we occasionally lose some UNESCO heritage status sites as well. The important thing is that, for certain places, particularly if they are not already on the global radar, that UNESCO status can really help, because it is an immediate signal and indicator that there is something to see here that is recognised as globally significant around the world. It is probably not as significant from a marketing and push point of view for places that are already globally world renowned, but it is important from the point of view of processes, special interest, planning procedures and so on.

So it varies in terms of the value attached to it, but we do treasure our heritage in the UK and we want to work internationally and co-operate. Still, the total number of UNESCO world heritage sites does tend to be a bit heavy on the western world, whereas there are a lot of other sites around the world that also need heritage status.

Q401 **John Nicolson:** That is a fair point, and I think the distinction you make between places that are already famous and places that are less famous is a fair one. I know that if I am thinking about going somewhere the fact that it is on a UNESCO list always gives me the added impetus. As you correctly say, I would like to ask you about Liverpool and the fact that the Maritime Mercantile City was removed. This is only the third time in the history of UNESCO that a World Heritage site has been lost, and as somebody who loves Liverpool, which is so similar in many ways to Glasgow, the city I was born in, it just seems a tragedy. As the Minister, why do you think this happened, and what could have been done to prevent it from happening?

Nigel Huddleston: One of the challenges with UNESCO is that once you have an area on the list, there is a boundary that is given, and effectively very little change can then happen within that UNESCO status. If you are in a dynamic place of the world—of course, Liverpool still being an incredibly dynamic, vibrant city, there are bound to be changes, development and planning proposals that come forward—that



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immediately causes red flags to that UNESCO status. The question is, does it compromise the overall listing or is it tolerable, recognising that we probably need a reasonable balance?

Q402 John Nicolson: Exactly, and the UK was warned repeatedly by UNESCO that if it went ahead with this, it would lose its status. So it was not a surprise; the UK was told what would happen. Nobody could look at what Liverpool has chosen to build and think that UNESCO was wrong. It was clearly the wrong call, and Liverpool, like Glasgow and many of our other great cities, has made some disastrous planning decisions over the years that have destroyed so much of the character of the inner cities. It is tragic to see that we are still doing it and, in Liverpool's case, with such terrible consequences.

Nigel Huddleston: I agree that there are some terrible planning decisions. As a person who has to list various buildings or occasionally delist them, I have seen some horrific examples. That said, I do think there needs to be a balance—of course, we are currently in discussions even about Stonehenge—about what is genuinely still going to protect the status and protect the heritage, versus leaving completely empty spaces.

Q403 John Nicolson: Nobody is arguing for leaving empty spaces, and around the world the fact that only three have been delisted shows that cities have managed very successfully to balance modernisation with new development.

Nigel Huddleston: Yes, but not often if they are UNESCO heritage listed.

Q404 John Nicolson: Obviously there are a lot of UNESCO heritage sites and they have not been delisted; therefore, they have managed to modernise to some extent while preserving their character. Edinburgh is a very successful example—St James is an exception, historically.

In conclusion, because I know we are short on time, can you tell me what lesson you want to learn to stop this happening again?

Nigel Huddleston: There are two bits. One is that we need to be very careful and work with UNESCO and all the heritage Ministers around the world—I have had conversations with several of them—to make sure that we are comfortable with the criteria for assessment or the delisting process for UNESCO world heritage sites, and recognise that some recognition of a dynamic environment, requiring some compromises every now and again, might be appropriate.

Secondly, as it relates specifically to Liverpool, for a period of time I was not heritage Minister when some of this came through, so I was not all over the detail of this when the decision was made. But I know that, for example, with the proposals around the Everton stadium, it was considering an area that, at the moment, is closed off from the public anyway. I am not doubting the important heritage element to that, but there is an argument to say that, with some development, that area



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could be opened up and be enhanced. I think it is about how we protect, but also about whether something is enhancing or not enhancing.

I can tell you this: I am hugely passionate about our heritage, and I would never want to compromise our heritage proposition for future generations, one of the reasons being that it is the most important part of our value proposition to international tourists. If we throw that away, then we can kiss goodbye to a lot of international revenue as well, and a lot of jobs.

John Nicolson: Agreed.

Q405 **Chair:** I was going to ask about the UNBOXED festival and its international—

Nigel Huddleston: I suspected you might. I think I know what you are going to say, and you know what I am going to say back.

Chair: Frankly, let us put it in a box and forget about it. Minister Huddleston, thank you very much for your evidence today. That concludes the session.