

Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: Rural Tourism, HC 428

Wednesday 16 November 2016

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Members present: Neil Parish (Chair); Jim Fitzpatrick; Simon Hart; Kerry McCarthy; Dr Paul Monaghan; Rebecca Pow; Ms Margaret Ritchie; Angela Smith; David Simpson; Rishi Sunak

Questions 1-74

Witnesses

I: Patricia Yates, Director of Strategy and Communications, VisitBritain/VisitEngland; Sir Gary Verity, Chief Executive, Welcome to Yorkshire; Jude Leitch, Director, Northumberland Tourism

Examination of Witnesses

Patricia Yates, Director of Strategy and Communications, VisitBritain/VisitEngland; Sir Gary Verity, Chief Executive, Welcome to Yorkshire; Jude Leitch, Director, Northumberland Tourism

Q1 Chair: Welcome to our rural tourism inquiry. Thank you very much for giving us evidence this afternoon. Jude, if you would like to start from your end and introduce yourselves please, then we will start opening the questions.

Jude Leitch: Hello and good afternoon. My name is Jude Leitch. I am the director of Northumberland Tourism, which is the destination management organisation for the county of Northumberland. Hopefully you are all familiar with it. The tourism gems that we have include Alnwick Castle and Gardens, Hadrian's Wall and Bamburgh Castle. Our visitors tend to be very much looking for history and heritage, but also wonderful landscapes. We are delighted this inquiry is being held.

Patricia Yates: Good afternoon. I am Patricia Yates. I am director of strategy and communications at VisitEngland and VisitBritain. We are responsible for marketing England domestically, building English product and marketing England through the Britain agenda in international markets.

Sir Gary Verity: I am Gary Verity. I am the chief executive of Welcome to Yorkshire, which is the official destination management organisation for Yorkshire, the largest county in England. I am also on the board of Yorkshire County Cricket Club and I chair for the Government the Great Exhibition of the North in 2018.

Q2 Chair: It is a great county, Yorkshire, but Devon has its moments as well. We had better not get into competition today as to which county is the biggest, the best or whatever. You are very much welcome. Thank you very much. I will open with the first question, which is fairly simple. How optimistic are you about the prospects for the English tourism industry in the coming two to five years?

Jude Leitch: As far as Northumberland is concerned, I am very optimistic, if it is left to the businesses and the partnerships that exist in the north-east currently and, going further across the north, with counties such as Yorkshire. We have a very good chance of continuing the growth that has been experienced over the last few years. There will be challenges, however. That is optimistic, but with caveats that there are some real challenges that will be coming up to face us.

Patricia Yates: The tourism industry is an industry that has shown substantial growth over the past few years. It is a job creator and delivers right across the country. Inbound tourism is our third biggest service export; we get around 36 million visits a year. We are working to



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get to 40 million visits by 2020, continuing that pattern of growth. We have seen really good growth in domestic travel as well. The good thing about that is that domestic travel has grown at a time when the economy is strong. It is not the case that people are staying at home because they cannot afford to go abroad; they are staying at home because they want to holiday domestically. We have customer sentiment showing that there is a real driver of people loving holiday at home and wanting to continue that and an increase in ABs who want to stay domestically.

There are of course challenges, though. We work in a competitive environment. We have to look at what our international competition is and look at some of the challenges we have. In rural tourism for example, we have seen growth, yes, but that 16 to 35-year-old traveller is disproportionately not going to rural destinations. How can we make sure we are building the tourism of the future?

Sir Gary Verity: We are naturally optimistic. The sector is a very resilient one. It has a lot of entrepreneurialism and entrepreneurs within it. Without being complacent, we would be positive about the outcome for the next two years. Forward bookings for next year are strong, on the back of a very strong year this year. That is not to say that there are not issues and that we could not do better.

Q3 Chair: Patricia, you touched on it slightly: we have a lot of tourists. I think nearly half the foreign tourists who come into London. How effective are Government policies in getting these tourists not only to visit London, but to visit the rural areas? How effective are Government policies generally in moving people from London to the great rural locations with great food and scenery so we have a combination? How do we do it?

Patricia Yates: That is a good question. We are targeted to do that. We are absolutely targeted to get inbound tourism across the nations and regions. We have done campaigns, such as the countryside campaign, bringing together all the countryside bodies to promote the countryside in international markets. We have done customer research and we have found that the barriers there are transport, even for markets that know us very well. They do not want to travel on the wrong side of the road, so we need to have better public transport.

When we look at who goes to rural holidays and how they travel, they tend to travel by car. How can we have a better public transport system that, for an international visitor, makes that trip very easy and bookable in advance, so they are able to take advantage of cheap travel? That is a real issue for us.

Q4 Chair: One of the issues is probably that some of our train fares, especially if you book them when you are here at a very late time or date, close to when you want to travel, can be very expensive, whereas sometimes on the continent you will find the trains are quite a lot cheaper.



Sir Gary Verity: That is a really valid point. Where it sits, whether it is government policy or transport policy, I am not quite sure. There is a practical issue that it is currently not possible to through-ticket from Europe around the UK. You can get your ticket in Paris, Brussels or wherever you are coming from, which finishes at St Pancras. Then you have to go and purchase another ticket to go wherever you are going around the UK, whether it is heading west, north or whatever you may be doing. Surely, in this day and age, that must be crackers. You should be able, when you are booking your ticket—to your point about getting advance fares that are not as expensive—to sort that out, print it all out so you can get off your train at St Pancras, go to another station and head off to wherever you are going around the UK. That is not how it works at the moment and that really is a deterrent, certainly for many people we speak to around and near Europe who want to come here. That is a really obvious and practical thing that would make it a lot easier to get more tourists out of London.

Patricia Yates: We are looking at that as one of the strands, and I absolutely take that from Gary. We are looking at train itineraries and making those bookable in international markets. We are looking at operators that sell train and how we can make the English tourism train product bookable in international markets. That work is under way, but I absolutely agree that through-ticketing is a part of it.

Q5 **Chair:** Especially if they are able to buy off-peak, because tourists do not necessarily have to travel at 7 o'clock in the morning or whatever.

Patricia Yates: No, indeed. If you pitch up to the station, it is a very different fare than if you have booked in advance.

Jude Leitch: There is an ongoing issue from that as well, which is the huge cuts we have experienced in bus and other travel in the rural areas. Of course, you can get to a mainline train station but often you cannot get in any further. In Northumberland at the moment, over 96% of our visitors come by car. When you are trying to maintain a rural and beautiful landscape, the sustainability of that is very questionable.

Q6 **Angela Smith:** I just wondered what the main destinations are outside London for international visitors. You are going to tell me I am wrong I hope, but I have been told it is Oxford, Cambridge, Stratford and Haworth. Haworth is very popular as well. I suspect Oxford and Cambridge will be in there, but do you recognise those statistics, Patricia?

Patricia Yates: One region where we are seeing strong growth is Yorkshire, which is up by 7% this year.

Q7 **Angela Smith:** Which are the most popular? I am not asking about trends. I am asking which are the most popular over time, historically.

Patricia Yates: It would still be Yorkshire and the south-west, where we have seen good tourism numbers going. Yes, you get Oxford and



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Cambridge, because you get the day trip from London. If you are looking at overnight visits, then it is further afield.

Q8 **Angela Smith:** Could we ask for a note, Chair, to tease this out?

Chair: Yes, with the breakdown.

Patricia Yates: Yes, sure. We can certainly follow up with that.

Chair: They are obviously very discerning tourists who are going to the West Country as well as Yorkshire.

Angela Smith: Very discerning.

Jude Leitch: However, Chair, there is an issue with the trends and the way people take their holidays. International tourists are now coming for fewer amounts of time. If it is their one holiday of a lifetime, it is difficult to drag them out of London because it is of course what they want to see. In Northumberland, only 2.9% of our visitors are international. Despite the attractions we have, we really struggle to encourage them out of the city.

Q9 **Rishi Sunak:** I have a general question. When you look at the opportunities and are reasonably optimistic, do you think the opportunity is greater for getting not just London-based but UK-based people to come to visit regional areas; or is the opportunity greater to attract international people out of London into regional areas?

Sir Gary Verity: It is both, clearly. Your spend per head will be more from your international visitor, but you will get fewer of them. The reality is that you need both. You need a mix. Back to the previous point, as we have worked out that a lot of our international visitors and clearly a large number of our domestic visitors will be in a motor car, things like brown signs are really important. I have failed to persuade the Highways Agency that, on the main road through Yorkshire, I should have signs to the Peak District National Park, the Yorkshire Dales National Park or the North York Moors National Park. They just say they are not applicable for a brown sign.

Q10 **Angela Smith:** I have heard that as well.

Sir Gary Verity: If you want to say to people, "There are some nice things you might want to go and look at, so think about turning off here", a sign would not be the most ridiculous idea.

Rishi Sunak: On a small intra-constituency point, we have some good news: we are going to get a sign to Wensleydale. We have made some progress. You are right; it is harder than you would imagine. You need to get special dispensation now. It is a very good point that collectively we should probably look at.

Q11 **Rebecca Pow:** I was involved in the brown signs in Somerset for Hestercombe Gardens, which has now almost 100,000 visitors per year. I did all their PR and marketing. It took them 12 years to get a brown sign



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on it, because brown signs are not actually tourist signs. They are signs that just help with the congestion of the traffic. It is a numbers thing. It is a highways decision. Do you think, for the record, we should recommend having some other system that is used for our tourist industry? No one even knew this place was there when they were coming down.

Sir Gary Verity: Absolutely. We can learn a lot from our neighbours in France. You drive down the roads in France and you can see fantastic signs: to chateaus and other such things. These are not to relieve congestion.

Chair: They have pictures of them, too.

Sir Gary Verity: Exactly.

Q12 **Rebecca Pow:** Should we change the emphasis and make it a tourist sign?

Sir Gary Verity: I am sure that must be right.

Jude Leitch: When you think that every day we have a large cavalcade of cars driving off the DFDS ferry at Newcastle and up the A1 to Edinburgh, straight past all the wonderful attractions that they just do not know about, it is very difficult for our business to watch.

Chair: It is about getting the balance right between having enough signs and not having the countryside entirely littered with signs. That is always the big argument, but it is a really good point raised. We will bear that in mind.

Q13 **Dr Monaghan:** Good afternoon. Ahead of this inquiry, we found quite a lot of evidence that highlights tensions, perhaps, between VisitEngland and VisitBritain. We have noted that the UK Government have identified that they want these organisations to work more closely together to support content sharing, whatever that may be, and promote England in a more cost effective way. In Wales and in Scotland, we have dedicated agencies that promote our countries. We wonder if you feel that English tourism is suffering because it does not have a dedicated tourist body in England. Would you like to start?

Patricia Yates: I would say there is no tension between VisitEngland and VisitBritain, because we are one organisation. The remit was clarified for VisitEngland: that it was about product development and bringing product together to get it into international markets, which is funded through the Discover England fund, and about domestic marketing and business support. In VisitBritain, we have the international network. We are there to get that product into international markets. Of course we promote the other nations of Britain as well, but England gets its share of voice through the Britain activity that we do in international markets.

That closer working together has removed duplication and the £40 million fund coming in has enabled us to work with English destinations to really



think about how we can get a win-win, addressing the previous point, so we have products that work in international markets but deliver for domestic business as well.

Sir Gary Verity: We have worked with both regimes: before the change and the one that exists now. We found that to be seamless. We find working with VisitBritain and VisitEngland as is now to be absolutely fine. One thing we look on with a modest amount of envy is the different funding models that exist for different parts of the UK: Scotland versus Wales versus England and so on. There is a disparity in the amount of money that goes in; Patricia could speak accurately to those different numbers. That is the big difference that we would identify. In terms of structures, there has been no detriment from our point of view with the current structure versus the previous one, if that makes sense.

Q14 **Dr Monaghan:** Interesting. The evidence that we have challenges the views that you are expressing. To give you an example, Northumberland have said that the closer working together between VisitEngland and VisitBritain is a backwards step. The UK Government have said that it is not a merger, but you have described it as one organisation. We are getting quite a confused picture now of what is going on. Who is correct?

Patricia Yates: The organisation, if you look at it structurally, is the British Tourist Authority, which has always been the case, with VisitEngland and VisitBritain working alongside that. I, for example, am director of both VisitEngland and VisitBritain, and my CEO is of VisitEngland and VisitBritain. I have read the evidence that has come to the Committee. People are confusing funding with remit and structure. We get a certain amount of funding for domestic marketing. We had a £2.5 million campaign earlier this year, which I hope you saw on television, to promote England in a different and exciting way.

We run a website that has inspirational content to get people to come. We have seen a 50% increase in that over the past year. We do great social media, engage with people and work with films, like *Swallows and Amazons* and *The BFG*, to create a sense of excitement about a domestic holiday. Yes, we could do more, and we put a bid into the Autumn Statement, but I think we are very good at delivering with the sum of money and the remit that we have, with a real emphasis in the remit on building English product and getting it into international markets for the future. That has been funded to £40 million over three years.

Q15 **Dr Monaghan:** That is probably an answer to a slightly different question from the one I asked, I suspect. We will leave it just now. Jude, you are from Northumberland. What is your view?

Jude Leitch: It is almost too early to tell, because there is now a new structure for the way that VisitEngland works with the destinations. That has not completely come to fruition yet. We have yet to have very many meetings and work out how the structures will work. Purely from a small, emerging rural destination's point of view, we now find it more difficult to



work with VisitEngland, simply because of the cuts that they have experienced and the number of staff who have now left. Similar to many rural destinations where you have small and medium enterprises, Northumberland has never had the large amount of resources to be able to effectively market Northumberland the way it ought to be; we do not even have a city.

We have relied on clear relationships with VisitEngland to help us to do that. We have a very clear relationship with their PR staff, for example. We make sure that we prioritise any requests from them. We take the time out to make sure that we give them as much help, imagery and content as we possibly can. It is in those smaller areas where we are now finding difficulty. The overall work that they are doing, as Patricia said, is very good for the amount of funding they receive. However, there are now some gaps there that we, as a small destination, are really starting to feel.

Q16 **Rishi Sunak:** This is a question for Gary and maybe Jude, about the structure of funding in a large regional area like Yorkshire or Northumberland. How does funding work for you at Welcome to Yorkshire? Does it come centrally or not? Do you think there should be some change in the structure? We are devolving powers and funding in lots of other areas of Government. How should we view tourism funding in that context for a large, successful region like yours?

Sir Gary Verity: There is no central funding for Yorkshire as such. We can bid for the Discover England fund, to get some money out of that, and we work with VisitEngland and VisitBritain on some bespoke campaigns and items, but there is no central funding per se. One thing that would be worth looking at, which would be a big benefit to rural tourism, is the idea that has been kicking around for quite some time around match funding. If some money were able to be found, you could say to an area like Northumberland, Somerset, Yorkshire or anywhere else that needs an agglomeration of very small rural businesses coming together to do some good work, that the Government would match an amount of money raised from the private sector.

I would put a minimum level on that of, say, £250,000, so you do not end up processing lots of tiny claims per annum. That would mean that you had an amount of money you could do something with, either to work alongside VisitEngland or VisitBritain or to do some activity locally. That would give an opportunity to the private sector. In a place like Somerset, for example, you would say to all businesses there, "If you come together and raise an amount of money between you, there is a carrot here to take something forward."

In Yorkshire, we raise a large amount of money every year from the private sector, but we could probably raise a lot more and get rid of what have colloquially been called the freeloaders, who are happy to ride on the back of the activity of everybody else, but not put anything into the



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kitty. That would be a good way of trying to tease those people out. That is my suggestion.

- Q17 **Simon Hart:** We are on the same team. It was a throwaway line of yours, Gary, about Scotland versus Wales versus England. I do not think you meant it in the way I perhaps interpreted it. It got my nose twitching a bit because I am wondering, listening to your contributions and the evidence as it unfolds, whether by having separate organisations we inadvertently create a sense of competition between the devolved regions and London as a centre. Is that a reasonable concern to have? It frustrates me, because it takes less than two hours to get into Wales from Heathrow, and yet it is, to all intents and purposes, if you are visiting from abroad, another country. We do not think we get the recognition we probably deserve. Is that a fair observation?

Patricia Yates: The Government have made strenuous efforts to target us on getting tourists to nations as well as regions. The tourism is, as you know, devolved, but the Tourism Ministers meet regularly and they agree on our targets. Visit Wales and VisitScotland sit on our board. They fully contribute to our board meetings. Every year, we agree a high-level marketing plan that talks about what the objectives are for Scotland, England and Wales, how we think we can work together, where the synergies are and how we can deliver that. A lot of thought has gone into how we work together. That is easy in international markets; in the domestic market, Wales, Scotland and England would see themselves as competitive.

- Q18 **Simon Hart:** I do not want to unpick the years of the devolution settlement, but is it the fact you have to get all of these different individuals and Governments to agree to high-level marketing plan? Is that a simple task and what is the measurement of success? What are the criteria that have been set upon which you can measure progress?

Patricia Yates: I am going to go into technical terms here. The measurement is about delivery for Scotland and Wales that is a higher level than the baseline figures. I know I am not explaining that well. I will stop and start again.

Chair: When you are digging a hole, stop digging.

Patricia Yates: I did see your eyes glaze over. We have to evaluate all the activity we do. We are targeted to deliver additional visits and additional value. We then break that down to what we are delivering for the nations and regions.

- Q19 **Simon Hart:** Since you have been adopting that model, is the general view that it is successful? Where is it doing well? Where is it doing badly?

Patricia Yates: As you indicated, it is complex. Our strength in VisitBritain is that we look at international markets, international competitors and customers. We have to work together as Britain. People overseas want to be able to come to Britain and explore all the nations



and regions. We have to showcase that and not be competitive in international markets. Yes, it is a complex environment, and politically it is a complex environment, but we make a lot of effort to make sure we are as collaborative as we possibly can be. Our international network, which VisitScotland and Visit Wales do not have, is something that is available to all the tourism industry, to the nations and is very well used by them.

Sir Gary Verity: One of our strengths as a country is our diversity. We want people to explore the UK. We would like them to explore a lot of Yorkshire, with a selfish hat on, but we want people to explore the rest of the UK and see what there is on offer. We are not a one-trick pony. Whatever it is you are looking for, you have a great city, an international capital city, here in London but you have other great examples as well. You have fantastic examples of rural tourism across the UK. Whatever it is you are looking for, you will probably find it here within these shores. The more we can say to people, "Have an explore around; try other places; you will constantly be amazed and surprised in a positive way", that has to be a good thing, so people can, over time, develop their own favourites and decide where they want to head back to.

Jude Leitch: From Northumberland's point of view, we can understand the emphasis on product development that the Government currently have, because there really is a need to make sure that people, especially international visitors, are able to easily reach and book the product that we have. What is disconcerting for us is that we already feel we have world-class product; however, we struggle to tell people about it and we struggle to maintain it. There are an awful lot of funds out there at the moment where you can apply for capital funding to develop new product. We have been doing that. However, we then struggle, with, for example, local government budgets being cut, to work out how we can continue to maintain those assets and how we tell people all about them.

Q20 **Dr Monaghan:** The question is probably for Patricia again. I am sure you are aware that, in 2014-2015, the Culture, Media and Sport Committee recommended a clearer delineation of VisitEngland and VisitBritain's roles. Has that been progressed at all?

Patricia Yates: It has. I talked about the clarity of remit: that VisitEngland is focused on product development, domestic marketing and business support; and VisitBritain is focused on promoting Britain's nations and regions and international marketing. That works well.

Q21 **Rebecca Pow:** There are something like 200 destination organisations, as they are referred to, in England. I am going to talk about the Federation of Small Businesses, who obviously have some data. They would say that they think the marketing in English tourism is rather piecemeal, which must have something to do with all those organisations and local authorities not taking such a lead anymore. They potentially criticise the LEP for not doing enough. What would be your view?



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Jude Leitch: If you were looking at the entire country, you would probably say it is piecemeal. There have been different reactions, mechanisms and partnerships developed in different parts of the country following the abolition of the RDAs. In the north-east, our organisations have done very well and we have worked very clearly in partnership. We have developed clear organisations that have worked very well and hard together. I know that is not the case in other parts of the country.

A lot of the benefit that areas get from tourism now depends on how much the businesses, in whatever type of partnership they are in, are able to convince authorities and LEAs that tourism really is important. For Northumberland, with 11% of our employment, that is something we were always going to strive to do. Other parts of the country struggle perhaps because it is not such a focus.

Q22 **Rebecca Pow:** Would that be your experience, Sir Gary?

Sir Gary Verity: I can see your comment that it is piecemeal, but that is not necessarily a problem, because the country is not uniform in terms of geography and structure. It is not a grid system; we are not talking the city of New York. Therefore, you need something that reflects the differences within the country. That is what you have.

Q23 **Rebecca Pow:** Do you think they are all inevitably in competition with each other?

Sir Gary Verity: Not necessarily, no. Through the Northern Tourism Growth Fund, we have all worked together on a number of initiatives. Different organisations across the north, vis-à-vis this fund, have led on different aspects of the work. We did a piece of work on behalf of the north of England that brought 219 overseas journalists in to take them around the whole of the north of England and write articles about why people should come back here. There does not have to be an overt competition. To the point that I made earlier to Simon's question, one of our strengths is that you can go to various parts of the UK at the same time on your visit. That has to be something that, if that is what you want to do, we should encourage.

Q24 **Rebecca Pow:** Patricia, I will bring you in on that point. The FSB was slightly critical in suggesting that VisitEngland tends to promote by county. You are suggesting you have done some regional work. Would it be constructive to be more regional in the approach?

Patricia Yates: Can I answer both questions?

Rebecca Pow: Yes, of course.

Patricia Yates: On the structure, as you can imagine, 200 DMOs lead to a very fragmented English landscape. Those DMOs do not follow what the customer would see as an area they would naturally choose to holiday in, obviously apart from Yorkshire. That fragmentation is difficult to work with. The degrees of knowledge and expertise are different in those 200



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organisations. You have some that are well funded and others that are not. Trying to share best practice so we are not reinventing the wheel 200 times is a challenge. Since we have started working more closely together, we have set up a destination management forum. We have more than 100 DMOs coming next week.

Part of the reason they are coming—and I would agree with the Federation of Small Businesses—is that LEPs are obviously organisations that are comparatively better funded than DMOs. They are looking at economic growth in their region, and they are people who could take more of an economic view of tourism and join up some of those DMOs. We have 12 LEPs coming. We have the Tourism Minister and the LEP Minister coming to talk about how we could make a step change in that area. Part of the Discover England fund's remit was not just to deliver world-class product, but to get DMOs working more closely together. If you look at some of the projects that have been approved, like the Great West Way, that brings together many DMOs, right through from London to Bristol, and the private sector to work collaboratively on delivering something that works for a customer. That is that bit. I have almost forgotten what the second bit was.

Rebecca Pow: It was about the counties.

Chair: That was a good answer, but quite a long answer. Could you be more concise, please?

Jude Leitch: One of the things that Patricia said was about taking the visitors' perception of what a destination should be. You go on holiday to Northumberland or Newcastle. You do not go on holiday to the north-east. These perceptions are very, very strong. Yorkshire is a clear conglomeration of a range of different destinations.

Rebecca Pow: You do go on holiday to the south-west.

Jude Leitch: That may be an opportunity to promote the south-west.

Sir Gary Verity: You are more likely to say you are going on holiday to the West Country.

Chair: Yes, you are more likely to say the West Country than the south-west, Rebecca.

Q25 **Rebecca Pow:** To my second question, there was a criticism that you were promoting on county lines. Should it be more regional?

Patricia Yates: I do not recognise that we promote on county lines at all. Our promotion, both domestically and internationally, is "GREAT Britain—Home of Amazing Moments". When we did the domestic campaign, we spoke about amazing moments because it is very social and digital, with sharing great experiences. Although we are strong for history and heritage, it was about getting that sense of excitement back to choosing a domestic or international holiday. It absolutely was not



done by regions at all. There is an onus on us, of course, to promote the entire country. Yes, we have to think about that.

- Q26 **Rebecca Pow:** To bring us back to rural, though, should there be more focus on promoting rural? If you go to Italy, you might think of a few cities but you think very rural; you think of all that lovely food and the lovely outdoors. Do you think we are doing that enough in the UK and England?

Patricia Yates: Interestingly, we think we are very strong for countryside. If you look at international markets, there is a Nation Brands Index and Britain comes about 18th in that for countryside. Normally, we are up in one to five. Internationally, it is not seen as a strength. In that joined-up world, we should think about where people are going—so the cities—and get them to explore more of the countryside. Part of that is: why should they travel? Great hotels, great attractions and the great outdoors. We need to tell that compelling story in international markets. Yorkshire, of course, has had the Tour de France; they have had cycling and have been able to promote those villages through an outdoor activity. That is the way to do it.

- Q27 **Rebecca Pow:** Does that not show it works and, if we are 18th, does it not show we have not done it quite well enough in the past?

Patricia Yates: As you say, other countries have great countryside as well. Australia has great countryside. Yes, it is an area where we are working. We have launched countryside campaigns, but also, in the effort to get people out of London, we are looking at promoting the countryside and the countryside for experiences.

- Q28 **Chair:** Are we promoting enough the food, the wine, the cider, the beer and all those things? In a lot of countries, Italy and others, you will see them really promote it, not just for the countryside but what you are going to get there. I believe our diversity of food and beverages is much better, but I am not sure the foreign visitor in particular would realise that.

Patricia Yates: We are working with Defra on four food hubs, one of which is the south-west and another of which is Yorkshire, looking at pulling together products, hotels and food destinations that we can then build into itineraries to work in international markets. Yes, both British produce—which is probably what Defra is most concerned with—and British destinations are great for food. We want to promote them much more strongly internationally.

Sir Gary Verity: To continue that theme, we got the Tour de France to start in Yorkshire, which was largely about promoting big swathes of the rural areas across North, West and South Yorkshire. Alongside that, we now have our own bike race every year, the Tour de Yorkshire, which is very successful. It will finish one of the stages next year just north of Sheffield, in Stocksbridge. We have the Tour de Cuisine, which we have done to promote all the food and drink around the route of the bike race,



which goes to your point. We are very fortunate to have 200 independent breweries in Yorkshire, and lots of fantastic artisan food producers as well.

One really important point to make, which I am sure will come out at some point during your inquiry, is about the fragility of the rural economy and the importance of tourism within that, because of the link between the pub in the village and the bed and breakfast. If the pub shuts, the bed and breakfast will shut because there is nowhere for anyone to go and have their evening meal. The pub can sell beer from the microbreweries and food produce from the farmers locally, and so on. There is a very fragile co-existence between all those businesses. If one thing tips over, the whole thing can unravel quite quickly.

We understand the sensitivity that exists throughout three of our national parks. It is the same across the whole of the country, I am absolutely sure. Anything we can do collectively to help that fragility and make it less so is very, very important. That is true across the whole of the UK, not just England.

Q29 Kerry McCarthy: I think I am right in saying that, in terms of overseas visitors, after London, Liverpool is the biggest attraction because of the Beatles heritage and that sort of thing. In terms of the tourists we get coming to the UK, are they the sorts of people who would be interested in having a cream tea in a stately home? Is that a difference from the way we market? We are quite a cool country in terms of young visitors, but they would be coming here for the urban life, rather than the cream teas. Are you ever going to attract those sorts of people or is that more aimed at the domestic tourists?

Jude Leitch: We need to build our brand to be a combination of both that young, trendy idea and the history and heritage. In the same index that Patricia mentioned, we are I think fourth in "rich in historic buildings and monuments". People love to come and see those. Our website just about crashes every time Downton Abbey is played in the States and they realise that parts of it were filmed in Northumberland and Alnwick castle. There is a big crossover with what young people want to experience in the UK. They will go out of the cities if you give them the reasons and the activities and make it easy for them to do it.

Sir Gary Verity: My answer would be that we appeal to so many different markets. The young urban market we absolutely appeal to. If you take a city like Leeds or Sheffield at the weekend, it will be full, not just of domestic visitors but of overseas visitors of a certain age group who are looking for city life. We do not make a distinction. As you will have seen in our 15-page submission, one of the 10 themes that we promote the area on is city life because we believe that people who stay in an urban area might want to go and visit the rural areas, and vice versa. We do not want to operate within silos.



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Equally, some people come here who are very interested in the heritage and just want to go and do that. That is a certain age group, and that is no problem. We want to be welcoming to all people, wherever they are coming from around the world. Whatever it is they are looking for, we can provide it in the UK. If you want to go and do cities, we have plenty of great cities. If, however, you want to get out into the countryside, if that is what floats your boat, that is no problem at all. We can satisfy that between us all—no problem whatsoever.

Patricia Yates: We do customer segmentation in all the markets we are in. We are in more than 20 markets. In most of them, there are those two demographics coming through. We are looking at people coming up to retirement, who have more time and can explore and go into depth, but also the younger traveller who sees Britain as hip and exciting and loves British culture in the modern cultural sense. They go to Liverpool and you get them to explore more. It is the younger demographic where we have more of a challenge with getting them out to the countryside. Portraying in the “Home of Amazing Moments” campaign the events and experiences that people can have outside cities is really important.

Sir Gary Verity: Events are really key. When you put on events in rural areas, whether they are arts, jazz or food and drink festivals or cycling events, each one attracts a different kind of person and helps to stretch the season as well.

Q30 **Kerry McCarthy:** The growth of towns like Hebden Bridge, Stroud and Frome, which have a bit of an alternative edge to them, might be a way of attracting people to those places.

Sir Gary Verity: Absolutely. Haworth, Hebden Bridge and York are all really strong areas for overseas visitors. There is Whitby, as well. It depends what you like. If you want to go somewhere that is a little edgy and not just like the cover of a chocolate box, we absolutely have that for you. We will make sure we push those people to those sorts of places and give them those choices. It is very important that we do that; otherwise we become pigeonholed as one type of destination. We are not.

Q31 **David Simpson:** I get the impression that Yorkshire has been well promoted today. It is certainly good at promoting its tea, because my wife buys it now.

Sir Gary Verity: One in 10 cups of tea drunk in the UK are Yorkshire Tea.

Chair: All grown in Yorkshire.

Sir Gary Verity: All blended in Yorkshire.

Q32 **David Simpson:** We will not go there. This debate today is about England, Scotland and Wales. Both Margaret and I, from a Northern Ireland perspective, believe we punch well above our weight when it comes to tourism. I was interested in listening to the different sources



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and mechanisms of funding and how your funding operates. It sounds a wee bit complicated to me, but maybe that is me being naive. When it comes to the funding side, how effectively can a modestly funded scheme, such as Discover England, promote rural areas across the countryside to visitors?

Patricia Yates: £40 million invested in tourism is quite a large sum, and it is a challenge fund, so people bid in. It has certain amounts every year. For the first year, it was £6.5 million, for the second year £11.5 million and for the third year £22 million. We invited smaller bids for the first year, when getting up and running, of around £250,000. We had about 70 bidders. We have announced 21 bidders.

It is hugely oversubscribed, with huge enthusiasm and small and large DMOs coming together and testing concepts. Some of those things are pretty much there. We have had things like golf tourism, Gardens and Gourmets, which is regions like Kent, Cheshire and Essex working together, the South West Coast Path and England's Seafood Coast. There is a huge variety of projects and other things. Looking at that last mile of transport you were talking about, we will have e-cars at certain key stations that you can pick up.

There are really innovative ideas coming through there. In the second and third year we are looking for much bigger projects: over £1 million. The bidding for that has just closed, and we have more than 30 bids for that. Again, there is huge enthusiasm from the English regions bidding in. Those bigger bids have to be led by a DMO and have to be very collaborative. We are looking to see big regions coming together and delivering those, with the private sector coming in and match funding.

Q33 **David Simpson:** On the word "collaboration", is there any contact at all with the Northern Ireland tourist board or even the Republic of Ireland tourist board?

Patricia Yates: You have challenged that Britain tourism is complex. I would say that Ireland has its challenges too.

David Simpson: Do not go there.

Patricia Yates: The Northern Ireland tourist board sits on our board. We run a number of engagements. I meet all the strategy directors in Northern Ireland, so I am involved with that. We come to the marketing directors. We run a lot of functional groups; Northern Ireland is involved in that. We have MOUs with the Northern Irish tourist board and with Tourism Ireland. When I mentioned the domestic campaign, the domestic campaign included Northern Ireland in there. Yes, we do work across.

Q34 **David Simpson:** It may be complicated at home, but we are nice people to work with.

Patricia Yates: Yes.



Dr Monaghan: And modest.

Q35 **Angela Smith:** I will start by referring to the Tourism Alliance's view of DMOs. I suppose this is for Gary particularly. They have been quite critical, Gary, of the performance of DMOs in terms of promoting rural destinations effectively. I wonder if you could outline for us what some of the really big challenges are in terms of marketing rural destinations to overseas visitors.

Sir Gary Verity: The challenge from our point of view, which is a nice challenge to have, is that it is so vast and there is so much diversity within it in terms of geography and different types of products that you are trying to agglomerate together. We do that around different themes, because to do it for the whole of rural Yorkshire would just be too vast. We try to break that down a bit. We use events as a big one. For us, cycling is a big thing to promote the rural parts of the county, but it is not just about cycling; it is other things, as well, that we do.

The Committee have had our 15-page submission, a large part of which is about the stuff we have done and continue to do to promote rural tourism. If you visit Yorkshire without taking in the rural side of Yorkshire, whether it is one of our three national parks or whatever, you are missing something out, so we would have to ask you to come back again to make sure that you do not miss out a second time around. That is really important for us.

One of the advantages we have is that, by staying in one of our cities or towns, you are only a few minutes away from some stunning countryside and scenery. That is something we use as a big strength: you can, if you want to, stay in the countryside and then get into the city or the town to take in culture, retail or whatever is important to you, and vice versa. We try to make sure we are linking everything wherever possible.

You will have a view, and Rishi Sunak certainly would have had a view, that our rural tourism businesses have generally performed very strongly over the last two years. We had a record season this season just finished, and that was on the back of a record year last year, which was on the back of a record year the year before, which we attribute to the Tour de France visiting. The direction of travel is positive, but there is a lot more we can and need to do collectively, because we are missing opportunities.

Jude Leitch: I do not believe VisitEngland is funded sufficiently to effectively promote rural tourism abroad. At the moment, we have a lot of activity by the richer DMOs. That is how I would class Welcome to Yorkshire, which does very, very well with the amount of money. Compared to us, I would call them a richer DMO. Our strategy has always been to rely on VisitEngland, because, with only 3% of our visitors coming from abroad, I really need to spend the small amount of resources I have on where I can get the best response and attract the most visitors. Logically, that is on my domestic visitor. For me, the



relationship with VisitEngland and the ability of VisitEngland to promote us abroad is very, very important, because we cannot do it ourselves.

Q36 Angela Smith: I appreciate that point and it is very important. Going back to the point that Gary made about the challenges and how you need to build on what has been done so far, it always seems to me that one of the challenges is the very disparate nature of the offer sometimes in rural areas. I take the points about events. We are proud as punch to get the world cycling championships in Yorkshire in two or three years' time.

Sir Gary Verity: 2019.

Angela Smith: For the Tour de Yorkshire to be finishing in my constituency next year is hugely important to us. If you take parts of South Yorkshire as an example, you have four stately homes in a short distance of each other and an amazing industrial heritage, none of that is joined up in the way that perhaps Ironbridge is, where you have the passporting system and people can get a ticket. You have all the different offers aligned in one package, which can then be very effectively marketed. I wondered whether that was a concept that has been—

Chair: Patricia is dying to come in.

Patricia Yates: That is exactly what the Discover England fund is doing. I shall nudge Gary, who will hit me, but that is exactly what the Discover England fund is doing.

Chair: We do not need violence in the Committee.

Patricia Yates: We are not going out and building buildings. This is not a capital fund. This is looking at what we have and joining the dots, so that it can be booked and be accessible to an international customer. Concepts like the Great West Way and England's Seafood Coast inspire international customers, and then they can come and book it. I absolutely agree with you: we have such a wealth of offer that making that idea inspirational and then bookable is absolutely crucial.

Angela Smith: There is Makers Miners and Money in South Yorkshire.

Sir Gary Verity: The link between the various stately homes, for example, we will provide through our website yorkshire.com. We also work with other organisations like Yorkshire's castles, stately homes and gardens. We do an excellent job linking all of those up, but of course they have different ownership structures. Some are owned by English Heritage and some are owned by others. Getting them all to have the same ticketing system is slightly trickier.

Angela Smith: That is what I am referring to.

Sir Gary Verity: Yes, exactly.

Q37 Chair: Those who belong to the National Trust and things are easier to deal with. Where you have private ownership, it makes it more difficult.



Angela Smith: All of mine are privately owned.

Sir Gary Verity: The first thing we would seek to do is to at least move visitors around between the various different things that exist. The ticketing thing is slightly more difficult.

- Q38 **Angela Smith:** On the fragility that you referred to earlier, this is really interesting. I know Yorkshire and Cornwall best of all, so I will refer to these places. If you take Howarth as an example, it is perfect for the kind of historic home, access to the countryside, an amazing number of restaurants and shops so people who cannot walk far have an amazing offer and great accommodation. I would recommend Howarth to anybody. It is a great place, but there are other parts of Yorkshire and Cornwall where that offer is not quite the same.

If you go to Malham, you will have a job finding somewhere to eat after a certain time on a Sunday evening. I have been there; I have found that. It is very patchy. Where you have that critical mass of visitors, you can deal with fragility in terms of rural economy, surely. Where you do not have that critical mass, it is more difficult to make the local economy more robust. This is a bit of a chicken and egg situation, isn't it?

Sir Gary Verity: It is.

- Q39 **Angela Smith:** What is your plan for developing a more robust rural economy by boosting tourist numbers? How do you get there?

Sir Gary Verity: First, you have to continue to boost numbers because it comes down to critical mass. The reason that businesses are not staying open on a Sunday night serving meals is that, if there are only two people wanting a meal, it is just not viable to do so. You essentially have to be pragmatic about the whole thing. I would say to anybody in Malham who cannot get a meal on a Sunday night, head to Settle. You will get well fed in Settle. There is a choice of eateries just down the road. There are options around that. Ultimately, you have to continue to drive the business, because the private sector is very good at spotting an opportunity and realise that, if people need food, they will be fed. Equally, they will not stay open on the off-chance.

Jude Leitch: I would reiterate very strongly that it is about creating a virtuous circle. I speak to businesses every day that are desperate to set up tourism businesses. They are excited about opportunities to set up a coastering business or wildlife watching business, but they are still nervous. They do not believe we are going to drive enough tourists to them to make that business viable. They are very nervous. Especially in the real rural parts of Northumberland where agriculture is so, so important, we need to drive people to those areas, and make sure they can get there and that they have broadband. All those things need to come together.

Sir Gary Verity: The more rural you get, the more fragile it gets.



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Q40 Angela Smith: Absolutely. I go back to the point about the outdoor economy, i.e. wildlife visitors, hillwalkers and cyclists. Cycling and hillwalking are hugely important to my constituency. The problem is that, in Malham, having walked round Malham Cove and everything else, it is the walkers who are looking for somewhere to eat. It is about whether the outdoor economy, in terms of sport and recreation, will ever provide a critical mass to develop the infrastructure. You have highlighted how difficult that is.

Sir Gary Verity: There are examples around Europe of places that have set their stall out around that. If you look at Majorca out of season, people who are going there for sport are sustaining the place. There are examples in parts of Spain and elsewhere of people who have set their stall out very strongly around that. That has become their main selling point.

Jude Leitch: It is also identifying what attractions you have that could provide that additional draw. In Northumberland at the moment, we have managed to create an International Dark Sky Park. For the first time since I have been working in tourism, we are starting to see our shoulder season pick up, because we have people coming in autumn and winter. Our local businesses are getting behind it. They are setting up little observatories and making sure they are friendly enough to work with people who are coming to watch the skies. Other things are then popping up during the day, because if you are coming to watch the skies at night you have to have something to do during the day.

Q41 Angela Smith: Another problem is surely that, particularly with the outdoor economy, people tend to stay for one night. They are usually day visitors or they stay for one night. Is there any strategy for building longer stays, which would help to build infrastructure?

Sir Gary Verity: Our strapline was "A long weekend in Yorkshire isn't long enough". We work with businesses to make sure that people stay for more than one night. We have certainly found that in terms of the growth of accommodation providers—good quality accommodation providers at self-catering level, quality pubs and inns and, even above that, decent hotels and so on. That seems to have happened more, and there is certainly evidence that greater numbers of people are staying for more than just the one night now, which has to be a good thing.

Q42 Angela Smith: Is there a strategy for developing that?

Jude Leitch: We certainly have one when it comes to cycling. Of course every cyclist is not your Lycra-clad enthusiast that you see on the Tour de Yorkshire. Lots of families come, so we have set up cycle hubs where there is accommodation that can look after you and does not mind you coming in a little damp and muddy, and where children have some nice cycle routes that they can go out and do in a day, so they have different experiences over three or four days. There are strategies you can use to encourage different types of activity.



Sir Gary Verity: A whole series of examples of those are on our website, yorkshire.com.

Q43 **Kerry McCarthy:** Can you say more about what you are doing to try to attract visitors outside of the peak summer months? You have already touched on it a bit in your answer to the previous question.

Jude Leitch: Of course. Our Dark Sky Park is the key at the moment to attracting people in the autumn and winter. It is also about making sure that our activities are accessible. People still like to go walking and cycling. It is about making sure that our businesses do simple things like letting people come in with a dirty cycle, and building their capacity so they are set up for those types of activities. It is also about making sure that we continue to promote. There is often a perception that counties like Northumberland are closed for business over the winter when our attractions close. It is about setting up the mechanisms for telling people there are lots and lots of activities that they can do and there is no such thing as bad weather; there is just inappropriate clothing.

Sir Gary Verity: I go back to events and linking into events, whether they are local events that might be happening, or events that we can do to get areas joining up together—neighbouring villages, towns and so forth. That helps to drive people coming in. Whether it is the War Weekend that goes on in Pickering or whatever it might be in one of the out of season times, those are things we are promoting very heavily to make sure that places are very busy outside the traditional season.

Q44 **Kerry McCarthy:** Areas like Cumbria were hit very badly by the flooding last year. They were very keen to send out the message that they were open for business, but tourism did take quite a big hit. There is no obvious solution as to how you deal with a situation like that, but is that something you think might deter people coming in? If I were looking to book a Christmas break this year, to be honest, I might think twice about booking it in Cumbria because of what happened last year.

Jude Leitch: It was an issue for a lot of the north, Yorkshire and Northumberland included. The most important thing for us was being ready with our promotion and partnerships. The partnership with VisitEngland was very, very important. There was a perception, especially in certain countries in Europe, that the north of England was simply underwater and you should not even consider it. We had lots of people trying to cancel their holidays. VisitEngland's PR staff stepped in very rapidly and were able to access some funding to help to promote and let people know that those perceptions were incorrect. That is all you can do: get the information out there in a timely manner.

Patricia Yates: The "open for business" message is really important. We also had a partnership with Virgin Trains to offer deals. The issue is to turn the business back on again. February half term was coming up, with Easter ahead of it, so that put a booking offer in front of people, to encourage them to book and go now. From what I hear from businesses,



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they have recovered, not necessarily for the whole year, but they have seen their business come up again. It has been a good year and we have seen very strong confidence from businesses.

For next year, we are looking at where we can add value, particularly in the domestic market. That is about driving business through the shoulder season and addressing the problems we have talked about here. For the rural economy, self-catering is a really big part of where people want to stay. Talking to self-catering operators about enabling more flexible and shorter stays is part of the agenda we will look at, in trying to drive that business through a longer part of the year. That then helps with skills agendas and people finding work in the tourism business for the whole year.

Q45 Kerry McCarthy: In terms of short breaks, particularly off-season, say you were trying to book somewhere for the Christmas/New Year period. To book a cottage in England is pretty expensive when you could jump on an EasyJet flight and be somewhere a lot sunnier in a few hours. Is that cost a deterrent to people or is supply meeting demand?

Chair: It is much cosier to be in a cottage with a fire at Christmas time. Can we not market that, as well as going to the sun?

Sir Gary Verity: That is what we do.

Chair: How do we compete?

Kerry McCarthy: It is one thing to be cosy. Is it just that you have to pay quite a lot to rent somewhere during those periods because there are not many places available, and therefore there is not an issue, in that all the available places are booked up? Could you do more to attract people to villages by accommodation being cheaper?

Sir Gary Verity: If you have a look on our website, yorkshire.com, there will be things across all different price ranges. We are pretty full for Christmas, but we are not totally full, so have a look. You will find something on there. I am not sure about going on EasyJet to somewhere sunny. We do not offer that alternative in Yorkshire.

Q46 Chair: Yorkshire is always sunny, isn't it?

Sir Gary Verity: Everything is relative. Going back to your previous point in terms of the flooding, in the jobs we do, we are duty bound that wherever adverse weather hits somewhere and affects the fragility of the rural economy, which we have already alluded to, we need to step in and do whatever we can. Whenever possible, we will say, at the appropriate time, "They are open for business, and the best thing you can do to support them is to go and take your business there." Having your home or business affected by a flood is one thing; losing your livelihood full stop is an even more devastating thing.

We have to step in and help. We do that, working with colleagues, and we will continue to do that. We will do that this coming year in the bike



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race. We will go to places that were affected by the floods, to showcase live on television to 165 countries around the world that they are open for business. York was badly affected by the floods last year. It is totally open for business now. If you get a chance to go to York over the next few months, you will have the most fantastic winter experience. If you are still thinking about booking a Christmas break in Cumbria, please do so, because they are very much open for business and you will be welcomed with open arms.

Chair: The advertising is going well today, isn't it?

Kerry McCarthy: I am not sure what our plans are.

Q47 **Angela Smith:** This is a question I am particularly interested in. How can local authorities be encouraged to place a higher priority on supporting rural tourist businesses? I like this question because a third of the city of Sheffield is in the Peak District National Park. Gary is smiling. What can cities and local authorities do to encourage a higher priority on supporting rural tourist businesses?

Sir Gary Verity: We deal with 22 local authorities across Yorkshire. Some are very supportive of rural tourism and businesses. There are very good examples of that. Others are slightly less so, to be polite. We have to, between us, do what we can to persuade them that this is a really important part of their remit. It is not a statutory responsibility but it is an important responsibility. As you have said, if you take Sheffield, it is the only city in the UK with a national park within its boundary. That is a fantastic asset.

One of the issues that we have, not necessarily for Sheffield but for other places, is the closing of tourist information centres and the closing of public toilets with cuts to local authorities. We are working with volunteer groups. There are some good examples of tourism information centres now being run by volunteers. There is an excellent example in Thirsk, but there are other great examples, where volunteers have taken over the tourist information centre and are doing a great job. We should do whatever we can to support them and we do, in terms of training and other encouragement and support. Tourist information centres are still very important for many visitors. Not everybody has access to an app.

One of the challenges for us in terms of rural tourism, on that point, is the very, very patchy mobile phone coverage, or the lack of it, in many rural areas. The best thing we could do is to make sure every rural area has either 3G or 4G. That way, getting information out to people would be a lot easier. Being able to make a phone call, for example, would be a nice thing to do in some places.

Patricia Yates: On cities, apart from the Discover England fund, which is getting people to work together, we are looking at city gateway programmes. We are picking up with gateways like Birmingham and Manchester and looking at the rural area around them that they could be



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deriving customers to. It is not just about people staying inside Manchester. They are looking at that area. That really follows on from the northern and south-west funds, where people got used to working together.

Q48 Angela Smith: It is about linking to the city offer, and the same in Newcastle and Northumberland.

Jude Leitch: Absolutely. We work very closely together. The approach we have taken to convince our local authority that tourism is important has been a clear focus on providing evidence. We are very lucky; we get to work with one unitary local authority, rather than lots. However, there are still a great number of personalities and they all have their different priorities. We have really concentrated on making sure that, for every activity that we do, we can come back and tell our local authority exactly what the results of that were.

Oftentimes, those results are very impressive. Visitnorthumberland.com—I should get that in—is a very cheap asset to run. It costs us around £35,000 a year and yet we can clearly demonstrate, using methodology that has been given to us by VisitEngland and DCMS in previous years, that it brings in around £75 million of additional spend to the county every year. That shows the real benefit. Of course, we then translate that information into the number of jobs that it supports and creates.

Q49 Angela Smith: There are some interesting points there. The point about the closures of things like public toilets and tourist information centres is important and indicative of the cuts in funding for local authorities. If events are one of the key means by which we can promote rural tourism, like the Tour de France, Tour de Yorkshire and the world cycling championships, often that requires some input from local authorities. Do you think it is going to become more and more difficult for local authorities to support bids for really big events like the Tour de France?

Jude Leitch: Again, if you provide them with the evidence, they are willing to support those events. In Northumberland this year, we have had tall ships.

Q50 Angela Smith: What if their funding has been cut repeatedly?

Jude Leitch: It becomes more difficult, absolutely, but it is a matter of prioritisation and understanding the benefit that those events can bring. To Northumberland County Council's credit, over the last couple of years—I know this has been the same in Yorkshire—that has been recognised and funding has been found, perhaps not for as many events as we could have, but focusing on several key events like the tall ships that we had recently in Blyth, which really brings in a huge benefit.

Patricia Yates: Part of what local authorities deliver for visitors is the public realm: the clean streets and gardens. That benefits residents as well. At the baseline is making sure the public realm is good. We did three roundtables with DMOs and the big issue they would like addressed



is public toilets, because that is what they get the most complaints about. It is about the funding of tourism activity, but do not forget the public realm activity, which is crucial for local authorities.

Angela Smith: I completely acknowledge that.

Sir Gary Verity: We have to look at other funding streams that can be accessed locally, whether it is LEPs, which you have spoken about already, business rate pools, BIDs or TBIDs. You can find funding from all those different things. It will become increasingly challenging, but it will not become impossible.

Jude Leitch: Again, partnerships and DMOs working closely with their local authorities are terribly important. On the point about tourism information centres, Northumberland still has about 13 dotted around the county. They cost us an awful lot of money to maintain, and yet, when we do our research, only 7% of our visitors use them. We have to become much cleverer about how we give our information to our visitors: digitally, etc. They want it in different ways now, rather than just a room. If a local business can attract more customers by providing that service, that has to be a win-win for both of us.

On the side of public toilets, we now have a scheme called "You're Welcome", where we encourage local business to open their toilets up. They get a small amount of help to provide the bits and pieces they need. Often, if you are going to a little market town, the local pub or shop has a much nicer, cleaner, more welcoming toilet than the concrete block sitting on the corner with cold water and no supplies.

Q51 **Angela Smith:** Like the average National Park. Finally, the dreaded word, Brexit, means that we will need to replace European Union programmes like LEADER, which has been very successful in my constituency, and the Rural Development Programme. What is your view on how the UK should respond to the loss of such funding?

Sir Gary Verity: LEADER has been very significant for us across the patch. We hope that something would come into its place and we would not just be left with absolutely nothing. Otherwise, that would not have an effect immediately, but if you scroll forward five years you would suddenly think, "Oh, what has happened?" It is something we hope will get onto the radar. I am sure there are people who are considering that.

Chair: It is certainly something we can drill down on with the Chancellor, because although it is European funding it started off coming from this country and was then reallocated. We can say we need it.

Q52 **Angela Smith:** Absolutely. I wondered whether there was any intention to analyse the potential impact of the loss of funding, to help us to drill down.

Chair: That would be quite useful. You may not be able to answer that in detail this afternoon, but it would be good if you could give us some



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written evidence.

Sir Gary Verity: Yes.

Chair: Perhaps you could look at that, please. That would be quite useful when we are drilling down with the Chancellor.

Q53 **Ms Ritchie:** There has been a long-running campaign for VAT rates to be cut for tourist business activities. What is your assessment of the impact of a reduction in VAT on tourist accommodation?

Jude Leitch: I would support it. Northumberland, especially, is a good example, in that we really struggle to provide the accommodation our tourists need. There needs to be some encouragement for entrepreneurs and businesspeople to set up that accommodation. The VAT issue makes it a little more difficult for them to do that.

Patricia Yates: I am a Government-funded body, so I will leave it to the industry to argue that one.

Ms Ritchie: Very diplomatic.

Chair: Can we not tempt you with a reply? Right, carry on.

Sir Gary Verity: There is a very good paper that you might want to get as part of the written submission from the Tourism Alliance as to the impact of the cuts on VAT and what that would do for the industry. That would be an excellent place to start.

Q54 **Ms Ritchie:** What is your response to calls for some type of tourist tax to fund local infrastructure improvements?

Sir Gary Verity: You have to be quite careful as to what the infrastructure improvements are if this is stuff that the Highways Agency should be doing anyway. One of the things we do not have at the moment, and I know it is an issue in other parts of the country, is a dual carriageway going to our coast. A dual carriageway on the A64 towards Scarborough, Filey and that part of the world would not be beyond the wit of man.

Chair: I have been stuck behind tractors and things on that road.

Sir Gary Verity: We want to make sure that is done. That has been needed for the last 37 years, since anybody last did any work on the road. We are not going to start diverting the money from that point of view. The point about BIDs and TBIDs—bed tax is another way of phrasing the same sort of thing—is very important. I spend an amount of my time talking to organisations and places that are thinking of setting up a BID, and my strong advice to them is absolutely, if you can, do one, because then it gives you money to do something with. Back to Angela's point, in a world of decreasing finances, you need some resource to give you options. If you have a BID, you have an opportunity. There are



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plenty of good examples of places that have started up a BID and now have money to make a real difference.

Patricia Yates: We compete in a global marketplace and we are not a cheap destination. We have to work very hard to portray ourselves as good value. Be careful about putting increasing taxes on visitors. We do not have a history of hypothecated taxes in this country. We look with envy at America, where the visa waiver scheme is used to fund Brand USA, our US equivalent. They get about \$120 million from that fund. My concern is that you would see visitors being taxed with no real benefit or delivery to them. We should be very cautious of that.

Q55 **Chair:** It would have to be ring-fenced if you did it, because otherwise it would disappear anywhere.

Ms Ritchie: It would have to be earmarked for that specific purpose.

Jude Leitch: I agree with both points. From a rural point of view, we need more analysis about the options that could be made available. We have looked at TBIDs. If you could get one through, it would be wonderful. However, with Northumberland, for example, you have to convince an entire county when only 11% of the people are working in tourism. You would have to work out which businesses you included: would you include restaurants? How would you get people to vote for it? It could become very, very difficult. Again, as a destination with only a population of 300,000 people and lots and lots of small to medium enterprises, we really struggle. We have bled our businesses dry trying to get as much income out of them as we can to do the work we need to promote. Perhaps looking at an option that involved some contribution from visitors might be advisable. Again, it would have to be carefully looked at.

Q56 **Ms Ritchie:** Going back to the first question, Jude, in relation to a potential cut in VAT on tourism, have the hospitality and tourism-related businesses you have worked with voiced a need for such a reduction?

Jude Leitch: Some have. For many of them, the rates side of things is more of a concern. They are all desperate to invest. One of the points made about the prices is that they have invested and quality is increasing. The prices are commensurate with that. You will find that we, for example, provide a late availability board; we have deals, but at the same time the businesses are pricing commensurate to what you receive and the quality visitors are getting. There has been an awful lot of work put in there. Any help that they can get to invest further and continue to develop would be beneficial.

Q57 **Ms Ritchie:** Do you believe that tourist accommodation businesses in England face competitiveness issues with other countries that have lower rates of VAT, particularly those in the European Union, where about 23 of them have much lower rates?



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Jude Leitch: I do not have any evidence of that but, anecdotally, that is what I am hearing from my businesses.

Chair: At the moment, it is offset by the value of the currency. That is not the case if the pound is higher.

Q58 **Rebecca Pow:** We touched on this earlier. This is about transport, with 85% of most businesses going to the countryside by car. What could we do to try to give them easier access to the countryside, particularly the coast, in other ways? Do you have any panaceas?

Sir Gary Verity: Yes: a dual carriageway for the A64, please.

Rebecca Pow: Not just about Yorkshire.

Chair: And the A303.

Sir Gary Verity: For sure.

Chair: We can list these all afternoon.

Q59 **Rebecca Pow:** Do you think the dualling of the A303 and A358 will make a really big difference in Somerset? It is raised by visitors that, if we had better, more organised buses and systems for getting from A to B, that would help.

Patricia Yates: The panacea would be an integrated transport system; a more bookable transport system, so people could book in advance and get the cheaper deals from overseas, which is impossible to do at the moment; suggestions of itineraries to get people to explore more of the countryside; and that final mile. If you go to the train station in Germany, you can buy a ticket that takes you straight through to the attraction you want to go to. We do not have that.

Q60 **Rebecca Pow:** Why do we not do that?

Patricia Yates: The operators are all very different. The train companies do not have a tourism requirement when they are being taken on. Tourism as an industry is not necessarily factored in.

Chair: It is not part of the franchise.

Q61 **Rebecca Pow:** Is that something where—I do not know, forgive me—VisitEngland or one of these organisations would say, “We want people to come to Northumbria so we are going to make all the contacts and set up the links for all that travel”? Is it too difficult?

Jude Leitch: We have tried. There does not seem to be much enthusiasm on the part of the operators. They often ask us how much we are going to contribute.

Q62 **Rebecca Pow:** How can we make it better? Are there any suggestions?

Patricia Yates: Part of it is with rail companies: that tourism is factored into their franchise. We are working with some companies on making



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tickets more accessible for international visitors and building those itineraries. When we are talking about tourism, many of these are cross-Government issues. We had an inter-ministerial group on tourism that brought together people like Transport and Defra to work on addressing some of these common, knotty problems. We would very much like to see that group reactivated.

Q63 Chair: There must be options for off-peak type tickets, where you would have thought they would want to fill the trains. At peak times they probably have no trouble with filling the trains. Perhaps we are missing an opportunity there. Do you think so?

Sir Gary Verity: Some of the train operators operate such systems and schemes.

Q64 Chair: Are they making the tourists aware of them? That is the thing.

Sir Gary Verity: In some cases, yes. Part of the problem is that that is on the mainline train routes. Then the trains do not necessarily speak to the buses. The whole thing becomes a bit fragmented. I was in one European capital city earlier this year, where I checked into the hotel and they gave me a ticket for the local tram system, just included. You jump on the tram and use the ticket. It would be unthinkable for that to happen here, because the whole thing is fragmented.

Q65 Rebecca Pow: For example, in Somerset, our bus company, Berry's Coaches, will give you a theatre ticket to go and see something like *Phantom of the Opera* and do the travel. That is just an individual company doing a one-off deal.

Sir Gary Verity: Absolutely. There are examples of that happening, but it is down to individual operators on a piecemeal basis.

Q66 Rebecca Pow: Do you think we are missing funding to the nation by not getting this sorted out?

Jude Leitch: Yes.

Sir Gary Verity: Potentially.

Angela Smith: To have an integrated ticket, you need a bus in the first place.

Chair: The bus has to arrive after the train, rather than before the train leaves.

Q67 Rebecca Pow: There was one more thing I wanted to ask. Do you think we should do many more packages? A big thing I am very interested in is garden tourism and I worked with VisitEngland and VisitBritain. It is a massive selling point for the UK. We are the greatest garden destination. Should we be doing more to promote ourselves like that? Could you also do castles? Surely we could link up the transport for those and get the bus that goes around all the gardens in the West Country.



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Patricia Yates: This year was the year of English gardens. That is absolutely about promoting English gardens. Next year is the year of English literary heroes, if you want to get involved in that. If you look at some of the Discover England fund bids, which were in our evidence, there is a Gardens and Gourmets one in there. We are trying to make that more bookable and join it up. People were asked to join up transport options in there as well. It was one of the asks when we looked at funding bids. Hopefully Discover England fund bidders will start to show delivery and we can come back and tell you about that.

Chair: It is a very good point, Rebecca. We have great gardens in this country. I enjoy them, too.

Q68 **Angela Smith:** At the weekend, there was quite a big splash in relation to the Ramblers campaign about the lack of maintenance of public rights of way, particularly by local authorities because of cuts in funding, and of national trails. There is, in our area, the Pennine Way, which is one I use regularly, and the South West Coast Path in Cornwall, which is an amazing facility and resource. What is your assessment of the impact on the rural economy of funding constraints for maintaining paths and trails? This is very much an issue for Northumberland.

Jude Leitch: It is a huge issue for Northumberland. We have a range of national trails, but also more local trails like St Oswald's Way and St Cuthbert's Way, which link into the heritage of Northumberland and the north. As I mentioned before, while we see on the horizon some funding available for developing new routes and new infrastructure, we struggle to maintain the infrastructure that we have. It damages our reputation when people come who perhaps have dreamt about walking the Northumberland Coast Path all their lives and they realise half of it has eroded and the surfaces along it are not as well developed as they could be. It is a problem. The ownership of all these different paths varies. There does not seem to be an onus on maintenance or a requirement to maintain them. It is up to local authorities, Sustrans and other bodies to decide whether they want to support that. They have conflicting demands on their resources.

Q69 **Angela Smith:** It is very varied across Yorkshire, I imagine.

Sir Gary Verity: It is, yes, absolutely. It is something we keep an eye on all the time, but it does change enormously.

Q70 **Angela Smith:** This would not solve the problem entirely, particularly in places like Cornwall where there are no national parks, but do you think it would solve part of the problem if responsibility were to be passed from local authorities to national parks?

Sir Gary Verity: Potentially. That would be something to look at.

Jude Leitch: The national parks would be fairly capable of doing that. Hadrian's Walls Path is now maintained by Northumberland National Park, and maintained very well.



Angela Smith: With the signing, the stiles and the paths.

Jude Leitch: As long as they are given sufficient resource to do the job properly.

Q71 **Ms Ritchie:** How effective are current programmes for rolling out fast broadband to rural areas in meeting the needs of tourist businesses?

Patricia Yates: We ran three roundtables before we came here and the issue is rural broadband. Why is that important? It is important for businesses and how they operate. It is also important for attracting tourists, because if you are asking why the younger groups do not go to the countryside, younger tourists will not go to places where they do not have great Wi-Fi access or a mobile signal. One of the things we are trying to do in this very digital and social era is to get people who are visiting to post their photographs and share images with their friends. You are missing that opportunity to turn those visitors into advocates for the region. It is a huge issue for tourism.

Q72 **Ms Ritchie:** Do you have any figures you can provide on the difference that reliable broadband connectivity can have on the profitability of tourist businesses?

Patricia Yates: I do not have those on me, but we will have a look and see if we can come back to you on that.

Q73 **Ms Ritchie:** Can you send us those?

Patricia Yates: Yes.

Q74 **Ms Ritchie:** Finally, the Government's commitment is to provide all businesses with a broadband connection by 2020. Do you think that is soon enough? Sir Gary?

Chair: Go on. Go for it.

Sir Gary Verity: Let us go for 2019 instead, then. We are fortunate in some areas. In North Yorkshire, real progress is being made in rolling out superfast broadband, but in other areas it is not as quick. I would highlight to the Committee again, to emphasise it, that one of the big things that could make a massive improvement quite quickly is mobile phone coverage. If you 4G the whole area, the need for digging up and putting fibre pipes in and everything else suddenly dissipates. What is really important for us is when we bring a lot of visitors into rural Yorkshire and they cannot make a phone call; they cannot understand it.

Q75 **Chair:** You can get broadband through the 4G as well, if you want to.

Sir Gary Verity: Exactly.

Q76 **Chair:** People are not terribly worried how they get it, as long as they do get it. Any figures you have on that would be useful. We are going to do a quick part of this inquiry on rural broadband. Anything you have for us would be really useful.



What solutions are needed to ensure rural tourism is not hampered by any constraints on free movement of labour after the UK leaves the EU. That is a very non-political, easy question. Have you any ideas? How reliant are you on labour?

Sir Gary Verity: The sector is very reliant upon seasonal labour and other labour that comes from the EU and beyond. They are watching with interest, trepidation and anxiety as to what the outcome to all of that will be. If, in a worst-case scenario, all those people disappear and cannot be replaced on an annual basis, we will have a problem.

Q77 **Chair:** The argument is, in farming for instance, you used to have seasonal workers permits. Is there something in particular that the tourism industry might particularly like? One of the arguments about Brexit is that people do not want to stop all labour coming in, but they want to have some idea of who and where they are. I do not know whether there is anything, as an industry, you think would be suitable.

Sir Gary Verity: A scheme needs to be worked up that would do just that. Otherwise, we are going to have a problem.

Jude Leitch: It needs to be paired with the skills agenda. There is a real need to convince young people especially that tourism is an industry they can thrive in and it is not a second-rate industry to go into. In Northumberland, we are working with Northumberland College. We have developed a rural tourism academy within the college. We are hoping to build a teaching hotel, so the students can learn on the job and understand that they can stay within Northumberland and are lucky enough to live in one of the most beautiful parts of the country. It is something that can benefit them.

Chair: Thank you. There are a couple more questions and different things we have on the agenda, which we are not able to discuss because this is the division bell. We would love to have any further evidence you would like to give us to those questions or anything else you would like to add in writing. That would be really useful. We very much appreciate your evidence. It is very, very useful for the start of our inquiry. As there is a democratic vote to be taken, we had better go and do it. Thank you very much.