Summary: without good infrastructure, including that for medical services, no rural community can provide a good environment for tourism.

Key Points
1. While there is no doubting that tourism is of benefit to rural communities, it is impossible for any community to survive without proper support for the residents. Unless the resident community has a good infrastructure available, it cannot be in a position to offer a good visitor experience. While you note the problems of transport connections, restrictions to broadband access and seasonal employment, I see no mention of things that many people would take for granted, such as access to medical services within a few miles.

2. Alston Moor, in the high North Pennines (the Roof of England) is threatened with the loss of its community hospital (through the plans of the so-called Success Regime), and it is inevitable that the closure of all in-patient beds will result in the closure of the minor injuries unit, run by the nurses. It is almost certain that, without the income from hospital work, it will no longer be viable for there to be a properly equipped, staffed and financed GP surgery on Alston Moor. The next nearest hospital is 20 miles from Alston, with a further six miles travel for those in the further reaches of Alston Moor. All roads are slow and liable to closure in severe winter conditions (and some of our tourism relates to winter sports). Visitors obviously expect better than nothing, and the stress and demoralisation of the local community if this plan goes ahead is not conducive to a good welcome for visitors.

3. To add to the problems, after a long struggle to retain our locally-based ambulance, staffed by retained local emergency medical technicians, the North West Ambulance Service has made it virtually impossible to bring the plan to fruition and is now asking for our 2000-strong community to raise funding towards the ambulance and the training of further staff.

4. It is not possible to consider tourism and the visitor experience without considering the rural communities within which it takes place. As the most isolated rural community in England, we are the canary in the coal-mine, and we believe that if our situation is dismissed, there will be a knock-on result for many others.

Recommendations: all government departments should recognise that funding needs to be person-centred rather than finance-centred, in order to ensure that rural communities can play their part in the economic health of the country, including that provided by tourism.

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