Introduction

Tourism in the Peak District and Derbyshire accounts for approximately 11% of England’s rural tourism market, some £1.9 billion of visitor expenditure measured in 2014, tourism in the Peak District and Derbyshire supports over 27,000 FTE’s.

Peak District and Derbyshire has a significant range of product falling under the ‘Dramatic Countryside, Market Towns and Villages and Rural Countryside’ categories. In terms of geographic based brands, within the administrative boundary there is the Peak District National Park, Derwent Valley Mills incl. the World Heritage Site and many Market Towns and Villages including; Buxton, Matlock, Bakewell, Ashbourne, Hathersage, Castleton, Edale, Hartington, Eyam, Tideswell, and Wirksworth. All of these areas, to a greater or lesser extent, are reliant on tourism and the visitor economy. All areas, again to greater or lesser extent, are also involved in tourism marketing and development activities, these activities are undertaken by various organisations.

The overarching marketing of the destination is delivered by Marketing Peak District and Derbyshire (MPDD), whose primary aim is to attract new and additional staying visitors to the area.

MPDD has a membership of over 700 businesses, a staff of 9 FTE’s and a range of expertise covering marketing, PR, policy and strategy, research and intelligence. MPDD was established in 2005 and has worked with Visit England and VisitBritain over the last 5 years and a wide range of partner organisations in the delivery of the Government’s Growth Strategy for Tourism.

According to VisitEngland’s research, the Government’s ‘Growing Tourism Locally’ RGF Peak District programme, delivered by MPDD, delivered circa £45 million of additional expenditure and supported over 830 jobs.

Whilst we recognise that new and innovative approaches are needed to grow rural tourism in England and that marketing has a key role to play, we respectfully suggest that there are more fundamental issues facing rural areas like the Peak District and Derbyshire. Growth in the visitor economy will only reach its full potential when rural areas, towns and villages are made sufficiently attractive places live, work and be educated. This requires considerable investment in infrastructure, in particular improved transport connectivity, more affordable housing, broadband and mobile communications, better schools and hospitals as well as investment in visitor facilities such as car parking, broadband and mobile technologies, public conveniences and recreation facilities.

The Peak District and Derbyshire attracts 38million visitors per year of which 4million stay overnight. The average spend of visitors to the Peak District and Derbyshire is £32 per day which compared to destinations with a similar offer for example Cumbria at £64 doesn’t fair
well, more needs to be done to improve the quality of the offer, and marketing money is needed to raise the awareness and profile of the area, converting more of the day visitors into staying visitors. (see table below)¹.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Destination</th>
<th>Average spend per night</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cornwall</td>
<td>£69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lake District</td>
<td>£64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gloucestershire</td>
<td>£52</td>
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<tr>
<td>Devon</td>
<td>£50</td>
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<tr>
<td>Northumberland</td>
<td>£46</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rutland (EM)</td>
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<td>Oxfordshire</td>
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<td>Leicestershire (EM)</td>
<td>£32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Derbyshire (EM)</td>
<td>£32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comments on the Inquiry’s Specific Issues

1. How can more people, both from the UK and abroad, be encouraged to visit more of England’s rural places, for longer and at all times of the year?

   According to VisitBritain, awareness of England’s rural visitor offer remains at a low level in most of the overseas markets.
   - Greater resources are needed to raise the awareness in the priority overseas markets and with resources being scarce the most effective way forward would be further refine the priority countries and the market segments within them to focus marketing activity in order to drive interest and bookings.
   - Rural destinations are often seen as the ‘add on’ to the ‘usual suspects’, London Manchester etc. The Northern Futures Project was a great example of this with the Peak District struggling to raise its profile against such big hitting cities, rural destinations need greater visibility.
   - Improving the performance of rural areas will be delivered by improving the product, better presentation of the product offer and better target marketing.
   - In the current climate of declining marketing budgets, it is important to promote the benefits of collaborative and partnership working between businesses, between Destination Organisations and with national bodies such as VisitEngland and VisitBritain.
2. How can farmers and rural residents be encouraged to diversify into tourism and grow their businesses?

- Planning is a real issue for diversification, around 45 applications to convert barns into self-catering accommodation are turned down every year by our National Park. Whilst we fully understand the reasons for many of these decisions there perhaps needs to be a review of current planning regulation.
- Land in rural locations is often too expensive which prohibits farmers extending their business.
- The application process to access funds to diversify a farming business often creates a barrier. The process is seen as too complicated and too bureaucratic. We need more business advisers on the ground to guide applicants through this process.
- Careers in tourism need to be more attractively portrayed in schools and colleges, similarly there is need to improve the understanding of how the supply chain to the visitor economy functions and also how many of these supply chain companies and services can often provide highly skilled work and career progression opportunities.
- Employers based in rural locations often find it difficult to recruit as there is little or no public transport to get employees to their place of work. With many working unsociable hours, employees have to have their own transport or be able to get lifts.

3. How can the needs of visitors be balanced with the need to preserve the environment and the character of local communities?

- MPDD works closely with the Peak District National Park and supports their National Park Management Plan, which is currently being updated.
- Sustainable tourism is an integral part of all marketing campaigns – with all campaigns aiming to increase overnight stays and reduce the level of day visits, thereby reducing the amount of cars coming into the area.
- We have recently secured an ERDF business support project, which will support visitor economy businesses to gain green credentials. This project will also work with those businesses in market towns encouraging them to use local produce, providing local food to visitors with that ‘field to plate’ message.
- More needs to be done to encourage local farmers markets, and preserve market town high streets to offer ‘distinction of place’.
- Local authorities are under increasing pressure to offer up empty units to businesses that can often be to the detriment of the local high street pursuing business rates– with take away style businesses and charity shops, which lead to the loss of identity of a market town.

4. Marketing - How well do agencies promote rural destinations across England?
Defining ‘rural destinations’ as a singular generic entity under sells the rich and
diverse range of destination types and experiences that this umbrella term covers.
As well as the VisitEngland categories i.e. ‘Dramatic Countryside, Market Towns and
Villages and Rural Countryside’ the term ‘rural destinations’ covers many different
types of location e.g. coast, countryside, Lakes, Moors, National Parks, Country
Parks, Canals and Forests etc.

These destination types offer different kinds of experience and have different levels
of general appeal to the market. Within England there are strong and mature rural
tourism brands and there are also less mature developing rural brands. The impact
of national ‘rural tourism’ marketing campaigns is sometimes diluted, as a generic
approach can dilute the appeal of strong brands and can sometimes over promise
and under deliver in the weaker rural tourism areas. Stronger brands deliver a
greater return on investment and usually can create critical mass of activity that is
more likely to be economically sustainable when public funding intervention comes
to an end. We appreciate that many rural areas have access to a wide range of grant
funding from differing sources and Government bodies. These bodies have different
objectives and reasons for their interventions. Nevertheless, on occasion some
initiatives have a large marketing/communication element which can duplicate or
overlap with other local or strategic marketing initiatives. In these circumstances
intervention can result in a lack of coordination resulting in fragmentation,
duplication and overlapping efforts and ultimately poor use of scarce public funding
resources. There are many Government Agencies/Departments/Quangos who
receive and/or allocate public funding. It is important that the effectiveness of all
initiatives using public funding is measured in a consistent format. Accountability for
public spending on tourism and visitor activity needs to be improved and should be
an urgent matter for national and local scrutiny and review.

LEPs need to fully understand the economic impacts of rural destinations and
promote the importance of the tourism sector within rural destinations more
consistently.

5. What more should the Government do to support this work?

Government should support those rural destination that truly have a visitor economy
sector, i.e. those rural destinations that rely on this sector for business growth and
local jobs and also having socio economic impact. This could include areas such as
Cornwall, Dorset, Cumbria, the New Forest, Yorkshire Moors, Peak District and
Derbyshire, Northumberland etc.

Government needs to address the imbalance between capital and revenue funding
for this sector. Allowing for some destination marketing support to boost new
demand with particular reference to international audiences, and help to drive
international visitors out of London.

A longer term and sustained regional growth programme (RGF) should be instigated.

Government should also be doing more to help reduce the reliance of
accommodation businesses on Online Travel Agencies (OTAs). High commission
charges from OTAs can result in a reduced profits and less money to invest in
product and service improvements. OTAs commission charges extract millions of pounds from the local economy which inevitably impacts on the local supply chain so vital to rural areas. Sustainable tourism is reliant on creating economically sustainable destinations.

- Government and national tourism bodies need to give more recognition to the role of Destination Organisations and the role they play in sustainable tourism.

6. Access - What, if any, changes are needed to give people better access to the coast and countryside?

Improvements are needed to road, rail, sea and air transport throughout the UK. In terms of overseas visitors, continued improvements to airports and other gateways is needed. Railway services especially at weekends are generally poor and a lot more could be done to specifically link weekend services with rural and coastal destinations with the main city based railway hubs (e.g. ticketing ‘the Derbyshire and Peak District weekender”, ‘the Lake District” or the ‘Cornwall’ etc.).

- Innovative sustainable transport projects should be expanded to continue to reduce the reliance on car transport and be further integrated as part of the visitor experience.
- Greater encouragement of ‘staying visitors’ should be the focus of national campaigns as opposed to day trips.
- Rural transport providers are not encouraged by government to give due weight to the needs of visitors. Often a tourist will arrive at a train station to find no onward public transport connection, this problem is exacerbated by the lack of visitor information at the point of arrival.
- Government (national and local) urgently needs to recognise the importance of tourism in transport planning and investment.

7. Funding and fiscal policies - How can public funding be best targeted to get new rural tourist businesses off the ground and keep them going? Are changes needed to tax levels and business rates?

Peak District and Derbyshire strongly supports the reduction of VAT on hospitality businesses which as demonstrated by the Tourism Alliance would result in a net gain in tax receipts from the growth in expenditure that would be generated. VAT reduction would also help boost the UKs reputation for good value in key overseas markets.

There are already a range of funding policies that support rural tourism. However, there is little collaboration between the funding schemes which we believe would benefit from greater coordination and alignment with regional and national Tourism Strategies.
- Rural Development Programme (RDP), Heritage Lottery Funding (HLF), etc. do not align strongly enough, having little or no marketing money available, to promote the project once completed, and no alignment to Destination Plans.
- More business support programmes, encouraging competitiveness and improved quality, thus making businesses more competitive might offer a better solution, to that of business start-ups.
- Seasonality remains a big issue for many smaller businesses particularly in the remoter rural areas. Business rates are not sensitive to seasonality issues and more could be done to support rural based businesses in this respect.

8. **Planning and regulation** - What, if any, changes are needed to planning and other regulations covering rural areas of special character, such as National Parks, to encourage sustainable tourism?

Planning and regulation services are delivered by a vast and complex range of public bodies making it difficult for potential developers to navigate and further innovative ideas.

- Central Government should continue to seek to reduce the regulatory burden in this respect and to reduce the number of consultative bodies and local authorities.
- Further research and feasibility plans need to be undertaken to guide and drive investment and to open up further visitor economy opportunities. In the absence of poor (local) Government data on the visitor economy, a stronger evidence base will help determine priorities and strengthen local strategies and plans.
- Rural tourism businesses should be encouraged to develop sensitively and sustainably, and this should be actively encouraged by local authorities and planning authorities (please refer to our earlier note, of protecting the distinctiveness of rural destinations, and Market Town high streets).

9. **Skills** - How can the sector ensure there are enough people with the right skills to support customers and businesses?

We undertook a skills action plan on behalf of the sector during 2014. This action plan identified a number of overriding issues:

- Image of the sector
- Hard to fill vacancies
- How can micro/rural businesses benefit from the programme?
- Mapping of existing provision and Local Management Information (LMI)

Further efforts are needed to align the needs of businesses with qualifications and the Government backed skills improvement programmes. In rural areas there is an acute shortage of labour and skills and there is a high demand for suitably qualified
people to work in the tourism industry and supply chain. Depopulation and an ageing population continues to be problem for rural areas.

- Tourism bodies and public funded inward investment should be aligned to ensure that all promotional activities highlight the benefits of living, working and being educated in rural areas of England. Current efforts are fragmented and scarce public resources are spread too thinly.
- Rural tourism is dominated by small and micro businesses, often such businesses are lacking ICT and business management skills. There is also a lack of specialist tourism marketing and management advice available for visitor dependent businesses.
- Given the importance and scale of the tourism sector in the Peak District and Derbyshire, more needs to be done to ensure the successful delivery of the actions highlighted in the Visitor Economy Sector Skills plan.

10. Local environment and character - How can national and local policies get the right balance between growing tourism and enhancing the local environment and character?
- Local policies are most critical to the enhancement of local distinctiveness. Tourists visit places; those places need to be special in character and nature if they are to survive in today’s market. Local planning policy needs to strike a balance between the ever increasing globalization of many market town high streets and that of local trade and initiatives.
- The resources to enhance the local environment and character are very scarce and only very modest and small scale improvements have been made in some areas of the Peak District and Derbyshire, however, in many instances there are barely the funds available to do routine maintenance let alone undertake enhancements.
- RDP, HLF, CCF and other funds should give greater priority to the enhancement of the historic character of town centres and high streets, and working with the Local Authorities to improve the public realm.

11. Defra role - What more should the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs do to ensure government departments (including Departments for Communities and Local Government, Business, Innovation and Skills, Culture Media and Sport and HM Treasury) support rural tourism?

Government intervention in tourism development and marketing responsibilities permeates through many Government Departments and results in a diluted and confusing range of policy initiatives. More resources appear to be available for rural tourism initiatives via DEFRA than via the lead Department for tourism DCMS. In recent years Government policies have resulted in fragmentation and the undermining the strategic coordination and marketing role of the Destination Organisation in Peak District and Derbyshire. Businesses have been concerned with this trend as more and more public funding resources are allocated to unaccountable bodies.
• When asked, tourism businesses from within the Peak District and Derbyshire are not aware of an expressed policy for rural tourism. They also believe that given the fact that most developed and even emerging nations have such a policy, it seems eminently sensible that DEFRA itself should develop and lead such a policy.

• A rural policy for England could do much to ensure the fortunes of rural businesses and communities are given a full and proper consideration.

• It is our view that a joined up view for rural policy and government departments is sorely lacking, and this is endorsed by our many private sector businesses.

• Resources need to be made available to support a coherent sub national tourism Destination Organisation structure to ensure that evidence is collated and collected to inform strategic investments made by various Government departments.

• The tourism sector needs to have a higher profile in government, given its potential to continue to drive inward investment, bring visitors in from overseas, and support rural communities.

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i Visit Britain  [https://www.visitbritain.org/destination-specific-research](https://www.visitbritain.org/destination-specific-research)

*September 2016*