Marketing: How well do agencies promote rural destinations across England? What more should the Government do to support this work?
In my experience (31 years running two static caravan parks in Worcestershire + 8 years with a major national caravan park group) we have little or no experience of marketing help from government agencies.
The local TIC is staffed by volunteers who may be able to help once we have visitors arrive with us but are unlikely to produce any new business bookings.
There does seem to be a much higher profile government effort promoting tourism just over the border in Wales.

Access: What, if any, changes are needed to give people better access to the coast and countryside?
Access to footpaths and open forest/moorland/river banks is adequate in this area and is not a problem for us.
Lack of decent broadband is a major issue as is the number of road pot holes which need repairing.

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?
Our local pub has just been expensively refurbished and has added planning permission for several camping pods. Two other local enterprises have recently obtained planning permission for “wigwams” and “pods” so there does not seem to be a lack of confidence. The bigger risk is that these ventures are based on too much optimism about the prospects for tourism.
The nature of our business means that the big costs are people and financial, leaving only incidental expenditure to attract input VAT. The 20% levy on our holiday hire rates is therefore equivalent to a 20% sales tax whilst competing with smaller non registered accommodation operators and foreign holidays – neither of which charge VAT.
A reduction in the VAT rate for accommodation providers would be the most beneficial change by government to help rural tourism. The benefits have been spelt out in several forums and lobby groups.
Business rateable values are still calculated by reference to historic and opaque concepts of rentable values. This results in our small caravan park (where we operate a hire fleet -with a clear rental income) having a much higher rateable value per pitch than similar parks in the area – many of which are better placed for access, facilities and passing trade.
By abandoning holiday hire in favour of only private owners we could secure a reduction in our business rates.

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?
In 2009 we approached the local planning authority for permission to site a warden's mobile home on our park.
Discussions with the officer were negative and unhelpful. Our response was to engage a
professional advisor and submit a planning application. The application was approved under delegated authority at officer level. The additional cost to us was around £6000. This could have been avoided.

- Infrastructure and skills: What measures are needed to ensure transport, housing and other infrastructure meets visitor needs? How can the sector ensure there are enough people with the right skills to support customers and businesses?

We are located 7 miles from shops, bus stop, taxi service and emergency services. A car is essential for all of our visitors. Pot holes on local roads are a problem. Broadband for wifi once on the park is now as important as a water supply.

- Local environment and character: How can national and local policies get the right balance between growing tourism and enhancing the local environment and character?

No comment – this is really a political decision in my view

- 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?

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