Part 2

Following the EFRA Select Committee oral evidence on 16 November 2016 detailed below are Welcome to Yorkshire’s response to the additional questions raised at the end of the session.

1. How are you working with tourist businesses to minimise the impact of visitors’ activities on the environment and character of rural places?

   □ How should the Government factor in rural tourism when developing agricultural and environmental policies post Brexit?

The Yorkshire Dales National Park states that maintaining the “Sense of Place” and “Local Distinctiveness” of rural areas is critical to sustaining rural tourism. Transport planning and road engineering can often be inappropriate and damaging to the rural character of an area (including the level of street lighting). National Parks are exemplars in demonstrating an integrated and sensitive approach to development that benefits local communities and sustainable tourism.

Greater recognition by all Government Departments, local authorities and agencies of the importance of tourism, particularly sustainable tourism, to rural economies would assist in the promotion and development of an improved visitor offer across the UK.

The National Park Authorities in Yorkshire are working with the many tourism business across rural Yorkshire at pre planning stage to ensure their developments reflect the need of the National Park’s policies at an early stage. At good example is a recent bunk barn development in the NYMNPA where planning was granted without delay.

With regards to Brexit we are aware that much of the DEFRA / EU funding is on hold or progressing very slowly at present. We would expect that in the long term this could have an effect on proposed tourism development which may be reliant on external funding, however hopefully the slow decision making processes are a temporary situation pending the outcomes of the higher level discussions taking place within government.

Post Brexit, we believe there needs to be clear communication on what funding pots are available for tourism businesses from the Government and guidelines on how to apply for these to help the tourism sector and the businesses within it, to flourish.
2. How effectively do planning policies achieve the right balance between the needs of tourist businesses and conserving the local environment and amenity?

What is your response to those who are concerned that planning rules in National Parks are too inflexible and do not allow developments to proceed which would benefit the economy without having significant environmental impacts?

Since foot and mouth, national parks have needed to diversify their offering to attract and meet the growing needs of visitors. This ranges from support for large hotel developments to glamping sites and more niche attractions like star gazing pods.

Welcome to Yorkshire as an organisation supports national parks in Yorkshire and how they develop their planning policies.

There is an understanding between all parties about the need for diversification and meeting the needs of tourists whilst preserving the natural beauty and heritage of these destinations.

For example:

- The North York Moors National Park Authority planning policy framework is positive about the need for continued development of tourism infrastructure – in a way which does not undermine the attractiveness of the area to visitors. This is of vital importance to the businesses that make up the £608m pa visitor economy associated with the North York Moors.

- As evidence, the National Park Authority has approved significant extension to every major hotel in the National Park in recent years – including Grinkle Park, Feversham Arms (Helmsley), Black Swan (Helmsley) and Raithwaite Hall (Whitby).

- The vast majority of visitors to the area come because of the peace, tranquillity, landscapes and the excellent opportunities to explore. The NYMNPA recognises how important it is that these qualities are protected as they make the National Park stand out. They are the bedrock of the tourism industry in this area.

- An example of recent success is the securing of protection for the tourism industry in the National Park through the Section 106 agreement for the Potash development. NYNMPA were the only organisation that identified and evidenced the potentially serious negative consequences of this development to the tourism industry and successfully secured the resources necessary for its protection (including a £200,000 pa annual payment to Welcome to Yorkshire).

- NYMNPA has a close working relationship with many of the businesses that make up the tourism industry, communicates regularly via the network of 600 businesses that are members of the tourism network and has a grant fund that supports new and innovative activities every year.
• NYMNPA has an excellent track record of securing external funding for activities which support the industry – for example HLF, CCF.

The Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority led a combined National Park response via National Parks England about the importance of balancing preservation with meeting the needs of tourists.

Planning and regulation

• Planning and regulation play a vital role in maintaining a high quality tourism offer.

• This is particularly so in the context of National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) and their special qualities. The planning system provides a key tool for protecting and enhancing the special qualities of these areas, for enabling sustainable development and tourism and so ensuring businesses which thrive in the National Parks respect and value the environment in which they operate and trade: that inappropriate or unconstrained development does not kill the goose that lays the golden eggs. Unconstrained development or greater relaxation of planning control risks eroding the special qualities which attract visitors to our National Parks in the first place.

• The National Planning Policy Framework already looks to support a prosperous rural economy and requires that planning policies support economic growth in rural areas including by supporting sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments that benefit businesses in rural areas, communities and visitors, and which respect the character of the countryside. The Committee asks if any changes to planning and regulation are required to encourage sustainable tourism. We would argue that rather than further changes, there is clear evidence that the planning system, and rural areas in particular, need a period of stability. Our evidence to the Rural Planning Review in April 20163 sets out our case in more detail.

• National Park Authorities take a proactive and positive approach to planning in order to protect and enhance these special places for the benefit of visitors, residents and businesses. This includes supporting the provision and expansion of tourist and visitor facilities in appropriate locations where identified needs are not met by existing rural services and support for rural businesses through skills training, grants, business support and other initiatives.

• Robust rural proofing of national and local planning policy4 is required to avoid unintended consequences and negative impacts upon sustainable development in our protected landscapes. For example, the planning system plays an important role in sustaining viable farm holdings by protecting them from the promise of residential uses or conversions which may have greater value than their current use. A greater flexibility around residential conversion risks skewing land values in favour of conversion to residential use for short term gain, prejudicing the ability for the farm
unit to operate sustainably into the future and thus undermining the viability of critical land management practice and doing nothing to address issues around affordable rural housing