1. **About ADEPT**

1.1 The Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning and Transport (ADEPT) represents Place Directors from county, unitary and metropolitan local authorities, along with Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs). ADEPT members are at the very heart of maximising sustainable growth in communities throughout the UK. We are delivering the projects that are key to unlocking broader economic success and creating more resilient communities, economies and infrastructure.

1.2 ADEPT is a membership based, voluntary organisation with 65 local authority and 15 LEP members across England, plus 8 corporate partners from the private sector. ADEPT members manage some of the most pressing issues facing the UK today. Our remit includes:

- economic development (including tourism)
- transport and communications
- planning and housing
- environment.

1.3 ADEPT members have a key role in supporting and delivering sustainable economic growth and improved quality of life.

2. **Key points**

2.1 Substantial and continuing reductions in public sector spending in recent years have meant that local authorities have had to prioritise essential services to protect and support the most vulnerable people in their communities, and reduce spending on non-statutory functions including tourism promotion, transport, and countryside.

2.2 LEPs and business organisations must now play a vital role in supporting rural tourism businesses, and connecting them to the wider economic landscape in their localities and regions. The provision of good infrastructure – transport and digital/mobile – is essential to rural tourism and the wider rural economy.

2.3 Rural tourism marketing must be multi-level (national, regional and sub-regional), joined up, and properly funded. Government support for rural tourism should form part of the Industrial Strategy – an economy that works for everybody.

2.4 Local authorities, LEPs and DMOs should look to enable local communities to be active in the marketing and provision of rural tourism opportunities in their area, and to make strong links with the health and wellbeing of their own populations.

2.5 The natural capital and heritage assets of an area are fundamental to rural tourism, these assets should be used to support sustainable economic growth locally in a way that preserves and enhances their value.
2.6 The rural tourism sector is largely comprised of small and medium-sized enterprises, the business rates system has a significant impact on them.

2.7 The Government’s devolution agenda has focused on creating combined authorities with executive Mayors, many of the early ‘deals’ have been for the major city regions and there is a risk that rural economies including tourism will not benefit.

2.8 ‘Brexit’ will bring significant opportunities and risks for rural tourism and while it is too early to understand these fully they are likely to include an increase in ‘staycations’, the need to ensure easy travel for overseas visitors, the adequate supply of labour for rural tourism businesses, impact on food and farming, and any changes to environmental protection.

3. Marketing

3.1 Rural tourism marketing must be multi-level (national, regional and sub-regional), joined up, and properly funded. Joined up means co-ordinated between different levels and places to avoid territorial competition and mixed messages. It also means co-ordinated with other non-tourism marketing, particularly inward investment.

3.2 Marketing should emphasise the diversity of rural tourism opportunities, and encourage visitors to go beyond traditional tourist destinations.

4. Access

4.1 Good transport access of all types – road, rail, bus and air – to, and ease of travel within, rural areas is essential to tourism. Funding reductions and changes have impacted on highways maintenance and resulted in fewer rural bus services. We support the LGA’s call for all local authorities – not just the combined authorities with executive Mayors – to have bus franchising powers and to be able to establish quality bus partnerships.

4.2 The condition of highways and transport infrastructure has deteriorated as local government spending has reduced. Councils are allocated far less funding for local roads than the strategic roads managed by Highways England. Local roads, cycleways and public rights of way are essential to a good rural tourism experience (getting around easily and enjoyably in a local area) and indeed are often part of the initial attraction, so continued deterioration of this infrastructure will have a serious impact.

4.3 Good digital access (broadband and mobile) is equally important. Local authorities are actively supporting the rollout of superfast broadband to rural areas, this is essential to residents, businesses and visitors alike. No rural areas should be left behind.

5. Funding and fiscal policies

5.1 Funding support for rural tourism needs to be integrated and long-term. There is a perception of too many initiatives and competitive bidding funding sources, often with
a short-term focus. This does not help the development of a clear and consistent rural tourism offer.

5.2 The rural tourism sector is largely comprised of small and medium-sized enterprises, the business rates system has a significant impact on them and increases in business rates can lead to some businesses downsizing or folding. The Government intends that by 2020, 100% of business rates revenue will be localised to English local government. Business rates for rural tourism businesses will need to be considered in this new context, and we support the LGA’s call for any increased powers around business rates to be extended to all areas not just those with directly elected mayors.

5.3 Brexit will impact on regional and rural funding. The Government has said it will ensure that existing EU funding commitments will be honoured as long as the UK remains a member. It is important for tourism and wider rural economies that these are replaced by new programmes co-ordinated within the Industrial Strategy. Any replacement for the Common Agricultural Policy will impact on food production and countryside protection. There will be an opportunity for Government to review farm subsidies in a way that will stimulate and support rural tourism by encouraging diversification, access (well maintained public rights of way), and conservation.

6. Planning and regulation

6.1 Local planning authorities need to have sufficient powers to protect and enhance the natural capital and heritage assets that are fundamental to rural tourism. Spending reductions have seen a significant reduction in planning capacity at many councils. The planning system should give a strong voice to local residents and businesses in decisions, and the system should be properly resourced so that the cost of processing applications can be fully recovered.

7. Infrastructure and skills

7.1 Transport and digital infrastructure are mentioned above. In terms of skills and the labour market, tourism is a labour intensive industry and the success of rural tourism will depend on having access to sufficient skilled workers. Training provision must be aligned with the needs of tourism businesses. Rural tourism is dominated by small businesses which need public support to improve their skills in key areas such as ICT and marketing. Brexit presents a risk that the supply of labour for rural tourism businesses will be reduced by restrictions on the free movement of labour.

8. Local environment and character

8.1 We have referred to the importance of natural capital and heritage, and the need for marketing to emphasise the diversity of local areas and rural tourism opportunities.

9. Defra’s role
9.1 Defra has a key role to champion the importance of rural tourism to other Government Departments and to promote the understanding of its significance in terms of a prosperous economy for all, an effective Industrial Strategy, and a successful Brexit.

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