1. What measures should the Government adopt to tackle problems with recruiting and retaining labour?

1.1. As described in our written evidence we believe that the causes and effects of a significant proportion of the recruitment and retention issues within the tourism and the visitor economy are potentially misunderstood and therefore misrepresented at a macro policy level. Whilst there are wide spread issues of recruitment and retention, including in most of the popular rural tourism areas, the root cause can often be traced to the ability or, more accurately, to the inability of individuals to live and work comfortably in a relatively low wage form of employment that is often based in areas with relatively higher purchase and rental housing costs. These higher costs in the rural context are, in part at least, attributable to tourism itself, for example the popularity of holiday homes and the demand for holiday rental properties. Many City destinations will have the same housing cost related problems impacting on tourism employment but the inflated housing cost are generally caused by very different underlying social and economic circumstances, for example, employment driven housing demand outstripping supply.

1.2. In rural communities, inadequate public and limited expensive private hire transport infrastructure, serves to compound the issues, for a workforce that is often expected to work during unsociable hours. The immediate solutions in remote rural areas being either to live onsite or own a car and commute from other relatively sparsely populated and well spread rural communities. The consequences of accommodation and transport problems being that many jobs are taken by transient (migrant) workers who are more willing and able to live in relatively poor onsite staff accommodation or in cheaper and therefore basic locally rented accommodation. Part of their willingness is derived from the fact that they seldom intend to stay in the area and the employment for more than a few months or years and therefore their expectations and motivations are different, i.e. they are not seeking to settle and establish a normal life style. Transience and churn within a migrant based workforce is in our view all but inbuilt and will be until such times as it is possible for resident and migrant workers to earn sufficient to afford to live comfortably and settle in rural communities whilst still working within the tourism industry. Seasonality, although increasingly a less marked problems, can be yet another factor making stability within the workforce hard to achieve. If the employment is effectively transient then inevitably so too will a proportion of the workforce that serves it.

1.3. Recruitment and retention can best be improved in the long term by looking at a heady mix of wages levels, affordable housing and to a lesser degree both transport and seasonality as appropriate to the individual areas concerned. As we pointed out in our written evidence: “Training sufficient chefs may seem the solution to a chef shortage but if most young chefs don’t earn enough to rent, let alone buy a property in an over inflated popular rural tourist area housing market, then no amount of skills training will solve the problem.

1.4. As a parallel and potential far more productive measure, in the shorter term, rather than agonising over the undoubted problems of retaining trained individuals in the tourism and
leisure and indeed other service sector industries, like retail, we should recognise and proactively celebrate the fact that for many individuals these sectors are providing invaluable on the job training grounds for key interpersonal and customer service skills. Ask a room full of individuals working in well paid jobs of almost any kind and you will find that a high percentage will happily declare that their first and often most formative job was a frontline role in leisure or tourism or another closely associated part of the wider visitor economy.

1.5. How different the attitude to employment in the tourism industry might be and how differently we might manage and train trainees, if the industry’s critical role in developing key transferable skill was properly recognised and promoted as a positive asset? Actively encouraging large numbers of young resident workers to work in tourism and leisure with the declared intention for the majority to use it as a stepping stone to employment in other sectors could start to solve and/or avoid a multitude of the UK’s employment and associated issues, whilst also starting to help the tourism industry find a new sustainable source of sufficiently well educated and motivated people.

2. How are your businesses working to minimise the impact of visitors’ activities on the environment and character of rural policies?

2.1. We don’t directly represent business as such but rather the destination areas within which many businesses operate. In our experience most businesses in sensitive rural areas are acutely aware of the need to achieve a workable balance between visitor impacts and maintaining the environment which many, but by no means all, visitors are coming to see. For many businesses it is a case of trying not to kill the Golden Goose, i.e. there is often a slightly higher degree of financial self-interest involved, than there is a genuine and deep rooted environmental concern. That we feel is an entirely reasonable stance.

2.2. The consequences of an understandably higher degree of financial self-interest are that many rural businesses are far more amenable to activities and policies which maintain or enhance the general areas appeal but they are often less amenable towards activity and measures that might or do limits them or business directly. The biggest area of difficulty in our limited experience relates to increasing levels of innovation and new business, many of which are increasingly linked to activities and outdoor sports pursuits and thus to land usage which individually or cumulatively can have significant impact on the environment or more subtly on the nature of the new customer and/or the overall experience for other new and existing customers. Change is seldom universally appreciated or positive for everyone involved and, thus, there will be diametrically opposed views on almost every proposal made.

2.3. Many of these new and expanding activities don’t actually occur on the private land for which any planning application may be made and the activities to be undertaken don’t therefore relate to a material planning issue on the site directly concerned. For example, an application to building accommodation specifically intended for mountain bikers, will not necessarily be able to take into account the impact that (more ?) mountain biking, may, or may not have on a much wider surrounding area. The application will be assessed largely on the impact of the building on the immediate environment of the property.
2.4. This is not by any means a new issue but until relatively recently in England it was to a degree addressed by officially approved 48 page tourism planning policy guidance (PPG 21). This, despite protest from both planning authorities and tellingly also from the tourism industry itself was removed from the list of official planning guidance that was previously used to inform planning authorities, applicants and on occasion the planning inspectorate of all the pros and cons of tourism that should be considered whenever an application related to tourism was made, and especially where it involved any degree of controversy.

2.5. After its removal the document was supposed to have been maintained by DCMS as demi official guidance available to those who sought it. In our view, a combination of the unofficial status, the reduction to a c 2 page summary (held on the VisitBritain website [here]) and a general lack of awareness have rendered the guidance all but unfit for purpose. We believe that the reintroduction of an updated formal DCLG official planning guidance note on tourism should now be considered as a priority, or, failing that a full DCMS note on the issues.

3. How effectively do planning policies achieve a balance between tourist business needs and environmental and amenity concerns over new development?
   - Should policies in National Parks be amended to allow tourism businesses more flexibility [If so, how?]

3.1. We don’t think that all current planning policies necessarily address the issue of balance. Tourism is a complicated and often innovative industry. Many of the individuals having to occasionally consider tourism based applications lack the depth of understanding of those complexities and currently have no source of advice or informed opinion on which to fall back on, which is precisely what the former tourism policy guidance notes set out to provide. Again we believe that reinstatement of the official tourism guidance note is the solution.

3.2. The task of the National Park Authorities is far more difficult than those of other planning authorities when it comes to maintaining the balance. Tourism and the environment combined are not simply an important industry but the primary industry and the key asset. Unlike other planning authorities National Parks do have to look at the much wider impacts and the issues of consequential effect, for example, the much wider land usage issues resulting as the consequence of building additional accommodation and not simply the issues relating to the building plot, immediate access or its immediate environment.

3.3. Few if any of our National Parks are truly untouched natural environments; they have been moulded by all manner of economic and human activity overtime and new economic activity and change must be allowed in order sustain local communities and to continue that evolutionary process. That said on balance we would still urge great caution; self-interest of individual businesses combined with the undoubted commercial appeal of major development in our National Parks means that if the planning policy brakes are slackened off, however well-meaning the intent, then it likely that significant irreversibly damaging development would almost certainly occur somewhere, soon, and well before the development brake could be readjusted. We would recommend instead that the planning processes involved in the National Parks are sped up and decisions and appeals are made far more quickly.
3.5. The biggest complaints we are aware of is not that things are seldom allowed to happen but that whether they are or not allowed takes an inordinate length of time and costs the parties involved significantly more than it would if applications and appeal were processed more quickly. Speeding the process would inevitably require greater resource to be invested into the planning authorities themselves and ultimately it is that cost which would need to be addressed. Simply charging it to future applicants is not the solution, especially since the very nature of National Park’s planning restrictions tends to discourage major national developers and encourage smaller local enterprise; the latter being far less able to access capital and cover incidental costs like the planning and planning appeals process.

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