

Debate on ensuring seaside resorts can respond to any increased demand for holidays in this country

House of Lords

22 June 2020



Key messages

- Councils play a key role in the tourism sector. They run tourism attractions, including castles and historic buildings, parks, piers, amusement parks, and destination management organisations.
- The sector has taken one of the biggest financial hits due to the COVID-19 crisis. Gaps in support packages alongside the absence of the seasonal boost the industry usually sees over the summer means the impact will be felt in the weeks and months to come, even as social distancing measures are eased.

Guidance

- It is concerning that Government guidance on the practical steps needed to reopen many key facilities, although drafted, has been delayed for several weeks and will not now give the required two weeks planning period that was the absolute minimum for facilities to properly determine their approach. The Government now risks individual facilities making their own well intentioned, but potentially wrong, decisions about the safest way to reopen.
- Camping and caravan parks are likely to quickly adapt to restrictions and, with carnivals and other local events cancelled, the availability of self-catering units will be higher than usual. However, coastal communities and towns themselves, and the businesses within them, are often small.

Social distancing

- As is currently stands, many of the coastal tourism industries and businesses are not viable with two metre social distancing rule in place. Many tourism businesses in coastal areas focus on getting as many people into one small space as possible, meaning the viability of their business is challenging. For example, many B&Bs in coastal areas generally tend to be small, so there will only be capacity to hold one family at a time in many cases. Additionally, cafes and restaurants will not be able to meet the demand with two metre social distancing rule.
- Recent influxes of people to the beaches have proved challenging for councils. A reduced level of lifeguarding provision across the country has been a significant issue for many coastal authorities and there have been serious concerns about public safety. Beaches have been inundated, leading to jammed roads and pressure on visitor parking. It has also created challenges with regards to cleanliness and littering compounded by the lack of normal level of toilet provision. This is creating concerns for councils who are worried about the environmental and public health impact, and any negative experiences damaging the reputation of the area. Many destinations are now avoiding their traditional beach marketing approach and instead advertising less well known visitor opportunities in their area.

Briefing

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- Pictures of packed beaches also highlight the challenges of trying to attract tourists and ensure they can visit safely. It is important that whilst people are being welcomed to the area, they are not congregating in one particular space. This is particularly difficult in places such as seaside resorts and nature reserves where pubs, restaurants and other facilities have not been available to spread visitors across the area.

Supporting tourist destinations

- As social distancing measures are eased, but international travel still looks unlikely for most people, it is crucial local authorities dependent on tourism, such as seaside resorts, are supported so their areas are not overwhelmed by an increase in visitors over the summer.
- Partnership solutions like the website developed by Natural England and the Ordnance Surveyⁱ to inform people about what facilities are open or closed, and advise on where there is greatest demand, are extremely welcome but need better public communication from Government. We have also called for the Government to set out clear guidance for the public to check before they travel to tourist hotspots, especially as we face local lockdowns.
- Similarly, work by VisitBritain to develop a kitemark to reassure visitors and residents that attractions and facilities are following the best public health guidance is valuable, but is urgently needed now.
- Areas report that many visitors are from a new market audience and, while this is to be welcomed, there are indications of a mismatch between expectations and that existing communications channels are not necessarily reaching this group. The Government could helpfully conduct some behavioural insight research into this and support destinations with their communications and marketing plans.
- We are calling on the Government to introduce a funding programme that builds on the work of the Cultural Destination Programmeⁱⁱ, Great Places Schemeⁱⁱⁱ, and Discover England Fund^{iv} which enabled arts and culture organisations to increase their reach by working with the tourism sector. With some of our member councils with seaside resorts to be the hardest hit due to the pandemic, it is crucial local authorities have every opportunity at their disposal.
- There also need to be a review of Destination Management Organisations to ensure some consistency in approach and an assessment of whether they are adequately resourced to perform their role. There has been variable performance even before this period and, while some have provided invaluable support to business recently, others have had to furlough staff from financial necessity. Effective marketing and business support to tourism businesses and potential visitors will be critical in the months ahead.
- We have also called on the Government for fast-track funding to help fund beach patrols, additional toilets and prominent signage, to improve safety at hot spots, particular at a time when there are fewer lifeguards at beaches.

ⁱ <https://getoutside.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/covid/>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/cultural-destinations#section-1>

iii [https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/funding-finder/great-place-scheme#:~:text=The%20Great%20Place%20Scheme%20is,cohesion%20and%20health%20and%20wellbeing\).](https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/funding-finder/great-place-scheme#:~:text=The%20Great%20Place%20Scheme%20is,cohesion%20and%20health%20and%20wellbeing).)

iv <https://www.visitbritain.org/discover-england-fund>