

## **Joint submission to the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Select Committee Inquiry into Rural Tourism**

*This submission is made on behalf of the National Museum Directors' Council (NMDC), the Museums Association and the Association of Independent Museums (AIM). NMDC represents the leaders of the UK's national collections and major regional museums; the Museums Association represents individual museum professionals and museums across the UK; and AIM represents museums which are operated as independent charitable trusts.*

### **1 Summary**

1.1 The UK museum sector is more vibrant, popular and internationally respected than ever before and visiting a museum has never been such a popular pastime with 52.5% of UK adults doing so each year.<sup>1</sup> Museums are the UK's most popular visitor attractions, and play as central a role in the tourism economy in rural areas as they do in cities. Heritage Lottery Fund research concludes that heritage-based tourism is worth £26.4bn to the UK economy.<sup>2</sup> They provide varied employment across professions and skill levels, encourage both domestic and overseas visitors of all ages, and yet also fulfil a critical civic role for rural and coastal communities. It is difficult to image Barnard Castle without the Bowes Museum, the Lake District without Dove Cottage or West Cornwall without Tate St Ives. However, it is also the hundreds of smaller museums, galleries and historic houses – Normanby Hall in North Lincolnshire, Time and Tide in Great Yarmouth or Ditchling Museum of Art and Craft in Sussex - that are the lifeblood of local tourist economies.

1.2 Museums attract tourists of all budgets, interests and length of stay: with museums from large nationals like IWM Duxford, to those like its volunteer-run neighbour The Fry Art Gallery all able to make a significant contribution. They achieve this because of their collections, the buildings in which they are housed and the expertise of their staff.

1.3 Although museums play such a critical role, this does not mean that their excellence in visitor experience, collections care and display and public engagement is assured for the future. Significant changes made to the budgets of local authorities have had – and will continue to have – a serious impact on the future vitality of the museum sector.

1.4 There are also challenges and as-yet-to-be-taken opportunities which could allow museums to maximise their potential in providing a thriving and diverse rural tourism offer. Improvements to infrastructure such as public transport, high-speed broadband and signage would support all rural visitor attractions; encouraging the removal of unnecessary barriers to enterprise, and for local authorities and for regional economic planning to recognise the importance of the tourist economy (and museums' role in that) would aide investment and improved destination marketing; and creating a funding and tax regime which reflects the logistical challenges and day-to-day reality of operating charitable museum enterprises in rural areas could have a dramatic impact.

### **2 Role of DEFRA and other Government departments**

2.1 NMDC, AIM and the Museums Association would consider the role of DEFRA to be to:

- Promote and incentivise the development of sustainable rural tourism, focusing particularly on demonstrating the role of tourism (including cultural and heritage tourism) in local economic planning, and ensuring it is adequately represented in the priorities of Local Enterprise Partnerships and combined authorities.
- Work with DCMS, CLG and Arts Council England to ensure that there is strategic and continuing public investment in rural museums – revenue investment for those where

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/taking-part-201516-quarter-4-statistical-release/taking-part-201516-quarter-4-adult-statistical-release-key-findings>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.hlf.org.uk/about-us/media-centre/press-releases/new-research-reveals-heritage-tourism-boosts-uk-economy-tough>

the collection is in public ownership, as well as project investment for those that deliver local priorities – and that there are no unnecessary barriers to enterprise.

- To work with all relevant Government Departments and agencies to seek solutions to three major rural infrastructure challenges: the provision of fast broadband, the provision of affordable housing for those who work locally, and a frequent and reliable system of public transport.
- To work with DCMS, the devolved administrations and tourism agencies to promote rural cultural and heritage tourism, considering ways to encourage international tourists to travel beyond cities.
- To work with the Department of Transport to seek solutions to the provision of brown tourist signs, and to simplify rail ticketing (particularly for overseas visitors).
- To work with the relevant Government Departments to seek a change in how museums' business rates are classified.
- To work with lottery distributors to ensure that funds continue to offer strategic investment in the development of rural and coastal cultural infrastructure, and that this continues.

### **3 How museums contribute to rural and coastal tourism**

3.1 Museums, galleries and heritage sites make a place attractive to live in, work in and visit. They make a place distinctive and unique, telling stories of the people, history, landscape and present day. Discovering more about the culture and heritage of a place provides a compelling reason to visit. 67% of visitors to Penlee House in Penzance visit from outside Cornwall, with the same proportion visiting Penzance with the specific intention of going to the gallery.<sup>3</sup> Cultural tourism is increasingly popular, and has in some cases been the catalyst for a much wider regeneration of a place as a tourist destination. This success has led to major capital and engineering projects, such as the creation of the Windermere Steam Museum at Windermere Jetty. The examples of Beamish and Tate St Ives prove that this economic catalyst is long-lasting. When it opened in 1993 it was hoped that Tate St Ives would attract 90,000 visitors per year: it now receives over 240,000, necessitating a major capital development to extend the gallery (to be completed in Spring 2017).<sup>4</sup>

3.2 Museums can be the primary reason for an overnight stay, or for a trip out from a city during a short break or longer-stay visit to the UK. Up to 60% of visitors to Ironbridge Gorge Museums stay overnight in the area and approximately 50% of Beamish's visitors travel from outside the region. Both have partnerships with accommodation providers (YHA leases space on the Ironbridge estate, and Best Western operates the Beamish Hall Hotel). Of the 300,000 tourists Beamish attracts each year, about half would not visit the North East if the museum did not exist. Museums create additional opportunities for tourists to spend money in the local economy: on food, accommodation, transport, other attractions and locally made products. The National Museum of Flight hosts the Scotland's National Airshow: 94% of visitors said the event was their main reason to visit East Lothian. 13% of these stayed overnight in East Lothian and average group spend is £57.

3.3 As year-round, all-weather visitor attractions, museums sustain local tourism in both low and high season. Many will maintain their permanent offer throughout the year, whilst others will also put on special exhibitions and seasonal events: *Twelfth Night* at Beamish encourages visitors between Christmas and New Year; and exhibitions like *The BFG in Pictures* at Carlisle's Tullie House, featuring 40 of Quentin Blake's original illustrations, provide a reason to visit in winter.

3.4 Museums also support event and festival tourism, hosting their own major events attracting visitors from beyond the region. The Rural Life Centre in Surrey hosts acclaimed music festival Weyfest each year: the 2016 festival was headlined by The Boomtown Rats. *Poppies: Waves and Weeping Window* – the Government-supported acquisition and

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<sup>3</sup> [http://www.cornwall.gov.uk/media/3624815/max\\_impact150.pdf](http://www.cornwall.gov.uk/media/3624815/max_impact150.pdf) (p.10)

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.tate.org.uk/download/file/fid/44097> (p.92)

national tour of the two iconic sculptures – is proving enormously popular at each of the museums or heritage sites at which they are installed, particularly those in rural areas. In seven weeks in Autumn 2015, 125,000 people visited Woodhorn Museum and Colliery to see *Poppies: Weeping Window* (more than the museum's usual annual visitor figures), whilst at the Yorkshire Sculpture Park, visitor numbers increased by 170% to see *Poppies: Wave*.

3.5 The museum sector is a well-connected one, with museums of all sizes working in partnership. The lending and borrowing of objects is a critical part of this, including the lending of objects from national museums to rural and coastal museums, galleries and historic houses to enable them to put on popular exhibitions and showcase the heritage or landscape of a place. The loan of the Lindisfarne Gospels from the British Library to Durham Cathedral in 2012 generated £8.3m in economic benefit and was visited by 100,000 people<sup>5</sup>. The Turner Contemporary has been the catalyst for the economic regeneration of Margate, attracting two million visitors in five years. As the gallery has no collection of its own it depends on museums to lend works and objects: Tate has been a significant partner, including Turner Contemporary in the Plus Tate network and lending hundreds of works, including 80 works by JMW Turner in 2012 and a further 36 in 2015. The V&A has hundreds of objects on long-term loan at historic houses across the UK, including at Sizergh Castle in Cumbria and Turton Tower in Lancashire.

3.6 Museums have direct and indirect employment impact. The museum workforce is unusual as it requires such a range of entry levels and skills: from interesting non-specialist roles in visitor services and catering; to crafts and trades, such as gardeners and technicians (now frequently supported by apprenticeship programmes); to professionals such as curators, accountants and directors.

## **4 Marketing and promotion**

### Place and product promotion

4.1 Although museums will produce their own marketing materials, place and product-based marketing from destination management organisations, promotional partnerships with other tourist organisations and the content promoted by Visit England and Visit Britain have a greater impact. Museums experience great variation in the support they receive from destination management organisations: some understand what museums are able to offer and are very active in the promotion of place, events or products whilst also providing an important link between local commerce, visitor attractions and local government. However, this is not always the case. Greater encouragement to identify region-wide themes and priorities, encourage marketing to drive tourists into and out of towns and cities in otherwise rural counties and the surrounding area, and further investment in the manner of the Discover England fund (where consortia can apply for funding to create new products and offers) would mean marketing would be more effective and demonstrate how museums appeal to a broad range of interests, budgets and ages. Destination Management Organisations can focus on two narrow a geographic location, creating “honeypots” and leaving some attractions under-promoted.

4.2 An example of successful investment in people and place promotion is Arts Council England's Cultural Destinations programme. Using this funding, *The Grand Tour* was launched to showcase the world-class collections of Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire through simultaneous exhibitions at Chatsworth, Derby Museum, Harley Gallery and Nottingham Contemporary. Visitors can pre-book their own Grand Tour using a three-day itinerary (which also includes restaurant recommendations), use links to public transport and local accommodation providers, and further explore both counties through a fringe programme. The Grand Tour is supported by D2N2, Visit Peak District and Visit Nottinghamshire. Promoting and providing the seed-funding for initiatives like this – and the similarly successful Yorkshire

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.itv.com/news/tyne-tees/story/2013-06-28/lindisfarne-gospels-exhibition-preview/>

Sculpture Trail (Leeds Art Gallery, Yorkshire Sculpture Park and Hepworth Wakefield) – will enable others to do the same.

#### Local Enterprise Partnerships and Combined Authorities

4.3 DCMS and DEFRA can offer leadership and ensure the broad economic impact of museums in coastal and rural areas, particularly through tourism, is properly understood and enables museums to be part of the work of Local Enterprise Partnerships, economic planning and the priorities of combined authorities. This would build up profitable relationships throughout a locality and ensure funding streams, such as the Local Growth Fund, could be used for cultural and heritage tourism. DCMS should exercise influence on the allocation of funds for cultural priorities by LEPs.

4.4 The structure of the New Anglia LEP – which includes a Cultural Board – allows both business and civic leaders to take advantage of the economic impact culture has in Norfolk and Suffolk, and enables cultural bodies to receive funding to further boost their role in regional cultural tourism. The Cornwall and Isles of Scilly LEP has acknowledged the critical role of museums to Cornish tourism by appointing the Chief Executive of the Cornwall Museums Partnership as a LEP Board Member.

#### Digital independence

4.5 Some museums that are managed from within a local authority face additional challenges when marketing their offer, particularly to tourists. Unlike other tourist attractions, these museums may be bound by internal local authority controls which mean they cannot develop their own website (and instead have pages embedded within the local council pages), have their own social media presence (which is an increasingly effective low-cost marketing tool), or develop their own marketing materials and messages. This can be enormously problematic, particularly as tourists increasingly search for information online and through social media. If Government Departments could encourage local authorities to grant such museums their digital independence, they would be able to fulfil their potential as visitor attractions.

#### International

4.6 Encouraging short-stay visitors to visit other UK regions and long-stay visitors to venture outside of London was identified as a priority in the recent *Tourism Action Plan*. As culture rates so highly as a reason for overseas tourists to visit the UK, museums are in a prime position to deliver this. The Wordsworth Trust, which manages Dove Cottage in Grasmere, makes special provision for Japanese visitors drawn to the Lake District because of the popularity of Beatrix Potter in Japan. Overseas visitors accounted for 25% of visitors to Dove Cottage between April and July 2013.

4.7 Museums are adapting their offer and improving their marketing to attract overseas tourists – websites, audio guides and apps are produced in many different languages, café menus have been altered and partnerships formed with tour groups. However, there remains the opportunity to do more: public investment in this capacity building should be encouraged, as should the promotion of partnerships with tour operators and public transport providers.

4.8 The aims of the GREAT and #OMGB campaigns to showcase rural destinations to international audiences are welcome, should continue and feature the breadth of museums, galleries and historic houses.

## **5 Access and public transport**

5.1 Museums have benefited from 20 years of capital investment from the Heritage Lottery Fund, matched by local and national governments, trusts and foundations, the EU and individual donors. The visitor experience – in displays and facilities – has improved almost beyond measure. Although the experience once a visitor has arrived has improved, getting to the museum has not.

5.2 The unnecessarily complex and bureaucratic nature of securing brown road signs is problematic. It can be expensive for institutions to secure appropriate signage, and the decision-making as to what attraction gets what signage and from what distance seems opaque. There needs to be a more strategic, nationwide approach – led by the Department of Transport - which prioritises ease of way-finding for visitors to attractions.

5.3 Infrequent, confusing and expensive public transport in rural areas is a significant barrier to increasing tourism (and recruitment), and leads to reliance on the car. Although booking twelve weeks in advance can result in cheaper rail tickets, off-peak rail tickets can be expensive and the number of options confusing. Many rural areas – including those very popular with car-driving visitors (for example, mid-Devon, North Cornwall and Norfolk) - remain unserved by the rail network. This is exacerbated across the UK by an infrequent bus service which can be difficult to understand by those who do not use it regularly.

5.4 As the Government's own *Tourism Action Plan* states, international tourists are reluctant to drive in the UK. Any moves to simplify public transport ticketing and provide clearer options for overseas visitors would be welcome. Similarly, encouragement of partnerships between attractions and rail companies to encourage independent international travellers would be helpful, as would the sharing of advice and information by Visit Britain on modifications to the visitor experience which entice the growing number of international visitors to visit locations beyond major cities.

## **6 Funding and fiscal policies**

### Local government support for museums

6.1 The financial environment within which non-national museums operate has changed rapidly since 2010. The greatest change has been the marked reduction in local authority investment. Although this is a consequence of the significant cuts made to the budget of the Department for Communities and Local Government, it is compounded in some rural areas by the long-term increase in the cost of statutory services (most notably, adult social care). In order to be successful cultural enterprises, museums must be able to maintain their public trust and popularity, as well as their reputation for expertise and high quality collections care. This requires secure public investment in collections, expertise and buildings: from this basis, museums can then generate income, become more financially sustainable and continue to drive rural tourism.

6.2 Public investment in museums takes two broad forms: direct revenue investment in museums and their core business; and project support, capital investment, tax relief and investment in local infrastructure. Museums are sympathetic to the financial pressures local authorities are under, but would encourage local authorities to view their contribution to museums as an investment – particularly in the tourism economy - not a cost. NMDC, AIM and the Museums Association would like national and local government departments, government agencies, lottery distributors and those who run museums to work together to maintain strategic public investment and create the conditions for museums to flourish.

6.3 Museums are adapting to become cultural enterprises, whilst still being safe and social community spaces and creating engaging public programming. Those museums with open, pragmatic working relationships with local authorities have been able to develop a fiscal and governance relationship which maximises museums' benefit to a place. However, some rural museums remain restricted by local authority controls, such as in one case, only being able to send three tweets a week and then from a general council Twitter account. These are incompatible with running a successful cultural enterprise. Being able to open on Sundays without having unduly high staff costs, managing their own communications and working in partnership across regions would be low-cost ways of maximising museums' contribution to rural tourism.

## Lottery funding

6.4 The Coastal Communities Fund, provided by the Big Lottery Fund, has enabled dozens of programmes and projects aimed at contributing to the development of peaceful and prosperous coastal communities, including through tourism. The Fund has been open to applications from museums, providing funding to help develop apprenticeships at Shetland Museum, to lever in private investment in the redevelopment of The Beacon in Whitehaven, and contribute to the expansion of Tate St Ives.

6.5 The recently announced Great Places Scheme is welcomed by museums, as are the Heritage Lottery Fund's Resilient Heritage and Heritage Enterprise programmes. Similarly, Arts Council England's strategic partnership with Visit England – and promotion of cultural and heritage tourism products – is productive and should continue.

## Business rates

6.6 A beneficial business rates environment is one of the key ways in which government supports museums. Over half of museums in the UK are charities and benefit from 80% mandatory relief on business rates for their properties, many of which occupy historic buildings or large sites. It is vital that this relief is protected as business rates are devolved to local authorities. Three quarters of museums also benefit from some amount of discretionary relief, but this has already been reduced for many and will be increasingly under threat as local authorities' own finances are squeezed. 60% of museums responding to a survey in 2015 fear their rates bill would increase in the future.

6.7 As more museums are now paying business rates, the issue of whether the valuation of their properties is fundamentally fair has become increasingly urgent. In many cases it is not fair, but challenging the valuation is expensive and complicated. This could be helped significantly by including museums valued by the Contractors Method within the lower "education" band of the de-capitalisation rate.

## **7 Broadband, workforce and skills**

7.1 The accelerated roll-out of superfast broadband to rural areas would benefit museums because a lack of adequate broadband limits the degree to which museums are able to take advantage of the public programme opportunities provided by digital technology. It acts as a disincentive to visitors and can affect recruitment. As part of the relaunch of new hangars at the Scottish National Museum of Flight earlier this year, digital touchscreens were installed to improve visitor interpretation, and the museum experienced significant problems uploading the content because bandwidth is so limited. It is also an inhibitor to introducing a CRM system which would help the museum better understand its audience.

7.2 The cost of living in rural areas – particularly transport costs and property prices – can be a challenge for the modestly paid museum workforce. It is important for the future of museums that they are able to continue to offer apprenticeships (including through Government-supported schemes) and early career opportunities – as well as being able to staff front-of-house, catering and retail – and that good candidates are not dissuaded from applying by the lack of affordable housing or reliable transport. A recent vacancy for an entry-level Collections Assistant at The Tank Museum in Dorset advertised the post at £17,000 pa: the average monthly rent in Dorset is £1041 pcm.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, the Museum Manager post at the Museum of Dartmoor Life was recently advertised at £11,100 pa (21 hrs pw): the average property price in Okehampton is £188,187.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.home.co.uk/for-rent/dorset/current-rents?county=dorset>

<sup>7</sup> [www.rightmove.co.uk/house-prices/Okehampton.html](http://www.rightmove.co.uk/house-prices/Okehampton.html)

## **8 Local environment and character**

8.1 Museums are very well placed to be able to develop a tourism offer whilst preserving and maintaining the local environment and character. Museums use their collections to tell stories of a place and its people, and preserve the physical and natural environment. Open air museums, such as Avoncroft, Chiltern and the Scottish National Museum of Rural Life, have turned the preservation of the physical environment into a tourist attraction. Museums are also not just tourist attractions but are a critical part of the civic infrastructure. As well as making a place attractive to live in, work in and visit, museums develop peaceful and prosperous communities by creating safe and welcoming community spaces, providing local volunteering opportunities, contributing to health and well-being, providing education from pre-school to adult learning, and creating a thriving, vibrant and diverse cultural life.

*This submission was written by Katie Childs, Policy and Projects Manager, National Museum Directors' Council. For questions or further information, please email: [katie.childs@nationalmuseums.org.uk](mailto:katie.childs@nationalmuseums.org.uk)*