



APPG for the Visitors Economy AGM Minutes

**7 July 2015
Room N, 6.30pm**

Present (parliamentarians):

Margaret Ritchie MP, Nigel Huddleston MP, Mark Williams MP, Caroline Lucas MP, Tom Elliot MP, Danny Kinahan MP, Jim Shannon MP, David Simpson MP, Mark Durkan MP, Sammy Wilson MP, Alistair Burt MP

Non Parliamentarians present:

Vernon Hunte - BHA, Sara Williams - Campaign to Cut Tourism VAT, Timothy Jenkins - Visit Britain, Colin Neill - Hospitality Ulster, Claire Tighe - SDLP Westminster Office, Paula Kelly - SDLP Westminster Office

Apologies:

Albert Owen MP, Dr Philippa Whitford MP, Angus MacNeil MP

1. Introduction from Secretariat

Vernon Hunte welcomed the group to the inaugural meeting of the APPG Visitors' Economy.

2. Election of officers

The following officers were elected unanimously:

Co-Chairs: Margaret Ritchie (SDLP) & Nigel Huddleston MP (Conservative)

Vice-Chairs: Albert Owen MP (Labour), Dr Philippa Whitford MP (SNP), Mark Williams MP (Liberal Democrat), Caroline Lucas MP (Green), Sammy Wilson MP (DUP), Danny Kinahan MP (UUP), Hywel Williams MP (Plaid Cymru)

3. Introduction of Officers & Proposed activity for 2015/2016

Margaret Ritchie welcomed the group and thanked her nominees. She highlighted that the APPG will focus on enhancing the UK's local economy by promoting measures and incentives, one of which is a reduction of tourism VAT. She highlighted the importance in promoting the tourism industry and to celebrate the number of visitors and their potential investment to all parts of Britain and Northern Ireland.

Margaret asked them what issues the group thought the APPG should deal with going forward and whether they thought the APPG should conduct an inquiry.

David Simpson MP suggested that the APPG should look in further detail at the Treasury's arguments against a reduction in Tourism VAT and suggested the possibility of holding a Westminster Hall debate. He suggested that with two former finance ministers in the group the inquiry may wish to challenge the Treasury official's figures.

Sammy Wilson MP noted the importance of focusing on goals that are likely to be achieved. Tourism VAT is important in the Republic of Ireland but he believes that the APPG should broaden the remit it's to the wider tourism industry.

Mark Durkan MP agreed that the APPG should have a broad tourism remit and that there are a number of important questions that the APPG needs to address. He noted that if the APPG were to hold an inquiry the APPG should hear from those who work in the industry, not just the investors and highlight the importance of the tourism skill set.

Mark Williams MP responded that in the past year there have been two Westminster Hall debates on tourism VAT. He supported the group's realistic outlook and asked Vernon Hunte whether he believed any progress had been made on the issue of the Visitors' Economy.

Vernon Hunte was positive in that over the past two years he has noted a significant change in the level of support for the Campaign. He noted the Treasury's comments, made in March 2015, that a reduction in tourism VAT "is not just a case for economics, but now a political decision". He agreed with the need to expand the APPG's remit and highlighted that the APPG also needs to help change the perception of the tourism industry. One of the big challenges on the issue of Tourism VAT going forward is to further demonstrate consumer and industry interest in and support for the measure. He mentioned that the British Hospitality Association is inviting tourism businesses for a Hospitality and Tourism Day in Westminster, to meet with their constituency Members of Parliament to address leading issues for the industry including Tourism VAT.

Caroline Lucas MP apologised for being late and thanked her nominees for her election as vice chair. She suggested that the tourism industry should look at engaging further with Local Councils and Local Government Associations. The grass roots campaign is extremely important and suggested that if the APPG holds an inquiry, it may wish to hear from Councils Leaders.

Nigel Huddleston MP thanked the group for his nomination as co-chair and highlighted that his membership of the Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee may be a benefit to the group. He confirmed that tourism would be at the forefront of the CMS Select Committee agenda. He welcomed the comments that the APPG should be realistic and suggested that the group needed to address the perception of the industry. He said the group should recognise and celebrate the success of London's booming tourism industry and aim to raise the agenda. He welcomed the title of the APPG and praised the focus on the economic argument.

Danny Kinahan MP said the APPG should look to other European Countries to see what pressures they have regarding tourism economics and that the APPG also needs to respect smaller tourism businesses such as B&Bs and recognise that there are sports and activities, such as hunting and fishing, which bring in tourism.

Tim Jenkins from Visit England welcomed the formation of the group and agreed that the tourism sector does not receive the appreciation it deserves. He said that Visit England would welcome to be a witness if the APPG conducted an inquiry.

Colin Neill, CEO of Hospitality Ulster, said that tourism VAT is, and will be, a long burning issue. He highlighted the opportunities tourism brings to regions, as many workers do not need qualifications. He highlighted that the tourism industry provides a number of opportunities to workers with disabilities and that this should be promoted and celebrated. He noted that in Northern Ireland the assembly has passed a motion in researching a reduction on tourism VAT.

4. Next meeting and Actions

The next APPG meeting will be held in September 2015. The Secretariat was asked by Margaret Ritchie to prepare a paper covering potential issues and evidence for the Group to consider in a planned inquiry.