



EASCO News

Monthly news from YOUR trade association

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Shock as Berresford Resigns VisitEngland Future Uncertain



In a shock to the industry, VisitEngland Chief Executive James Berresford is to leave VisitEngland in January after six years developing the organisation as England's national tourist board.

The news follows the government's surprise decision to merge VisitEngland back into VisitBritain. Whilst reasons for his departure have not been officially announced, it would inevitably be difficult for him to continue in a more secondary role as part of the VisitBritain team.

The loss of a well-respected Chief Executive came as a shock, if not a huge surprise, to many industry leaders and the main reaction was one of dismay.

Co-ordinated by British Destinations, the association of destination organisations, a letter signed by over 50 tourism organisations (including EASCO) expressed the industry's concerns and this has been followed up in meetings by the Tourism Alliance.

Said the letter: "Without VisitEngland's expertise and leadership, the very real growth potential of the sector (the domestic and international businesses and organisations we represent) will be damaged and jobs and growth put at risk. The dominance of VisitBritain is not the best course of action to deliver the Prime Minister's Five-point Plan,

the Triennial Review, or indeed your own recommendations when Chairman of the DCMS Select Committee earlier this year."

EASCO also wrote separately to the Secretary of State focusing on the conflict of interest that arises because VisitBritain's board will now be responsible for strategy. The Board includes representatives from Wales and Scotland, and an observer from Northern Ireland. Whilst it is of course right for those representatives to sit on the Board, they are all representing competing "don't visit England" camps. In contrast the board includes no representatives of the English

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regions at all and even London and Partners has no place on the Board – unlike Visit Scotland! Yet this Board will now be in charge of England's domestic tourism marketing and although a VisitEngland board will exist it will only be advisory.

In a reply to EASCO, Tourism Minister Tracey Crouch says *Since the publication of the Triennial Review the scope to enhance effectiveness by focusing on core activities, cutting duplication and strengthening collaborative working between VisitBritain and VisitEngland has become clearer*". However she did not explain what was clearer now than just a few months ago when the

Triennial Review recommended complete separation of VisitEngland.

Opposition to the merger has also been expressed by the Wales Tourism Alliance. Its Chair Adrian Barsby said in a letter to the Government *The position of the representatives from Wales and other countries on a Visit Britain board, which is also responsible for tourism development in England, would be invidious.*

It is important that Visit Britain has a clear and unambiguous Britain-wide remit and if this is compromised it could lead to tensions with potentially wide ramifications."

Sally Balcombe, the Chief Executive of VisitBritain, who will now be in charge of the combined organisation, said *James's knowledge, engagement and passion for the England Tourism sector have enabled VisitEngland to deliver a wide range of significant outcomes over this period. These have included securing the RGF fund for England, delivering the Holidays at Home campaigns and most recently leading the tourism activity around the Rugby World Cup. I would like to thank him on behalf of the whole English Tourism industry for his work and commitment.*

The statements made by ministers have included a commitment to ring-fencing the VisitEngland budget and retention of the VisitEngland brand. However statements from VisitBritain make it clear that they will be firmly in charge and the composition and role of the advisory VE Board is unknown.

James Berresford himself has been publicly silent on the issue confining his Twitter utterances to warm words for those who have wished him well.

England will now be one of the few countries in the world without a dedicated tourist board. The issue will doubtless continue to be one of the controversies of 2016!

Rural Broadband Progress

The Government has announced that 3.5 million homes and businesses now have access to "superfast" broadband Internet connections. Superfast is defined as providing Internet speeds greater than 24 Mbps. This has mainly been achieved through the ongoing rollout of "Fibre to the Cabinet" services in subsidised schemes where commercial investment is not forthcoming. Some locations are covered by satellite broadband schemes. There is now a government guarantee that every business and home can access at least a basic 2Mbps service and the intention is to raise this to an expectation of 10Mbps in the next few years.

Flood Safety Advice from the HSE

With large parts of England suffering terribly from the Christmas floods, the Health and Safety Executive has published some guidance for people recovering their businesses after the water has receded.

They warn that floodwater can be contaminated and advise protective clothing and that rats may have entered a building after their nests are disturbed by water. Most of the guidance is straightforward common sense but of course they point to the need for qualified people to check gas and electrical installations before they are used. The importance of ventilation is a theme running through the advice. Bottled gas cylinders may float and damage their connections so these are specially to be checked after a flood.

If your holiday home has been affected you should read the advice in full at:

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/business/recovering-your-business.htm>

Meanwhile, Across the Pond....

Reports in the American travel media suggest that Trip Advisor may be planning to change its pricing model to charge customers who book a fee, and reduce the amount of commission charged to business owners. Whether this amended model will be introduced in the UK is not yet known. The change has the obvious advantage of the lower commission rate for owners and agencies, but consumers may resent having to pay a booking fee. In other changes amongst the big American-owned booking companies, HomeAway, which operates in the UK as well as the USA, has been bought by travel giant Expedia. Interestingly, the forecasts of HomeAway's future revenue were marked down because of a perceived risk to profits from Google – if the search giant changes its algorithm – the formula used to decide what comes up when you search for something – then millions can be wiped off the profits of big companies and small alike.

Two other American giants that operate in the UK have formed an alliance. Booking.com will offer properties from the large Wyndham group through its website. Wyndham is better known as Hoseasons in the UK and operates a number of self-catering agency brands.

New Year's Resolutions

Earlier this year an agency manager wrote that "It might actually be an idea to perhaps run an article regarding 'all' the safety certification that is required, just as a refresher, as I am finding a lot of holiday home owners are not even aware that a 'Fire Risk Assessment' is required"

It would be a rash editor who promised to feature "all" certification etc. in an article but perhaps we can offer something of a checklist of the most common issues that need the attention of holiday home owners.

Fire

We all do know, of course, that owners have to carry out a fire risk assessment. This need not be complicated and you don't usually need a consultant but it does require some effort – it is certainly not a box-ticking form-filling few minutes of a job. Essentially you have to think through how a fire might start, how fire and smoke might spread, what you're going to do to prevent that happening and how people are going to be alerted and evacuated if the worst were to happen. As with all risk assessments, whether or not you are obliged to write it down, if you fail to do so you will never prove to a court that you did it properly so make sure it is well documented.

General Health and Safety

If you're an employer, even if only of an occasional cleaner, the general health and safety law of employment applies and even if you're not, there are numerous other risks of ending up in a court of law if you don't get this right, so it is more or less essential to carry out a general risk assessment and update it. Like fire, general health and safety risk assessment is more about thinking than form-filling. Think about trips, slips, loose carpets, hazardous garden equipment, chemicals, dodgy maintenance, and anything that could result in a person having an accident. Document what you're going to do about it.

Private Water Supplies

If you have a private water supply be aware of the testing requirements for this.

Legionella

Covered recently in EASCO News, you need to consider this if you have a hot water tank.

Gas

Landlord's Gas Safety Certificates are pretty well known, so if you use gas you're going to need one.

Electricity

It is another slightly grey area because the so-called electrical regulations are not really regulations at all but a kind of industry standard. As a minimum, get the whole fixed wiring tested every 5 years and check portable appliances visually much more often. Some portable appliances should be tested with a testing device by someone who knows how to use it but double-insulated equipment doesn't really need this and most of what you'll find in a holiday home is double-insulated.

Swimming Pool

If you have a swimming pool that's a whole lot of work for you because you've got to consider the risks associated with:

- Drowning
- Slipping tripping and cracking-open of skulls
- Contamination of the water
- Child protection (i.e. from the attention of adults whose interest in children is for all the wrong reasons)

The issue of lifeguards is a vexed one for pool owners – obviously the ideal is to have a lifeguard on constant watch but in most self-catering situations that is not affordable.

Jacuzzi

Mostly the same issues as swimming pools apply to hot tubs although drowning is generally pretty far-fetched. A huge amount of care is needed to avoid contamination of the water, though.

Asbestos

If your house or flat was built before 2000 you need to consider whether asbestos was used in its construction and document your findings. Asbestos left alone is usually safe but if your electrician inadvertently drills into some of it you'll be in as much trouble as he is. If the presence of asbestos is suspected you will need to have a proper survey done.

Working at Height

The laws that govern this are often pooh-poohed by the unthinking but falling off ladders is common and highly dangerous, sometimes resulting in death or very serious injury. For that reason the law requires us to ensure that people cannot fall off and that may mean:

- Using alternative methods to clean windows. The water-fed hose pole is nowadays a common sight.
- Hiring an access tower for maintenance work
This is probably something to consider in your general risk assessment.

This may seem like quite a long list of issues to consider, certificates to obtain etc. and indeed it is but in a typical small holiday home the job won't be too onerous and of course you only have to consider things that are relevant to your property, which won't be everything on this list!

Is this a list of all the topics? Most, maybe – if you think of another, please let the editor know!

And finally....

A Happy New Year to all our members and especially we hope for better luck for those affected by December's flooding.

January is the month in which the most subscription renewals are sent out and we will appreciate prompt settlement. There will be an e-invoice heading your way if you're due to renew.