



EASCO News

Monthly news from YOUR trade association

Edition 99 March 2015

VisitEngland and VisitBritain Survive Triennial Review

Questions over Star-grading raised

The Department for Culture, Media, and Sport has published the report on the triennial review of VisitEngland and VisitBritain. The two organisations survived the reviews, which are supposed to check that public sector organisations are still needed and that they are doing the right things and effective at doing them.

The Review team received a clear and consistent message from stakeholders that a British Tourist Authority and English Tourist Board were still required.

Legally VisitEngland and VisitBritain are part of the same organisation, the British Tourist Authority, and they share some accounting functions although they operate separately. The main recommendations were about separating them completely, and also making clear the distinct roles that each has to play. VisitEngland has to give up all marketing overseas and leave that to VisitBritain. However the review team also proposed that there was scope for more efficiency by having the two organisations share some support services to a greater extent.

A major recommendation was the creation of a "challenge fund" to be run by VisitEngland.

The challenge fund should offer financial and strategic support to incentivise local partners to work together across geographical boundaries to develop products and offers which are fit for market and can be promoted to domestic and international visitors. The focus should be on supporting the development of soft infrastructure, but successful bids should also demonstrate how this will be aligned with, and encourage investment in, hard infrastructure from other public and private sector partners.

In EASCO News 99:

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- Implications of Consumer Rights Act
- Sharing Economy
- VisitEngland Strategy Review
- Select Committee report on tourism
- Carbon Monoxide

The implication here is that match funding will unlock money from this fund. It is not yet clear how much money this challenge fund will have to offer and of course with an election pending we don't even know who will be holding the purse strings at No 11, Downing Street.

The report also heralds a review of the star-grading quality assurance scheme that is operated by VisitEngland and also by partners

in the other countries of the UK. It suggests that the *changed operating environment for both businesses and consumers*. By this they mean the growth of review websites. There is a review taking place currently that will reach a conclusion in the autumn.

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This review will doubtless take account of the ease with which fictional establishments can be posted on review sites and false or inaccurate reviews given to real establishments. Trip Advisor now offers readers a warning that a certain hotel does not really exist!

Grey Gables Hotel

48 Reviews

Arkwright Lane | Ambridge, Borchester, Birmingham B5 7SA, England

Overview Reviews (48) Photos (4) Location

There are also proposals in the review for clarifying the currently muddled reporting and accountability structure between VE and VB, and for sorting out issues relating to VisitEngland's Headquarters premises in London. Interestingly, the review team do not seem to have asked themselves the question of whether VE needs to be located in London, although there may well be good reasons for this.

Consumer Rights Act Receives Royal Assent

The Consumer Rights Act 2015 has received the Royal Assent and will come into force in the autumn.

The act includes services and updates existing legislation so will apply to self-catering holiday accommodation. EASCO News will

cover the Act in more detail later in the year. In summary, the key points are:

- **Information is binding.** Anything you, or your agent says about the property is considered a contractual obligation. So, to take a silly example, if your website or brochure says the front door is blue, and you painted it green last week, a customer who regards green as an unlucky colour can regard that as a breach of the contract. So, it will be doubly important to ensure that descriptions and photographs published are 100% accurate.
- **A reasonable price** is payable for anything you provide without a prior agreement as to the price. So, if you agree something extra, you won't be able to charge what you like for it. This might be a time extension on the stay, use of equipment such as a barbecue. These situations don't arise often in self-catering but it is always best to agree a clear price for things.
- **Where a service is not in conformance with the contract** – e.g a so called "SNAD" property (Significantly Not As Described) there is a right to a price reduction or refund. This may be the case even if the consumer has not given the owner the opportunity to put things right by raising the issue immediately – nothing in the Act allows the consumer's right to be restricted to complaints notified at the time.
- **Unfair terms** in contracts are invalid. They will be unfair if illegible, unintelligible or hidden etc.

EASCO News will be covering the subject of consumer rights in more detail during 2015 in the lead-up to the Act coming into force.

Select Committee Reports

It has been a month for reports. The House of Commons Select Committee has also reported on tourism in March. Its recommendations largely support those of the triennial review.

Particular recommendations that are of interest to self-caterers are:

- Funding for the GREAT advertising campaign is supported.
- The VE/VB split is supported
- A vague expression of support for more funding for VisitBritain. Attention is also drawn to the disparity between the public funds going into VisitScotland and VisitWales compared to VE.
- Support for the fledgling National Coastal Tourism Academy (a best-practice-sharing and education body based at Bournemouth University)
- Guarded support for the accommodation grading scheme, emphasising its role as an advice source.
- Guarded support for the Cut Tourism VAT Campaign – they recommend further analysis.

Unfortunately and perhaps as a result of the politics of parliamentary committees many of the recommendations are expressed in half-hearted style and there are few decisive calls to action. However the report can only further the interests of the industry and is thus to be welcomed.

VisitEngland Launches Industry Consultation on Growth Strategy for England's Tourism Industry

VisitEngland has launched a consultation on changes to its strategy for growing England's tourism industry. Launched during Tourism Week, the revised proposed strategy builds upon the several years of the current rather complex multi-stranded strategy and focusses more closely on core priorities.

James Berresford, VE's Chief Executive, said "the tourism landscape has changed radically

over the past five years with political, economic, structural, technological and social shifts all having an impact, which is why we need to revisit the original strategy to make sure it is still right for a new operating environment." He might have added, but did not, that the previous strategy was so detailed and complicated that few people could remember what it was!

There are three core objectives to the updated strategy:

- Strengthen the competitiveness of businesses and England's tourism offer
- Increase the contribution of tourism to the English economy
- Increase tourism employment and local prosperity

There are five strands of work that will be undertaken in order to deliver on this. It should be remembered that these are not just objectives for VE itself, but for the industry.

1. Investing in tourism products and experiences.

This of course sounds good. It includes their market intelligence work, and some less clearly defined actions: Investing in products and experiences that address seasonality of demand; increasing the personalisation of products; developing locally differentiated products, developing cultural assets and iconic buildings, developing products that respond to market opportunities including activity and participatory experiences; and investing in facilities and services for the business visits and events market.

2. Attracting and retaining motivated people and developing their skills.

VE wants to further the ambitions of making the industry a career of choice, having more apprenticeships, developing vocational training, and improving skills.

3. Increasing the Visibility and Understanding of England's tourism offer.

This addresses a real issue for England's tourism: many people simply don't know what their own country has to offer and their knowledge of its geography can be weak. Unfortunately people in London may not know much about Hebden Bridge or even where it is.

The work strands are about improving understanding, including through digital channels, highlighting what's on offer through marketing, promoting the inbound offer via "regional gateways" (I think they mean airports and ports- Ed), Facilitating travel planning, and capitalising on major events.

4. Overcoming barriers to business competitiveness and investment

The actions here are mostly about influencing and business support. Business support will continue to be a VE function. Access to finance gets a mention and increasing resilience to weather crises is also an action. They hope the industry will be able to influence planning policy and increase awareness amongst development bodies such as planners and transport managers about the importance of tourism.

5. Investing in the infrastructure and environment on which tourism growth relies.

Some of these actions are clearly things on which VisitEngland and the Tourism Industry can have a voice but not implement on their own. The topics of work are broadband access and mobile connectivity, Conservation in natural landscapes and heritage sites, regeneration of urban, rural and seaside town centres and the public realm, improving rural transport, and maximising London as a gateway to the rest of England by facilitating ease of onward travel. More controversially they propose to ensure readiness for HS2.

The consultation asks for your views in a short(ish) online survey. EASCO will be submitting a response and we'd like to know what members think so do tell us (succinctly

would be appreciated!) The consultation closes on May 15th.

Carbon Monoxide

The Government has announced an intention to make the provision of a carbon monoxide detector mandatory on every floor of private rented properties

The draft The Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Alarm (England) Regulations 2015 prescribe that every floor of a rented property must have a smoke alarm, and any room containing a solid fuel burning appliance, must have a carbon monoxide detector.

As is so often the case the position of self-catering accommodation is less than clear and EASCO will be asking the Department for Communities to introduce clarification on this.

The regulations relate to tenancies so it would appear unlikely that they will have effect for short-term holiday rentals.

However, it would be wise for self-catering owners to also follow these regulatory requirements because a failure to do so could be construed as an offence under other health and safety legislation. In other words, the regulations will create a standard expectation that the courts will heed whether these regulations are specifically applied or not.

Revaluation Rumbles Closer

Business Rates Revaluation Written by the Valuation Office Agency

If you receive a form from the Valuation Office Agency, it is important to complete it accurately and return it promptly.

From April the Valuation Office Agency (VOA) will be issuing forms asking for information

about your property and business. They will be using the information they receive back to review the rateable values of all non-domestic properties. Local councils use these rateable values to determine the business rates you pay. Failing to return the forms could mean the amount of rates businesses are asked to pay is not accurate or fair. You may also face a fine of £100 if the form is not returned within 56 days.

The VOA is preparing to update the rateable value of all business properties: this is known as revaluation. The basis of their valuation is the rateable value, which represents the VOA's estimate of the rental value of the property at a set date. The next revaluation will come into effect on 1 April 2017 and will assess all non-domestic property in England and Wales, based on its rental value as at 1 April 2015. This is why they are requesting information this spring.

A revaluation does not raise any extra revenue for government. It will redistribute the amount businesses pay, based on changes in the rental market since the last revaluation in 2010.

Some areas and property types become more in demand so values there rise relative to the national average. In other areas demand and values fall relative to the national average. The revaluation enables the VOA to reflect these changes and so ensures that each business contributes to local services based on the up-to-date position.

For self-catering, and other properties in the leisure sector, the VOA requests information about the business, such as trading receipts. This is in order to understand the level of fair maintainable trade. This influences rents that businesses pay to property owners and therefore rateable values.

The VOA knows the information they are asking for is commercially sensitive, and will treat it confidentially. The VOA is also currently consulting with EASCO and others representing the industry. This is to help them

ensure that their approach to valuation mirrors changes in the sector as a whole. You will be able to view your new rateable value online from October 2016, and councils will calculate business rates bills based on these new values from 1 April 2017.

Find out more about business rates at www.voa.gov.uk/valuation

The Sharing Economy

Review Recommendations sidelined

The government's response to the independent review by Debbie Wosskow of the so-called sharing economy has largely steered her most worrying suggestions into a siding. The review of internet-based resource sharing schemes included accommodation amongst the list of areas considered and posed a potential threat to the industry if it had resulted in part-time self-caterers being allowed to let with fewer safeguards for consumers than those who are in the business professionally.

Wosskow proposed that *Regulations for those providing accommodation should be proportionate to the scale of operation – someone renting out a spare room a few nights a year should not be subject to the same level of regulation as a business renting out 100 rooms year-round.*

However the government has responded that the regulations for sharing-economy providers should not be different to those that traditional hospitality providers have to follow. The government believes that the existing regulatory regime is already proportionate.

Wosskow recommended that *The government should set clear minimum standards for health and safety, including fire safety, for all providers of accommodation. For example, there should be a working smoke alarm on*

every floor, and guests must be made aware of the escape plan. Platforms should make these rules clear upfront to their hosts.

The government's reply suggested that they did not really understand the point being made, which is one with which self-caterers might agree, and they responded by detailing the powers that local authorities already have under the Housing Act. They referred to new regulations on smoke alarms that don't apply to holiday accommodation. They referred to existing guidance on fire safety in holiday accommodation. So absolutely nothing is to be done on this point!

Woskewicz recommended that *The standard tenancy agreement template should be updated to remove the current explicit ban on subletting – tenants should be able to ask their landlords to sublet parts of their property for a period of time.* Here the government did agree and this might result in more spare rooms coming on to the holiday market but the effect on self-catering does not look like it will be significant.

People sometimes do not realise that if you pick up your guests from the airport or station in your own car, you need a taxi licence and appropriate insurance because you're doing this in the course of business and not as a completely free favour to a friend. The recommendation on this was that *Drivers that have undergone appropriate safeguarding checks should be allowed to make a profit from ridesharing. This should only apply for journeys where taking paying passengers is not the primary reason for the journey.*

This is of course a can of worms that might only last until the first guest was killed due to poor driving or poor maintenance of the car. Not surprisingly, the government turned this one not into a siding but straight into the buffers. They said that *activities which involve making a profit and potentially transporting strangers fall within the scope of taxi and private hire vehicle legislation and should be licensed as such. The licensing regime ensures that the public are transported in safety and*

that anyone in a position of trust has the appropriate safeguarding checks carried out.

So in conclusion, the Woskewicz review had the potential to create some serious issues for the industry but the outcome seems to be that after a lot of hot air there will be no changes that affect our industry.

Ideas from Ecobuild

The annual Ecobuild show is a mine of useful ideas and EASCO News looks out for the best ones for self-caterers! This year we noticed a widely-available product called SureStop that has some advantages in a self-catering property. It's a water-pressure-controlled valve that turns your emergency water stop-cock into a push-button operation with no electricity supply needed. When the button is pressed water is diverted from the pressured side to be used to close the valve and cut off the supply.

This has the advantage that it is much easier to use so it can prevent an emergency from turning into a disaster. We all know that traditional tap handles, seldom used, can be stiff to operate and for some people that might be a problem. So in the event of a burst pipe or leak the fact that the holidaymaker can turn off the water quickly could be quite a blessing. www.surestop.co.uk for more information.

EASCO at the North Tourism Fairs

EASCO has been out "on the road" again and attended the two North Tourism Fairs in Northumberland in March.

These two local fairs are popular amongst accommodation providers who come to collect leaflets for the season from attractions, meet other businesses, and brief themselves about the latest local offerings in the north east. The first Fair is in Alnwick

(pictured) and the second in Hexham. The Alnwick fair is a particularly busy event.



The shows gave EASCO a chance to raise its profile in Northumberland and talk to self-caterers in the area and do some recruitment!

HMRC Education Campaign

HMRC are keen to spread the message about all the help resources that they provide and we think some members might find this useful. The following article is shortened from HMRC.

HMRC know that most Small & Medium Enterprises want to get things right but may need help to do so. We particularly want to help customers as they face key business life events, including starting in business, taking on an employee, registering for VAT, importing/ exporting and incorporation. To aid this our **Partner Service** offers:

- **Webinars** – These are tailored online presentations for your members that can

be run weekly/ monthly/ quarterly, depending on the numbers attending, as part of a **regular programme** or as **'pick and mix days'**, if you're running an event over a day. You can choose the subject(s) from our extensive menu of options and, as they're live, your customers can interact with HMRC and ask questions.

- **Regular and varied communications** –

- **Key Messages** which feature important and widespread information from across HMRC.
- **Information emails**, these link to help and support for a particular or timely theme.

Our products include:

- E-learning packages for self-employed customers and employers. [Starting your own business](#) for the self-employed covers all aspects of starting and growing a business. [Becoming an employer](#) deals with taking on and paying employees.
- A range of [webinars](#). These enable customers to attend a seminar at a time to suit them. Live and pre-recorded webinars.
- A selection of short videos on [YouTube](#)
- Business help and education [emails](#) is a free service to provide emails from HMRC that are tailored to your needs.
- Record keeping for mobile devices will enable customers to access [apps](#) to help make life a little easier for busy people on the go. A [ready reckoner](#) is also available to help customers budget for their first tax bill and our [tax help fact sheets](#) are a good source of straightforward guidance
- **@HMRC Business Help** is a Twitter account designed to provide help to business.
- **Business Support Tax App** allows access to all the above via your tablet or mobile device: on
- [Apple i-store](#) or [Google play](#)