

March 26, 2020

Dear East of England MPs

Help us now – so we can help secure the recovery

On behalf of the thousands of tourism businesses in the East, we are writing to you again following our correspondence of March 20, to highlight the catastrophic impact Coronavirus is having on the region's visitor economy and to ask you to pressure the Government to help alleviate what is now an existential crisis for thousands of SMEs.

The sector is worth over £10bn a year to the local economy and more than 246,000 people in the region are dependent on a thriving travel and tourism sector for their livelihoods. It is the largest sector and biggest employer. Crucially, it can bounce back quickly given the right conditions.

We welcome steps set out so far, such as long-term relief on business rates, but without more immediate action many businesses will close, not to return, and many thousands of people will be made unemployed and a burden to the State.

We cannot stress enough how more Government support is needed to help businesses weather the storm so that the industry is fit and prepared to help secure the economic and wellbeing recovery.

We join our colleagues in Destination Marketing Organisations across the region and the Tourism Society in calling for urgent action for:

- Salary and redundancy support, in particular the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme to extend to home *working*. There is little point paying 80% of someone's salary to do nothing when they can be working from home to ensure there is a business to go back to. This chimes with the Prime Minister's: 'Protect your workers and we'll protect you'.
- Underwrite insurance costs for business interruption for a period of at least three months, either through insurance companies or direct to businesses. The Government has told people not to travel, and accommodation providers to shut, effectively closing down the tourism industry. This should be sufficient to trigger *Force Majeure*.

Chairman: Dr Andy Wood, OBE
President: Lord Leicester of Holkham

- Grants, not just loans. Most SMEs can ill afford to take on debt through the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme when their revenues and cash are collapsing now.

Government proposals so far will go some way to helping companies survive but, crucially, those initiatives will only assist if they are enacted immediately and go further as outlined. There is no time to lose.

If there is one industry that can help the economy recover quickly, it is tourism and hospitality. When this pandemic is over, there is likely to be an unprecedented demand for getaways and holidays. This will be domestic as there is unlikely to be an appetite for overseas tourism.

To that end, we ask you to urge the Department of Culture, Media and Sport to allow funds for promoting bookable domestic tourism, to help accommodation providers as well as the wider industry. This would require changing the rules that currently only support marketing for inbound tourism.

As well as helping the economy recover, we believe this will also highlight the environmental and wellbeing benefits of 'staycations'. Not least, it will help rejuvenate your constituencies, many of which are dependent on tourism and travel.

As our local MPs, we strongly urge you to make any and all possible representations, without delay, to help make these things happen.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A Wood', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Dr Andy Wood OBE
Chairman, Visit East of England