

Rural Economy Growth Review

Rural Tourism Package – Main points

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Rural Tourism Package

On 29 November 2011, the Government announced as part of the Rural Economy Growth Review that it would support the promotion and development of rural tourism in England through a £25m package of measures.

This is part of a wider initiative to maximise tourism's contribution to the economy, to employment and to the nation's quality of life, and achieve a target of 5% year on year growth in the value of the tourism sector over the next decade. This was set out in the [Strategic Framework for Tourism in England 2010 – 2020](#) and put into a rural context through the [Rural Tourism Action Plan](#) which the Government is now pursuing in partnership with VisitEngland and the private sector.

The Rural Tourism Action Plan focuses on three key objectives:

1. Diversifying and modernising rural tourism products to generate business opportunities suited to local environments and communities and to develop a year round visitor offer;
2. Increasing consumer awareness, understanding and enjoyment of the products and experiences available in rural areas; and
3. Encouraging rural communities and economies to benefit from the value of tourism by taking ownership for the development, management, protection and conservation of rural assets and locations.

The £25m Rural Tourism package is designed to support these objectives and comprises the following elements:

- A £12m campaign spearheaded by VisitEngland to promote tourism in rural England. The campaign will involve national-level promotional activity by VisitEngland, as well as local level promotion of destinations and attractions by delivery partners such as Destination Management Organisations. It will seek to attract more visitors to England's rural destinations and encourage them to spend more when they visit.
- A new £10m Fund, delivered through the new Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) Rural Economy Grant scheme, designed to complement the VisitEngland campaign by providing funding for the development and improvement of tourism destinations, facilities and products.

- A Defra-led initiative to work with the 34 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty in England to develop a new approach to supporting sustainable rural tourism in these iconic rural landscapes.
- A new RDPE-supported “Paths for Communities” Fund of up to £2m, delivered through Natural England, to enable rural communities to enhance their local tourism offer by improving public rights of way networks.
- The investment by Defra of up to £1m of RDPE funding, with significant investment from the private sector, for a new sustainable rural tourism initiative in North East England, based on the Our Land approach being used across protected landscapes in the South East. The project will help tourism businesses offer activities and accommodation which celebrate and connect the visitor with local Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and National Parks.

Full details of how the elements of the package will operate, including when the various Funds will be launched and who can apply, will be published during 2012.

Frequently Asked Questions

VisitEngland Campaign

Q. Why is VisitEngland promoting tourism in deprived rural areas?

A. VisitEngland promotes England tourism products and services. The rural areas of England are amazing tourism assets that generate visits and visitor spend. Research suggests that there is potential for growth in rural tourism. The Regional Growth Fund project aims to stimulate visits to areas that are facing particular economic challenges but have economic growth potential through growth of the visitor economy. This and other elements of VisitEngland’s marketing programme create opportunities for all areas of England to participate in activity and access these growth opportunities.

Q. Is VisitEngland not supposed to be promoting all parts of England?

A. VisitEngland has a programme of marketing that covers the whole of England. Working with local and national partners in the public and private sectors enables VisitEngland to promote England and its rural products throughout the year.

Q. Which rural areas will the VisitEngland campaign promote?

A. See above. VisitEngland works with partners across the country and works to promote England’s tourism offer as appropriate.

Q. Where is the money for VisitEngland’s £12m campaign coming from?

A. The VisitEngland marketing programme is funded by the Regional Growth Fund, Government Olympic Executive, Department for Culture Media and Sport, private sector operators and local partners.

RDPE Rural Economy Grant (REG) Fund

Q. Who can apply for money from the REG Tourism Fund?

A. The REG will provide support to rural businesses to enable a significant step change in performance – increasing trade through targeting new markets, and working in collaboration with other businesses (including supply chain development), leading (where possible) to increased employment.

Tourism is a themed programme within the overall REG and tourism businesses will be able to apply for REG support where they can demonstrate a clear need/demand for the required investment (the market opportunity), they have the resources available to match fund (circa 50% of total costs), and how their project contributes to the development of their destination through collaboration with other local tourism businesses.

In addition, applications from DMOs, Tourism Associations, LEPs and Local Authorities are to be encouraged, particularly where collaborative activity is identified as a priority within the application.

Q. What will the Tourism Fund support?

A. The REG launched on 29 February 2012. Full details of what support is available can be found on the Defra [website](#).

Q. Will the Tourism Fund also be focused on deprived rural areas?

A. The REG will prioritise support at both rural Upland and Rural Growth Network areas.

The tourism specific elements of REG will also target key rural destinations identified with VisitEngland – to ensure the VisitEngland destination marketing support and REG complement each other, ensuring greatest impact of available public funding.

Q. When will the REG Tourism Fund open for applications?

A. The REG launched on 29 February 2012 and Round 1 is now open for applications. Those wishing to apply under Round 1 must complete an outline application and required supporting documentation by cop (5pm) 30th April 2012. Appropriate forms and guidance are available on the Defra [website](#).

AONB Tourism Initiative

Q. Why do AONBs need to improve their tourism offer?

A. We know protected landscapes can stimulate growth. The National Parks attract millions of visitors per year, a tourism industry worth £ billions, and thousands of jobs. But “the visitor offer” is less developed in AONBs.

Up to 30% of all businesses are tourism-based in AONBs ,this represents over 17% of employment in all the AONBs. But there is an untapped potential. More employment and visitor spending could be achieved in line with the objectives of the Rural Tourism Action Plan.

Q. How will you improve the tourism offer of AONBs?

A. AONBs are already looking at ways of improving the tourism offer and supporting the development of tourism businesses in order to make the most of the special qualities of their areas. The Government,

VisitEngland and the AONBs will now work together to identify and pursue further opportunities to achieve this, including through improving coordination, marketing and information provision, and by building the links with key local partners such as the Destination Management Organisations and the Local Enterprise Partnerships.

Q. Won't encouraging more people to visit AONBs damage these fragile national assets?

A. People choose to visit AONBs because of their fine landscapes, natural and cultural heritage, opportunities for outdoor recreation and peace and tranquillity. These qualities should form the basis for the future development, management and marketing of tourism. This initiative is not just about greater numbers but is about improving the quality of visit, improving the benefits of tourism and encouraging more overnight stays and extending the season. Promoting a sustainable "tourism offer" can be viable when tourism businesses offer activities and accommodation which celebrate and connect the visitor with these iconic landscapes.

Paths for Communities

Q. How will this initiative work?

A. This will be a competitive scheme open to community partnerships and will support proposals that offer best value for money. The central fund aims to help communities create new public rights of way links and/or higher rights (e.g. for horse riding, cycling and carriage driving) along existing ones making the local path network easier to use, better publicised and better integrated with local transport, services and popular destinations.

Q. Will this initiative provide new permanent rights of way?

A. The programme will rely on land owners voluntarily granting new permanent rights of way, following negotiation by a local community partnership. The partnership will also liaise closely with anyone else in legal occupation of affected land, such as a farm tenant.

Q. Will this programme benefit horse-riders and cyclists?

A. Yes. These users will be key beneficiaries of the programme. Local partnerships will upgrade selected existing paths for use by horse riders and cyclists as well as creating entirely new multi-user paths.

North East sustainable tourism initiative based on "Our Land" approach

Q. What is the "Our Land" initiative in the South East, and what has it achieved?

A. The Our Land project is developing and promoting sustainable, rural tourism in the AONBs and National Parks of the South East. The aim of the project is to help tourism businesses offer activities and accommodation which celebrate and connect the visitor with these iconic landscapes. By working with industry they have shown the "tourism offer" can be viable and sustainable. A website has been developed as part of this initiative www.our-land.co.uk (hosted by responsibletravel.com). It was launched by the DCLG Minister and Kate Humble in October. There are already over 130 businesses that have been helped to develop their sustainability credentials and celebrate their landscapes. In turn they are benefiting from the marketing potential of Our Land and the great exposure the project is getting.

Q. Will the initiative in the North East be the same as the South East model?

A. We envisage the broad principles of the Our Land approach being used but it is too early to say quite how the project will develop as this will depend on the local partners. So this is not a question of just rolling out the South East model, but the important lessons learnt in the South East should certainly help inform future developments in the North East.

Q. Why the North East?

A. A significant area of AONBs and National Parks are found in the North East and the area has beautiful landscapes well worth visiting. But visitor numbers are a long way from achieving their full potential. The additional funding will help improve the tourist offer. The area is also relatively less affluent with large tracts significantly dependent on Tourism

Q. Will the idea be extended to other parts of the country?

A. The Our Land model is such that it could be rolled out in other areas in clusters of AONBs and National Parks and, given sufficient investment and interest, it could become a national programme. However, funding is limited and, based on the experience of the South East, it is better to engage in a discrete area first and develop it in a thorough way there.

Q. Can an Our Land approach really make a difference to businesses in the North East?

A. Yes, we believe so. It will forge stronger links between businesses in tourism provision, food and local suppliers. It will encourage more overnight stays which bring more revenue compared to day visitors.

Experience in the South East Our Land project suggests that businesses are keen to look at making themselves more sustainable and profitable and they are keen to sign up. The project is still in its early stages but feedback from partners and commercial enterprises in the region has been very good. The project has sparked interest in other areas outside the South East.

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