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27 May 2009

cc. Sarah Ebanja, Deputy Chief Executive

Dear Mr Brannen,

London Assembly response to the draft London Tourism Action Plan

Thank you for allowing the London Assembly's Economic Development, Culture, Sport and Tourism Committee this opportunity to respond to the draft London Tourism Action Plan 2009-2013. This letter sets out a number of specific issues we would like the final action plan to address.

As you know, the Committee enjoyed a very productive meeting with your colleagues Sarah Ebanja and Carolyn Smith recently, alongside other contributors Helen Bull of Merlin Entertainment, Mark Elliott of Time Out, Richard Pulford of the Society of London Theatre and Simon Calder, Travel Editor of the Independent. This response to the consultation is informed by the discussion at the meeting.

Overall conclusions

Tourism is vital to London's economy, and there is much we can do to make London a more attractive destination for both domestic and international visitors.

Although the plan contains a large number of actions, the Committee believes that the plan at present lacks direction and priority for London's tourism offer and industry. The London Development Agency needs to identify their priorities, and how these will be taken forward. We would suggest that in the final version of the plan, a stronger statement summarising the overall direction of the LDA's proposed actions should be made, with the key actions highlighted. We expand below on what we believe these key priorities are.

We are also concerned that some of the actions in the draft plan are vague. For instance, one action is to, *"Continue to improve the brand awareness of London's visitor destination brand,"* while another is to *"Build the business case for investment by hotels and attractions in accessible facilities."* We suggest that these are modified or removed to ensure meaningful actions are given the necessary emphasis.

Key issues for the plan to address

The Committee believes that the key issues that the Tourism Action Plan needs to address are: (i) the exploitation of the domestic tourist market, (ii) making the transport

network more tourist-friendly, and (iii) taking advantage of the 2012 opportunity. We set out our views on these and other issues below.

1 Promoting London to the domestic market

Despite the reduced value of sterling, international tourism in London has declined since the beginning of the economic downturn. The main impact of sterling's reduction may actually be the large increase in the number of domestic visitors, as people look to stay within Britain.

We believe this presents an opportunity in the short term to fully exploit the domestic tourism market, although it is not clear in the draft how the LDA will do this. There is a strong case for targeting campaigns at this market, for instance. We encourage the LDA to revisit this issue to ensure all possible ways of encouraging domestic tourism are being deployed.

2 Transport

The transport network is an essential part of London's tourism infrastructure. However the draft plan does not propose significant new actions to help make the network more tourist-friendly. As Transport for London is the LDA's key partner in this, we recommend that the final plan sets out in detail the specific actions that TfL needs to take and the measures the organisation is working towards. We therefore recommend that TfL becomes more actively engaged in the plan, and strong leadership from the Mayor will be required to ensure that this happens.

One key issue is the cost of travelling, which has increased recently on public transport and in taxis. Tourists would pay less using Oyster cards; however Oyster is still under-used by both domestic and foreign visitors, meaning they pay cash fares, which are much more expensive. New measures to promote Oyster to tourists – perhaps by working with tour operators or hotels – should be included in the final action plan.

3 The Olympic and Paralympic Games

London's hosting of the Olympic and Paralympic Games in 2012 present short, medium and long-term challenges for the promotion of London as a tourist destination. We also look forward to the opportunity to comment further on these in relation to the forthcoming Olympic and Paralympic Tourism Action Plan.

We believe that it is important that the LDA revisits its thinking about the relationship between tourism and the Olympic Games, and takes a realistic view of the effect of the Games during and after the event. The LDA's thinking should be informed by the experience of previous Games.

Evidence from other Olympics suggests that exploiting the tourism opportunities of the Games themselves is important but that those cities who secure lasting benefits, and not a rapid dropping off of tourism after the Games have happened, do so by driving their strategy with a clear vision of what lasting benefits the event and its associated activity will secure for their city. London is unlikely, given its size and other roles, to secure the impact achieved in Barcelona but we believe that we can substantially raise our game with a focus on the longer-term benefits for our city from the Games. We have no evidence that this thinking is yet taking place and would recommend that this happens without further delay.

Guests at our meeting expressed some concerns that, although tourism may be boosted in the long term by London's hosting of the Olympic Games, there may be negative

impacts for established attractions during the period of the Games. Tourists may be discouraged from visiting London during the period of the Games because of concerns around congestion or disruption within the city.

We suggest that the LDA should also explore ways of assuring potential visitors that the Games will not disrupt London's tourist attractions and infrastructure, and that the Olympic Park is promoted as an attraction. For instance, in the short-term the LDA could support Olympic-themed marketing aimed at tourists visiting London in this period before the Games, encouraging them to return during 2012. This could involve new branding emphasising London's host city status at Heathrow and other gateways to the city.

Other issues

In our meeting the Committee discussed a number of other issues with guests relating to the content of the draft action plan, including business tourism, transit passengers and accommodation, as detailed below.

Business tourism

It is appropriate that much of the action plan focuses on the leisure market, but there is more that can be done to encourage business visitors to visit London. Indeed, we believe that business tourism is a vital and under-valued sector of the market in London. Business tourists tend to be higher spenders and the attraction of business events and conventions to London is a large and growing sector in a very internationally competitive market. With the recession impacting negatively on business tourism this is an issue requiring immediate attention. On a specific point, the commitment in the plan to, "*Supporting the findings of the International Convention Centre Mayoral Commission*" is not supported by specific actions to further plans for a new centre or the development of a convention bureau. The strengthening of London's support to visitors through a convention bureau should be included in the plan.

Transit passengers

Guests noted the many air passengers who travel through London without visiting the city. Other cities have been successful in exploiting this potential market, for instance by offering free tours or overnight accommodation for transit passengers. Sarah Ebanja noted that this was an area of work for the LDA; we are encouraged by this and hope to see actions included in the final plan.

Accommodation

We discussed the perception of accommodation in London, as being costly and of relatively low quality. This is an issue we hope the action plan can help to address, and we note the actions you have already proposed. In his recent proposals for the new London Plan, the Mayor made it a priority to ensure there are more accessible hotel rooms available. We support this goal, and will look to the final action plan for more detail on how the LDA will help to achieve this.

London Living Wage

The Mayor has reiterated his support for the London Living Wage, raising it recently to £7.60 per hour. The draft action plan contains actions on the development of the tourism workforce, for instance through new training modules. However, although the draft plan states that tourism should not be dismissed as a low-wage sector, there are

no actions pertaining to the wider recognition of the London Living Wage within the draft plan. The final action plan should address this by stating how the LDA will work with partners to help ensure staff working within the tourism industry receive the London Living Wage.

Visit London

Finally, Sarah Ebanja promised to write to the Committee with regards to the role and capacity of Visit London, and we look forward to receiving this letter. It has been reported that the Mayor is reviewing whether to merge Visit London with other promotional bodies – Think London, Film London and Study London. We hope that this review is an opportunity for the LDA to address the strengths and weaknesses of Visit London, and consider whether it is meeting its goals as effectively as possible. In any event, the plan needs to say more about how and by whom the review will be delivered.

I would like to thank the LDA again for this opportunity to comment on this work, and look forward to the publication of the final Tourism Action Plan.

Yours sincerely,

Dee Doocey AM

Chair of the Economic Development, Culture, Sport and Tourism Committee