

The Rt Hon Oliver Dowden CBE MP
Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport,
100 Parliament Street
Westminster
London
SW1A 2BQ

secretary.statesoffice@culture.gov.uk
dcms.coronavirus@culture.gov.uk

28 May 2020

Dear Secretary of State

Tourism Taskforce

I am writing to you about the importance of tourism to the rural economy. You may have seen our President's, Baroness Mallalieu, opinion piece in the [Telegraph](#) over the weekend where she articulated the Countryside Alliance's strong belief that tourism underpins the rural economy and will be the engine that restarts it. We are pleased to read reports today that restrictions may be eased to help tourism businesses and restart the rural economy.

Rural tourism in England contributes over £13 billion per year to the economy, and VisitBritain predicts the £80 billion domestic tourism industry, spanning holidays and day visits, will suffer a £22 billion drop this year. Tourism makes a significant contribution to the rural economy, supporting village shops and services, jobs and businesses, and it is crucial to ensuring the long-term sustainability of our countryside. That rural economy has been devastated by the impact of COVID-19, making it even more important that tourism in the countryside resumes as soon as it is safe for it to do so.

The Prime Minister's announcement earlier this month that restrictions in England were being eased to allow people to the countryside has created a new wave of concern in some rural communities. However, the Countryside Alliance supports the lifting of restrictions as it becomes safe to do so and we recognise that those who have been in lockdown in cities are keen to enjoy the British countryside. With the easing of restrictions, we must also be reopening the countryside to allow its visitors to support the communities and economies they are visiting. Already domestic tourism spend is forecast to be down £22 billion this year, a significant economic hit, and in many business cases, potentially terminal.

Tourism businesses in the countryside cannot wait until the Government's proposed Step 3 of COVID-19 recovery in six weeks time, particularly with increasing numbers of people travelling into the countryside on a daily basis. It is only right that those who live in the countryside should have the opportunity to reopen their businesses to take advantage of incoming visitor numbers. If shops, cafes and pubs continue to be forced to remain closed, and therefore unable to relieve some the economic hardship already endured, it risks creating a divide between town and countryside.

The Countryside Alliance believes that we should if we open the countryside to everyone the countryside should be fully open, and that includes allowing rural businesses to reopen, at least in some capacity, to kick start the rural economy.

There are three areas in particular where the Government could start to reopen the countryside before Step 3:

1. Relaxing the restrictions on staying away from home and allowing campsites and self-catering accommodation to reopen. Camping and caravanning sites and self-catering farm cottages in particular could operate with the appropriate hygiene and social distancing measures in place. Camping and caravanning sites alone have already missed out on £25 million of income during lockdown.
2. Allow cafes and pubs to open gardens and outside seating. Pubs and cafes should be able to make use of the takeaway rules and also be able to serve alcoholic beverages and other drinks subject to social distancing rules, with the use of beer gardens, car parks and other outside areas explicitly permitted.
3. Encourage all national parks, local authorities and private landowners to reopen car parks to spread visitors across the countryside rather than concentrating them at 'honey pot' sites.

We recognise that these proposals might not be universally popular in the countryside, but the countryside is not immune to the economic impact this virus will have on its communities and businesses, especially as most are reliant on the tourism sector.

Tourism will kick start the rural economy as people from across the UK will be desperate to get away as restrictions on movement are eased. With international travel likely to remain difficult for some time the British countryside and coastline will be the number one destination. It seems only right that when the countryside opens its businesses should open, too.

We would welcome an opportunity to discuss our proposals with you, and further make the case for why the countryside needs to be supported at this difficult time.

Yours sincerely



Tim Bonner

Chief Executive

Email: tim-bonner@countryside-alliance.org

CC: Rt Hon George Eustice MP, Environment Secretary - secretary.state@defra.gov.uk