

Press Release

BUSINESS TOURISM PARTNERSHIP

Leading the way

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BUSINESS TOURISM LEADERS DISMAYED AT VISITBRITAIN FUNDING SETTLEMENT

A delegation from the Business Tourism Partnership, including representatives from EIA, Eventia, MIA and VisitBritain, met Margaret Hodge MP, Minister for Tourism yesterday and told her that the tourism funding settlement for VisitBritain was woefully inadequate and would jeopardise the stated aim in the recently published Tourism 2012 Strategy to reinforce Britain's reputation as a leading location for conferences and events.

Michael Hirst, Chairman of the Business Tourism Partnership said that, "The most important factor for international buyers in deciding where to place events is that the Government is seen to be fully behind promotion and facilities. Any reduction in funding for bidding and promotion sends out the wrong message and will have a damaging impact on Britain's ability to win new business". He added, "It puts at risk the DCMS's own stated objectives of "boosting both our domestic and international appeal and leaving a significant legacy for UK tourism".

The Business Tourism Partnership had previously been encouraged by the extensive inclusion of business visits and events within the Tourism Strategy for 2012. VisitBritain's business visits and events department is the main delivery agency for these objectives. The recent establishment of eventBritain is also considered key to help secure significant additional business in the run up to and post the Games. Sustaining these new events will be the true legacy of the 2012 Olympics.

The cuts in funding come on the back of recently announced record 2006 figures for inbound business visits and spend. with over 9 millions visitors spending £4.75 billion. This is an increase of 10% and 17% respectively at a growth rate that exceeds overall tourism growth. However even with these welcome trends, Britain's competitive position continues to fall with all its major competitor event destinations outspending it in pursuit of new business.

A number of other issues were raised at the meeting. These included a further plea for ministerial support for bids. Here the Minister offered to assist at twenty events each year. Further discussion would be undertaken with UK Visas regarding the high cost of business visas and the difficulties for group business travellers. The Minister promised her support for more streamlined and uniform health and safety regulations at event venues.

Presentations were also made to illustrate the growth of events as a preferred media of communication and their role within creative enterprise. Incentive travel and corporate hospitality opportunities were outlined together with an update on venue quality accreditation using the MIA's AIM scheme.

Michael Hirst said, "We are gradually succeeding in developing a greater understanding of the business events sector. The Minister told us that Government intends to punch harder to support us. However the cuts in VisitBritain funding will do little to achieve the strategic aim to reinforce Britain's reputation as a world-class destination for business visits and events".

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Note to editors:

- **DCMS resource funding for tourism will be reduced over the next three years** – from £55.1 million this financial year (2007-8), to £53 million in 2008-9, £50.4 million in 2009-10 and £45.8 million in 2010-11.
- The **Business Tourism Partnership** consists of nineteen members representing the leading trade organisations and government agencies with an interest in conferences and meetings, exhibitions and trade fairs, outdoor events, business event, incentive travel, corporate hospitality and individual business travel.
- Business tourism is worth **over £22 billion** in terms of its wider economic impact through associated delegate expenditure on travel, entertainment, shopping, pre and post conference tours etc.) In addition the value of business transacted at trade events is estimated to generate in excess of **£100 billion** a year.
- Over the past ten years there has been a **53% growth** in all business trips exceeding the overall tourism growth rate. **Over 9 million visits** are made to the UK each year for business purposes **contributing £4.753 billion** to the British economy.
- The sector generates 28% of all overseas visitors and 30% of inbound tourism earnings.
- Business tourism activities create high quality, year round employment opportunities accounting for some **530,000 jobs** directly and indirectly.
- **Around 80 million people attend 1.5 million** conferences and meeting annually.
- **Business visitors spend on average £527 per visit** – over twice that spent by leisure travellers.
- For further information on Business Tourism and the **Business Tourism Partnership**, please refer to the website: www.businesstourismpartnership.com