



## **Response to the Department of Communities Consultation**

### **‘Sale and supply of Alcoholic Drinks at Special Events in Northern Ireland’**

#### **Submitted by the Northern Ireland Tourism Alliance**

We welcome the opportunity to respond to the Department of Communities consultation.

#### **Northern Ireland Tourism Alliance (NITA)**

The Alliance was launched in August 2018 to provide a united and independent voice of the Tourism Industry in Northern Ireland. NITA currently has members in the following categories:

- Accommodation Providers
- Food & Drink Industry Associations
- Regional organisations - Visit Belfast, Visit Derry and Visit West Belfast
- Major Tourist Attractions
- Tour Guides
- Passenger Transport
- Airports
- Ports
- Airlines

NITA also has associate memberships including 10 local councils, ABTA, Tourism NI, Tourism Ireland and education and skills providers.

NITA’s role, as the single representative body for the tourism and hospitality industry in Northern Ireland, is to represent our members and ensure the voice of industry is listened to, to shape the future growth of tourism and lobbying at all levels of government and beyond to raise awareness of and contributing to the solution of major strategic issues affecting the industry, which include everything from the UK’s exit from the European Union, the impact of APD, VAT, Skills development and the ongoing uncertainty of the economic climate to the industry’s overall competitiveness.

#### **Introduction**

Tourism is one of the success stories in Northern Ireland. Although starting from a low base, Tourism has continued to grow and it is estimated that in 2018, (official figures not available until June 2019), Tourism generated £1bn in revenues and employed almost 65,000 people (8.7% of total jobs in NI). Over 70% of revenue was generated from visitors from outside of NI, meaning that Tourism brought in approximately £700m in new money to the economy contributing to the growth of the overall economy.

What is not well articulated is how the impact of Tourism is felt across our society by supporting a number of other sectors within the economy including transport, local food & drink producers, retail, artisan craft, construction and the heritage, cultural and arts sectors. In addition, it supports

entrepreneurship and innovation, enabling local people to develop their own tourism businesses, building on their passions, culture and talents.

### **Ambition for Growth**

Tourism is an exciting and dynamic industry and Tourism NI have set an ambitious vision to double the economic impact of the industry by 2030 to an industry that will generate £2bn in revenues. Continued investment, a supportive policy environment and collaboration across private sector, government – central, local and agencies - education and our politicians is required for us to make this vision a reality.

There has been no encompassing Tourism Strategy in place for over a decade, and with the collapse of the NI Executive in 2016, there has been a lack of political focus on the Industry. This has meant decreasing budgets, out of date legislation for the like of licensing, regulation and certification, and an increasing fragmentation of responsibility for tourism with no overarching strategy to ensure that we are all pulling in the same direction and that the right level and focus of funding and resource is in place to support growth.

### **Challenges Facing the Tourism Industry**

NI faces unique challenges and competition when compared to the rest of the UK particularly with regard to Liquor Licensing legislation.

NI's Licensing legislation is outdated and out of step with the rest of the UK. There is a clear need for licensing legislation to be updated to reflect the needs of a modern market and to support the growth of the Tourism and Hospitality industry.

Before the collapse of the NI Executive in 2016, work was ongoing to take a Bill through the committee stage to move forward the legislation. Although the initial Bill did not include all of the measures that the industry believed was necessary to bring our legislation up to date, further discussions have been undertaken on the required amendments which has been recognised by our political parties who support the need to expand on the initial proposals.

Although the Bill fell, it is clear what the intent of the NI Executive was, and this should inform the Department of Communities which regard to the changes required to modernise the licensing legislation.

Reflecting the views of our membership, NITA believe that the 'Special Event' legislation, which is currently being reviewed as a result of The Open being held in Portrush this year, provides an opportunity to introduce a broader licensing Bill that addresses all of the outstanding issues on liquor licensing that are negatively impacting our tourism offer and not just address the single item of Special Events.

NITA urges the Department to take forward an updated and inclusive Liquor Licensing Bill, which encompasses provision for 'Special Events'. We believe this recognises the intent of the NI Executive, before it collapsed in 2016.

NITA would be happy to provide any further information the Department may require.

For further information, please contact

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