

Statement 10 – Malcolm Baldwin, Circus Area Residents Association (CARA)

Future-proofing our tourist economy sector (Part 2)

Good evening,

When I last spoke to full Council in July 2024, I made the statement, albeit in the context of our Circus area's need for a meaningful Liveable Neighbourhood:

".....my catchment area may not yet be suffering from over-tourism although we are likely, in some respects, to be close to that point."

In September 2024, at the B&NES Policy Development Committee, I made a not so 'bold' assumption that:

"Both residents and tourist/visitors will support a better looking and better managed street-scape for our city and its surrounding areas."

"Over-tourism".....it's a lazy and can be an emotive term. (I use it.....but I guess I am a lazy person on too many occasions). What we really need throughout our city, but particularly in key heritage/high density visitor areas, are effective mechanisms for better management, and where necessary, better enforcement of our tourist sector and the issues it creates. (There is, of course, a financial cost to all of our aspirations for our city and this is no exception).

This evening Council you have the opportunity, in Cllr. O'Doherty's proposal, to support the concept for a visitor charge/levy proposal. This can provide a mechanism for vitally required additional resources to both assist in offsetting the issues created by the sheer magnitude of our tourist/visitor economy, whilst at the same time providing additional resources for significantly improving the quality of our public realm.

A tourist/visitor levy on commercial guest accommodation (including Airbnbs*) in our city is, I suspect, implicit within the proposal before you later this evening. Looking forward, such an additional revenue-stream would be wasted, in its level of opportunity to transform our important tourist sector, if it were ever merely used to offset budgetary gaps within the wider range of B&NES departmental spending.

A revenue-stream/tourist levy created from the local visitor-accommodation structure, if secured, should be re-invested into improving the quality of our public realm and its street-scape. This together with investment in more effective enforcement of all aspect of our tourism sector activities, which could and SHOULD be a quality exemplar for all other tourist cities in the United Kingdom.

We should not be tempted to allow any such additional tourist-sector financial resource streams, if they occur, to be diluted in their impact by being used to 'paper-over' budgetary gaps in other sectors or by reducing the assumed on-going base budget (plus annual inflation?) for the heritage - tourist sector, currently reflected within the BANES overall budget envelope.

Within the proposal later this evening we have the opportunity to create a virtuous circle of: additional financial resource - improved management of an increasingly pressurised but vital tourist sector - significant improvements to our public realm - all resulting in a more robust, a better managed and more genuinely satisfied visitor profile.

* Remember:

"The best thing about Airbnb is that it has made it much, much easier for people to rent out their properties as holiday homes and for would-be-guests to find them.

This is closely linked to the worst thing about Airbnb, which is that it has made it much, much easier for people to rent out their properties as holiday homes and for would-be-guests to find them!"

Malcolm Baldwin
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