

Speech: Michael Ellis speech at the Walpole British Luxury Summit

Thank you Michael and Helen for the lovely welcome and for inviting me to speak at your inaugural British Luxury Summit.

It is a great honour to be in such august company, with so many heritage brands, august establishments, emporiums and boutiques which help make the British tourism offer such an impressive one.

It is organisations like yours that attract our highest spending visitors. And higher spending visitors mean – quite simply – more money coming into the UK and its institutions. That spend creates jobs, contributes to UK taxes, and helps to drive further inbound investment.

But it is also a mark of quality for which the UK is recognised around the world. It thus contributes to our soft power and how we are thought of by others.

I want the luxury market to thrive long into the future here in the UK and the report you referred to just now shows that this part of the sector is growing at a tremendous rate.

Today's summit is all about the future, so with that in mind, I want to talk to you about three key words: confidence, challenge and ambition.

Uncertainty has seemed like the word of the day for some time now, and I recognise that businesses like yours want certainty as a matter of priority.

The biggest uncertainty – of course – has been our forthcoming Exit from the European Union. But I know our officials, across Government, have been working hard to prepare businesses and citizens for the potential impacts our exit could have on the industry.

We have now published a series of technical notices about what no deal would mean for travellers, for passengers and for workers. Just last week the Home Secretary confirmed that arrangements for tourists and business visitors will not look any different.

Although the underlying legal framework will change, EU citizens coming for short visits will be able to enter the UK as they can now, and stay for up to three months on each entry. Until 31 December 2020, EU citizens will be able to enter the UK by showing either a valid national identity card or a passport.

But if anyone here feels uncertain on particular elements, please do contact my team – through my office – and they can provide as much guidance as possible.

Make no mistake, the UK's Exit from the EU has obvious challenges which

require us to be at the very top of our game. I know that our tourism and hospitality sector will be able to demonstrate to visitors that the UK remains an open and welcoming place.

Our relationship with the European Union may be changing, but our fantastic array of tourism products will not.

From the whisky distilleries of Scotland to the Giants Causeway of Ireland, Caldicot Castle in Wales to the London Eye, we have a little bit of something for everyone. We always have and we always will.

With the help of organisations like VisitBritain, a stalwart pillar of certainty for tourism in these uncertain times, I am confident that we can work together to resolve any concerns and grasp any opportunities.

Which brings me to the challenge. Uncertainty brings opportunity, a chance for everyone to step up and take their work to the next level. In the case of tourism, our challenge is to turn our incredible soft power into hard cash for businesses, jobs for citizens and opportunities for inward investment and growth.

So how can we do this? We need to ensure that our ambassadors have an outstanding stay whilst they are here, so that they promote our product to their friends and family – as well as their social media followers of course – and they therefore encourage more people to come and enjoy a holiday here in the UK.

And who are these ambassadors? They are our visitors, your clients. In essence, our lifeblood. Their word of mouth can persuade so many more people that a holiday in the UK is better than anywhere else. And that investment in the UK makes more sense than anywhere else.

In the luxury sector, we can provide them with the ultimate experience to talk about; the very best of customer service, accommodation, shopping and travel.

One of my challenges to you is to keep pushing the boundaries of our luxury offer and keep exploring what we can do to give our customers an even more comfortable and luxurious time in our great nation, with amazing stories to share with their friends and family.

Not only does it increase our draw as a nation, but it improves our prospects of investment, with figures showing that people who had a good time in the UK were 17% more likely to invest in British businesses. I think that is a pretty good statistic, but I would like to make it better.

Currently, just under 1 in 5 people who visit the UK want to invest in us in the future. Well what if we could make that 1 in 4?

Which leads me to my final word: ambition! Achieving the highest possible standards has long been a British ideal. And achieving these standards is increasingly important in an ever more competitive environment.

So many of our global competitors are seeing the growth potential of tourism, and that means more choice for visitors. We need to make sure Great Britain is heard among that noise.

You will have all, I hope, heard about the ideas being worked on for the proposed Tourism Sector Deal.

For those of you that have not, what we would like to see is a deal, between us in Government and you in industry. You have come together and told us what you need from Government to boost your productivity and keep the UK competitive. On business visitors. On local tourism offers. On connectivity.

But we – in turn – want to see equal ambition from the industry. Ambition to invest in training our workforces. As I saw at Gieves and Hawkes with their highly-skilled apprenticeship training. -Ambition to share the data you have, so that we can better target our overseas promotion. Ambition to make the UK the most accessible destination in the World.

This is where I want to see Tourism's ambition and drive shine through. Where you can all work together and, with Government, create something durable, that makes us more prosperous and a centerpiece in the UK's economy.

I encourage any of you who have not yet done so, to work with Steve Ridgway of VisitBritain – on this Sector Deal particularly – but also in preparing our sector for the future, expanding our markets and appeal and driving growth across the nation.

I challenge you all to be even more enterprising, committed and pioneering.

Working together, I believe we have an offer here in the UK that can continue to go from strength to strength. Continue to create those jobs. Continue to attract that tax growth. Continue to encourage investment.

I thank you all for your attention and I look forward to working with you in the future.