

# North Devon Conservatives

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## Shadow Tourism Minister Meets Tourism Leaders from Northern Devon

At the invitation of Prospective Member of Parliament for the Conservatives for North Devon, Mr Philip Milton, Mr Tobias Ellwood MP, Shadow Tourism Minister, attended a very well supported meeting at the Park Hotel on Tuesday night.

Organised by "North Devon Plus", after short presentations from Commercial Director Robin Makeig-Jones, Marketing Manager Sarah Steptoe and Business Adviser Janet Hernaman, Tobias addressed the meeting on the latest Conservative views for tourism strategy.

Not only was much commonsense shared with the meeting but some valuable points and questions were posed by the audience and these will be taken up the line. Albeit very late, credit was given for Lord Mandelson's latest review of tourism promotion spending but the message from the Conservative Party was that we need to do far more to promote our fifth biggest industry (bigger than fishing and farming) and to replace Great Britain higher up the list from where we have slipped to stand as the sixth most popular destination in the world.

Tobias reminded us that in 1997 we had 6.7% of global tourism and that has now dropped to 3.9%.

Philip, who is also a licensee, local hotelier and financial adviser, has promised to pass further concerns through to Tobias who will be tabling numerous parliamentary questions as a result of his visit.

He shared that he looks forward to becoming a dedicated tourism minister in a Conservative Government, a role at present which is simply departmental under the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport.

Very salient points were made in relation to the need for an effective and efficient transport infrastructure in North Devon and clarity in relation to the myriad tourism bodies which seem to proliferate across the Country and with a mixture of accreditation processes which seem unwieldy, expensive and impractical.

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Tobias pledged that a future Conservative Government would do something about this and ensure that further effective financial concentration would be made to boost the tourism industry across the Country and particularly in promoting the fantastic benefits of holidays here – and not just London when it comes to promoting ourselves overseas. Tobias pledged to come back regularly for further meetings with tourism leaders and recognising the importance of North Devon and the very successful model of “North Devon Plus” and cooperation with the local authorities, which recognised long ago the significant importance of this joint working and the imperative need to maintain effective funding, both for the area’s overall benefit but also from self-interest of those local authorities which benefit from a more buoyant tourism industry and greater visitors providing funds to their coffers as well!

Tobias was not scathing of the present Government’s approach to tourism but did note that over the last thirty or forty years, as an industry, respective governments have failed to appreciate Tourism’s significance or dedicate adequate resources or attention to it and its importance. He noted that the last Tourism Act was in 1969 and in attending a recent celebration at which previous leaving Tourism Ministers attended, it reminded him how many changes there have been in the last eleven years and that really, the only recent effective Minister was Mr Kim Howells MP. He noted that DEFRA has a £30 million budget for farm diversification (including holidays), that “Visit Britain’s” overall budget is only £11 million and that Yorkshire tourism is spending £30 million advertising itself in America alone! He noted that the latest fire regulations were never run past the Tourism Minister and that there is no joined-up thinking in relation to the significance of tourism.

**ENDS**