



Cumbria Tourism



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Business Tourism Tracker 2026

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Chartered Accountants, Tax and Business Advisers

Ready to support you

It is hard to ignore the current feelings in the UK about the future of its economy and Cumbria's tourism industry is very aware of a challenging future ahead.

The latest Business Tourism Tracker report for 2026 highlights that rising costs, particularly wages and operating expenses, alongside ongoing staffing challenges, booking uncertainty and a fragile economic outlook, remain the sector's biggest concerns.

While businesses are beginning to adjust to the changes introduced in the 2025 Autumn Budget, the longer-term implications continue to shape decision-making and confidence across the industry.

As a proud, long-term sponsor of this important report, we hope you find its insights valuable in helping you plan for and navigate the challenges and opportunities ahead.

We know that the information gathered within this study plays an important role in shaping Cumbria Tourism's initiatives, so we would like to thank everyone who contributed their time and insight.

As always, we remain committed to supporting Cumbria's travel, tourism and leisure industries, helping businesses adapt, build resilience and move forward with confidence in an evolving landscape.



Graham Lamont
Chief Executive, Lamont Pridmore



Gill Haigh
Managing Director, Cumbria Tourism

Economic performance

The UK's economic outlook isn't looking the brightest at the moment, as the nation once again faces global pressures that are driving up the cost of living. As a result of this, **74%** of the businesses surveyed in the latest Cumbria Tourism Tracker are concerned about the poor economic climate/impact on consumer spend – up from **69%** in the last survey conducted six months ago.

Nevertheless, **29%** of business said that their performance had been better than a year ago, showing that not every business is being hit the same by inflation. Despite this small window of positivity, the broader picture is more concerning, with more than half (**55%**) of businesses describing their performance as either a little or a lot worse. This is **13%** higher than the figure for March 2025.

If we look at the key concerns for businesses, in Cumbria, it is not surprising that the economy and their financial health rank highly:

- **77%** are still concerned about increased costs in general
- **67%** are concerned about high energy costs – up from 56% six months ago
- **59%** are worried about inflation, with a quarter concerned about the impact on interest rates
- **50%** are concerned about business rates, up from 42% a year ago
- **35%** are concerned about further changes to the minimum wage and the Employment Rights Act

It is hard to predict exactly how the cost of living will rise in future, with much of the potential outlook dependent on events happening outside of the UK's control.

However, it is clear that many businesses understand that costs will need to be passed on, with **56%** worried about having to do this to their customers.

With only one fiscal event planned each year, all eyes will be on the Chancellor in the Autumn, with many hoping for a Budget that offers extra support to beleaguered sectors such as tourism and hospitality.

Business performance

We have already touched on the general feelings about business performance shared by businesses, but let's take a deeper look at the concerns of companies across Cumbria:

- **29%** said business performance had been better than a year ago
- **55%** described business performance as either a little or a lot worse

Looking ahead, the outlook for the next six months is even more pessimistic with **43%** of businesses surveyed saying that they have poor expectations for their performance.

In fact, only **25%** think that things will get better, while **12%** expect things to get worse.

This is a long running trend within the Tracker, with the sentiment similar to the March 2025 results, suggesting that conditions with the sector locally aren't improving.

These feelings can be tracked back to the revenue figures for many of these companies, with **26%** recording that their revenue had increased over the last six months compared to the same time last year. This is down from **44%** six months ago and **51%** said they had experienced decreased revenue.

If we look back 12 months ago, a similar **47%** reported revenue was down in the last six months as well, which may suggest a degree of seasonality, but nevertheless it points to a wider economic weakness in the local tourism industry.

Costs and taxation

Rising costs continue to be an issue for the industry in recent years, which is affecting the spending of businesses and consumers.

The latest survey reveals that **17.4%** of businesses listed costs as their main concern.

When it came to the individual expenses **9.4%** of businesses said the costs associated with the National Minimum Wage rise in April and the changes under Employment Rights Act worried them most.

With predictions of higher fuel costs driven by global conflict, **7.4%** of firms said that energy prices were their biggest concern. **5.4%** of businesses also worry the most about changes to business rates.

However, the far greater issue were concerns about the money in consumers' pockets, with **26.2%** reporting this as the biggest issue – the highest ranked concern above all others.

Predictions from economists suggest that things have the potential to get a lot worse before they get better, with food and beverage costs likely to see substantially higher rates of inflation than other supplies.



Bookings and visitors

Without people visiting our great region, our tourism industry cannot thrive. Businesses were asked about forward bookings across key periods in 2026, from Easter through to the summer holidays, to see how things in the industry were changing.

The findings show that around half of all tourism businesses are reporting reduced bookings across each of these periods.

For Easter and May, **49%** of businesses reported that bookings are down, rising to **54%** for April June, remaining at **54%** for the summer holidays.

While this may at first appear concerning, the position is notably more positive than this time last year, as twelve months ago, **63%** of businesses reported bookings down for Easter, **65%** down for April and **37%** down for May.

Looking further ahead, however, things don't look as promising, particularly for June and the summer holidays, according to the results of the survey.

The gap between businesses reporting increases versus decreases remains widest for these periods, highlighting ongoing uncertainty as the year progresses.

Encouragingly, a proportion of businesses are still seeing growth in bookings, with **13%** to **19%** reporting increased bookings depending on the period, showing that demand has not disappeared altogether.

Instead, it is becoming far harder to predict busy or quiet periods throughout the year, which makes forward planning more difficult for the sector.

A key theme underpinning these findings is a significant shift in booking behaviour, with **71%** of businesses reporting that booking lead times have shortened over the past 12 months, with **48%** describing them as "much shorter".

This reinforces the growing trend towards last-minute bookings, first identified in earlier Tracker reports. This just adds to further uncertainty for tourism businesses, particularly when forward bookings appear weak.



Staffing issues

Staffing issues continue to be a huge challenge for Cumbria's tourism businesses, with pressures remaining widespread across the sector.

Rising wage costs remain a key concern, with **89%** of businesses reporting this as problematic and **60%** describing it as a significant issue.

Beyond wage pressures, recruitment remains an issue, with **69%** saying staff recruitment is difficult due to two main challenges:

- **53%** cite a lack of applicants
- **49%** highlight the cost of recruitment

These challenges are compounded by wider issues affecting the local labour market. Accommodation continues to be a major barrier to recruitment and retention, with businesses reporting:

- Around half face a lack of affordable housing
- Around half are struggling with limited private rental properties
- **30%** impacted by a lack of on-site staff accommodation

Transport and accessibility also play a significant role, particularly in rural areas:

- **63%** report issues with public transport
- **58%** cite poor public transport connectivity
- **53%** highlight the cost of travel for employees

Vacancy levels remain unchanged, with around **7%** of roles currently unfilled. As a result, many businesses are feeling the operational impact:

- **52%** report staff shortages are impacting profits
- **51%** report limits on business capacity
- **43%** report staffing issues are increasing costs
- **28%** report a reduction in the quality of the visitor experience

These challenges are beginning to affect business resilience and long-term prospects. A quarter of businesses say staffing issues are impacting their future viability and some report temporary or partial closures as a result.

Overall, while the nature of staffing challenges has evolved, the underlying pressures remain firmly in place, continuing to affect recruitment, retention and the ability of businesses to operate effectively.



Confidence and growth

Despite the ongoing challenges facing the sector, tourism businesses in Cumbria are showing a mixed but cautiously optimistic outlook for future growth and over the next six months:

- **20%** of businesses expect to grow
- **55%** expect to remain the same

Confidence improves when looking further ahead and over the next year:

- **29%** of businesses anticipate growth
- **52%** expect to remain stable
- **20%** expect to shrink

Looking longer term over the next five years, sentiment becomes even more positive, despite some of the findings in other parts of the report:

- **54%** of businesses expect to grow, up significantly from 40% six months ago
- **24%** expect to remain the same
- **22%** anticipate a decline, down from 28%

This suggests that in the short-term, growth is likely to be curtailed, but many businesses still believe in

the longer-term strength and resilience of Cumbria's tourism sector.

Unfortunately, these figures come amid declining confidence in business survival, drops across all timeframes:

- **76%** of businesses are confident about surviving the next six months (down from 83% six months ago)
- 68% are confident through to the end of 2026 (down from 76%)
- Only **51%** are confident about surviving the next five years

Alongside this, uncertainty remains a key theme:

- **13%** are not confident in the short term, rising to 20% over the next year
- **27%** have said they unsure about their long-term survival prospects

Long-term growth ambitions remain strong and have improved compared to previous reports, but short-term pressures and declining confidence highlight the ongoing challenges businesses face during a time of great uncertainty.

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Here to help

At the moment, Cumbria's tourism industry is facing difficult times, as are many other sectors in the region. This is only being fuelled by rising costs and uncertainty.

However, despite these challenges our team at Lamont Pridmore remain steadfast and ready to help businesses take advantage of the opportunities that come their way.

We have spent decades supporting businesses across Cumbria and beyond to grow and thrive – even during the most challenging at times.

Why not find out why working with us may be the best next decision you make?

0800 234 6978 • info@lamontpridmore.co.uk • lamontpridmore.co.uk

Cumbria Tourism
At the heart of our visitor economy

01539 822222 • info@cumbriatourism.org • cumbriatourism.org

Chartered Accountants, Tax and Business Advisers
with offices throughout Cumbria and Lancashire

