I write on behalf of the Cheshire East Local Access Forum which is a statutory body established under section 94 of the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000, to provide advice on access to the countryside. Forum members wish to submit the following comments to the consultation matters raised and questions posed:

The inquiry looks into a number of matters relating to supporting rural growth, in particular how government policies can:

a. Encourage more people, both from the UK and abroad, to visit more of England’s rural places, for longer and at all times of the year;
This has to be a national initiative although many local tourist boards are already doing a great deal in this area, perhaps more government funding to these bodies.

b. Support farmers and rural residents to diversify into tourism and grow their businesses;
A lot is already being done here but there has to be a careful balance between setting up B&Bs, renting out holiday cottages etc. and reducing the amount of affordable housing for the local population.

c. Ensure visitors' experiences are balanced with the need to preserve the environment and the character of local communities.
By keeping tight control on private companies.

The Committee is seeking written submissions on the following key questions:

a. Marketing: How well do agencies promote rural destinations across England? What more should the Government do to support this work?
Areas such as the Lake District already do a lot in this respect but more government funding would be welcome.

b. Access: What, if any, changes are needed to give people better access to the coast and countryside?
The Coastal Path project seems to be proceeding very slowly, more help could be given to local authorities in order to expedite this.

c. Funding and fiscal policies: How can public funding be best targeted to get new rural tourist businesses off the ground and keep them going? Are changes needed to tax levels and business rates?
Yes.
d. Planning and regulation: What, if any, changes are needed to planning and other regulations covering rural areas of special character, such as National Parks, to encourage sustainable tourism?

*A careful balance needs to be struck here and how does one define “sustainable tourism”?*

e. Infrastructure and skills: What measures are needed to ensure transport, housing and other infrastructure meets visitor needs? How can the sector ensure there are enough people with the right skills to support customers and businesses?

*More support for technical education is required if these skills are to be developed. Local technical colleges have all but been wiped out in the push for university courses which are not the right track for many of the skills required here.*

f. Local environment and character: How can national and local policies get the right balance between growing tourism and enhancing the local environment and character?

*These are not necessarily opposite issues.*

g. Defra role: What more should the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs do to ensure government departments (including Departments for Communities and Local Government, Business, Innovation and Skills, Culture Media and Sport and HM Treasury) support rural tourism?

*September 2016*