1. Background

As a Local authority, Cheshire East has a key role in developing the visitor economy’s local growth potential through playing a strong leadership role and catalyst for growth and creating the conditions for it to thrive. Cheshire East can also ensure there is a rich cultural offer to attract visitors, pulling in visitors through the area’s events, arts and heritage and helping to support both vibrant towns and the rural setting. The Council also has an important role, along with the Destination Management Organisation, in helping coordinate the activities an increased choice of facilities such as places of stakeholders across the destination. Our ‘quality of place’ has a direct bearing on our consideration of the visitor economy, particularly in the contribution of the rural environment, culture/heritage, visitor attractions & events. The Council has published a visitor economy strategy 2016-20.

2. Marketing: How well do agencies promote rural destinations across England? What more should the Government do to support this work?

There are significant regional variations. While recent policy changes at a national level have led to a focus on international markets into England, growth in the domestic market remains important to sustain many rural areas. Government need to have a supportive strategy for domestic tourism growth using a combination of national bodies such as VisitEngland, regional destination management organisations and Local Authorities in partnership.

3. Access: What, if any, changes are needed to give people better access to the coast and countryside?

Cheshire East has a large right of way network totaling 1928 km and a Rights of Way Improvement Programme. There are opportunities to improve bridle path access in some areas and an opportunity to improve the value and usage of longer distance paths such as the Gritstone trail. Further fiscal support targeted on strategic improvements to the network and facilitation of collateral improvements such as public transport links, on-route accommodation and marketing would provide economic benefit to the area.

4. 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?

Most public funding for rural comes from European programmes. For example the Defra managed EAFRD grant programme is now not being progressed in Cheshire post BREXIT so we need to ensure that these funding schemes are replaced.
The majority of the public funding targeted at rural businesses has a mandate to support small scale tourism developments with multiple administrative layers. This leaves a gap for strategic initiatives and more significant projects that reflect local opportunities/need as well as the marketing opportunities to maintain growth. Local authorities, often working in partnership, would be a more effective and direct route for these programmes.

National initiatives or fiscal support for local/regional initiatives could help solve the tourism funding challenge to support growth through marketing and development programmes to benefit rural areas and tourism businesses

5.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?

Connectivity is a significant issue, both in terms of transport and in broadband/mobile reception. Addressing ‘not-spots’ with better 4G mobile signal coverage will help keep visitors connected, improving both marketing opportunities and experience of a place. Integrated transport needs to take account of the needs of visitors, often benefiting local communities and business at the same time. East-west connectivity and links to metropolitan areas are an issue in Cheshire East. Better connections and ease of use will assist to avoid dispersal of tourism markets from the cities. A focus on skills (including transferable skills) and apprenticeships can help address specific shortfalls in the visitor economy and boost employment in the wider economy.

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

Our ‘quality of place’ has a direct bearing on our consideration of the visitor economy, particularly in the contribution of the rural environment, culture/heritage, visitor attractions & events. Rural character has a strong bearing on quality of place and all aspects of support for sustaining this character have a bearing on he success a distinctive rural offer and visitor economy.

7.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?

Cheshire East Council has a strategy for visitor economy to 2020 to grow value from current £842m to over £1bn. This strategy has a distinctive rural offer at its core and a strategic thematic approach that recognises that tourism contributes strongly to Quality of place as businesses and residents are attracted to quality environments with a good leisure offer.
This is also recognised in the Council’s Rural strategy ‘where rural matters’. Tourism supports the quality of place that allows business investment and growth. These benefits need to be reflected in DEFRA and other government priorities as well as LEP strategic plans.


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