Written evidence submitted by the East Lindsey District Council
(RUT0214)

East Lindsey is geographically one of the largest shire District Councils in the country covering some 700 square miles. The district covers virtually the entire Lincolnshire coastline, including the seaside resorts of Skegness, Mablethorpe and Sutton on Sea. In the heart of the District lies the Lincolnshire Wolds, designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The main industries are agriculture and tourism. The tourism offer is diverse with a mix of traditional coastal resorts, coastal nature reserves and inland the beauty of the Lincolnshire Wolds and surrounding historic market towns and villages where visitors come for a mixture of outdoor pursuits and culture and heritage.

Economic impact research (STEAM) for 2015 estimates that the East Lindsey visitor economy is worth £584 million and has increased by 5.1% on 2014 estimates (£555 million). The district welcomed over 4.5 million visitors in 2015 and is a mixture of staying and day visitors. It is estimated that approximately 20% of this economic spend is attributed to the rural visitor economy.

Response to Inquiry Questions

Marketing

There has been limited support from agencies, such as Visit England, to promote rural tourism although it is acknowledged that there have been thematic marketing campaigns in the past, which East Lindsey District Council has been a partner. Increased marketing support to promote rural destinations would be most welcomed as well as marketing funding support for rural tourism businesses, which at present is very limited. In particular funding to support digital marketing for rural destinations and businesses is required to ensure that rural destinations can remain competitive in the domestic and international markets.

Access

Public bus transport access to the Lincolnshire Wolds is limited. It is almost impossible to access and explore the Lincolnshire Wolds by public bus transport at the weekends and bank holidays. Support for bus service providers to encourage weekend transport needs to be considered.

Funding and Fiscal Policies

The East Lindsey District is covered by two LEADER areas (Coastal Action Zone Local Action Group and the Lindsey Local Action Group) providing funding opportunities for businesses through the Rural Development Programme for England from 2015 to 2020. Whilst there is
uncertainty if the programme will continue to 2020 given the referendum vote to leave the EU, currently the uptake of funding has been slow as small rural businesses find the application process. Most successful applications are made by well established businesses. The take up of funding from business start-ups is very low. To encourage rural tourism product development a more simplified funding programme is required.

According to the Tourism Alliance while other major European countries apply a reduced rate of VAT to tourism products (averaging 10.5%) the UK still applies the standard rate of 20% and puts the UK at severe competitive disadvantage. As such British tourism businesses are continuing to lose further ground to European rivals in attracting domestic and international visitors. Reducing VAT on tourism products (accommodation and attractions) would help lower prices and allow businesses to increase investment.

Planning and Regulation

In its draft Core Planning Strategy the Council proposes to facilitate quality tourism and leisure facilities by:

- Giving a high priority to development that extends and diversifies the tourism and leisure economy and visitor facilities and provides additional employment opportunities;
- Supporting additional and improved visitor attractions and accommodation; or
- By providing opportunities for the enjoyment of the District’s wider countryside.

Infrastructure and Skills

Improved road infrastructure to improve travelling times on Lincolnshire’s main routes would make the area more competitive in attracting visitors. This has been demonstrated by the duelling of the A46, which has seen a dramatic increase of visitors coming from the West Midlands as the journey time has been reduced substantially.

Continued funding to support skills programmes for people wanting to set up business or begin a career in tourism need to continue with flexible access to learning. Flexible learning needs to include the opportunity to undertake training at the times of the year best for industry. The make-up of rural tourism businesses in the area are small and often family run. This makes access to learning difficult due to nature of running these businesses.

Local Environment and Character

In the draft Core Planning Strategy there is a policy commitment towards protecting the District’s landscapes which will be enhanced, used and managed to provide an attractive and healthy working and living environment. This commitment will allow for greater public access to the countryside and naturalistic coast and which supports visitors to the District,
helps provide additional employment opportunities, and adds to the health and quality of rural communities. Development will be guided by the District’s Landscape Character Assessment and landscapes defined as highly sensitive will be afforded the greatest protection.

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