Written evidence submitted by the Allerdale Borough Council (RUT0276)

Our Rural Context -

Allerdale Borough Council is a unique area in that it has three major designations covering its rural area. It has part of the Lake District National Park, all of Solway Coast Area of Outstanding natural Beauty and part of Hadrian’s Wall World Heritage Site. Without the designated landscapes the Council area is rural in character and dotted with notable market towns such as Cockermouth and Wigton.

Two of the designated areas share a top 5 position in the ‘Visit England’ most popular destinations; they are ‘Cumbria, The Lake District’ and ‘Hadrian’s Wall Country’. The former has a DMO namely Cumbria Tourism but the latter shares its marketing success across three councils an AONB and a National Park which are contiguous along the linear designated site.

Allerdale has a particularly long coastline with more than one third of it being ‘traditional seaside’ consisting of beaches, sand dunes and Victorian towns and villages.

Marketing –

The Borough of Allerdale lacks a DMO that is particularly focussed on Rural Tourism outside of the Lake District National Park.

Create destination and offer themes through both attack and slipstream branding

· Need for support to work with rural micro businesses (less than 10 employees) to coordinate marketing for rural areas – this might be through funding rural tourism coordinators working with or in DMOs or LAs.

· Support for establishing rural tourism partnerships, needs coordinator/funding

· Need to gather/coordinate data that is cut to rural area boundaries to have clear picture (uncluttered by urban) of tourism in rural areas to support and plan for growth

· Develop itineraries that link businesses – showcase what is available in rural areas, encourage tour operators to take up

Access -

· Need for easy to access, coordinated information that is marketed well – how to get to places, physical signposting,

· Investment in green infrastructure for visitors – cycle routes, walking routes that will attract visitors to explore rural areas and open up opportunities for businesses along those routes e.g. cycle hire, baggage transfer, accommodation etc.
· Investment for other tourism facilities, transport, toilets, park and ride – necessary infrastructure for positive experience and management of rural infrastructure.

Introduction to markets of the experience of rural tourism by developing/supporting tourism initiatives to support rural growth that conserves and enhances landscape both in a coastal and inland context.

· Development of walking and cycling opportunities – development, marketing and maintaining clusters of interest (5 circular walks or cycle routes) thus creating ‘visitor attractions’ with a need to ‘stay’ rather than ‘pass through’

   Wildlife tours and experiences based on the plethora of attractors from ospreys to dolphins providing a year round (non-seasonal) visitor pull.

· Tourism seminar/workshops – bringing businesses together to network/share knowledge and to embrace and share the rural experience

   Design and development of identity signs and infrastructure to underpin the essence of the rural areas. Rural heritage, wildlife and cultural themes through storytelling and ‘bringing the countryside to life’ experiences.

   Move away from high cost ‘Visitor Attractions’ and create outdoor multi-centred attractions at low cost and maintenance. Tourism job creation through growth would be via the development of Experience Operators rather than attraction owners.

Funding and fiscal policies -

· As above – funding for marketing/Rural Infrastructure and business support.

   Intervention rates need to be high at around 70-90% as there is little profit to re-invest by small rural businesses outside of farming.

Infrastructure and skills -

· Need to identify skills needed - working with businesses

· Need to correct poor image of working in tourism sector – low pay/unskilled/lack of career progression

· Need for national promotion to young people (16+) of opportunities in high quality rural tourism

· Need for funding for colleges/Universities and businesses to develop/offer courses/work experience/apprenticeships to meet need of businesses and students

· Funding for specialist advisors working across regions to undertake the above work
Need for broadband across all rural areas to enable businesses to function

Local character & environment – getting the right balance - showcasing

- Use experience and track record of tourism initiatives in rural areas

- Give weight to local plans/strategies - AONB Management Plans as statutory Plans set out how landscape to be conserved and enhanced whilst recognise importance of rural growth and tourism's contribution to this. AONBs have supported development of Neighbourhood Plans to ensure landscape character taken into account. Other strategies/plans that assist management include Green Infrastructure strategies – identify multiple benefits for people. Places and wildlife, and English Nature Partnership maps – identifying ecosystem services opportunities – these should be used in guiding future decision making including tourism opportunities.

Defra role -

- Sharing knowledge and pulling together and targeting various dept. funding streams to meet needs identified above.

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