Written evidence submitted by Alison Lawson (RUT0101)

I am responding to this because I am concerned about the effect of fracking on the area in which I live.

I live in Ryedale, North Yorkshire, which is a quiet, peaceful and beautiful area of North Yorkshire. I live in Pickering, a busy Market town that has the North York Moors railway at its heart, and is situated near to Malton, Scarborough, York and Whitby, all places that draw visitors from far and near and which attract tourism all year round. People come here to walk on the Moors, to explore the historical heritage of the area (rich in ecclesiastical history), to travel on the steam railway, to go birdwatching, to visit the numerous cultural events and the Food Festivals, to enjoy music at the well-established Ryedale Festival, and many other attractions, for example the Traction Engine Rally, the 60’s Festival, the 1940’s weekend, Flamingo Land and so on. The revenue generated by these events enables small businesses to thrive, and for quality to match production. Pickering could not thrive without the income generated by visitors to the steam railway for example.

For all these reasons, and more, I think that the industrialised process of fracking will be a disruption and will negatively influence the decision of visitors to come here. If I was a potential holidaymaker, I would not choose to visit a place that had sites for fracking, for these reasons and others I will touch on later. How can it be compatible with EFRA’s aim of developing sustainable rural tourism?

Here are some reasons to support my statement above:

The process of fracking will require an increase in heavy goods traffic, it will be noisy and will create noise, light and air pollution. It is inevitable that businesses within fracking areas will be negatively affected. Over time, the small country roads will become congested with HGV trucks constantly arriving and leaving.

Studies have shown that health issues near fracking sites include asthma attacks and premature births (see research from John Hopkins University). The risks of danger from water pollution, even if they are small, have huge implications. Pollution from increased traffic will exacerbate breathing/chest problems and it is obvious that tourists will not be drawn to places that pose health risks. Most visitors are seeking the fresher air of the countryside, especially if they are city dwellers.

Jobs within the tourist industry far outnumber the potential number of jobs at a fracking site. Employment at a fracking site would be mainly for skilled, specialised staff rather than local people and if fracking goes ahead, those employed in tourism would be negatively affected.
Food production could be affected. Ryedale has many outlets for fresh, seasonal produce such as farm shops, local markets and Food Festivals. Fracking poses a question mark over potential pollution of water supplies and even the perception that the quality of food production might be damaged, could lead to a huge loss of income to this area.

The National Parks and Areas of Special Scientific Interest may well become ringed by fracking well sites, with drilling going on underneath these areas, and the resulting noise, pollution and increased traffic would definitely affect tourism. Wildlife will also be affected, birds and animals including protected nocturnal creatures such as owls and bats, and this will deter people who come here specifically to watch wildlife.

The risk of water contamination due to fracking, no matter how small the risk, is simply not worth taking. It is of paramount importance if we are to continue to be an attractive place to visit. If contamination happened, it would affect the farming communities, food production, businesses, residential areas and all of us. Tourism would drop dramatically!

Properties and businesses in the vicinity of a fracking site would lose value. The Mortgage Introducer magazine reported a drop of 4% in value of properties near a fracking well site near Preese Hall in Manchester.

DEFRA’s draft ‘Shale Gas Rural Economy Impacts’ paper states that fracking ‘may reduce the number of visitors and tourists to the local area, with an associated reduction in spend in the local tourist economy’. This report has been discontinued, therefore there is not, to date, a comprehensive report on the effect of fracking on the rural economy.

To conclude:

I am fortunate to live in a peaceful, unspoilt area of Britain that attracts many visitors over the year. The town where I live, Pickering, would decline without the annual boost from holidaymakers. If shale gas were to be a significant industry here, it would be a death blow to tourism. I feel DEFRA should be working to promote sustainable, low-impact tourism and to help preserve the English countryside.

I recommend that EFRA select Committee should commission a new independent report of the impact of the shale gas industry on the rural economy, including local tourism. Until this is produced, it should demand an immediate moratorium on fracking and other forms of unconventional gas production.

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