Written evidence submitted by Carolyn Boots (RUT0112)

Executive Summary

- Important that measures to boost the local economy do not destroy the very reason that people visit the countryside.

- Peace and tranquility are major attractions of the countryside.

- Greatest threat to the countryside and rural tourism in Northern England is fracking.

- Climate change targets unlikely to be achieved if fracking goes ahead.

- Tourism-related employment will be severely damaged by fracking. Few alternative opportunities, forcing local people to leave or commute long distances to find work.

- Government should respect views of local people.

- Broadband improvements needed to support rural businesses.

- Public transport improvements needed to increase access to the countryside without damaging the environment.

Personal statement

I live in Slingsby, a rural village in North Yorkshire about 10 miles south of the North York Moors National Park and on the fringe of the Howardian Hills AONB. In our village I believe we have achieved a happy balance between the demands of farming, local businesses and tourism. We continue rural traditions like the annual Mayday maypole dancing and the harvest festival, while supporting village businesses in the form of a village shop, pub, local tradespeople and tourism activities with two caravan sites in the village. We also enjoy a regular bus service to the nearest (6 miles) market town, a mobile post office four days a week and a mobile library once a fortnight.

Until my retirement, I worked for a local district council and came to appreciate the challenging issues facing rural communities. I have been active in the village as Parish Clerk and as a contributor to our Village Design Statement now adopted by the District Council as a Supplementary Planning Document to encourage good design in building in the village. I have also helped prepare a Village Trail to encourage visitors to learn more about our
village. We also have a website giving lots of information about the village and events going on and a newsletter six times a year.

I am responding to this consultation because I believe it raises important issues facing rural communities, particularly a feeling that the voice of local people is not being heard against the powerful forces of big business and Government schemes devised in Whitehall with little knowledge of rural life. Chief amongst these is the threat to tourism and the local economy in rural Northern England posed by fracking.

My comments below are drawn from my experience of living and working in North Yorkshire, but apply also to other rural areas.

Response to consultation

1. I live in a beautiful part of North Yorkshire which is a popular tourist destination. People come to enjoy the peaceful countryside, visit our historic abbeys and stately homes and take part in outdoor activities like walking and cycling. Along with agriculture, rural tourism is a mainstay of the local economy. It is important therefore that attempts to boost tourism do not result in destroying the very reason that people come to visit. Peaceful enjoyment of the countryside is damaged by inappropriate developments eg roads through beauty spots, pylons through protected areas (eg the Lake District National Park), and inappropriate industrial developments, notably fracking.

2. It is hard to overestimate the damaging effect of fracking on the rural economy in Northern England. In North Yorkshire the main drivers of the local economy are agriculture and tourism. Fracking is a threat to both. DEFRA's own paper, "Shale Gas Rural Economy Impacts" published in 2015 sums up the threats perfectly:

"Shale Gas may transform a previously pristine and quiet natural region, bringing increased industrialisation. As a result, rural economy businesses that rely on clean air, land, water and/or a tranquil environment may suffer losses from this change, such as agriculture, tourism, organic farming, hunting, fishing and outdoor recreation."

The public recognises these dangers and is strongly opposed to fracking, but the Government doesn’t listen or care and has licensed large areas of countryside for fracking. Nothing could be worse for tourism: who would want to visit an industrialised area for pleasure? The danger to walkers, cyclists and horse riders from HGVs pounding along narrow country lanes is a real deterrent to peaceful
enjoyment of the countryside. Fracking is totally unsuitable for the English countryside - we do not have the space that the US, for example, has.

3. Rural employment is an important consideration with tourism providing thousands of local jobs. The small increase in local employment created by fracking would be outweighed by the loss of tourism-related jobs in pubs, hotels, b+bs etc. Access to fast broadband is crucial in encouraging and enabling rural businesses to compete fairly. The Government should require the broadband providers to guarantee 100% coverage.

4. Public sector cuts have hurt non-statutory public services badly - TICs have closed, funding for bus subsidies (eg the Moorsbus in the North York Moors National Park) has been reduced or abolished, grants to local events and festivals have been cut or abolished altogether. These have a negative effect on tourism. One option might be for the Government to give rural local authorities special funding, ringfenced for tourism initiatives. Increasing access to the countryside for those less mobile (eg people without a car) could be a priority.

Recommendations

1. Fracking should not be permitted anywhere in the UK. It damages the environment, destroys tourism and local economies, and prevents the achievement of climate change targets.

2. The views of local people should be respected. The Government should not force schemes on local communities.

3. Local businesses (and therefore employment) rely on preserving and promoting the attractions of their area, and may need Government help to do so eg broadband, marketing.

4. Government departments should be required to take account of the impact of proposed decisions on the rural economy eg pylons or new roads through beauty spots, fracking.

5. Greater weight should be given to environmental issues when considering decision options - local and national.
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