At a time when the Government have launched a £40 million fund designed to ensure the UK remains a ‘World Beating Destination’ for holidaymakers and a new ‘Tourism Action Plan’ is published to encourage visitors to travel beyond London and support the UK’s ‘vitally important tourism industry’ it is good to hear the Prime Minister say “We will make sure Britain is even more attractive, accessible and welcoming to visitors.”

I sincerely hope this is true. If Mrs May and her ministers are serious about promoting tourism in this country, their number one priority must be to make sure fracking is never allowed here.

I have lived in the countryside all my life (69 years). During that time, rural tourism has changed out of all recognition. When I was young a day out in the country consisted of a day out with my family, taking our own sandwiches and a flask of tea and having a picnic in a lay-by by the side of the road.

The countryside itself and farming in particular has seen many changes some of which are detrimental to the very assets that make the countryside so attractive to visitors and residents alike, namely the beauty, tranquillity and chance to get away from urbanisation.

Rural tourism today is a multi-million pound industry on which millions rely for employment in the countryside. People now have more leisure time and also take short breaks in addition to their main holidays. Tourists from abroad are also being encouraged to visit. All this is good for the rural economy, but tourism development must be sensitively sited and planned. Much of our countryside has already been lost through roads, housing and other development. It is a priceless asset which once destroyed can never be regained.

The biggest threat to rural tourism, and the huge benefits it brings, is now looming in the threat of fracking. Much of the North of England, where I live, and some parts of Southern England are now licensed for the exploitation of gas and oil.

Protecting the National Parks is all very well but it is also vital to protect the more local areas. Many people rely on their local environment for the leisure and recreation and tranquillity which are essential for a healthy, well balanced life. Not everyone is able to travel to visit protected areas, indeed they should not need to.

Many farms are diversifying into tourism. Fishing lakes, camp-sites, petting farms and archery are just a few of the newer attractions. Where I live in the Fylde area of Lancashire there are a large number of well established caravan and lodge parks which cater for tourers and also the many holiday makers who have permanent holiday homes which they regularly visit. Marinas too are popular with visitors. One nearby at Glasson Dock brings in a huge number of visitors to the surrounding
countryside and the city of Lancaster. There are also a great number of equestrian establishments providing livery and riding for both local residents and visitors. This area is particularly suited to horse riding as there are numerous peaceful, narrow lanes and bridleways to enjoy in safety. This in turn creates employment for local vets, farriers and feed merchants.

Walkers come to explore the quiet, winding lanes and PROWs and cyclists, both touring and racing cyclists use the lanes, some of which are part of the National Cycle Network.

All these visitors shop locally, use the restaurants, cafes, pubs, B and B’s and amenities which creates local employment and revenue.

This is all now in jeopardy as the Fylde is threatened by Cuadrilla who have applied to frack on 2 sites at Preston New Road and Roseacre Wood. And we know this would be just the beginning.

A similar threat hangs over all the areas where PEDL’s have been issued.

Fracking will kill rural tourism STONE DEAD.

In order to be viable, fracking would have to create widespread industrialisation. Francis Egan, CEO of Cuadrilla has already stated if full scale fracking is permitted they intend to locate multi -well pads in a grid pattern in each 10x10km PEDL area. He did say they would be “Not closer than 2 miles apart”. That is hardly reassuring. Other gas companies have said much the same. Throughout the country there are 100’s of PEDL areas. That means 10’s of 1000’s of wells, 10’s of 1000’s of HGV movements, constant activity, drilling for 24 hours, 7 days a week, gas flaring, air pollution and lighting in previously unlit countryside.

NO sane tourist would choose to spend time in and subject their family to such a scene.

HGV’s, some carrying hazardous waste, on narrow country lanes would certainly deter holiday traffic, walkers, cyclists and horse riders. The beauty and tranquillity of our ever more precious countryside and villages would be completely destroyed.

Fracking activities would be detrimental to the wildlife which many come to enjoy. My area is renowned for the 100’s of 1000’s of internationally protected species of overwintering birds. They would definitely be adversely affected.

Locally produced food is a big attraction for tourists, from shops, farm-shops and local restaurants and pubs. It creates a great deal of employment and income for local residents. Visitors will not want to risk food produced on farms close to a fracking site. Neither will supermarkets. I certainly would not allow my family or friends to touch it. Any suspicion of contaminated food or water would devastate a tourist area. It would also do untold damage to farming and all the businesses associated with farming.
I well remember the BSE outbreak. Any investment in rural tourist businesses would be deterred. Why would anyone invest time and money in a business, or a home for that matter, anywhere in a PEDL area, only for it to be ruined by a fracking site springing up nearby? A clear example of the damage fracking is already creating was presented at the Public Inquiry held last February/March at Blackpool Football Club into Cuadrilla’s planning appeal, which I attended.

On the Evening Session of Day 15 of the Inquiry (8th March 2016) —
Award winning Ribby Hall Village, (one of just seven 5 Star holiday villages in the UK) is a holiday village, spa and gym situated close to Cuadrilla’s proposed Preston New Road site. It is the largest employer in tourism in the Fylde, employing 850 people directly and a further 200 people indirectly. With over 600 businesses in its supply chain and an annual 1.5 million footfall. the proprietor, Paul Harrison, told the Inquiry Inspector that despite the fact that his business had a good capacity to grow and be of enormous benefit to the local community the threat of fracking was deterring him from carrying out his planned expansion of the business.

On the Evening Session of Day 6 of the Inquiry (17th February 2016) —
Elaine Smith who holds a Masters’ Degree in Tourism told the Inquiry that the Fylde’s main industries are tourism, food production and manufacturing. She quoted from a current holiday brochure which describes the area as ‘One of the cleanest, greenest and quietest areas of the country.’ She said shale gas would damage all this. “Will it still pull people here with security barriers, HGVs and fracking? No it won’t. They will choose to avoid the area and go elsewhere.”

At the same inquiry, Cuadrilla was forced to admit that the 2 sites in question would each provide just 11 jobs for local people and they would be cleaning and security jobs. It’s obvious that fracking would completely destroy the rural tourist trade, resulting in huge job losses which even full scale fracking could not compensate for.

Evidence of all this and many more potential detrimental effects will be documented in the Report of the Public Inquiry which the Secretary of State, Sajid Javid, is shortly to decide upon following Lancashire County Council’s refusal of Cuadrilla’s Applications.

The populations and environments of countries where fracking is already established have experienced widespread damage, some of it irrevocable, and those countries are far larger and less densely populated than this country. Fracking would permanently destroy large swathes of our countryside and the livelihoods of those who work in it. Many of our farms and rural businesses have
been built up over generations. To risk destroying them, together with the environment and wildlife for a dirty, dangerous industry which has little public support other than from those with a vested interest is irresponsible in the extreme. It is also totally incompatible with essential action we must take on climate change. The news that China and the US have now announced their intention to ratify the Paris accord on Climate Change means it is imperative that the UK follows suit.

Almost every day, new studies are discovering more about the harm done and the dangers of fracking. No amount of ‘Gold Standard Regulations’ can ensure its safety, particularly in such a small country as ours. A growing number of countries and States are now issuing moratoriums or outright bans on fracking.

If EFRA is serious about promoting employment in our countryside, FRACKING MUST BE BANNED HERE.

September 2016