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Summary

1 Fracking and the threat of fracking seems to me to be the greatest threat currently facing rural tourism. Many of the proposed sites are in predominantly rural locations. It has the potential to actually deter tourism and reverse advances made over the years. As a result of this, it could decimate existing local businesses which rely on tourism.

2 Rural, low-impact showgrounds, properly planned and sited for easy access, could be a way to improve tourism by increasing visitor numbers and exposing the area to new visitors.

3 The heritage of marginalised groups, such as travellers and ethnic groups, could be enhanced as a tourist attraction. This may also, over time, help break down ingrained prejudices such as those widely exposed by the Brexit vote.

4 The growing interest in self-sufficiency provides a new market for rekindling the concept of loosely-regulated self-build holiday home sites, to specifically encourage rural tourism and repeat visits.

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Introduction

5 My name is Tony Johnson. I was born in Stockton-on-Tees, then in County Durham, but my father came from Scarborough.

6 Almost every weekend in summer, we would go out in the car to the countryside, visiting places around North Yorkshire, from Great Ayton and Stokesley, across the North Yorkshire Moors to Whitby, Scarborough, Danby and what is now Ryedale, so I grew up to love this countryside. What is notable, I now realise, is that we always headed south or west on these trips and never north into County Durham, dominated, as it was then, by coal mines.

7 Unfortunately, my father’s job moved to Cheshire and I then moved to Manchester. It took me almost 20 years to move back, which I did to a job in Ryedale. I lived in Malton, commuted toward the coast every day and often took long detours to and from work to enjoy the countryside around me. Eventually I moved back to my father’s roots in Scarborough, where I now live.

8 The countryside here, with its moors, wolds and sea, and further west, the Dales, is probably the most beautiful part of the British countryside, with many, many attractions. There are stately homes, ruined castles and abbeys, preserved steam railways and amusement parks among this cornucopia and miles upon miles of walks and scenic drives. I have seen many changes while I have known this area, and seen disasters averted, such as the east coast motorway, which would have divided the moors.

9 This beautiful area is under threat once again, due to fracking.
Fracking

North Yorkshire County Council have approved a planning application for fracking at Kirby Misperton, in the face of many thousands of objections from local people, who recognise the damage this industrialisation of the countryside could do to the environment and to tourism. Kirby Misperton is the home of FlamingoLand, a place I fondly remember visiting as a child, when it had recently opened and was only a zoo, and which I have revisited over the years as it has grown to the huge attraction it is today.

Fracking is synonymous with bad in many peoples' minds. There are horror stories from the US of smells, chemicals and sickness around fracking sites and terrible tales of gas from water taps and badly contaminated water. Whether these have any bearing on how fracking would actually affect the UK is fairly irrelevant as there is tremendous public awareness of fracking as a bad thing, and the response to the planning application demonstrates this.

I believe fracking is the biggest single threat to British tourism. People visit this area for the unspoilt countryside, not an industrial scene. FlamingoLand, although a very popular tourist attraction, has faced problems with planning in the past, when its 'industrial style' steel rides became tall and intrusive in the surrounding view. Fracking wells, and they rarely come singly, would replicate this problem over a much greater area, dominating and visually destroying the unspoilt rural landscape people are travelling to see, walk through, holiday within and enjoy.

There are also tales from within the UK of continuous noise, smells and illness to people and animals within the vicinity of fracking wells, due to the heavy equipment and to the secret mix of toxic chemicals used in the process. This industrialisation of the countryside is compounded by the huge increase in heavy lorries on country lanes, carrying waste water, chemicals and equipment.

Lastly, and by no means least, there is the water supply. Scarborough and its surrounding area is supplied with water from an artesian lake below the Vale of Pickering, water which has percolated down from a glacial lake formed in the Vale at the end of the last ice age.

Many of the generations which have given this area its cultural history and its tourist attractions used the remnants of the glacial lake until it was drained in recent centuries, but its mirror still sits below the surface, and will be threatened by the fracking wells driven down through it. Pollution of this aquifer, if it occurs, will destroy the water supply of the whole area surrounding it, including Scarborough, recently named Britain's most popular tourist destination outside London.

In short, fracking in the countryside is a route to imminent destruction of the mass of businesses that tourism supports, many of which are privately run and would collapse without a sustained level of tourism.
Showgrounds

17  Tourism facilities in North Yorkshire are growing. More holiday lodges are springing up, alongside ‘glamping’ sites with less permanent accommodation. One downside to this is that the Pickering Showground, which hosted the internationally famous Pickering Traction Engine Rally at the end of July every year, as well as other events through the summer, has been bought by a developer and partly converted into a holiday lodge park. As a result, this year’s rally had to be cancelled as there was insufficient room.

18  When large shows like this are hosted, visitors and enthusiasts come from all over the country and from abroad. Often they will combine it with a longer stay, if not the first time, then later, when they have seen the other attractions the area has to offer.

19  These permanent show sites are few and far between and tourism could be enhanced by encouraging more of them. Pickering has shown that a small hub of administrative offices, refreshment and toilet facilities could service a large show site, which only requires access roads and can be left as green fields the rest of the year. This is in contrast to more urban show sites which have a much larger proportion of permanent infrastructure and buildings. The shows help local businesses and accommodation flourish while they are on, although they can bring local travel to a standstill unless they are sited by arterial roads.
Traveller and Culture Based Fairs

20 Scarborough has a travellers horse fair. This is probably the only surviving remnant of the internationally famous 'Scarborough Fair', but the council seem intent on marginalising it, instead of seizing the opportunity to enhance and expand it as at Appleby horse fair. I recall Yarm Fair as a boy, when the wide high street was packed with travellers' caravans, horses, amusements and fairground stalls in a giddy, apparently chaotic, display.

21 While this sort of location would not be appropriate at Scarborough, such an annual event could rightfully be expanded and marketed as Scarborough Fair, with all its international associations, and a new local showground could host it and a slightly relocated Pickering Traction Engine Rally.

22 This is a local example. I would suggest that this kind of event could also help break down the prejudices often held by people against those who are 'different' in some way. It is not difficult to see how the principle could be expanded to the activities of other minority groups, such as those from other countries and cultures, to help with their integration and acceptance.
Self-sufficient Campsites

There is, broadly speaking, a moratorium on residential development within the countryside. I remember, as a child, the regulations being much more relaxed. I would often visit my aunt's shack in a shanty town of individualistic self-built holiday homes at Potto. This was hidden on a wooded hillside, with a river below and earth steps and tracks snaking between the individual plots of indiosyncratic shacks and it has long since disappeared. In my opinion, the world is a poorer place without it. My uncle also had a similar wooden shack near Marske, in a collection right by the seashore. Technology has moved on since then, but the regulated lines of mobile homes which have supplanted this accommodation seem a very poor substitute for the irregular jumble of individual lodges which they have replaced.

Alongside traditional lodge and mobile home parks, caravan and camping sites, I think there is scope for a return to the 'self-build' park. With the growth in popularity of 'alternative' dwellings and lifestyles, I believe there is a substantial market demand for this to be allowed within a countryside setting. The sites do not have to be intrusive or obvious. What is needed is a suspension of planning regulation within a designated area, allowing dwellings within the area to be of a more relaxed and individual design. Ideally, structures should be of an environmental form - straw bale, cob, earthbags, etc or of a temporary nature, such as yurts, tipis or tents, with a more permanent platform beneath if desired. I would anticipate a plethora of solar panels and small wind turbines, depending on the location.

Facilities could be similar to those on campsites, with a centralised facilities hub, containing toilets, water, 'elsan' disposal, and maybe a leisure battery charge point and a supply shop. Stoves and contained fires for heat and cooking would be allowed on individual plots but each plot should have at least one sizeable fire extinguisher. I would not anticipate that any services would be supplied to individual plots as self-sufficiency, rather than aesthetics, would be the order of the day. It need not be flat or have vehicle access to the plots.

As these would be 'holiday' sites, I would expect the residence requirements to be similar to those on mobile home sites, with a closed season of a few weeks a year over winter, but there is certainly scope for small residential sites of this nature as many seek them. The camp sites need not be obvious or placed in tourist hotspots and could be discreetly hidden in old quarries, wooded valleys or within a plantation, which would also provide protection from extremes of weather.

The adoption of a sustainable ethos would encourage those who seek a rural weekend and holiday retreat and are already in tune with nature. These sites could provide for personalised accommodation without increasing the demand for rural houses as holiday cottages. This could help increase visitor numbers and benefit the rural economy.