I am submitting comments on Government ambitions to sustain and develop rural tourism.

I’m doing this on my own behalf, i.e. not representing an organisation. I have been taking holidays in Britain exclusively for the past 20 years and I especially want to raise the issue of fracking in the context of tourism and the rural economy. At this point in time, I believe this to be of extreme importance.

My area of North Yorkshire is threatened by fracking. Four miles away from where I live is a well site which has recently received planning permission for a test-frack and subsequent fracks if the resource proves worthwhile. This one well is likely to be replicated many times across a swathe of northern England and I’m concerned that here and in other parts of Britain shale gas extraction will have a damaging effect on rural tourism. In our village we have a pub that needs visitor trade and several holiday cottages.

I would not want to go away on holiday to a gas field. Last year, for instance, we took a holiday in the Forest of Dean area but if I knew fracking was to go ahead there, I would not want to return. I’m sure other people would be of the same mind.

Like many people, while on holiday, I like to be away from industry and be in the midst of more uplifting surroundings. Unspoilt countryside is a must. I know exactly what a fracking well pad looks like, having been right up close to our local one at Kirby Misperton and whilst this one is camouflaged by relatively tall trees on three sides (it happens to be a conventional gas well site as well) this would not be the case with most of them as the fracking companies, wanting to extract as much gas as they can, are planning to put hundreds of wells in each PEDL licence area (of 10 x 10 kms). There won’t be time for mature trees to grown round them all to screen them off.

In addition to the visual aspect of the fracking well sites themselves is all the infrastructure required to go with fracking activity plus the heavy lorry traffic on country lanes which with its noise, pollution and congestion is likely to have the effect of putting off tourists. The increase in lorry movement will be extremely significant. I also value dark night skies. Fracking drilling rigs are lit up like Christmas trees at night and would negate any enjoyment of otherwise dark night skies.

Another reason for fracking’s incompatibility with UK tourism are its health impacts which are increasingly coming to light. For instance, there is a new report from John Hopkins University (USA) showing that people living near fracking wells are much more likely to suffer migraines, sinus problem, asthma and premature births. With premature births, apparently it does not require long exposure – just a short episode.
of high pollution – to cause this. Some people are bound to be put off coming to an area which they know may affect their health adversely.

In a shale gas exploitation area, what happens to the reputation of local food? My own local market town of Malton, where local traders are often hanging on by their finger nails, is trying to promote itself as a centre of excellence for local food and drink. Two small breweries have set up and several other new food businesses along with farmers’ markets and special food markets where local producers e.g. rape seed oil can sell their products. Fracking may damage all that endeavour - as visitors and locals alike start to wonder about the purity of local food and drink. It may not take an actual incident of food contamination (as a result of fracking) but perception is everything and confidence in local food can easily be knocked.

Tourists often hope to see wildlife they wouldn’t normally see at home but in a fracking area some species are likely to decrease or even disappear as a result of noise, air or light pollution.

Rural areas currently benefitting from tourism may not do so to the same extent if house prices are affected. The DEFRA Shale Gas Rural Economy Impacts Paper said “House prices in close proximity to the drilling operations are likely to fall”. It suggested a possible 7% reduction in property values within 1 mile of an extraction site. It may turn out to be worse than that. In Kirby Misperton four miles away from where I live, where planning permission for a test frack and more has been granted by N. Yorkshire County Council, a local resident told me that houses in the village are not coming on to the market when vacated. Instead they are being rented out and this is altering the social fabric of the village with the prospect that gardens and exteriors will not get the same attention and therefore look more unattractive. This will not impress tourists.

**UK tourism will be damaged by widespread fracking. I suggest that the EFRA Select Committee commissions a new independent report on shale gas industry impacts with particular regard to rural tourism. Until this report is concluded, it should call for an immediate moratorium on fracking and other unconventional gas production methods.**

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