I am a resident of Pickering living 3 miles from the proposed fracking site at Kirkby Misperton in North Yorkshire. As an owner of a tourist business, I am extremely concerned about the negative impact fracking would have on this area as well as on the rest of the UK. I recently moved to this beautiful area of the country and have a holiday cottage which I rent out which is adjacent to our own property. Pickering and the surrounding villages and rural areas rely heavily on tourism, and I believe that this tourist economy would be severely affected, if not completely destroyed, if fracking were to go ahead. Fracking results in hundreds of wells in a small area (10 square kilometres) to produce a meaningful amount of gas. PEDL licences already cover vast areas of North Yorkshire as well as the rest of the country and threaten to destroy our precious landscapes irreversibly. Fracking creates noise, light and air pollution, it is a 24 hour process; many visitors come here for the peace and tranquility as well as the ‘dark skies’ as promoted on the North York Moors website. Fracking would be allowed within 400m of residential homes and businesses so will be on our doorstep and also Ryedale is a flat plain which forms panoramic views from both the North York Moors and the Yorkshire Wolds so any fracking sites will be clearly visible for miles around.

Another issue is the huge, expected increase in truck movements to what are already very busy roads. Each frack well pad will have 10 to 40 wells, meaning tens of thousands of HGV movements. Some of these roads are country lanes with walkers, cyclists and horse riders; there are often long delays in summer and also many slow moving agricultural vehicles using the roads. Adding trucks to our roads and lanes will be completely at odds with rural tourism: more noise and pollution, more queues, more accidents and damage to county lanes and verges. As well as losing our peace and quiet, travel around the area will be more difficult both for tourists and local businesses.

If fracking were allowed across the English countryside, many people would be discouraged from visiting because of health concerns for themselves and their families. Fracking has been banned (or moratoria are in place) in many countries: France, Germany, Bulgaria, Holland and Scotland, and in US states such as Maryland and New York State, due to the danger to public health. Dr. Howard A. Zucker, NY State Health Commissioner, who recommended a fracking ban in his home state after a six-year study, said, “Would I let my family live in a community with fracking? The answer is no. The potential risks of fracking are too great. In fact, they are not even fully known.” New studies from John Hopkins University show that people living near fracking wells are four times more likely to have asthma attacks and premature births. This is bound to have a profound effect on the number of visitors choosing to come to this area.

Widespread fracking would threaten thousands of permanent jobs in the tourist industry, as visitor numbers would fall and businesses would close. Tourism provides millions of permanent jobs for the rural economy (over 3.1 million in 2013, according to Visit Britain). Even a small business, such as my own provides employment opportunities to local people as I employ cleaners and laundry workers. I also buy local food produce for my guests. Most jobs on fracking well-sites would go to specialists brought in on fixed contracts, not local people and the industry has been shown to be a boom-and-bust industry in the USA and does not create long-term jobs.

Ryedale is known for its high quality food and there are many food fairs, farmer’s markets and restaurants serving local produce. Rural economies depend on farming and food production as
well as tourism. Introducing fracking to the area will affect the reputation of locally produced food which is often organically produced or grown on local farms. Visitors may also perceive food could be contaminated if it is grown near fracking wells with the result of falling tourist numbers and lower rural employment.
Fracking also brings with it the threat of water contamination through leaking wells, which could contaminate the aquifers that provide our drinking water or from surface spills or other above-ground accidents, which could pollute streams, rivers and other water courses. One incident of contaminated drinking water, or a catastrophic explosion at a well-site, would permanently damage the reputation of a popular tourist area for many years.

Fracking is extremely unpopular with the general public, with only 21% of the population supporting the process, according to the latest Government Wave 18 survey. Most people don’t like fracking, and are unlikely to want to go on holiday to an area where this industry is established. It seems likely that people will be discouraged from visiting a fracking zone if it were to be allowed.

Defra’s draft Shale Gas Rural Economy Impacts Paper, which was eventually published unredacted in July 2015, states the following: “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 first time this report was published it was redacted 63 times, including sections on house prices, economic impacts, social services, local services and the executive summary. The unredacted report was finally published in July 2015, only because the government was forced to do so by the Information Commissioner after a long-running public outcry. When it was finally published, Defra distanced itself from the report’s conclusions, claiming that it was an early draft of an internal document, was not analytically robust, and that work on this report had been discontinued. Many people wonder why the report was discontinued, instead of being re-drafted so that it was considered by Defra to be ‘analytically robust’ and suitable for publication. Was the effect of fracking on the rural economy not worthy of further examination? Defra has therefore never completed a comprehensive report on the effect of fracking on the rural economy – which of course would include the rural tourism sector, the subject of this enquiry. Is this perhaps because Defra knows that the results of such a report would be overwhelmingly negative?

I do not believe visitors will want to come to what would essentially be a heavy industrialised area if fracking is permitted to go ahead. Businesses, such as ours, which are close to a well-site will surely suffer a fall in visitor numbers which could mean that my business may not be viable. I would also not want to live near a fracking site and would want to leave the area. My other concern is that I would not be able to sell either my home or my business if fracking were to go ahead in this area. The DEFRA Shale Gas Rural Economy Report stated: “A study in Texas concluded that house prices valued at more than $250,000 and within 1,000 ft of a well-site saw their values decrease by 3-14%.”

It seems to me that fracking will have a very damaging effect on tourism in Ryedale as well as in other rural areas, and I believe that the shale gas industry poses a great threat to rural tourism in England. I believe that Defra has a duty to oppose such developments within government, and should instead be working to promote sustainable, low-impact tourism in order to preserve the English countryside.
I recommend that the EFRA Select Committee should commission a new independent report of the impact of the shale gas industry on the rural economy, including rural tourism. Until such a report is produced, the EFRA Select Committee should demand an immediate moratorium on fracking and other forms of unconventional gas production.

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