I am a British citizen who has always enjoyed the wonderful rural areas of my home nation. I fully realise the value of tourism to the rural economy, which is fragile and susceptible to any issues which may deter visitors.

My response to this enquiry is a result of the serious threat posed to rural areas by unconventional gas extraction, predominantly ‘fracking.’ This activity, which has a proven track record of despoiling rural areas in Australia and the USA will have devastating effects on all aspects of the rural economy, including farming and food production.

The fracking process requires tens of thousands of wells to be economically viable. However, the fracking operators will actually be looking to maximise profits.

Some of England’s most precious landscapes are already licensed for fracking, with PEDL (Petroleum Exploration and Development Licences) covering vast areas of the country. Shale gas companies are planning hundreds of wells per 10x10 km² PEDL licence area. Widespread industrialisation of the countryside for shale gas production is totally incompatible with EFRA’s aim of developing sustainable rural tourism.

In addition, the widespread industrialisation of rural areas by increased traffic levels, including many thousands of HGV movements, noise, odour, dust and light pollution from drilling operations will deter visitors, undermining the tourist industry which is key to the viability and survival of many communities. Visitors won’t want to spend their holidays in the shadow of a fracking well-site and will avoid fracking ‘blackspots’. Businesses close to a well-site, such as campsites, B&Bs, pubs, hotels, etc. will suffer a fall in visitor numbers.

I refer to a recent report in the Huffington post concerning residents of rural Pennsylvania:

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/pennsylvania-fracking-water_us_576b7a76e4b0c0252e786d5e

The fracking companies have no long term interest in rural economies, only short term profits.

Recently North Yorkshire County Council Planning Committee passed an application to frack an existing well at Kirby Misperton, within 1 km of Yorkshires biggest tourist attraction. 97% of local residents opposed this development, yet their opinions were ignored. This is a failure of the basic democratic process.

Fracking will reduce employment in the rural tourism sector. Tourism provides millions of permanent jobs for the rural economy (over 3.1 million in 2013, according to Visit Britain). Fracking would only provide a small number of short-term jobs at each well-site. Even industry estimates of up to 64,000 jobs in 2024 from 4,000 fracking wells are dwarfed by the numbers of jobs in tourism threatened by fracking. Most jobs on fracking well-sites would go to specialists brought in on fixed contracts, not local people. Fracking in the USA has been shown to be a boom-and-bust industry and does not create long-term jobs.
Water and air contamination from fracking could permanently impact an area’s reputation. It is accepted within the oil and gas industry that disused wells fall into disrepair. The contamination of the air in gasfields by Volatile Organic Compounds (VOC’s) has been identified as a significant cause of numerous health issues for local residents. Any incidence of contaminated drinking water or air would permanently damage the reputation of a popular tourist area.

Fracking companies are not required to post a bond with local councils to pay for environmental clean-up, if indeed such clean-up were possible. Once an aquifer is contaminated, it will be virtually impossible to recover it for re-use.

Fracking will reduce property prices, which will discourage rural investment. The DEFRA Shale Gas Rural Economy Report stated: *There could be a 7% reduction in property values within one mile of an extraction site.* This drop in property values which in turn will have a negative effect on rural business investment, as people will be reluctant to invest in new and existing rural businesses in areas where fracking is taking place. At the same time, rural businesses could have to face increased insurance costs or exclusion from cover for losses as a result of fracking operations.

It is time for The UK Government to recognise that The Public perception of fracking is overwhelmingly negative, only 21% of the population supporting the process, according to the latest Government Wave 18 survey. This is with just cause. The overwhelming amount of peer reviewed, evidence based scientific opinion undermines any benefits that may be gained from Unconventional Gas Extraction. Indeed, the arguments for fracking are very weak, contrived and only espoused by those with, or in the employ of, vested interests. Even the government’s proposals to pay up to £10,000 to residents living near well have failed to convince the public, with only 33% supporting the policy.

Defra’s own report says that fracking would negatively impact the rural tourist sector.


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?

Conclusion:

It is clear that widespread fracking will have a very damaging effect on tourism in rural areas, and I believe that the shale gas industry is one of the greatest threats facing rural tourism in England.
I feel 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.

*September 2016*