1. Introduction

Roseacre Awareness Group (RAG) welcome the opportunity to feed into this consultation as we believe tourism in rural areas creates job opportunities and supports the economic viability of our rural communities. It is essential that public programmes and government policies support this.

We applaud the committee’s Terms of Reference

- Encourage more people, both from the UK and abroad, to visit more of England’s rural places, for longer and at all times of the year;
- Support farmers and rural residents to diversify into tourism and grow their businesses;
- Ensure visitors' experiences are balanced with the need to preserve the environment and the character of local communities

Our main reason for responding to this consultation is we do not believe the government’s position in supporting unconventional shale gas extraction in rural areas is conducive with these aims and that measures need to be taken to “make the growth of countryside and coastal tourism sustainable whilst balancing economic, social and environmental interests”. This includes a thorough and fully independent assessment of the long term impacts of a full scale, production programme of onshore unconventional shale gas extraction, on the UK’s rural tourism and economy sector.

2. Background

Treales, Roseacre and Wharles are three small villages situated in the heart of rural Fylde midway between Preston and Blackpool, making up the parish of the same name. The area is largely good quality agricultural land, is scenic and tranquil and considered as ‘a pristine and quiet natural region’. It is known for good quality farming, food production and rural tourism which provide many jobs in the area.

Although there are only 600 permanent residents the area is enjoyed by thousands of people, from the surrounding towns and villages, for tourism and leisure purposes. The area is extremely popular for cycling, horse riding, walking, wildlife spotting, boating, fishing, shooting and many other outdoor activities. There are hundreds of well-established local businesses providing services for farming, food production and tourism such as camping and caravanning sites, b&b’s, public houses, tea rooms and cafes, farm shops, livery yards, agricultural services and food suppliers. It is a prosperous and affluent area home to many retirees and young, professional families seeking a quieter life away. It is an attractive place; not the ‘desolate North’ as portrayed by many.

Lancashire attracts over 63 million visitors per year, which contribute 3.68 billion to the local economy and support over 56,000 jobs. The Fylde attracts well over a quarter of these visitors with tourism accounting for 1 in 5 jobs in Blackpool and 1 in 10 jobs in Lytham.

“The area surrounding Lytham is the unspoilt scenery of the Fylde countryside. Nowhere can surely offer as much variety as the hamlets, small villages and market towns that are rural Fylde. You can walk, cycle or ride on horseback, enjoy this extraordinary area at its very best.”
In February 2014, Cuadrilla Resources announced plans to drill and hydraulically fracture up to 4 wells for shale gas at two sites in rural Fylde; one of these being midway between Roseacre and Wharles, just 200m from residential properties. Although the initial plans are for exploratory wells, it is highly likely, if sufficient shale gas reserves are found, these sites would become production sites operating for well over 20 years. It would mean hundreds of further sites, with thousands of wells, within a relatively small rural area (PEDL165). Fracking is an extremely industrialised process with high spatial intensity.

Roseacre Awareness Group (RAG) was formed in March 2014 to raise awareness about the impacts of these plans on our rural community. Although initially not opposed to fracking, we determined, after many months of research and gathering of evidence, that there would be significant, detrimental impacts on our community and rural economy and such an industry is not appropriate in a rural area such as this.

Although Cuadrilla’s plans were rejected by the Parish, Fylde Borough and Lancashire County Council (LCC), Cuadrilla appealed. RAG presented detailed technical evidence (as a Rule 6 party) supporting LCC’s decision to refuse planning permission at a 6 week Public Inquiry this Feb/March. We await the Secretary of State’s decision on whether to overrule LCC.

Our Proof of Evidence (attached to this representation) highlights the potential impacts on a rural community and rural economy. The main points are summarised below.

3. DEFRA report

We expect the committee is already aware of DEFRA’s report on ‘Shale Gas Rural Economy Impacts’ (March 2014) which was eventually released into the public domain. The report raised several concerns about the impacts of shale gas extraction on rural communities. Specifically

- ‘It could have an adverse impact on traffic congestion, noise or air quality depending on existing roads, traffic and air quality. It could have a more sustained and locally significant effect on communities adjacent to the development sites, or adjacent to the routes to the sites, during exploration and site preparation’.

- ‘There will also be sectors that gain from the expansion of drilling activity but others that may lose business due to increased congestion or perceptions about the region. These behavioural responses may reduce the number of visitors and tourists to the rural area, with an associated reduction in spend in the local tourism economy’.

- ‘Increased congestion on the roads...expected to have a higher impact on those communities living within a 5 mile radius of the site although the congestion could be spread wider but will depend on infrastructure and maintenance levels’.

- ‘Those residents owning property close to the drilling site may suffer from lower resale prices due to the negative perception being located near the facility and potential risks’.

- ‘Properties within a 1.5 mile radius of the fracking operation may also incur additional cost of insurance to cover losses in case of explosion to the site’.

- ‘Noise and light have also been cited in the US as environmental and health concerns for residents and animals living near drilling operations. Excessive and/or continuous noise such as that typically
experienced near drilling sites, has documented health impacts....... some residents may experience deafening noise: light pollution that affects sleeping patterns’.

- ‘Environmental impacts on the landscape are another consideration. Shale gas development may transform a previously pristine and quiet natural region, bringing increased industrialization. As a result rural community 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’.

- ‘Impacts likely to be mixed with short term positive economic gains from employment and energy that need to be balanced against the costs that may affect certain groups, such as businesses involved in tourism, local house price impacts and increased congestion’.

We believe these findings highlight significant risks to rural tourism and economy and the committee should recommend the commissioning of a further, fully independent report to establish the full extent of fracking on the rural economy specifically agriculture and tourism.

4. **Fylde Borough Council Coastal Strategy 2015-2032**

The Fylde Council Coastal Strategy 2015-2032 states ‘the Borough as a whole has some excellent visitor attractions spread across rural areas, villages and towns, including first class accommodation’ and also ‘the physical quality of the borough including its important heritage and natural environment should be protected and enhanced as this is a major factor in the attractiveness of the location as a place to visit’.

The Coastal Strategy lays down objectives and key actions to preserve the character of the Fylde as an important visitor location. The Vision is “to create a unique, high quality visitor destination for residents and visitors, which is based on the conservation and enhancement of the natural landscape and heritage assets’.

- ‘Leisure, culture and tourism make up an important industry in Fylde, accounting for 1 in 10 jobs. The hinterland of Fylde contains many rural visitor attractions and accommodation such as Ribby Hall village and a range of caravan and camping sites’.
- ‘The rural hinterland is predominantly agricultural and includes the market towns of Kirkham and a number of villages and hamlets.
- ‘Leisure, culture and tourism make up an important industry in Fylde, accounting for 1 in 10 jobs. The Borough attracts over 3 million visitors each year, generating nearly £220 million spending in the local economy through a total of 4.25 million tourist days. More than three quarters of these visitors are day-trippers to the traditional seaside resorts of St Anne’s and Lytham, the attractive market town of Kirkham and the picturesque villages.
- ‘There is great potential to build upon the rural tourism economy and develop greater links with other areas. Fylde’s Coastal strategy will develop new opportunities for local people, visitors and businesses to benefit from the area’.

The key actions identified are

- to maintain vibrant and diverse daytime and evening visitor economy
- to work in partnership with tourism agencies
- to work in partnership with the private sector
through the planning process support the primary holiday area as a centre for holiday accommodation and tourism whilst preventing inappropriate uses
to create visitor attractions through the diversification of the agricultural economy.
to encourage a range of fine dining experiences across the coast.
to support cultural and sporting events; that raise the profile of the area and support the visitor economy.
to build upon the rural tourism offer and develop greater links with other areas in Fylde

This illustrates the importance placed by Fylde Borough Council on rural tourism and leisure. The local authority has a key part to play in developing strategies to develop rural tourism and help promote such attractions.

We do not believe a full scale production fracking industry across the Fylde will help achieve this vision.

5. Detrimental Impacts of Shale Gas extraction

The following are what we consider the main detrimental impacts of fracking which could affect our rural economy.

a) Environmental Impacts

Noise and light pollution - fracking is a heavy industrial process operating 24x7, 365 days year resulting in significant noise and light pollution in a quiet, rural location.

Additional traffic – thousands of additional HGV movements, on narrow unclassified rural lanes, will adversely impact existing road users (residents, commuters and leisure) and create additional safety risks especially to vulnerable groups such as walkers, cyclists and horse riders.

Air, water, soil pollution – there is much emerging, peer reviewed, scientific evidence being published with regards to soil, water and air pollution. No matter how safe an industry is purported to be there will always be accidents. Just one incident could blight a whole area and affect its reputation for food production and tourism.

Landscape and visual impacts – having several large industrial sites in a relatively small area known for its scenic and tranquil nature will change how the area is perceived by many and will deter visitors. This will impact on rural businesses relying on their trade such as camping and caravanning sites.

Seismicity – fracking increases the risk tremors and earthquakes. Again there is mounting evidence from overseas of unprecedented increases in earthquakes as a result of fracking.

Ecology – many people visit the area for its abundant wildlife. Having such a heavy industry in the midst of the countryside is likely to put off visitors and wildlife.

b) Health Impacts

There is much peer reviewed, scientific evidence (888 papers published to date) which document the harm this industry poses to public health and the environment. PHE England’s report is out of date and does not consider this recent, emerging evidence nor take account of all the full cumulative effects.

This will seriously alter peoples’ perception of the area and deter people from visiting or moving into the area. With PEDL’s covering 63% of the England much of the population would be affected.
We believe there is sufficient evidence to warrant a moratorium on fracking until the health impacts are fully assessed.

c) Property Prices & Insurance

Our evidence includes details of several properties which have already been significantly reduced in value due to the prospect of fracking. Many residents have been told they are unlikely to sell their houses if they live close to a fracking. If no-one will move in, and no-one can move out, the communities will effectively wither and die.

Jobs

The number of jobs created is likely to be far fewer than those lost. Most fracking jobs are short term and specialist whilst jobs in tourism and agriculture are well established and sustainable as are jobs in the renewable energy sector. Fracking could result in a significant number of jobs being lost in tourism, agriculture and food production.

Mark Ogge, Principal Adviser at the Australia Institute said that Queensland’s experiment in unconventional gas had demonstrated that the economic benefits promised by the gas industry had largely failed to materialise, while negatively impacting other industries. Research had found that for every 10 new gas jobs, 18 agricultural jobs were lost, he said.

e) Farming

This is a relatively prosperous farming area. Fracking poses serious risks to farming and food production. Farmers, struggling for cash, may be tempted by offers by oil and gas companies without giving due consideration to the longer term impacts the industry would have on their land and food production. In the US and Australia many farmers are now trying to walk away from the industry saying their land/water is polluted or blighted.

This week Victoria, Australia announced a permanent ban on the exploration and development of all onshore unconventional gas, including hydraulic fracturing and coal seam gas stating

“The permanent legislative ban, to be introduced to Parliament later this year, will protect the ‘clean, green’ reputation of Victoria’s agriculture sector, which employs more than 190,000 people. This will provide much-needed certainty to regional communities. The decision ends the anxiety felt by Victorian farmers about the environmental and health risks associated with fracking. This Inquiry received more than 1600 submissions, mostly opposed to onshore unconventional gas. It is clear that the Victorian community has spoken – they simply don’t support fracking.

The Government’s decision is based on the best available evidence and acknowledges that the risks involved outweigh any potential benefits to Victoria.

Our state is the nation’s top food and fibre producer with exports worth $11.6 billion. The permanent ban protects our farmers and preserves Victoria’s hard-won reputation for producing high quality food.

Until the legislation is passed by Parliament, the current moratorium on unconventional onshore gas exploration and development will stay in place.

We will undertake the most extensive scientific, technical and environmental studies in Australia on the risks, benefits and impacts of onshore gas. These will be overseen by an expert panel, headed by the
Lead Scientist Amanda Caples, and will include farmers and industry, business and community representatives”.

**Quote attributable to Premier Daniel Andrews**

Mark Ogge, Principal Adviser at the Australia Institute, praised the ban as “sound economic and energy policy”.

The UK has a lot to learn from this.

**f) Rural Businesses**

Many rural businesses rely on agriculture, tourism and leisure. If fracking goes ahead the impacts on such businesses could be severe. Our evidence included statements from several owners who fear their business will be adversely affected.

One poignant example is a small, well established caravan park on the edge of Roseacre which has return visitors every year who enjoy the local pubs, restaurants and other attractions. However they have already informed the owner, that should fracking go ahead, just 500m from the site, they will not be returning.

These potential impacts must not be underplayed or discounted and a full independent study of the potential impacts of fracking on local rural businesses should be commissioned.

**6. Summary & Recommendations**

We believe that increasing the rural economy is vital whilst at the same time preserving our rural heritage and protecting the countryside. We consider a full scale fracking industry poses a significant threat to both rural tourism and the rural economy in England – and of course the rest of the UK.

We recommend the committee

1) Commissions a new, fully independent inquiry into the potential impacts of shale gas extraction on the rural economy, tourism, agriculture and food production taking into account recent scientific, peer reviewed studies into the actual impacts of the industry.

2) Proposes a moratorium on all unconventional shale gas extraction until a full independent inquiry has been completed in order to protect both rural communities and the environment from harm.

3) Requests an updated and comprehensive report from Public Health England which fully assesses all the current scientific, peer reviewed, evidence of fracking in relation to peoples’ health and well-being.

We have also added comments on the questions raised by the |inquiry although our knowledge is limited.

We hope this information is useful and would be more than happy to discuss our evidence further with the committee.

**a. Marketing:** How well do agencies promote rural destinations across England? What more should the Government do to support this work?
We believe much more could be done to promote rural destinations. The government should make it a priority and financially support organisations such as Rural England, Visit England/Lancashire, Marketing Lancashire, National Trust, CPRE, wildlife trusts and others, in actively promoting rural tourism.

b. **Planning and regulation:** What, if any, changes are needed to planning and other regulations covering rural areas of special character, such as National Parks, to encourage sustainable tourism?

We believe planning regulations should be changed to better protect rural areas from unsuitable developments. The **cumulative** impacts of large scale, spatially intrusive industries, such as fracking, on rural areas and the economy should be given more consideration. Our own area is typical as, although not specifically designated greenbelt, or an area off special interest, it still has a very high value to both residents and visitors.

We believe housing and industrial developments in rural areas should be strictly controlled and use of brown field sites actively encouraged before green field sites. This area is typical with a disproportionate number of new housing developments..

Encourage the designation of more areas of green belt to protect our countryside from unnecessary development.

c. **Access:** What, if any, changes are needed to give people better access to the coast and countryside?

We do not believe this is a specific issue at present. Priority should be given to increasing and maintaining the number of public footpaths, cycle and bridleways and appropriate signage.

d. **Funding and fiscal policies:** How can public funding be best targeted to get new rural tourist businesses off the ground and keep them going? Are changes needed to tax levels and business rates?

Control locally. Encourage investment by reducing taxes on small rural businesses in particular.

e. **Infrastructure and skills:** What measures are needed to ensure transport, housing and other infrastructure meets visitor needs? How can the sector ensure there are enough people with the right skills to support customers and businesses?

See above. No further comment.

f. **Local environment and character:** How can national and local policies get the right balance between growing tourism and enhancing the local environment and character?

Planning policies should be amended to take special account of rural environments and more effort made to protect them. The current balance appears to be in favour of developments not protecting rural areas.

g. **Defra role:** What more should the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs do to ensure government departments (including Departments for Communities and Local Government, Business, Innovation and Skills, Culture Media and Sport and HM Treasury) support rural tourism?
DEFRA needs to develop stronger links with other departments to ensure better protection of the environment and rural communities. See recommendations above.

Appendices (to be attached)

http://programmeofficers.co.uk/lancashire/

held under Proof of Evidence and Inquiry documents. I can forward if necessary.

1. RAG Proof of Evidence on Community Recreation & Amenity (RAG/6/1)
2. RAG response to Appellant’s papers on 4th March 2016 on Property Price and Insurance (RAG/INQ/011)

September 2016