Written evidence submitted by Jules Burton (RUT0149)

Introduction

As you can see from my address I am directly impacted by the threat of fracking. Cuadrilla have applied to drill just 400 metres from my home.

I am lucky enough to live in a beautiful and peaceful rural environs. There are two touring caravan sites situated within 800 metres of my home with a further 4 static caravan sites within one mile. Blackpool, one of the most famous and largest holiday destinations in the UK is only 8 miles away. The famous tower is visible from my village. Having been employed in the leisure industry for all my working life I am only too well aware of its fragile nature and how quickly a holiday destination area can lose its appeal if changes to its nature are not handled sensitively.

The Fylde area is a complex mix of tourist attractions which are both destinations in their own right as well as being inter-dependent. The rural Fylde is a mix of picturesque and tranquil villages interspersed with small market towns and bounded by larger towns and cities. To the North is the county city of Lancaster with its superb university, docks and shopping centres. To the East the market town of Garstang gives access to the Trough of Bowland, a valley and high pass in the Forest of Bowland Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, whilst the city of Preston combines its refurbished dock area and historic centre with excellent shopping facilities. To the South is the genteel seaside town of Lytham St Annes where the Royal Lytham and St Annes Golf Course can be found. This is the most Northerly of the English Championship Links courses and lies just 10 miles from Royal Birkdale. Royal Lytham St Annes regularly hosts the Open Championship. To the West lies Blackpool with its world famous Tower and Tower Ball Room which annually hosts the popular TV show Strictly Come Dancing and its 6 mile illuminations draw visitors from around the world. In between these towns and cities run rivers and canals along which narrow boats and launches are heavily in demand during the tourist season (approximately Easter to mid-September) whilst the pubs, cafes, country shops and markets rely on holidaymakers throughout the year. The award-winning Ribby Hall Holiday Village situated just outside Kirkham, is set in beautiful grounds and offers luxury 5 star holiday accommodation either in its bespoke hotel or award winning chalets. Add into this mix the cycle clubs who have regular meets on the Fylde’s roads, athletic clubs who have frequent road races, the horses and riders from all manner of stables from the livery who teach riding to racing and stud and you begin to understand the variety of attractions. The Fylde has a long history in both arable and livestock farming producing high-quality produce which is sold across the country. To underline the importance of farming to the local economy, Great Eccleston hosts Britain’s largest 2 day agricultural show every July though there are numerous other village shows and events throughout the year. In short this is a vibrant and charming area, popular with families, individuals and groups as a tourist destination all contained in a small, rectangular plateau of approximately 13 miles square.

These are the amenities under threat from fracking in my neighbourhood. Each rural area in our wonderful country has its own unique beauty. This irreverent and misguided policy will ensure that the legacy we leave our children is one of noise, poisoned air and water and ugliness.
1 Fracking will result in the irreversible industrialisation of our countryside.

- Fracking will irreversibly change the face of the English countryside forever.
- Fracking is a heavy industrialised process unsuitable for the English countryside.
- Tens of thousands of wells are required to produce meaningful quantities of gas.
- England’s most precious landscapes are already licenced 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 incompatible with EFRA’s aim of developing sustainable rural tourism.

2 Fracking will have a negative impact on homes and businesses near well-sites.

- Fracking will be allowed within 400m of homes, businesses and rural villages.
- Drilling and fracking are noisy 24-hour-a-day activities.
- Fracking will create noise, light and air pollution.
- A huge increase in HGV truck movements will make places less attractive for tourists.
- 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.

3 Fracking will result in a huge increase in heavy traffic on country roads.

- Each fracking well will require thousands of HGV movements to and from the site.
- Each fracking well-pad will have between 10 and 40 wells, which means tens of thousands of HGV trucks per well-pad.
- These trucks will cause noise and air pollution.
- There will be more queues, traffic accidents and damage to roads and verges.
- Travelling around rural areas will be far more difficult for tourists.
- This will impact on rural businesses such as farms, shops and small factories, all of which rely on prompt deliveries for their businesses to function effectively.
- The peace and quiet of the countryside and rural villages will be destroyed.

4 The health impacts of fracking will deter tourists from visiting fracking areas.

- Fracking is banned or restricted by moratoria in many other countries, such as France, Germany, Bulgaria, Holland and Scotland, and in US states such as Maryland and New York State.
- These bans and moratoria are mainly because the health impacts of fracking on public health are considered to be too dangerous.
- 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.
• If fracking were allowed across the English countryside, many people would be discouraged from visiting because of health concerns for themselves and their families.

5 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.
• Widespread fracking would threaten thousands of permanent jobs in the tourist industry, as visitor numbers would fall and businesses would close.

6 Fracking will affect the reputation of food produced in tourist areas.

• Rural economies depend on farming and food production as well as tourism.
• Many areas of the country are known for their high-quality produce and rely on this reputation to attract tourists to local food fairs, farmers’ markets, restaurants, etc.
• The introduction of fracking in these areas may compromise the quality and reputation of locally produced food.
• There may also be the perception that food from farms grown near fracking wells could be contaminated.
• This will result in lower sales, falling tourist numbers, and lower rural employment.

7 Our most treasured nature and wildlife sites are under threat from fracking.

• Our nation’s protected areas, such as National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs), Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), World Heritage and Ramsar sites, etc. are hugely important for rural tourism and attract millions of visitors every year.
• There is currently no primary legislation banning fracking within these protected areas. Currently fracking in these areas is only restricted by planning conditions and government policy statements, not legislation.
• However, current legislation does allow fracking well-pads to be situated just outside the borders of these protected areas and wells can then be drilled horizontally underneath the protected areas.
• National Parks, AONBs and SSSIs may therefore end up being ringed by fracking well-sites.
• The resulting noise, pollution and traffic would destroy the amenity of the country’s most precious and wildlife-rich natural places.
• This again would result in a dramatic fall in the number of tourists visiting the area.

8 Fracking will negatively impact wildlife tourism in the countryside.

• Large numbers of tourists visit the English countryside to enjoy the wildlife that lives there.
• Widespread fracking will have a very damaging effect on wildlife populations, particularly if fracking wells are situated around the edges of protected areas like SSSIs.
• Noise, air and light pollution and increased traffic from fracking well-sites will reduce the population of wild birds and animals, most of whom will leave the area completely.
• Drilling and fracking at night would also have a detrimental effect on protected nocturnal species such as owls and bats.
• This loss of wildlife will have a damaging effect on wildlife tourism in rural areas and a consequent drop in visitor numbers.

9 Water contamination from fracking could permanently impact an area’s reputation.

• Fracking also brings with it the threat of water contamination through leaking wells, which could contaminate the aquifers that provide our drinking water.
• There may also be surface spills or other above-ground accidents, which could pollute streams, rivers and other water courses.
• 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.
• 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.
• Any water contamination incident would result in a drop in tourists visiting that area.

10 Fracking will reduce property prices, which will discourage rural investment.

• Fracking will have a negative effect on house, land and property prices in fracking areas, particularly for properties within one mile of a well-site.
• 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%.”
• The same report went on to say: "House prices in close proximity to the drilling operations are likely to fall. There could be a 7% reduction in property values within one mile of an extraction site."
• A report in Mortgage Introducer magazine stated that properties near the only well that has ever been fracked, Preese Hall in Manchester, fell by 4%.
• This drop in property values will 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.

11 Public perception of fracking is overwhelmingly negative.

• 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.
• 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.
• Most people don’t like fracking, and are unlikely to want to go on holiday to an area where this industry is established.
• If a particular part of the countryside is known to be a fracking zone, this will discourage people from visiting this area, reducing tourist numbers.

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

This paper also went on to say that fracking “may reduce the number of visitors and tourists to the rural area, with an associated reduction in spend in the local tourism economy.”

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?

13. The Human Dimension of Shale Gas Developments in Lancashire

This is the title of a new 123 page report compiled by Dr Anna Szolucha, a Social Anthropologist at the University of Bergen, Norway which was published on 30th August 2016. The report singles out Lancashire since this is the community which has had significant and measurable exposure over a prolonged time frame allowing conclusions to be drawn, however its findings will apply to any area that is targeted for shale gas exploration. The impact on local communities will inevitably colour any visitor experience. In brief, Dr. Szolucha’s findings are that Lancashire fracking prospect causes stress, suspicion and fractured communities and demonstrates that the severe adverse effects of fracking are not simply limited to the Rural Turist sector but among all residents, including those working in the Rural Tourism Industry it caused stress and anxiety much of which was caused by what she described as “a profound sense of moral outrage” at the activities of the gas company, local authorities and the government. This had led to depression, annoyance and feelings of disenfranchisement, she said. Residents also reported:

- Atmosphere of intimidation and fear
- Feelings of powerlessness
- Conflicts between former friends
- Disillusionment with politics and politicians
- Lack of confidence in the shale gas company, Cuadrilla
- Distrust of council officers and regulators
- Changed perceptions of the police

The report concluded that Cuadrilla and decision-makers in Lancashire had failed to take account of social and psychological factors when considering plans for fracking at two sites
in the county. This “significantly understated” the actual and potential impacts, she said. “From a social point of view, assessing shale gas exploration as a low-impact activity is unsupported by evidence”. Dr Szolucha argued that “The anxiety and deep feelings against shale gas exploration and extraction in Lancashire have shown that it is not considered a desirable and necessary development. “It is unlikely at this point that any assurance from the government or the proposed regulation and mitigation measures will convince the residents to support shale gas development.”

Dr Szolucha’s research concluded “Without exception, all members of the communities that were engaged in the planning process and grassroots activism reported significant levels of stress and anxiety” She said sources of stress included public speaking and working with the police, media and stakeholders. Residents talked of the “constant struggle for money” and the need to be able to read, understand and co-ordinate a response to documents from Cuadrilla and the authorities, often at short notice. The planning process had “taken over their lives”, she said, but at the same time, it had led them to value their local landscape more. Dr Szolucha said residents reported feelings of fear and stress about the potential impacts that exploration and extraction could have on social well-being and health in local communities. “Anxiety has been amplified by a widespread sense of annoyance, disenfranchisement and powerlessness caused by the attitudes of the company and the UK government.” Government statements supporting shale gas and the focus of the planning system on material considerations had made people feel their concerns were not being addressed, she said. This has led to, and exacerbated, a range of health effects. “Even if stringent regulatory regimes and robust mitigation measures aiming to minimise the risk of pollution or accident were to be applied, they may not be sufficient in alleviating local fears and in reducing the level of perceived risk by the residents.”

Safety and security

- Dr Szolucha said the prospect of shale gas had “significantly undermined feelings of personal safety”. She said some people reported an atmosphere of intimidation, distrust and secret surveillance. Some felt the legal system was not adequately protecting them from restrictions on their democratic rights. “Residents feel that the shale gas development introduced unnecessary security personnel and a higher police presence in the area. They also led to securitisation of places directly adjacent to the shale gas sites where residents were photographed while approaching the fields.” According to the research, people no longer trusted the police generally, feeling that they put the interests of companies and government above the rights of residents. But many residents said they had a good relationship with local Lancashire police officers and wanted this to continue. People involved in the research had experienced the effects of criminalisation of protests and protesters. Yet despite this, most said they would take part or support direct action against fracking.

Fractured community and grassroots mobilisation

- The research found that the prospect of shale gas development in Lancashire had already disrupted relations within local communities. Residents reported that the proposals had “reopened fractures between certain members of the communities and has isolated some
of the landowners” but the local campaign against shale gas had created a new sense of community and for some people this had helped alleviate stress.

Social impacts “inadequately assessed”

- Cuadrilla carried out an Environmental Impact Assessment of its proposed sites and produced an environmental statement running to hundreds of pages but Dr Szolucha said local residents believed the social impacts of shale gas had been “inadequately assessed” during public consultations and the planning and appeal process. They thought the planning process prevented the consideration of social and health information alongside the technical and environmental data provided by regulators and the company. This could, the study concluded, influence the outcomes of planning and political decision-making, against the interests of local communities. The study also found that residents perceived that staff from the council and regulators were influenced by the government and/or the company and were thus unable to make impartial decisions. An independently produced social impact assessment, which analysed the human consequences of a development, should be taken into account in all decisions about shale gas, the study concluded.

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*