I am a resident of Kirby Misperton in Ryedale, North Yorkshire. I was a Church of England priest in York for 17 years, and my wife and I have had a house in this village for 23 years. We retired here permanently in May 2014. I am an Honorary Assistant Bishop in the Diocese of York and a Visiting Fellow of St. John’s College Durham.

Both in York and in Ryedale we have seen the huge benefits which tourism has brought to our County. This has increased notably since the Tour de France. We were delighted to see the World Travel Awards identify Yorkshire as the best travel destination in Europe for two successive years.

It is the beauty and unspoiled nature of North Yorkshire which attracts the tourists and is the long term foundation of our future economic wellbeing. Tourism, agriculture and locally produced food are the heart of the local economy.

But as a resident of Kirby Misperton I also live in the first community in the UK to have a planning application for fracking approved. I have to submit that there is a fundamental contradiction between the Government’s encouragement of rural tourism and its policy on energy.

The proposed scale of fracking in rural North Yorkshire is devastating. To provide a sense of scale, the well here at Kirby Misperton was drilled two years ago, on an existing conventional gas site, half a mile away, causing distress to this community both in terms of noise and light pollution and the scale of traffic. Now, with the well already drilled, the single test frack will, according to the planning application, involve 910 HGV movements and 504 other vehicle movements, passing my front door. We are promised that the noise level will be no louder than that of a nightclub, for the nearest properties! We have no idea how many more times they hope to drill or to frack.

But our village’s experience is to be multiplied many times. The latest round of exploration licenses cover more than 200 communities in the Diocese of York, as I have reported to my Archbishop. As part of an earlier license round, Third Energy told the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee that they aspired to no more than 19 sites each with from 10 to 50 wells, depending on size. In the latest round INEOS, in their advertisement for seismic survey subcontractors announced their plan for “up to 30 well sites, and up to 396 horizontal wells’ within each of their nine 10 kilometer by 10 kilometer exploration license areas. The company states that these figures are intended ‘to give the community an idea of the maximum numbers of well sites they can expect to see in a license area, as well as the number of wells.’” This could mean up to 300 well-sites and 4,000 horizontal wells across their area.

But these are just two of six companies with exploration licenses. The quantity of water and of traffic alone is huge, and the impact even greater where there is no pre-existing natural gas infrastructure, as a whole new infrastructure will have to be built. Should this
be similar to other parts of the world it involve new roads, pipelines, storage tanks and compressor stations.

For a short-term again, allegedly bridging to a carbon neutral economy, this amounts to the industrialization of much of rural North Yorkshire, profoundly threatening our long term economy, and beyond the capacity of our infrastructure: rural roads, villages in close proximity to one another, and busy main roads to the seaside towns. In addition large quantities of flow-back fluid have to be trucked out and need decontamination, presumable at Bran Sands in Middleborough.

The application to frack at Kirby Misperton was opposed by the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, Flamingo Land, Castle Howard, Duncombe Place, the Hovingham Estate and many other estates and primary tourist locations. More than 200 businesses have registered their objection.

When Flamingo Land, in our village, objected to the KM8 application, at the advice of their Director of Conservation, a senior lecturer at York University, they did so out of concern for their staff and visitor, but also for their animals. Submitting six scientific papers in support. Flamingo Land is part of a number of international breeding programs for endangered species. Ryedale is also a national centre fro the breeding and training of race horses. Air, water and environmental pollution, which have accompanied fracking wherever it has begun, are equally bad news for people and for animals.

I do not believe that tourists will visit what they perceive to be a gas field. This will negatively impact many businesses – in particular caravan and camp sites near fracking wells, B&Bs, pubs and restaurants, and farm shops, as well as the larger tourist attractions.

It will result in a loss of local jobs as short term jobs for specialists from outside increase at the cost of local, longer term employment. It is already impacting the price and salability of houses in our village.

If the Government imposes fracking on this area – where it has been opposed by parish, town and district councils – it will be at the price of the tourist industry in Europe’s leading destination. The choice is either thriving tourism or industrial scale fracking.

September 2016