I am responding to this enquiry as I am most concerned about the prospect of fracking on a beautiful part of the country which I visit regularly. Members of my family live in Ryedale in North Yorkshire, where permission has been granted for the development of shale gas extraction at the KM8 well at Kirby Misperton. I have visited many parts of Ryedale and regularly stay in bed and breakfast accommodation there. With my grandchildren I have visited many sites of local interest and love the peaceful and quiet countryside with its clean air and good Yorkshire welcome. Most of North Yorkshire and Ryedale have now been granted fracking licences as have many other outstanding tourist areas.

1. The harm fracking will do to our countryside

“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.” (from the government’s Draft DEFRA report Shale Gas Rural Economy Impacts Paper, 1.7.15)

This draft report makes it clear that very careful thought must be given to the effects on tourism of these heavy industrial processes. Petroleum Exploration and Development Licences have been issued freely covering vast swaths of countryside and each licence potentially results in 100s of wells within each licence area. To produce gas in commercial quantities requires tens of thousands of wells. It is obvious to me after studying the development of wells in Pennsylvania that over a decade the number of wells multiplies quickly until it blights previously pristine landscapes. It seems very clear that fracking is not compatible with the development of tourism in any part of our precious countryside.

2. Potential tourists will be fearful of the health effects of fracking

As a breast cancer survivor I have become aware through Breast Cancer UK about the health consequences of fracking. They have published a paper about their fears,

“There is no conclusive evidence that fracking causes an increase in the number of cases of breast cancer. However, many of the chemicals used in fracking are known to be of concern and have been linked to an increased risk of breast cancer.”

“An overarching concern is that a large proportion of the chemicals used in fracking have not been tested for adverse health effects in humans.” (http://www.breastcanceruk.org.uk/science/bcukfs-fracking)

This paper draws particular attention to endocrine disrupting chemicals (EDCs) which can interfere with hormone functions, and are known to be implicated in breast cancer. My own cancer was hormone receptive which makes this of particular significance for me and my family.
Fracking has been banned in many countries because of health fears and studies done in America have also linked fracking to asthma, migraine and premature births. It seems unlikely that tourism would thrive in such a situation and I myself would not choose to holiday anymore in an area which held such risks. With so many wells planned in the future any would be tourists would be most discouraged from holidays or short breaks which involved breathing potentially polluted air.

3. The Effect of fracking on national parks and areas of outstanding beauty

Many of us who choose to holiday in this country head for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty or National Parks. The reasons for this must be obvious; we hope to enjoy the tranquillity and peace of the unspoiled countryside. There is no legislation to ban fracking from these areas and permission has been granted for horizontal drilling to take place with wells just outside their boundaries. With the number of wells proposed by oil companies it seems highly likely that these pristine areas of our countryside could be ringed with drilling wells. It will also mean that these areas will experience increased noise and heavy traffic pollution. Why would anyone choose to holiday in an area spoiled by industry in this way?

3. Fears about water contamination will affect tourist numbers

Fears about water contamination are well founded on many stories from America and many members of the public are unwilling to trust reassurances from oil and gas companies that leaks and contamination cannot happen. Accidents do happen and the chemicals used are incredibly toxic. The fact that there are plans to drill through water aquifers is worrying to most of us who value clean and unadulterated drinking water. I would imagine that these fears will deter many from visiting areas close to fracking sites.

4. The need for a new independent report

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. As mentioned above Defra’s own report stated that fracking would have a negative effect on tourist areas. It 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”. This report was heavily redacted and finally published in its un-redacted form in July 2015 and it was stated that the report was not analytically robust. I am left wondering why DEFRA do not think it important to produce a report that is sound. Fracking is an industry that in so many ways is going to affect our country for many years to come. For the purpose of this submission I strongly suggest that it will impact negatively on our tourist industry. This includes loss of jobs for those the tourist industry employs which offers far more permanent employment than the specialist short term employment that fracking offers.

5. Conclusion

It is clear that widespread fracking will have an extremely damaging effect on tourism in rural areas, and I believe that the shale gas industry is one of the greatest threats to 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*