We set up a small self-catering business – Noelle’s Cottages - in 2005 eventually with three cottages. We won the White Rose Award in our category and then the National award for Visit England. We actively promote Ryedale and North Yorkshire as a holiday destination. www.noellescottages.co.uk

Marketing: How well do agencies promote rural destinations across England? What more should the Government do to support this work?

As far as I know the only agency promoting rural North Yorkshire is Welcome to Yorkshire. We also have the North York Moors National Park which is not as active. By slashing the money that District Councils have available, the Government has ensured that vital activities to promote local tourism have been axed. All the Tourist Information Centres in Ryedale have been closed down with ludicrous information points installed. These comprise of a box screwed to the wall with 50 or so compartments with leaflets. In Pickering only 3 leaflets refer to Pickering. The staff has no training, no funding, little knowledge of the tourism offering and little enthusiasm to break off from selling and embark on sometimes lengthy quests to resolve difficult questions. The Council Office is out of the centre of Malton but purports to inform visitors with its own box on the wall. It is worse than pathetic. All in the tourism industry in Ryedale share similar views. Tourism is a key part of the rural economy and is under threat from the loss of the TIC’s and the image problem that fracking might bring. Almost no support for the industry emerges from the large number of people whose livelihood depends on rural beauty and tranquility. The unspoilpt landscape, nature and old-fashioned villages and their roads are all part of the mix. If as a government you want to industrialise the countryside with huge gas processing plants, pumping stations then you will destroy tourism in rural North Yorkshire. If you allow gas pipes to be deployed on a wide scale then the countryside will be blighter for a generation or more. In addition the reading of history and society from the study of the untouched countryside will be a great loss. In Ryedale we are said to have evidence of thousands of years of human activity visible to those who understand what to look for. Industrialisation would be an act of stupidity and political dogma.

The Government would do well to listen to Baroness Anne McIntosh of Pickering who has lived in the area for many years, been our MP and Chair of the EFRA select Committee. She presented her views and those of the Chair of Tourism Association of North Yorkshire when she described the threat to a sector bringing in £7 billion to the county and gave employment to 400,000 people.

The Government must prepare for Yorkshire turning their back on them of they press on with the misplaced view that fracking will bring prosperity and development to the county.
We have had many of our customers baffled by the decision to frack Ryedale and see nothing but harm coming from it.


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

Our roads are inadequate and rural transport reduced to the level that is of little or no relevance to tourists let alone working people. Our Moors Bus was a very welcome service but seems to have disappeared. Bike friendly roads would help. Mixing bikes and huge lorries is unwelcome. Tourist Information Centres were able to offer advise and brochures, solve problems and make bookings for tourists and thus improve access. They have been closed in the drive towards austerity and impoverishment.

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?

There was minimal funding for TIC’s but help for rates rebates. TIC’s have gone and we are losing the rates assistance. Genuine self-catering activities have been hit by various tax modifications as well as austerity measures so many are feeling the pinch. In Ryedale three of the most prominent and best rated tourist businesses are up for sale. This is unusual and troubling. Taper relief and offsetting mortgages have both been targeted to the detriment of the survival of new businesses.

First the Government must want to help rural tourism. There has been no sign to date that that is so. Tax breaks should favour the small landowners and small businesses and be capped so as to not benefit absentee landlords with huge estates. A cost benefit analysis should be undertaken for the use of land for grouse shooting and a study of biodiversity of the uplands.

Better targeting of subsidies to farmers and landowners in the National Parks would be wise. Sheep farming gives a dull monoculture of a moment of history. More money could be made by returning the less productive areas to woodland, protected from hunting and fishing but allowing wildlife to flourish. This could include beavers to help reduce flooding at no cost for the leaky dams they make. They are the experts and hugely increase biodiversity. Money should be given to farmers and landowners to fence these unproductive areas to protect them from deer and sheep and encourage natural rewilding. The farmers can erect the fences and manage the land by only mending fences and not disturbing the natural sequence of nature returning. The benefits to the surrounds and to the local people would be immense.
not only in tourism and related activities but to children and adults in mental health terms and in respect for the countryside and its wildlife.

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?

No alteration of boundaries except for enlargement. No industrialisation of the NP’s. No industrialisation along the boundaries. No industrialisation on the approaches to the Parks. No selling off of small pockets of land so that fracking can take place within the boundary of the Parks. Allow greater variation of nature and avoid the financial penalties for allowing wildflower and trees to grow. Subsidise only native, local tree planting. Consult with local people, listen to them and do not over-rule their views. The Localism Act.

Review the definition of sustainable – the golden thread running through planning law. Gregg Clark was clear that you cannot trade one element of sustainability (say economic growth) against another (say increasing biodiversity) but that all the aspects of sustainability must be considered.

Come and talk to the local community. You might find they know best, if indeed the government cares about rural tourism. You would be welcome in Ryedale. I would set up a venue and bring interested and interesting people to discuss.

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?

Rural transport enabled. Moors Bus returned. This enables tourism to flourish and helps the low carbon economy. Park and ride, rickshaw or footpath to town. Cycle routes and cycle hire encourage.

Housing needed for workers in tourism – often not well paid so a need for local, well built, vernacular or eco-friendly housing available in rural areas as affordable housing and social housing. Recent changes to the approach to planning and social housing are disadvantageous to the poor or low paid workers. (Hard working families)

TIC’s made profitable and properly deployed.
Training available in localities for providers of accommodation, shop workers, hotel and catering etc. We lack the basic skills and attitudes required but readily acquired.
Training that starts in schools and is freely available. Aim at Short courses and online training.
Mobile reception needs to be available at least in towns and villages.
Fast broadband for customers is very important. Also vital for the businesses. Free Wi-Fi hubs in tourist centres. Wi-Fi signs on entering a village or town giving information on request.

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

Avoid large developments which overbalance the local economy. Listen to the local people and do not over-ride their decision-making. See Gregg Clark and the Localism Act. We do not seem to do anything to enhance the local environment and often little to enhance the local character. Would fracking assist either? Rural tourism relies on rurality and does not benefit from industrialisation.

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?

Remind the above that the rural communities enjoy rurality. They need transport, mobile signal and wi-fi to survive. Local government can no longer support the local community and tourism, they have been defunded. The skills base is not adequately enhanced. Big business is given priority over culture, media and sport. HM Treasury seems intent on destroying rural tourism and agriculture. The DEFRA report identified the risks from fracking but was subsequently side-lined. Neither tourism nor rural communities support fracking or industrialisation of the rural areas.

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