Tourists come to rural areas of England on holiday to visit the attractive villages, explore the vibrant market towns, relax in a peaceful environment and enjoy the countryside and wildlife. Therefore all national and local policies to support tourism should work towards preserving these important aspects of rural England.

Sadly, this is currently not the case, as often central and local government policies run contrary to the interests of rural England, prioritising damaging and ill-thought-out housing projects, rail schemes and industrial developments which damage the very aspects of rural England that people come to enjoy on their holidays.

One particularly damaging industry that is threatening to destroy the rural tourist industry is unconventional gas production, in particular fracking for shale gas, coal bed methane production and underground coal gasification (UCG). The government’s determination to drive forward a programme for fracking in the UK, despite continuing and widespread opposition from all sections of the population – and in particular from rural communities and businesses - is likely to have a very damaging long-term impact on rural tourism.

This conclusion is supported by DEFRA’s own draft Shale Gas Rural Economy Impacts Paper, which – having been first released with 63 redactions – was finally released in full in July 2015 after a national campaign. The report said, “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 Government 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.” While the government tried extremely hard to avoid this report being published unredacted, and has distanced itself from the report’s conclusions, it is generally considered by the public and other observers to be a fair reflection of the possible impacts of fracking on rural communities. It is noticeable that while the government dismissed the report’s findings, claiming it was only a ‘draft report’, it has failed to produce a final report or commission a new report on the impact of fracking on the rural economy. The inescapable conclusion is that the government knows full well the consequences of fracking on the rural economy, and have chosen not to produce a final report because they do not want these conclusions to be widely known.

There are many ways in which fracking would affect rural tourism, and rural life in general.

**Well proliferation**

It would be impossible for fracking to produce the meaningful amounts of gas demanded by the government without the industry fundamentally changing the nature of our countryside. Fracking is a heavy industrial process which requires thousands of wells to be financially viable. This is because fracked wells only produce gas for a very short time, between 1 and 3 years. Lord Oxburgh, former Chairman of Shell, has stated that: “The flow rates of the majority of fracked shale gas wells (in the USA) halved in the first 12 months. 84% of fracking wells became uneconomic within just three years.”
This means that more and more fracking wells will need to be drilled every year to continue production. According to Andy Aplin, Professor of Unconventional Petroleum, Durham University, “To recover 15% of shale gas in Lancashire would need 33,000 wells on 5,500 pads. 15% recovery would be equivalent to just 13 years of UK gas use. To be independent of gas imports, we would need to continue drilling 1,000 wells every year.” (March 2014).

From a tourism point of view, if fracking were to be rolled out across our countryside in the way planned by the government and the shale gas industry, it would turn large areas of previously unspoilt countryside into industrial landscapes, with hundreds of well-pads, thousands of individual wells, gas processing and separation plants, storage facilities, scores of new pipelines and other related infrastructure. The impact this industry would have on tourism in the area is therefore obvious to all who have investigated its impacts, and is likely to be devastating to the local tourist economy in a country with the population density of England.

**Noise and light pollution**
Drilling a new vertical well in preparation for fracking takes about 90 days, and each horizontal well would take another 30 days. For engineering reasons, this drilling work needs to take place continuously, 24 hours a day. Fracking – the process of injecting a mixture of water, sand and chemicals at high pressure – is also a noisy continuous process which could also continue for days at a time. This means that any towns and villages near a well-site would be subjected to high levels of noise day and night. Fracking would also cause light pollution, as the site would need to be lit day and night to enable drilling and fracking to take place. The effect this would have on tourism would be very damaging, and is likely to affect hotels, pubs, campsites, B&Bs and other rural businesses in the location.
As you may know, fracking has been approved at a wellsite near the village of Kirby Misperton in North Yorkshire. This well is only 400m from the village, and less from the nearest campsite. If this well is fracked, and then developed into the multi-well site that its owners, Third Energy, are planning, the impact on local residents and tourist businesses nearby would be very damaging.

**Health issues**
There are many other concerns about fracking, including the effect it has on human and animal health. While the government claims that fracking is safe, a conclusion based mainly on a report by Public Health England based on research published up to December 2014, this is now woefully out of date. Over 80% of peer-reviewed research on the health impacts of fracking have been published since them, and the overwhelming majority of these point to health impacts, air pollution and water contamination. Many countries have banned fracking or have moratoria, including Scotland, France, Germany, Bulgaria, Maryland and New York State. Dr. Howard A. Zucker, NY State Health Commissioner, who recommending a fracking ban in his home state, 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.”

**Public perception of fracking**
Despite millions of pounds of government money and a concerted campaign by government and the shale gas industry, fracking is still deeply unpopular with the British public. In the latest Government Wave Survey 18, only 21% of people are in favour of fracking, compared to 76% who are in favour of renewable energy. In a recent YouGov Poll, only 33% of people would support fracking in their area, even if they received a compensation payment of up to £10,000, while 43% said they would still oppose fracking, despite the payment. Even the government’s latest plans to
compensate local communities for allowing fracking wells in their communities has not persuaded people to support this unwanted, unnecessary and unpopular industry. People choosing their holiday destinations are therefore unlikely to decide that fracking is

**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?

**Transport and traffic**
Tourist often drive around rural areas to visit stately homes, National Parks, village pubs and other local attractions. Therefore any industry that significantly increases the amount of traffic on the roads in rural areas will almost certainly have a negative affect on tourism. Fracking wells require huge amounts of HGV traffic, with thousands of HGV movements to and from the well-site for every well, and tens of thousands for every well-site. The trucks are needed to deliver fresh water, sand and chemicals to the site for the fracking process, and then truck away toxic radioactive waste water, other waste products and the produced gas if there is no pipeline. These trucks would need to travel along small country lanes to access the well-sites, and this in turn would cause excessive delays and problems for tourists visiting an area where fracking was taking place. There is also the issue of the extra noise, air pollution, road damage, verge damage and traffic accidents this increase of trucks would inevitably create.
Many people who live in rural communities would say already that traffic is a major problem in their areas. If fracking were to be allowed across our countryside, the increased traffic congestion and related problems are likely to contribute to a significant drop in tourist numbers.

**Jobs**
The tourism sector in the UK is responsible for 9.6% of all jobs in the UK, or 3.1 million jobs in 2013. The Deloitte *Tourism: jobs and growth report* found that Britain will have a tourism industry worth over £257 billion by 2025 – just under 10% of UK GDP and supporting almost 3.8 million jobs, which is around 11% of the total UK number.
These figures should be compared against the claims of the shale gas industry, who cite a Ernst and Young report predicting up to 64,000 jobs in 2024, based on the drilling of 4,000 wells. Only 6,310 of these jobs would be directly related to shale gas production – the others would be ill-defined ancillary jobs, many of which would be short-term. It has also been shown that fracking produces few jobs for the local population, relying instead on skilled itinerant workers on short-term contracts as they move from place to place. At the only well to have ever been fracked, Preese Hall in Lancashire in 2011, only 16% of jobs went to local people, and these were mainly in security and catering.
It is clear that investing in tourism can create thousands of permanent jobs for local people, while fracking is a boom-and-bust industry that provides short-term employment for industry experts, but is of little benefit to the local population.

**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?
The current legislation regarding fracking does not give adequate protection for rural areas of special character, such as National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs), Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), Ramsar sites, and other protected areas.

Currently national guidelines do not allow fracking well-sites to be established in protected areas, although it should be noted that conventional gas production and other mining operations – such as the Potash Mine in the North York Moors National Park – are allowed. This type of mining development, while not fracking, is also very detrimental to sustainable tourism.

However, there is no primary legislation to prohibit fracking operations on the surface of these protected areas. The so-called ‘ban’ is actually a planning condition on new PEDLs (Petroleum Exploration and Development Licences) announced in 2015, and for earlier licences, the claim of a ban is only supported by a government statement saying they are ‘not minded to grant consent for any programme which includes associated hydraulic fracturing’. This would appear to hold little legal weight and could be changed at any time at the whim of a Minister.

However, the current regulations do allow fracking under protected areas, by means of drilling vertically downwards and then horizontally, if the fracking well-pads are located just outside the boundaries of these protected areas. This means that it would be possible to have a protected area ringed by fracking well-sites, which would have a hugely negative impact on the protected areas themselves and the wildlife that lives in and around the site. Noise, light and air pollution from the fracking would carry for miles into the protected area, disturbing wildlife – and also tourists who have visited the area to enjoy the peace and quiet of a National Park or an AONB.

It is also worth noting that many SSSIs and AONBs are relatively small in area, and a few fracking well-sites situated just outside its borders would destroy the amenity, nature and wildlife within the park. If the wildlife is forced to leave a protected area because of noise and light pollution, or is poisoned by water contamination caused by fracking-related activity, then those tourists who want to see wildlife will stop visiting the area. Similarly, if the traffic, noise and pollution caused by fracking wells means that visitors stop coming, this would again result in reduced tourist numbers for the area. There would also be considerable impact on the road network around protected areas, due to the huge number of HGV movements that fracking well-pads would inevitably generate.

In short, the current legislation is woefully inadequate in its protection of these areas, and are designed to facilitate the expansion of the fracking industry, rather than promote sustainable tourism.

If the intention of this consultation is to promote sustainable tourism in rural England, it would seem essential for the EFRA Committee to recommend that the planning regulations relating to fracking in protected areas are tightened up in the following ways:

- Primary legislation should be put before Parliament to ensure that fracking, and other forms of unconventional gas production, are banned by law on the surface of the following protected areas: National Parks, the Broads, AONBs, World Heritage Sites, Source Protection Zones, SSSIs, Natura 2000 areas and Ramsar sites.
- Legislation should also be proposed to prevent fracking under the above areas by drilling horizontally from outside the boundaries.
- Legislation should also be brought forward to include a buffer zone of 5 km (or 3 miles) around the perimeter of the aforementioned protected sites, within which fracking or any other form of unconventional gas production would also be prohibited.

This would help to protect our important nature and wildlife sites and their borders, and by doing so help promote sustainable tourism by preserving the very features which draw tourists to these areas in the first place.

Furthermore, the current planning system is so heavily skewed in favour of minerals development that it is very difficult for local communities opposing such developments to obtain a fair hearing. The government’s National Energy Policy, which (via the Infrastructure Act 2015) has enshrined in law a duty for developers to maximise the production of oil and gas ‘in the national interest’, appears to take precedence over all other legislation intended to prohibit development in protected areas, including the National Planning Policy Framework, Local Development Plans, Local Waste and Minerals Plans and The Wildlife and Countryside Act. If the EFRA Committee is serious about its desire to encourage sustainable tourism, it needs to address this imbalance as a matter of urgency.

**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?

There are a number of ways in which Defra can ensure that other government departments support rural tourism, some of which have already been mentioned in earlier sections.

---

**Housing**

Another of the key impacts of fracking that concerns people is the possible effect on house and property prices in the area, particularly for properties near a fracking 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 survey of UK estate agents in potential fracking showed that 67% thought that house prices would suffer. The majority of estate agents thought the loss of value would be between 10-15%, while a handful estimated a fall of up to 70%. (Daily Telegraph, 1st May, 2015). And a recent report in Mortgage Introducer magazine says that house prices near Preese Hall in Lancashire, the only well in the UK that has ever been fracked, dropped by 4%. Ray Boulger, from leading mortgage advisor John Charcol, said in July 2015 that “The prospect of fracking in your area is a bit like putting a motorway or railway, like HS2, through your front garden. It is going to have an impact on the value of your property.” It is very likely that fracking will result in a drop in tourist numbers, for the reasons given in this submission, and that would again have a knock-on effect on investment in tourist-related businesses and property prices. Against this background of potential falls in property prices, it is hard to see how local businesses would feel confident about diversifying into tourism by, for example, opening farm shops, setting up B&Bs, cafés or gift shops if they live in an area that is under threat from fracking.
So, the best way for the EFRA Committee to support farmers and rural residents who want to invest in tourism is to oppose fracking in areas that depend on tourism.

Finally, the key question we would urge the EFRA Committee to ask itself is this:

*Given the increased noise, air pollution, traffic problems, health risks and widespread industrialisation that fracking would inevitably, how many people are going to want to go on holiday in an area where there are thousands of fracking wells?*

*September 2016.*