I am a resident of Ryedale, North Yorkshire - a beautiful part of England that has an economy that relies heavily upon tourism and agriculture. The area has many historic monuments of national importance, including; Rievaulx Abbey, Byland Abbey, Helmsley Castle and Pickering Castle – magnificent stately homes such as Castle Howard and Nunnington Hall – to name just a few.

The landscape is breathtakingly beautiful and is bound by the North York Moors National Park, the historic Yorkshire coast with its towns and villages - including Whitby, Robin Hoods Bay and Scarborough and Ryedale also the Howardian Hills Area of Outstanding National beauty.

We have a successful monthly food market that tourists flock to. The area is recognised for the high quality and variety of food and produce, Malton has been designated as a Yorkshire’s first Food Enterprise Zone.

Understandably tourists from all over the world and UK are drawn to visiting and staying in this area. I often meet foreign tourists in our historic market towns such as Helmsley. During the busy summer months you regularly meet tourists from America, France Holland, Australia and elsewhere. Many return year after year. Indeed a lady I met from Wisconsin has been visiting Ryedale for 40 years!

Flamingoland, theme park and zoo is situated in Ryedale and has over one million visitors a year - it is one of the top five paid tourist attractions in England and the number one paid tourist attraction in Yorkshire.

The tourist industry in Ryedale is thriving and is actively working with partner organisations to build on our success. It must be recognised that Ryedale is a very important part of the wider Yorkshire tourism offer.
Yorkshire has been designated as one of the top regions in the world to visit and the best place in Europe.

http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-24713858


The tourist industry in Yorkshire and the Humber is worth an estimated £7billion per annum.

http://industry.yorkshire.com/media-centre/yorkshire-facts

Defra statistics state Yorkshire provides the second largest percentage of income from agriculture in the UK (16%).

The total income from farming in Yorkshire and Humberside in 2015 was also the second highest (behind the East of England region) at £ 466million


This shows how important the region is to the UK tourism and agricultural industry. Many of our farmers have combined agriculture with a tourist business and often provide holiday cottage accommodation or B&B accommodation, tea rooms, outdoor sports and pursuits.

Of the several farms that are close to my home – approximately one third offer some form of tourist accommodation/activity. Clearly this could be expanded and encouraged as it is an entirely compatible industry. However care must be taken to ensure food production/output does not fall as a result.

In order to maintain and build upon these two vitally important industries (tourism and agriculture) and our wonderful landscape and rural communities – it is essential that government policies must protect, support and preserve Ryedale and Yorkshire.

Fracking

One of the biggest threats to rural tourism is fracking (the extraction of shale gas and any other form of unconventional gas).

There are many and legitimate reasons for this concern:

1. Traffic

Many of the roads in this area are C class rural roads. They provide idyllic roads for cyclists, horse riders and our tourist. They are idyllic because whilst narrow (often
single vehicle width) and winding, traffic is currently relatively light – allowing leisure pursuits and agriculture to operate safely alongside one another.

Fracking would increase traffic to unacceptable and dangerous levels. Thousands of HGV journeys are generated from each individual drill pad being constructed, each drill being drilled and each frack taking place.

Heavy traffic from fracking will destroy the rural nature of the area and place HGV traffic on to unsuitable roads putting pedestrians, horse riders, cyclists and drivers at risk.

The noise and air pollution caused by high numbers of HGVs will have a very negative impact on the peaceful, rural environment, tourists and also on the health and wellbeing of local residents.

At certain times, particularly during the harvest period, high numbers of agricultural vehicles are on our roads from first light to very late at night and increased HGVs on the roads would cause significant problems to farmers and locals.

Our A Roads are few and extremely busy in the holiday periods – fracking HGV fleets would cause delay and inconvenience to tourists and all other road users. Additional delay and the impact of HGVs would definitely put visitors off coming to Ryedale.

The A64 is one of the main routs to York, the Yorkshire coast and Ryedale. It is already heavily congested and especially at holiday periods – there is no capacity for increased HGV fracking traffic.

**Helmsley Crowned Best Market Town High Street in Britain**


Helmsley is an extremely important tourist destination, having won the Best Market Town High Street in Britain in 2015, the quaint, historic and picturesque nature of the town is unique. Helmsley is also a successful market town, with thriving independent, local businesses that form an integral part of the local community.

The A170 goes through the historic and famous market town of Helmsley. It is only a single carriageway road and many would not even consider it an A class road.

Any increase from HGV traffic would be unacceptable, as the A170 passes next to the ancient market square, where tourists gather and visitors cross this road frequently to access shops and businesses.

Business and tourism would undoubtedly suffer if HGV traffic was increased and it would completely alter the character and nature of the town for visitors and locals.
I have no doubts whatsoever that traffic from fracking would negatively impact tourism in this area. Tourists do not visit rural areas such as this and expect to encounter heavy HGV traffic.

Traffic is an important issue for protecting rural areas and rural tourism. Traffic policies must fully evaluate the impact that increased traffic will have on the character of the area, visitors and tourism. The wider traffic network must be taken into consideration. Development of any kind must be limited if increased traffic will be detrimental to tourism, other existing industries, the landscape and local communities.

There must be stronger planning laws to curb excessive traffic in these important rural areas. Full economic impact assessments should be carried out and extensive local consultation should be undertaken. At present I, along with many others living in rural communities, consider that local opinion carries little weight and planning decisions are taken by council’s that are many miles away from the relevant application and without a councillor from the area on the Committee.

Local representation on decisions that are extremely important, such as our economy and tourism is very poor.

If tourism is to thrive in rural areas, the local community must have far more say and involvement in key decisions and policy making – and that includes at central government level.

2. Employment; Tourism employs 250,000 people some 7% of the total job market in the Yorkshire & Humber region (2008)

Employment in rural areas needs to provide sufficient jobs in order to be sustain the local economy and to prevent a skill drain to urban centres. Many jobs are dependent or linked to tourism. Although some of this work may be seasonal – the majority of businesses in Ryedale are open all year round and we now have visitors all year round. Many people enjoy visiting in the quieter months and Christmas is particularly busy. In addition many of the restaurants, cafes and pubs also rely on patronage from the local population as well.

In order to retain employment within the tourism industry it is important that policies are geared to support the industry. Tourist businesses wherever possible should be supported and encouraged to provide a career structure for people working in the industry, so it is not seen as a “dead end job”. Whilst there will always be an element of seasonal working – that is geared at temporary staff – given the amount of income tourism generates in Yorkshire and Humberside, the government must do more to support the industry and ensure that people employed in tourism receive at least the minimum wage and a career path wherever possible.

A buoyant tourist industry can help boost income to farmers as well and provide more all year round employment is appropriately marketed and managed.
The government must ensure that the wages of our agriculture and tourism workers are fair and provide sufficient income to live off. Low wages is a huge risk to two of our most important rural industries being successful.

The quality of the tourist offer and the food we produce relies upon the availability and quality of the people working in these industries.

Fracking has been shown to cause a problem for local rural communities and businesses – the Australia Institute have carried out an extensive study that has shown very negative impacts on rural economies.

For every 10 new jobs in the unconventional gas industry 18 agricultural jobs are lost


3. Planning & Industrialisation of the Countryside

Our planning policies must ensure that the character of our countryside is preserved at all costs. Whilst it is unrealistic to expect no development will take place, it is essential that any development is absolutely necessary and the implications and impact upon the character of the area (from a tourism and historic as well as nature and conservation) point of view must be at the forefront of all policy and decisions.

The policy of insisting that a certain number of houses must be built should not routinely apply to rural areas. Housing in these areas should be geared to meeting local needs and providing homes for local people.

At the moment housing is being built in Ryedale, which is far too expensive for many local people to afford and there are insufficient employment opportunities in the area that would pay sufficient income for locals to be able to purchase many of the houses built. This encourages people to move in from outside the area and commute to cities like Leeds and York – which increases traffic.

Over development of our villages and market towns can create sprawl and urbanisation and this again detracts from the character and nature of the area that attracts tourism.

Fracking is a major threat to the countryside and rural way of life. Not only from increased traffic but from the industrial activities and the associated industrial paraphernalia.
The Ryedale area is typical of many English rural landscapes mainly undulating and open vale with wide views across undeveloped landscape from any slightly elevated ground. Fracking operations will be visible and given they are 24 hour operations there will also be noise and light pollution.

The scale of fracking is vast if it is to be successful, the industry cannot operate economically on a small scale. The planning policies must be robust enough to control the fracking industry if we are to preserve our rural areas and keep them attractive to tourism. Without this commitment from government and planning policy the rural tourism in Ryedale and Yorkshire will undoubtedly suffer. People do not come on holiday to share the roads with heavy traffic and to see fracking pads on the rural landscape and suffer noise and light pollution!

Professor Andy Aplin (a specialist in unconventional gas/fracking) of Durham University warns of 33,000 wells and 5000 drill pads

https://www.dur.ac.uk/dei/news/?itemno=20408


Studies on the impact on tourism in America are unreliable because the out of town fracking workers occupied hotels and B&B accommodation for years so the actual bed occupancy rate of hotels and B&Bs in fracking areas will have shown full occupancy rates – but the facilities were full of gas workers not tourists! Anecdotal evidence suggests that tourism levels in fracking areas are now lower than before fracking commenced.

It must also be taken into account that the state of Pennsylvania, where 10,000 wells have been drilled and fracked, is approximately the same size as England with a population of only 12 million and 60% of the state is deeply forested. England has a population of over 50 million and most of the countryside is farmland. The impacts of fracking will be far greater in areas like Ryedale and other rural tourist areas in the UK.

The report below states that tourism and room occupancy rates are at an all time low following the fracking boom in Pennsylvania.


Defra’s own report stated that fracking would negatively impact rural tourism (Shale Gas Rural Economy Impacts Paper).

The report was withheld from the public for a considerable period of time but was eventually published in full.
People such as myself, living in a rural community, cannot understand why this report was so contentious and withheld by the government and then declared a “draft” report because it contains what we all know to be the obvious.

In a densely populated country like England fracking will have a huge negative impact on tourism. Make no mistake - unless the fracking industry is limited to one or two sites – the tourism in Ryedale and other rural tourism areas will be hugely and negatively impacted.

Hundreds of businesses in Ryedale have stated their concern about the negative impact fracking will have and the District, Town and Parish councils have also voiced their concerns. Ryedale District Council voted for a five year moratorium against fracking.

The two industries are not compatible.

The Defra report states

“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.”

And Dr Richard Miller, a former BP petroleum geologist, states why fracking is not suitable in our densely populated country and about the industrialisation of the countryside

“We’re like a cage of lab rats that have eaten all the cornflakes and discovered that you can eat the cardboard packets too. Yes, we can, but... Tight oil may reach 5 or even 6 million b/d in the US, which will hugely help the US economy, along with shale gas. Shale resources, though, are inappropriate for more densely populated countries like the UK, because the industrialisation of the countryside affects far more people (with far less access to alternative natural space), and the economic benefits are spread more thinly across more people. Tight oil production in the US is likely to peak before 2020. There absolutely will not be enough tight oil production to replace the US' current 9 million b/d of imports."


And Professor Richard Davies of Newcastle University States

“it could cause the “industrialisation” of the countryside because of the number of wells and the traffic.
In northern England alone it will require “thousands” of wells to extract just ten per cent of the shale gas reserves, he said.

“For me the fracking is not the problem, it is the number of wells and the traffic,” he added.


**Conclusion**

In a densely populated country like the UK it is vitally important that we protect our countryside and wildlife in order to support a successful rural tourism business.

I recommend that:

Planning policies must be robust and fit for purpose to deal with preserving the countryside, rural communities and the rural tourism and agriculture economies. Plans should be capable of limiting development.

Local communities should have far more influence over policy making and decisions taken than at present. Rural communities are underrepresented at all levels.

Government should work to ensure sustainable rural tourism jobs, with a career structure where possible.

Fracking (shale gas) developments pose a huge threat to rural tourism and should not be permitted for the reasons outlined above. Fracking is an intense industrial process that operates on a large scale and is not compatible with a rural tourism industry or the wider rural economy.

I would ask the EFRA Select Committee to investigate the impacts of fracking on rural tourism – to commission independent research on the impact that fracking will have on rural tourism and the wider rural economy (including agriculture). This should include a full economic impact assessment. I would then recommend that the findings of the research is published in a detailed report.

*September 2016*