I am responding to this enquiry because I am extremely concerned about the damaging effect that High Volume High Pressure Hydraulic Fracturing, or fracking, would have on rural tourism in England, and also in the rest of the UK.

I am a Parish Councillor for Gilling East, in an area that is currently threatened by fracking – it is in Petroleum Exploration and Development Licence (PEDL) No. 208, which was bought last year by INEOS, a petrochemicals company with an appalling safety record of spills, contamination and violations in worker safety and other rights at its plant in Grangemouth, Scotland. Many of England’s most precious landscapes are already licenced for fracking, with these PEDL licences covering one third of the country.

Gilling East has several B&Bs, pubs, organic farms and other businesses that rely heavily on tourism, so I am very worried about the impact fracking in our area would have on our rural tourist economy. Fracking is a heavy industrialised process which is entirely unsuitable for the English countryside, with its small country roads, and in some cases, medieval bridges. Fracking companies are planning hundreds of wells per 10x10 km² PEDL licence area. Tens of thousands of wells are required to produce meaningful quantities of gas, so if allowed to go ahead this process will lead to the irreversible industrialisation of the countryside.

Each fracking well will require thousands of HGV movements to and from the site. Each fracking well-pad will have between 10 and 40 wells, which means tens of thousands of HGV trucks per well-pad. These trucks will cause noise and air pollution. The peace and quiet of the countryside and rural villages will be destroyed.

There will be more queues, traffic accidents and damage to roads and verges. Travelling around rural areas will be far more difficult and less enjoyable for tourists. This will impact on rural businesses such as farms, shops and small factories, all of which rely on prompt deliveries for their businesses to function effectively. There are also safety concerns – Yorkshire has a number of accident blackspots, a situation that can only get worse if people are tempted to overtake queues of HGVs on our narrow bendy roads.

Fracking will reduce employment in the rural tourism sector. Tourism provides millions of permanent jobs for the rural economy – and Yorkshire is at the forefront of the UK’s tourist industry, worth £7 BN in 2015. Widespread fracking would threaten thousands of permanent jobs in the tourist industry, as visitor numbers would fall and businesses would have to close.

The introduction of fracking Yorkshire may compromise the quality and reputation of our locally produced food. There could also be the perception that food from farms grown near fracking wells could be contaminated. This will result in lower sales, falling tourist numbers, and lower rural employment. Only last week, the government of Victoria in Australia, after witnessing the disaster it has caused in its neighbouring state of Queensland, imposed a permanent ban on the process to protect its farming industry. Is ours not worth protecting too?

Our nation’s most precious natural treasures, such as National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs), Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), World Heritage and Ramsar sites, etc. are hugely important for rural tourism and attract millions of visitors every year. There is currently no primary legislation banning fracking within these protected areas. Fracking in these
areas is only restricted by planning conditions and government policy statements, not legislation. However, current legislation does allow fracking well-pads to be situated just outside the borders of these protected areas and wells can then be drilled horizontally underneath the protected areas. National Parks, AONBs and SSSIs may therefore end up being ringed by fracking well-sites. The resulting noise, pollution and traffic would destroy the amenity of the country’s most precious and wildlife-rich natural places. This again would result in a dramatic fall in the number of tourists visiting the area.

Large numbers of tourists visit the English countryside to enjoy the wildlife that lives there. Widespread fracking will have a very damaging effect on wildlife populations, particularly if fracking wells are situated around the edges of protected areas like SSSIs. Noise, air and light pollution and increased traffic from fracking well-sites will reduce the population of wild birds and animals, most of whom will leave the area completely. Drilling and fracking at night would also have a detrimental effect on protected nocturnal species such as owls and bats. This loss of wildlife will have a damaging effect on wildlife tourism in rural areas and a consequent drop in visitor numbers.

Fracking is highly unpopular with the general public, with only 21% of the population supporting the process, according to the latest Government Wave 18 survey. The government’s proposals to pay up to £10,000 to residents living near well have failed to convince the public, with only 33% supporting the policy. Most people don’t like fracking, and are unlikely to want to go on holiday to an area where this industry is established. If a particular part of the countryside is known to be a fracking zone, this will discourage people from visiting this area, reducing tourist numbers.

Defra’s own draft Shale Gas Rural Economy Impacts Paper, published in July 2015, states the following: “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 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.”

I believe that the fracking industry will have a very damaging effect on tourism in rural areas, that DEFRA has a duty to oppose such developments, and should instead be working to promote sustainable, low-impact tourism in order to preserve the English countryside.

I therefore 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 exploitation.

September 2016