Written evidence submitted by Jo-anne Veltman (RUT0261)

I have been moved to respond to this enquiry principally because I have very significant concerns about the impact on rural areas & communities, including on tourism, from proposed plans for a new shale gas industry in the UK.

I am a children’s doctor living & working in Norfolk, which is itself a beautiful county. However I come originally from Yorkshire & as you will be aware, large areas of Yorkshire, as well as other areas in the UK, are covered by Petroleum Exploration & Development Licences [PEDL]. Many of these licences & plans for exploration & subsequent shale gas development directly fall within beautiful rural areas or important urban tourist attractions (which can be a pull to rural destinations if they are close by) such as York. The current plans also mean that development would occur very close to residents and businesses.

Britain is a beautiful country & certainly should be able to make the most of its tourism possibilities. Yorkshire itself has much to offer in diversity of landscapes both inland & coastal, it’s rich cultural & historical heritage & places of special interest, as well as excellent shopping & leisure facilities. The county has been named (including by Lonely Planet, 2014) as one of the top global tourist destinations. I do not understand how shale gas development can be considered in Yorkshire & similar places, that provide such fantastic tourist opportunities. As you know tourism is an important contributor to the local economy in Yorkshire well as rural attractions include the Moors, the Dales & Yorkshire’s picturesque coast.

As you will be aware, Yorkshire was heavily impacted by devastating floods recently. It is well known that with global climate change these events will become more frequent & likely will be more severe unless measures are taken now. I would ask the Committee to please consider the urgent need for effective flood defences & climate adaptation strategies for Yorkshire, to protect the county, including it’s tourism.

The Parliamentary Committee for Climate Change has recently published a report on the Shale Gas Industry & has outlined three conditions that it says must be met for the UK to meet its current carbon targets. These conditions have not been met at this time. Additionally, because of the speed of current progression of climate change & the realisation that the Paris Agreement & the UK’s own climate targets, whilst ambitious do not go far enough to meet the less than 2 degree global temperature target, it would seem highly unlikely that a thriving shale industry in the UK could be compatible with protecting the climate. The committee also raises concerns about potential impacts of UK shale on global carbon emissions & their further report on this particular issue is yet to be published.

I mention this because:

1. Yorkshire & other areas of the UK have over recent times suffered from unusual & extensive flooding which we know will become more likely with
climate change. The costs of flooding are far-reaching & go of course well beyond direct economic impacts. This clearly has implications for the tourism economy in various ways.

2. One fifth of all PEDLs lie in areas that are already known to be at risk of flooding. When shale gas developed areas are flooded, the precautions that industry & government have put in place (even if considered adequate) re. protecting environment, water & public health become severely challenged: if not impossibly so. The impacts seen where this has occurred in USA have been devastating.

3. Shale gas is itself of course a fossil fuel & fugitive methane emissions pose a serious climate risk from the shale gas industry across all stages of development & production. In considering the protection & expansion of tourism for Yorkshire & other similar places in England, it seems incredible to me that an industry such as shale gas would even be considered, on the basis of climate alone. Why plan the development of a new industry which risks exacerbating climate change within an area whose coast & many inland areas are already at risk from climate change? Furthermore, why plan an industry which is likely to contribute to flood risk, within an area where flooding & that industry are incompatible & a combination of the two would lead to greater impacts on environment & people – including tourism?

Aside from climate change & flood risk, there are many other well-documented reasons why a shale gas industry in areas such as Yorkshire would appear to be completely incompatible with a thriving tourist industry.

Tourists visiting a rural area want peace & quiet. They want natural beauty & wildlife. They most certainly do not want to be confronted with heavy industry, noise, traffic or pollution.

It is also well evidenced that communities themselves are heavily impacted by the shale gas industry – with impacts on population demographics, house prices, rents, crime rates & pressure on local services as well as impacts on social cohesion. Spending time in rural communities is itself part of the desired tourist experience.

There must be local business confidence – for start ups, investment & for existing businesses to choose to remain & grow.

Local people in the surrounding areas of proposed drill sites have become very anxious about multiple potential impacts from shale gas, both to themselves, their environment & their livelihoods. To the best of my knowledge there has not yet been a definitive report into the socio-economic impacts of a shale gas industry for the UK. This would seem to me an essential piece of work that needs to be undertaken & with regards to this consultation about tourism: is of direct relevance.
Furthermore, as a (medical) doctor I have taken a close look at the hazards of the shale gas industry & potential risks to public health. You will be I am sure familiar with the list of the public's concerns about health risks from fracking. I am aware that these have been labelled by some Members of Parliament & Government as well as by representatives of the Oil & Gas Industry as "scare-mongering" & "ill-informed". I am also aware of the report into shale gas by Public Health England (2014). What is not widely expressed is the limited remit of that report. It most certainly was not a comprehensive report on the public health risks of fracking & in its own words never attested to be. However I am concerned that that is how it has been commonly presented by the Industry & other authorities including some in Government. Its conclusions are quoted widely out of context in a way that misrepresents their appropriate application. Many experts world-wide, along with senior doctors in the UK & myself (I am not an expert, but have done my own thorough & careful research) are highly concerned about the potential public health risks posed by shale gas. That the public's concerns are legitimate, has been recognized by many authorities, including the United Nations Environment Programme. As a rule, people do not generally wish to spend leisure time in areas where there may be concerns about health impacts from local industry.

CONCLUSION
I would like to conclude with a quote from DEFRA’s own draft “Shale Gas Rural Economy Impacts Paper” which I do appreciate was a draft & has subsequently been assessed by DEFRA itself as “not analytically robust”. However at the very least, its conclusions need investigating: as they appear to be rational, there is at least some evidence to support them, & the implications are very concerning.

“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.” The shale gas industry "may reduce the number of visitors and tourists to the rural area, with an associated reduction in spend in the local tourism economy." ~DEFRA

In terms of supporting growth in rural tourism in England, there are many strategies that could be helpful but it would appear that one of the biggest obstacles to a thriving rural tourism is the current plan to develop the UK shale gas industry in many of these very areas.

September 2016