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

The Government’s policy to promote Shale Gas extraction along with the Industry’s insistence in applying for permission in unsuitable and unsustainable locations in the countryside will consequently result in negative impacts on the ability of the tourism and leisure sector to successfully market and promote rural destinations. The promotion of controversial 24/7 large-scale industrial activity involving large volumes of HGV traffic and associated noise, light and air pollution in the heart of the countryside will pose a very difficult challenge to those seeking to promote and encourage visitors and investors in the rural economy.

Shale gas exploitation could be located in areas designated and approved for the purpose of industrial activity.

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?

It is not just rural areas of special character that need protection; our country needs to retain its precious countryside and coastal areas and ensure that they are preserved as attractive areas for people to enjoy. Rural tourism in the Fylde is valued by those living here and in nearby urban areas and provides a healthy destination on their doorstep for them to enjoy. The Parish of Treales, Roseacre and Wharles, although not designated greenbelt or an area of special interest, is highly valued by residents and the numerous regular visitors to the area who come to experience the unique facilities that the Parish has to offer; cycling, walking, horse riding. By protecting local areas for people to enjoy, the environment benefits from the reduction in the national carbon footprint.

Planning regulation therefore needs to be more robust to protect rural areas from unsuitable developments. The cumulative impacts on rural areas and the local economy from proposed large-scale industrialisation of the countryside by Shale Gas should be given more consideration. Developers should be directed to apply for permissions only in areas designated for such industrial activity.

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

The promotion of Shale Gas exploitation in the countryside will introduce thousands of HGV vehicle movements onto the rural road network will have a negative effect on peoples’ access to the countryside. Cyclists, walkers, horse riders and leisure drivers will be put at risk. Rural businesses will suffer from lack of custom and farming activity will be compromised.

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 is no compensation in place to try to address/avoid the negative impacts of the shale gas industry on rural communities.
**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?

The infrastructure required for large scale 24/7 industrial fracking process conflicts completely with infrastructure required to meet visitor needs and still maintain and protect the attractiveness of the countryside.

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

Planning policies should be amended to take special account of rural environments and more effort made to protect them. The current balance appears to be in favour of developments not protecting rural areas.

**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?

DEFRA does not have adequate controls over the EA and the Drinking Water Inspectorate. This was demonstrated earlier this year with the prolonged and serious contamination of Fylde’s water. It therefore puts into question the governance capabilities of DEFRA in relation to the permitting of shale gas activity and raises the question of whether the EA will be able to protect communities and the environment from the negative impacts of fracking in relation to air and water pollution.

*September 2016*