

Mendip Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Partnership

Fracking Position Statement- Update January 2014

What is Fracking?

Hydraulic fracturing (fracking) is a technique used to extract hydrocarbons trapped in certain types of rock. A mixture of fluid and sand is pumped into a borehole under high pressure to initiate fractures in rock layers to release gases. The gas is collected and used as fuel. It is thought that significant prospective resources of shale gas and coal bed methane may exist in Somerset.

What Is Government Policy?

The coalition government believes shale gas has the potential to provide the UK with greater energy security, growth and jobs. The British Geological Survey estimates there may be 1,300 trillion cubic feet of shale gas present in the north of England. [Government statement on shale gas](#)

The government has unveiled a package of reforms to encourage development in the industry. They include new planning guidelines to make the process of approving new drilling sites more streamlined, and a consultation on tax incentives to encourage exploration.

Communities affected by shale gas drilling are also expected to receive £100,000 in "community benefits" and 1% of production revenues, should sites start producing gas. Councils can keep 100 % of the business rates they collect from shale gas sites

What are the Environmental Concerns Associated with Fracking?

The principal issues include:

- noise associated with the operation
- dust
- air quality
- lighting
- visual intrusion into the local setting and the wider landscape caused by any the placement of any building or structure within the application site area
- landscape character
- archaeological and heritage features
- traffic
- risk of contamination to land
- soil resources
- water resources
- the impact on best and most versatile agricultural land
- flood risk

- land stability/subsidence
- internationally, nationally or locally designated wildlife sites, protected habitats and species, and ecological networks
- nationally protected geological and geomorphological sites and features site restoration and aftercare

Planning Policy

Paragraphs 142 to 149 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) set out minerals planning policy. Planning permission is required for each phase of hydrocarbon extraction, although some initial seismic work may have deemed planning consent under Part 2 of Schedule 22 to the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995

For further information can be found at the following link. [planning-practice-guidance-for-onshore-oil-and-gas](#)

What Is The Mendip Hills AONB Position?

The AONB's stance at this stage is to urge a very cautious approach to 'fracking'. We would have serious reservations about the process taking place within the designated landscape with regard to impacts on the character of the landscape from buildings and structures, on aquifers and the water table, on SSSI's and biodiversity.

The AONB Unit is not aware of any planning applications to date for test drilling and 'fracking' activity in or near the designated landscape but will be consulted on any that do come forward.

17th January 2014