

My response to John Penrose, MP for Weston

22nd December 2016 Robin Whitlock 0 Comments

Here is my response to John Penrose, MP for Weston:

Dear Mr Penrose,

Thanks for your reply.

Regarding your first point: “it doesn’t reduce or change our existing commitments to use green energy and boost our proportion of renewables”. Your argument circumvents the fact that the Tories have just delivered a range of stinging cuts to incentives for renewable energy, of which the cut to support for solar was the most ludicrous, given that solar previously added a few pounds to household energy bills and was about five years away from not needing subsidy at all. Furthermore, UK solar installations plummeted following these cuts. In addition, support for energy efficiency was slashed as well, and also for onshore wind, the cheapest form of low carbon energy in the UK of all. This, to my mind, demonstrates that in fact, contrary to your statement in this regard, green energy cuts were really a sneaky, roundabout way to clear the way for fracking and nuclear.

With regard to risks to underground water, the Environment Agency did in fact confirm that there are risks to underground water which requires regulation. A report by AEA Technology in 2012 also concluded that there is “high risk of surface and ground water contamination at various stages of the well pad construction, hydraulic fracturing and gas production processes” and that “cumulative developments could further increase this risk”.

A report by the University of Calgary in 2010 found that “cased wells are more prone to leakage than drilled and abandoned wells and injection wells are more prone to leakage than producing wells”.

In 2013, high occurrence of water contamination in Texas was linked to fracking sites and scientists from Duke University found that natural gas wells in Pennsylvania can be linked to contamination of water by methane, ethane and propane.

Just recently, a review by the US EPA did in fact conclude that fracking presents a systemic risk to clean groundwater.

Fracking also presents a real risk to UK climate targets at a time when the government is already struggling to meet its commitments. The government's own advisory committee, the Committee on Climate Change (CCC) has also stated that regulations intended to prevent methane leaks are inadequate.

On your point about planning, Government regulations now enable Government intervention if councils don't reach a quick decision, clearly a means to 'fast-track' applications, making local objections more difficult. In Lancashire, the Government even overturned a local decision to refuse planning permission for fracking.

With regard to the Infrastructure Act 2015, in fact, the legislation omitted strong legal safeguards to protect communities and the countryside, weakening overall safeguards. Furthermore, according to CPRE, a "definition of fracking introduced by the Government, based on the volume of fracking fluid, could enable companies to bypass the limited legal controls that have been retained."

So, despite your assurances, there remains significant concerns about the threats by fracking to the environment and to communities AND the ability of local communities to act strongly to reject fracking in their local area.

I will naturally continue to monitor the situation and press you again on the subject. I therefore urge you to act in the interests of the local community and move to oppose fracking in North Somerset.

With best wishes

Robin Whitlock