

Full Council – 16 July 2019

Motion to declare Somerset West and Taunton a Frack-Free Zone

Motion proposed by Councillor Caroline Ellis, seconded by Councillor Dixie Darch

Preamble:-

This Council notes that:

1. Parts of Somerset West and Taunton i.e. areas around Minehead and Watchet and a section of Exmoor National Park have been licensed by central government for onshore unconventional shale oil and shale gas development (PEDL 344), which could include hydraulic fracturing or “fracking” for short.
2. Shale gas and shale oil are fossil fuels and emit greenhouse gases (methane, via fugitive emissions and carbon dioxide via production processes and when burnt).
3. Fracking in the US, Canada and Australia has produced unacceptable risks including ground water contamination and adverse impacts on air quality (with the release, treatment and disposal of radioactive toxins), agriculture, public health and safety, climate stability, economic vitality, the rural economy (farming & tourism), landscape and property values as well as earthquakesⁱ. While England is said to have a more robust regulatory system, there are weaknesses; much of the monitoring of pollution, leaks etc. is left to the companies themselves and the regulators are often under budgetary pressures.ⁱⁱ
4. The latest scientific evidence demonstrates that fracking has no role to play in the transition to a zero carbon economy and would thwart the UK’s climate change mitigation efforts.ⁱⁱⁱ
5. Popular opposition to fracking across Somerset West and Taunton is evidenced by strong support for groups such as ‘Frack Free Somerset’ and ‘Frack Free EQS’ (Exmoor, Quantocks and Sedgemoor) and motions to declare Frack-Free Zones passed by Watchet and Wiveliscombe Town Councils and Parish Councils including Bishops Lydeard and Cothelstone, Clatworthy, Dulverton, Exton, Old Cleeve, Selworthy and Minehead Without and Stogumber.
6. The High Court Judgement on 14th May 2019 (Stephenson v Secretary of State for Housing and Communities and Local Government [2019]) confirmed that public bodies can depart from Government policy in the Written Ministerial Statements by adopting their own stance opposed to fracking on climate change grounds^{iv}.

This Council considers that:

1. Developing onshore oil and gas extraction in Somerset is inappropriate given:
 - a. The complex geology of our county;
 - b. The fact that PEDL 344 includes European, national and locally designated sites for nature and wildlife conservation;
 - c. The risk of flooding and the presence of Hinkley Point nuclear power station and;
 - d. The uncertainties surrounding the potential impacts on public health, landscape and local road networks, the risk of groundwater contamination and air pollution and increased pressure on water supplies and water treatment facilities.
2. Onshore unconventional oil and gas extraction is contrary to any strategy to address climate breakdown, diverting investment from clean, renewable energy and weakening the market for those alternatives and it would thwart attempts to make Somerset West and Taunton carbon neutral by 2030.

Recommendations:-

This Council therefore resolves;

1. To declare Somerset West and Taunton a Frack Free zone.
2. To oppose unconventional onshore oil and gas exploration and development activities on any land that we own or have an interest in.
3. Not to invest in any companies which are involved in fracking, including other methods of unconventional onshore oil and gas production.
4. To call on Somerset County Council and Exmoor National Park Authority to pass similar motions and to put planning policies in place to implement a presumption against all applications for unconventional oil and gas exploration and production in Somerset, including fracking, following the example of the Greater Manchester Authorities^v and the new draft London Plan^{vi}.
5. To write to our district's MPs to convey the Council's concerns about and opposition to fracking, to urge them to lobby Government to ban unconventional onshore oil and gas development permanently and to request that they write back indicating whether they are supporting the Council in this matter.

APPENDIX A – Motion Background Briefing Research Paper

- ⁱ https://concernedhealthny.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Fracking_Science_Compndium_5FINAL.pdf;
- ⁱⁱ <https://www.greenpeace.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Fracking-The-Evidence-.pdf>
- ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.escholar.manchester.ac.uk/api/datastream?publicationPid=uk-ac-man-scw:156730&datastreamId=FULL-TEXT.PDF>;
<https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/s10584-011-0061-5.pdf>;
http://www.talkfracking.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/20170200-whitehalls_fracking_science_failure-lq.pdf
- ^{iv} <https://www.bailii.org/ew/cases/EWHC/Admin/2019/519.pdf>. See also <https://drillordrop.com/2018/12/20/councils-can-use-climate-change-evidence-to-reject-fracking-government-lawyer-tells-high-court/>
- ^v https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/media/1710/gm_plan_for_homes_jobs_and_the_environment_1101-web.pdf
- ^{vi} <https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/planning/london-plan/new-london-plan/draft-new-london-plan/chapter-9-sustainable-infrastructure/policy-si11-hydraulic>