

Q&A –Policy Guidance Note on Fracking May 2017

Why has a new PGN been produced?

In June 2016, members of the Policy Committee determined that the 2013 Shale Gas PGN needed updating, following significant changes to the policy context since it was first drafted. It was felt that the original document was too lengthy and lacked clarity.

What is the main difference between this and the last PGN?

The 2013 PGN stated that CPRE does not oppose the exploitation of shale gas in principle, provided it meets certain conditions. This included provisions such as safeguarding the beauty and tranquillity of the English countryside, conserving natural resources such as water and ensuring that fracking makes a positive contribution towards meeting our climate change commitments.

After a comprehensive review and a consultation with branches, the following position has now been agreed:

CPRE believes there should be a moratorium on shale gas extraction (fracking) in England unless it can be clearly demonstrated that fracking would:

- help secure the radical reductions in carbon emissions required to comply with planning policy and meet legally binding climate change targets;
- not lead to unacceptable cumulative harm, whether for particular landscapes or on the English countryside as a whole, and
- be carefully controlled by effective systems of regulation and democratic planning, which are adequately resourced at both local and national levels.

What are the main risks to the countryside from fracking?

The PGN notes a number of serious concerns, including:

- the potential impact that fracking may have on the ability of the UK to meet its climate change targets, especially in the absence of an Emissions Reduction Plan;
- a lack of planning oversight at a regional level may result in fracking leading to the industrialisation of the countryside;
- without successful restoration after operations cease, developers could seek to argue that it constitutes “previously developed land” and hence be built upon;
- a significant increase in traffic on local roads with additional HGV movements. Fracking pads risk turning rural roads into “lorry lanes”;
- budget cuts to environmental regulators mean a reduced capacity to monitor the impacts of fracking, in turn reducing public confidence in the technology and
- local government cuts and lack of specialist staff undermine the ability of County and Unitary Councils to fully examine the full implications of fracking.

Are there any circumstances in which CPRE would support fracking?

As noted above, CPRE has set out a series of tough conditions that must be met before CPRE can support fracking. As a charity with a proud history of defending the English countryside, it is

absolutely right that we set very strict standards when assessing issues such as these. CPRE believes that these conditions cannot reasonably be met within current government policy. If there was to be a significant change in government policy, with a convincing explanation within the new Emissions Reduction Plan (ERP) of how fracking could be accommodated within our climate change commitments, then there is potential for these conditions to be met and a moratorium policy lifted. In such a scenario, it would be possible to make a reasoned judgement; in the absence of such an explanation within an ERP it is not possible to do so. It should be noted that a moratorium policy does not prevent CPRE National Office or Branches engaging with applications in order to assess whether the conditions have been met. The policy of moratorium applies to the fracking process itself, not associated policy activity.

Why not just call for an outright ban?

Whatever the issue, CPRE fights for the best outcome for the English countryside. In order to do so, it examines all the evidence available, assesses the risks and comes to a reasoned conclusion. CPRE has never opposed development of any sort simply for the sake of opposition. It opposes inappropriate development that harms the countryside and supports beneficial development that enhances rural England. At present, we simply do not know enough about what impact fracking would have on the countryside. Taking this in to account and using the precautionary principle as our approach, the available evidence supports a moratorium policy. It does not meet the threshold of justifying an outright ban.

What if fracking goes ahead anyway?

CPRE recognises that whether government heeds the call for a moratorium or not, there are a range of steps that should be taken to minimise its impact on the countryside. These include using shale wealth funds to deliver landscape enhancements, more money for local authorities, better information for communities, local decision making on applications, landscape preservation and guarantees to prevent sites becoming classified as brownfield land. Absolutely central to CPRE's approach is to ensure that national and regional assessment impacts are undertaken to all applications. To do so will require significant strengthening of the fracking regulatory structure. Only through such regulatory reform will negative impacts be minimised and public confidence in the process be enhanced.

What do other environmental organisations say?

A partnership of the Angling Trust, the National Trust, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), the Salmon & Trout Association, The Wildlife Trusts and the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust (WWT) have issued a statement that is very similar to CPRE's. They argue, "We believe commercial shale gas extraction should only go ahead in the UK if it can be objectively demonstrated that the regulatory framework for the industry is fit for purpose, and offers sufficient protection to the natural and historic environment." This was outlined in the [Are we fit to frack?](#) Report.

The [National Trust](#) states: "We have a presumption against fracking on our land because natural gas is a fossil gas and if it were proposed today on our land, we would say no."

[Friends of the Earth](#) and [Greenpeace](#) call for an outright ban on fracking, whilst the [RTPI](#), [TCPA](#), [Campaign for Better Transport](#) and [Green Alliance](#) currently have no published position on fracking.

What should branches do if they are concerned about fracking in their area?

The first point of call should be your local Minerals Planning Authority (MPA). This would be either your local County Council, Unitary Council or National Park Authority. All stages of the fracking process require planning applications to be submitted with the exception of some initial investigation and of monitoring boreholes and ground radar surveys. Applications can be found on the planning pages of your local MPA's website, as in this example from [Lancashire](#).

There a range of [helpful guides](#) to fracking and the planning process available on the internet. One of the most recent, published by the RTPI and Planning Aid England in March 2017 provides a comprehensive run-down of how shale gas is extracted, the application process and the role of regulatory bodies.

The Scottish Government, which itself currently has a moratorium on fracking, has been consulting on future policy north of the border with the publication of a series of [research documents](#). Many of the issues covered are relatable to England and provide a useful context.

What about the election?

All three main English political parties have now set out their manifesto commitments on fracking. Labour and the Liberal Democrats have pledged to ban fracking, whilst the Conservatives have set out plans for a significant de-regulation of the planning process to frack shale gas. The manifesto also sets out plans for environmental regulatory changes. At this stage of the political cycle, much of the detail remains unclear. However, CPRE is committed to monitor policy on fracking whoever wins the forthcoming election and will assess the merits of any proposals against the position set out in the new PGN.

Further Questions and Queries?

If you have any questions or queries about the PGN, the Q&A or any aspects of CPRE's position on fracking, please contact Daniel Carey-Dawes, Senior Infrastructure Campaigner at DanielC@CPRE.org.uk.