

CPRE briefing:

Response to Written Ministerial Statement on Fracking (May 2018)

Summary

CPRE is concerned with fracking in England over its threat to rural landscapes, the environment and climate, and the proposed changes to the planning system, which seriously undermine local democracy.

The general public echo these concerns - only 18% of people actively supporting fracking¹ - and communities in fracking hotspots have pushed back hard to halt fracking activities in their local areas. Yet the government seems determined to pave the way for this risky process, despite consistent opposition.

In May 2018 the government released a [Written Ministerial Statement](#) with worrying proposals that would effectively fast track fracking proposals, make it easier to gain permission for exploration and curtail the power of local authorities to oppose applications through the planning system - sidestepping local opinion in favour of making decisions nationally. It plans to consult on these proposals over summer 2018 with an expectation that new measures would be announced later in the year.

CPRE is campaigning for the government to drop these new proposals and to halt fracking until a series of environmental criteria have been met.

What's the problem with fracking?

Hydraulic fracturing (fracking) is a process where water, sand and chemicals are pumped underground at high pressure to fracture the surrounding rock formation in order to release the oil or gas stored within it. There are a number of very similar unconventional processes, such as acidisation, that pose equally serious risks for the environment. In recent years, some operators have turned to these processes to avoid the backlash in public opinion that comes from fracking.

Fracking has been associated with a number of health and environmental risks due to the inherent dangers with injecting a large amount of chemicals underground and the subsequent fracturing of rocks.

- *Climate change obligations:* Fracking risks putting the UK further out of reach of climate targets that we are already set to miss. The process threatens the UK's legal climate change obligations to reduce Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions by 80% of 1990 levels by 2050.
- *Industrialisation of the countryside, tranquillity and landscape impact:* The potentially massive scale of proposed fracking and ensuing cumulative damage could have dramatic effects in fracking locations.
- *Earthquakes:* Particularly in former mining areas. One earthquake resulting from operations in Lancashire led to a temporary moratorium on fracking in 2011.
- *Water supply:* Potential for fracking fluids to leak into local aquifers, and contribution to water shortages due to the substantial usage of water in the fracking process.

¹Energy and Climate Change Public Attitudes Tracker (PAT): Wave 25 - summary report, [BEIS \(2018\)](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/702640/Wave_25_Summary_Report.pdf)
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There is currently a widespread lack of support for fracking amongst the public and especially amongst the communities it would affect, leading to seven refused applications in 2018 so far. However, the industry continues to push through applications using government-granted special treatment to determine applications at the national level, and challenge in court any decisions made against them.

Preston New Road in Lancashire is currently the only site expected to begin operations in the immediate future, but other sites are likely to become active over the coming months. Third Energy's site in Kirby Misperton, North Yorkshire, was tipped to be the first site for fracking this year until the company delayed operations to the Autumn. Ineos, a major industry player, intends to place ten new fracking applications in the setting of the North York Moors this year.

Recent proposed changes to national planning policy are also weighted in favour of fracking, further strengthening an already pro-fracking government policy context.

What's CPRE's policy?

Fracking should be stopped unless it can be clearly demonstrated that the following criteria are met. However, we are further away than ever before in meeting these criteria.

- 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.

Written Ministerial Statement - May 2018

On 17 May 2018, Greg Clark, Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy published a Written Ministerial Statement on behalf of himself and James Brokenshire, Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government. It sets out a raft of proposals to streamline the planning process for fracking, many of which were part of the Conservative Manifesto in 2017, but were abandoned - until now.

CPRE is most concerned about two proposals and the government's plans to consult on them in summer 2018. Taken together, these proposals would weaken the ability of local authorities to determine applications for the exploration or fracking of shale gas.

- 1. The principle of whether exploratory drilling should be treated as permitted development (PD).**
Classifying exploration as PD would remove the need for full planning permission, completely removing local councils' decision making powers and ability to reflect their communities' wishes. Applying PD to fracking is a distortion of its intention and is a misuse of the planning system. Permitted Development is intended to be used to speed up planning decisions on very small developments - like conservatories or erecting a fence - not drilling for shale gas.
- 2. The criteria required to trigger the inclusion of fracking into the Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects Regime (NSIP).**
If designated as NSIP, fracking proposals would go through a national planning process that would reduce local jurisdiction. Designating individual fracking applications as nationally significant infrastructure projects would again lead to forcing decisions from Whitehall despite local opposition.