Shale Gas Exploration in Doncaster – Update June 2019

1. Introduction
1.1 To date the Council has not been contacted by any companies wanting to undertake hydraulic fracturing (fracking) within the Borough (as at June 2019).

1.2 The exploration, appraisal and subsequent development for conventional and unconventional gas and oil (including shale gas) can only take place in licenced areas (see paragraph 7.1), which have a valid planning permission to construct a well pad and landowner consent to access the land.

2. The Role of the Minerals Planning Authority
2.1 The Minerals Planning Authority assesses an application for the location of a well or well pad and must make sure the impacts on the land area acceptable. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) identifies the Planning Authority’s role and responsibilities. National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) provides more detail on the phases of hydrocarbon extraction and how the Authority should deal with planning applications if submitted.

2.2 The Planning Authority is required to work with statutory and non-statutory consultees for all shale gas related planning applications. These include:
- The Oil and Gas Authority (formerly Department for Energy and Climate Change) who issue hydrocarbon licences
- The Environment Agency who deal with the protection of water resources, treatment and disposal of mining waste, emissions to air, and;
- The Health and Safety Executive who regulate all aspect of all phases of extraction.

2.3 Non-statutory consultees include; the Coal Authority, Natural England, the British Geological Survey and Hazardous Substances Authorities

2.4 Planning Applications will be assessed using legislation, national policy and local policies.

Legislation, National Policy and Local Policies

3. Legislation - The Infrastructure Act
3.1 The 2015 Infrastructure Act includes hydraulic fracturing safeguards, such as:
- the local planning authority must consider environmental impacts
- independent well inspections are required
- methane monitoring in groundwater required for 12 months prior to fracturing,
- monitoring emissions to air required
- no fracturing in protected groundwater source areas,
- no fracturing within ‘other protected areas’
- the local planning authority must take into account cumulative effects of the application and related applications,
- substances used in fracturing requires disclosure
- the local planning authority must consider whether to impose a restoration condition
- the local planning authority must consult all the relevant undertakers prior to granting permission
- the local planning authority must confirm the applicant has met the public notification requirements
4. **National Policy**

4.1 The current government is committed to providing energy from a variety of sources to ensure energy security is maintained in the future, as such the domestic production of shale gas is being assessed to see if it is a viable option. The NPPF identifies the Planning Authority’s role and responsibilities. NPPG provides additional details. See hyperlinks above.

5. **Local Policy**

5.1 Hydrocarbon planning applications will be considered using policies in the Council’s Unitary Development Plan (Adopted in 1998) and Core Strategy (adopted in March 2012), as well as national policy. The policies in the two documents cover a wide range of subjects, which protect quality of life, the historic and natural environment.

The council is currently working on producing a Local Plan, which will soon be out for legal and soundness consultation before being submitted to the planning inspectorate for final consideration. Once adopted the new policies in the Local Plan will be used alongside the NPPF and NPPG to assess applications.

6. **Hydrocarbon Resources**

6.1 Natural gas (methane) has historically been extracted in Doncaster around Thorne and Trumfleet, but these resources were soon depleted and the areas are now used for underground gas storage. The British Geological Survey (BGS) say the conventional gas resource potential in Doncaster is low, but they do not currently know what the unconventional gas potential is.

6.2 Companies have also explored for, and extracted, methane from coal mines within the borough. We have not been approached by any companies interested in exploring for shale gas. Adjacent authorities have however received applications for hydrocarbon exploration.

6.3 Nottinghamshire County Council granted permission¹ to drill two exploratory wells at a site at Springs Road, Misson just over the border from Doncaster. This site is currently under construction. Nottinghamshire County Council also granted a three-year permission² for an exploratory well at Tinker Lane, just off the A1, South of Doncaster, between Blythe and Barnby Moor.

6.4 Rotherham received two applications for hydrocarbon exploration in 2017:

- Construction of an exploration well site at Woodsetts (RB2017/1577) which was refused in 08/03/18 and is currently subject to an appeal, and
- an exploration well site at Harthill (RB2017/0805), which was refused, but has since been allowed at appeal.

7. **Licensing (The Oil and Gas Authority)**

7.1 The government owns all the mineral rights in the UK. The exploration and extraction of energy minerals is regulated by the Oil and Gas Authority, who grant licences (known as Petroleum Exploration and Development Licence Areas PEDLs) for exclusive rights to explore and exploit onshore oil and gas in Great Britain. There are a number of granted licences in the Doncaster area. The hyperlink above takes you to the Oil and Gas Authority interactive map identifying granted licence areas in the UK.

8. **Summary**

- Doncaster Council has yet not been approached by any companies interested in exploring for shale gas. The Council has not received any applications for fracking, but companies are extracting coal mine methane in our area.
- There are a number of licenced areas in Doncaster and the extraction of conventional gas has historically taken place around Hatfield and Trumfleet.
- Mineral rights are owned by the government, and the government is exploring whether or not shale gas has the potential to contribute toward energy security in the UK.

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¹ Application ID ES/3379; decision date 15/11/16
² Application ID ES/3524; decision date 25/05/17
Nottinghamshire County Council have granted permission for two exploratory sites at Misson and Barnby Moor.
Rotherham has refused one application at Woodsetts and has an appeal pending for non-determination on a site at Harthill.

For more information e-mail: localplan@doncaster.gov.uk