

REPORT OF THE
Environment & Transportation Select Committee
PART I

39. REFERRAL OF MOTION: FRACKING

1. At County Council on 23 May 2013 it was resolved that the motion “In view of the potential environmental risks, this Council considers the controversial impact of fracking” be referred to the Environment and Transportation Select Committee, to report to the County Council at a future meeting.

2. This motion was considered at the meeting of the Environment and Transportation Select Committee held on 5 November 2013.

40. CONSIDERATION AT THE MEETING

1. Councillor Adam Carew, as proposer of the Motion, attended the meeting and introduced the motion, indicating that the motion had been put forward to reflect the concerns of the public regarding hydraulic fracturing to access shale gas ('fracking').

2. At the request of the Chairman of the Environment & Transportation Select Committee, a briefing on fracking had been held for Members of the Select Committee on 23 September to explain the facts about how fracking works and the regulatory regime in place to manage the impact. The presentation slides from this briefing were available as an appendix to the report considered by the Committee at the 5 November meeting.

3. The 'Frequently Asked Questions' document on onshore oil and gas (including shale gas extraction and associated fracking) produced by the Economy Transport & Environment Department and published on the County Council's website was also circulated to all Members of the County Council in August 2013 and brought to the attention of the Select Committee Members at the briefing. This continues to be updated and is accessible from the planning pages of hantsweb:
www.hants.gov.uk/county-planning.

4. At the 5 November meeting the Select Committee had available a report provided by the Economy Transport & Environment Department, which summarised the role of the County Council as Minerals Planning Authority in relation to proposals for shale gas extraction and associated fracking, and how other aspects are dealt with by other regulatory bodies including the Department for Energy and Climate Change, the Environment Agency and the Health and Safety Executive.

5. The Select Committee also considered a briefing note provided by the Scrutiny Officer supporting the Committee, which included in full the Executive Summary of the report 'Shale gas extraction in the UK: a review of hydraulic fracturing', the independent review of the major risks associated with hydraulic fracturing undertaken by the Royal Society and the Royal Academy of Engineering (published in June 2012). This review made a number of recommendations, and the briefing note included the government response to those recommendations (published in December 2012), which identified how the recommendations would be taken forward.

6. During debate on this item, Members noted that while operators may have a licence covering an area of Hampshire, this gave exclusive rights to that area but no rights to drill – if operators wish to undertake shale gas extraction and associated fracking, planning permission would still be required from the Minerals Planning Authority (Hampshire County Council for land within the administrative area of Hampshire excluding the National Parks), as well as other associated consents from other regulatory bodies.

7. Members noted that recovery of oil and gas through conventional methods also carried risks, and a number of Members commented that a possible energy source should not be ruled out, given current concerns about energy security and energy costs. A number of Members wished to see renewable energy pursued in preference to the extraction of shale gas.

8. Members were concerned about the negative impacts experienced in the United States. However Members heard that the industry was much more closely regulated in the UK. As a result of the seismic activity experienced in the Blackpool area in 2011 associated with exploratory fracking activity, further safeguards are now required including real time monitoring. This means that if fracking causes a seismic event, this would be captured by the live data monitoring and this would lead to the activity being adjusted or halted if the impact exceeded acceptable levels.

41. CONCLUSIONS OF THE COMMITTEE

1. The Chairman summed up the debate, noting that a number of Members initially had concerns about shale gas extraction and associated fracking, but after being briefed on the subject had been reassured that there were suitable and robust regulations in place to manage the risks, particularly the prospect of continuous monitoring of planning permissions, environmental permits and seismic activity. She noted that the evidence base about the effects of shale gas extraction and associated fracking would increase over time, and this would help inform future decisions. She noted that should there be planning applications for fracking in Hampshire in future, the County Council would have the opportunity to put requirements in place to mitigate the impact through the Regulatory Committee and any planning permissions granted.

2. The following recommendation was carried by majority vote, with Councillor Kyrle wishing to have it recorded that he voted against:

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the County Council endorses the conclusions of the Environment & Transportation Select Committee:

- (a) Having considered the executive summary of the independent review into major risks, and carefully reviewed the national and the local position, the Committee conclude that no further County Council action is required at this stage.
- (b) The Committee is satisfied that rigorous regulations and controls are in place to manage the potential risks from shale gas extraction and associated fracking, and that the County Council now has an up to date planning policy framework in place (through the adopted Hampshire Minerals & Waste Plan).

- (c) However, the Committee also recognise that the potential for shale gas extraction is still at an early stage in the UK and therefore the regulatory framework and Government guidance need to be kept under review.
- (d) The Committee supports the development of guidelines by the UK's health and safety and environmental regulators that are specific to shale gas extraction, in order to help operators to carry out appropriate and robust goal based risk assessments according to the principle of reducing risks to As Low As Reasonably Practicable (as per recommendation 7 of the Royal Academy of Engineering Independent Review).

The documents considered by the Select Committee can be found at www.hants.gov.uk/councilmeetings.htm by typing in the relevant reference number:

- Fracking Motion (search item reference 5346)

COUNCILLOR SHARYN WHEALE
Chairman of Environment & Transportation Select Committee

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