

## **Update regarding Shale Gas exploration in the Doncaster Borough October 2013**

### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 The council has yet to be contacted by any companies wanting to undertake hydraulic fracturing (fracking) within our area (as at October 2013). This is a completely new area of work for most local authorities up and down the country and we are liaising with colleagues in the South Yorkshire region on how to handle enquiries.
- 1.2 The government has recently published new guidance on hydrocarbon extraction. The guidance ([Planning Practice and Guidance for Onshore Oil and Gas](#)) clarifies the role of the minerals planning authorities and other regulatory bodies involved in obtaining permission for drilling wells. It is important the guidance is read alongside other planning guidance and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).
- 1.3 Maps on the Department of Energy & Climate Change (DECC) web site identify geological potential in our area. Energy companies may therefore approach the council at some point in the future. Applications will be assessed against the NPPF and adopted planning policy including relevant policies within the Unitary Development Plan and the Core Strategy.

### **2. Doncaster Council Core Strategy 2011 to 2028 (Planning Policy)**

- 2.1 Doncaster's Core Strategy (adopted in March 2012) identifies what proposed development may be supported during 2011 to 2028. Communities, the economy and the environment are at the heart of the development plan. The Core Strategy includes objectives and policies to ensure that residents are afforded the best opportunity to develop stronger communities. It sets out the strategic planning objectives and policies for the borough and covers a wide range of planning topics, including housing, the economy, and minerals. Any development proposal (including hydraulic fracturing (fracking) for shale gas) will be evaluated against the policies within the Core Strategy, and also national policy and legislation.
- 2.2 Some of the key policies within the Core Strategy that will be used when evaluating applications for energy minerals include:

Policy CS1: Quality of Life sets out the core approach to building a strong community and improving quality of life; including the protection and enhancement of the built and natural environment and protection of local amenity.

Policy CS15 Valuing our Historic Environment, looks at ensuring Doncaster's historic environment will be preserved, protected or enhanced

Policy CS16 Valuing our Natural Environment, looks at ensuring Doncaster's natural environment will be protected or enhanced

Policy CS18 Air, Water and Agricultural Land which looks at ensuring Doncaster's air, water and land resources will be conserved, protected and enhanced, both in terms of quantity and quality

Policy CS20 Minerals

While Core Strategy does not discuss fracking specifically, it does, acknowledge the importance of energy minerals in general. It provides broad support in principle for proposals for unconventional gas proposals in derelict and degraded areas, within close proximity to existing infrastructure requirements, such as gas pipelines and gas storage areas. **Importantly, any extraction of energy minerals must balance both economic and environmental benefits.**

2.3 This link will take you to the Core Strategy: [www.doncaster.gov.uk/ldfcorestrategy](http://www.doncaster.gov.uk/ldfcorestrategy) .

### **3. Geology of Doncaster and Mineral Resources**

3.1 The surface geology of Doncaster is divided into three distinct areas, with shallow coal measures in the east, a limestone ridge running north to south (roughly along the line of the A1 motorway), and sands and gravels over sandstone bedrock to the east. Deep underneath the sandstone bedrock is the deep coal, which is still mined at Hatfield Colliery.

3.2 The British Geological Survey (BGS) produced a "Geodiversity Assessment" on behalf of Doncaster Council in 2007. The report contains information on our local geology, mineral resources and groundwater resources. This report can be found at [www.doncaster.gov.uk/geodiversity](http://www.doncaster.gov.uk/geodiversity). The report has not taken account of shale gas extraction as it is quite a new idea. The report does, however, discuss "hydrocarbon potential", such as conventional oil and gas, and unconventional gas resources (abandoned mine methane, coal mine methane and coal bed methane). Shale gas is classed as an unconventional hydrocarbon gas resource, as it is the methane trapped in the tiny pores of the shale rock.

3.3 Natural gas 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 BGS states that conventional gas resource potential in Doncaster is low. Companies have explored for, and extracted, methane from coal mines in the area. They have, however, noted a rapid decline in the amount of methane extracted.

3.4 We have not yet been approached by any companies interested in exploring for shale gas. The BGS knows we have a lot of shale rock in the country; what they do not know is how much gas is in the rocks. Companies, who invest in hydrocarbon extraction, whether from coal or shale, will want to know that they can get a good return on their investment.

### **4. Licencing (DECC)**

4.1 The government owns all the mineral rights in the UK. The exploration and extraction of energy minerals is regulated by the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC). They 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 DECC map identifying granted licence areas. It is important to note that these licences do not include rights of access, which has to be sought from the landowner, or planning permission for any minerals-related development which still has to be sought from the local planning authority.

## **5. Government Policy**

- 5.1 The Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change announced in December last year that fracking will resume in the UK. They have yet to assess whether the domestic production of shale gas will result in cheaper gas prices in the UK. The government is committed to providing energy from a variety of sources to ensure energy security is maintained in the future.
- 5.2 According to Alkane Energy, one of the UK's fastest growing power generators, operating 20 "gas to power" electricity plants across the UK, "Plenty of people believe there is going to be shale gas, but whether it can be brought to the surface conveniently, we are yet to see" (quoted summer 2013).
- 5.3 Alkane Energy, whose headquarters are in Nottinghamshire, is now the largest coal mine methane operator in the UK. The company recently (May 2013) raised £6m in equity to buy the methane reserves at Maltby Colliery in Rotherham, and it has also recently announced plans to start drilling at Markham Main, where it is expected to produce 4MW in output. Alkane already operates at Cadeby, and a recommissioned site at Askern contributed 2MW to capacity during 2012, and there are plans to increase its output to 4MW after remedial work over the summer.
- 5.4 Alkane is exploring opportunities to enter the onshore shale gas sector. A potential shale gas formation, called the Gainsborough Trough, runs from South Yorkshire to North Nottinghamshire. The group has commissioned some geological work looking at shale production.

## **6. Conclusion**

- The 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 exploiting coal mine methane in our area.
- The Council has obtained information from BGS on our mineral resources, including energy minerals, but this does not include shale gas potential, as it is a relatively new process.
- All mineral rights are owned by the government, and the government is exploring whether or not shale gas has the potential to provide energy security and reduce gas prices in the UK.

**For more information e-mail: [ldf@doncaster.gov.uk](mailto:ldf@doncaster.gov.uk)**