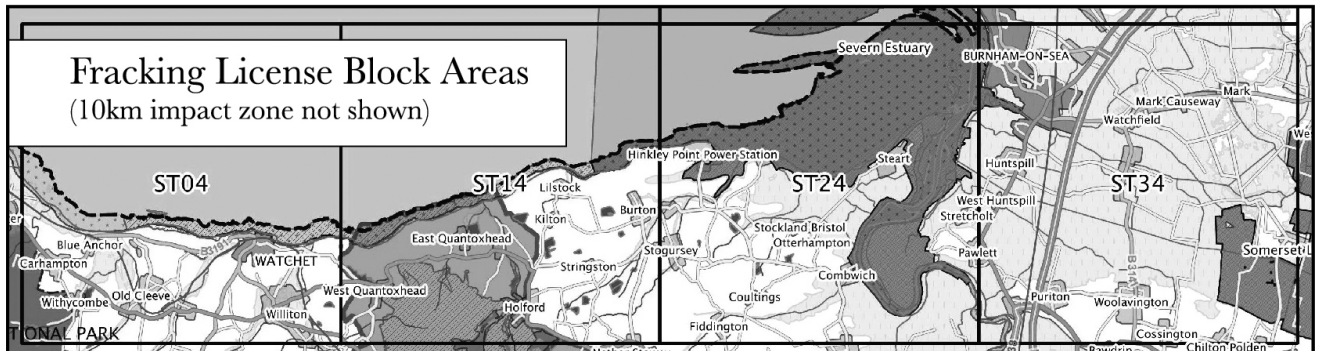


Somerset

New Home of Fracking and Unconventional Oil and Gas Industry?



Did you know that areas in Somerset have been licensed for onshore unconventional oil and gas drilling/exploration including fracking?

Well, neither did we until recently!

How can such a significant environmental issue be unknown?

No information has been forthcoming from either national or local public bodies and as a result our community has not had an opportunity to engage in any consultation process as to whether we want fracking to be conducted in our county. Many decisions have already been made and we are now at the stage where licences have been issued without any proper or meaningful public consultation.¹

Impact

Fracking could have a huge impact on our lives and on the lives of future generations due to its potential detrimental impact to public health and safety. Our natural environment (including part of an area designated by the government as an 'Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty' (AONB) is clearly at risk of water, air, light and noise pollution which could lead to severe damage to plant and animal life, not to mention damage to other industries such as farming, tourism and others that depend on the land, water and air quality. With a substantial increase in heavy goods vehicle movements and congestion in the area, the lowering of living standards and property prices would also seem to be an inevitable consequence.

Under the radar

This issue already affects many other areas across the UK, yet so far in Somerset this matter has gone under the radar. We are just a group of ordinary people with BIG concerns. Please kindly take a minute to read the below, make yourself aware and spread the word. Thank you. For more information refer to: www.frackfreeeqs.co.uk

What is Fracking?

Fracking, or High Volume Hydraulic Fracturing (HVHF), is a technique used to extract hydrocarbons, principally oil and methane gas, from shale rock and coal bed formations. A vertical well is drilled followed by horizontal wells reaching out more than 4 kilometres into the target strata. A steel wellbore casing is inserted and explosives are used to create holes in the steel casing so that huge volumes of water, mixed with toxic chemicals can be forced into the well at very high pressure to stimulate the gas/oil to flow. To make matters worse the toxic contaminated wastewater then has to be disposed of somehow and one method is underground injection.²

“Fracking is a nightmare! Toxic and radioactive water contamination. Severe air pollution ... pipelines and compressor stations devastating our countryside and blighting communities, all the while accelerating climate change. And to produce expensive gas that will soon run out.”³

It should be noted that the UK Government have created their own unique definition of fracking based on the amount of water used and under their definition the ‘fracking’ operation that led to earthquakes in Lancashire in 2011 (discussed below) would not now be called fracking. The new UK Government regulations also allow fracking at depths as shallow as 1000 metres (or 1200 metres in National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty).

Fracking and Unconventional Onshore Oil and Gas Drilling/Exploration in the UK

To date, the UK oil and gas industry has focused on exploiting conventional oil and gas fields, both onshore and offshore. The industry is now in a phase of exploration for ‘unconventional’ oil and gas deposits generally contained within deep shale rock or much shallower coal bed formations which can be accessed by methods such as fracking. Unconventional onshore oil and gas extraction includes production of shale oil and gas, coal bed methane (CBM), coal mine methane and underground coal gasification.

Conventional gas wells (North Sea), using a vertical borehole, produce up to 50 times more gas and can be productive for decades.

An unconventional gas well has a much shorter life span and the gas and oil reserves are reached by drilling horizontally from inside the vertical well shaft, four kilometres or more from the well pad. To maintain production levels this horizontal well is repeatedly fracked and additional horizontal wells can be drilled from the same vertical well shaft.

In order to maximise profits, the gas/oil reserves in the target area will need to be exploited to their full potential and it is most likely that many vertical and horizontal wells will need to be drilled, resulting in fracking operations within the target area taking place for up to 25 years.

Fracking Licences (PEDLs)

On 17 December 2015 the Department of Energy and Climate Change, now known as the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (DBEIS), announced that Petroleum Exploration and Development Licenses (PEDLs) for a total of 159 blocks of land had been awarded to successful applicants by the Oil and Gas Authority (OGA - an executive agency sponsored by DBEIS) as part of the 14th onshore oil and gas licensing round. Ten of these blocks are wholly or partially in Somerset. Seven of them include an area of land running from the eastern side of Exmoor to Blue Anchor and along the coast through the Quantocks to Bridgwater, then north to Weston-Super-Mare.

Who is Gerwynn Williams?

The licences for Exmoor, the Quantocks and Sedgemoor areas have been offered to a company called South Western Energy Ltd. (SWE), headed by Mr Gerwynn Williams⁴, who was also offered the Mendip area with one of his other companies, UK Methane, under a previous licensing round. In fact, Mr Williams has 18 directorships to his name.

What happens if it goes wrong?

Based on latest available accounts filed at Companies House it would appear that SWE is only a going concern because it can prove that it has access to other finances which are not shown on its balance sheet. In order for SWE to get DBEIS approval to begin drilling (which is the final step after receiving the Local Planning, Environment Agency and Health and Safety Executive approvals) they will need to show that they have adequate funds in an onshore bank account. However, SWE will not need to prove that it has adequate funds for disaster management because the government failed to put in place safeguards to ensure that drilling companies 'ring fence' monies (or post a bond) to deal with environmental or disaster management eventualities.⁵

Mr. Williams has now signed the license agreement which commits him to drill at least one exploration well to a depth of 1800m within our area. This process may involve fracking, but if economically recoverable recourses are discovered SWE could then go on to seek planning permission for other wells and develop into full production. SWE may already be looking for sites and beginning negotiations with landowners. Before fracking wells are drilled, landowners will be sought and seismic testing may occur. Exploration wells may be drilled in order to gather data and create “speculative scenarios” for investors. The exploration stage may also include the gathering of ‘social data’ and may target geographical areas with the least community resistance. This is why it is particularly important that our Community is well informed now in order to consider whether this is something we wish to happen on Exmoor, the Quantocks and Sedgemoor. Frack Free EQS would like our Community to have an opportunity to find out more and have their voices heard before it’s too late.

But fracking is not happening in the UK?

Oh yes it is! Information on all onshore fields and licenses is available from the government website.⁶ The first hydraulic fracking took place at Preese Hall in Lancashire in 2011, causing earthquakes and wellbore deformation and this site is no longer operational. Since that time test drilling has happened across the UK, including Yorkshire, Lancashire, Nottinghamshire, Manchester, Warrington, Sussex and Surrey.⁷

Residents of Horse Hill, such as those at Lomond Equestrian Centre, are very worried about recent activities, and were disturbed to find themselves with a drilling rig in the neighbouring field, pumping unknown substances into the adjoining ditch.⁸ Most recently on 23rd May 2016, shale gas fracking was given the go ahead by Yorkshire County Council despite considerable local community opposition.⁹ This is the spade in the ground for the UK onshore unconventional oil and gas industry and fracking, and it is expected that many more planning applications will be submitted in the months ahead. However, one very important recent development is how the Scottish Parliament has voted narrowly in favour of a ban on fracking.¹⁰

But they can’t frack under my home without my permission can they?

Yes they can! As stated by DECC: ‘*The Infrastructure Act 2015 simplifies the procedure for obtaining the right to use underground land 300 metres and below for the purpose of exploiting oil and gas (petroleum)*’. The Act came into force on 12 April 2015.¹¹

The Government's commitment to this industry is further demonstrated in their Autumn Statement 2013, when the Chancellor announced his support to encourage investment in onshore oil and gas, including shale gas, by halving the tax rate on early profits.

But they can't frack on my land if I don't want them to!

Yes they can! If an agreement cannot be reached between the operator and land/strata owner(s) then under Section 7 of the Petroleum Act 1998 the operator who holds a License (PEDL) can acquire ancillary rights to:

*'...enter upon the land to sink boreholes, for the erection of buildings and the laying and maintenance of pipes, the right to obtain a water supply or other substances and the right to dispose of water or other liquid.'*¹²

It would seem that this ancillary right also extends to the pre-fracking stage of seismic surveys (method of investigating what petroleum/gas/minerals lie underground).¹³

But they can't do this under Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and near groundwater source protection zones (i.e. Exmoor, Quantocks, Sedgemoor)?

Yes they can! Despite the Government making a public commitment in January 2015 for an absolute ban on fracking in these areas,¹⁴ they reneged on this promise a few months later!¹⁵

But they can't do this under or near Hinkley Nuclear Power Plant?

Yes they can! Hinkley falls squarely within the area being licensed for the Quantocks.

At a local level who can be asked and held to account about fracking and onshore unconventional oil and gas exploration/drilling?

A. Our Local Authorities:

- Somerset County Council and its Waste and Minerals Policy team is the minerals and waste planning authority for the county except for Exmoor National Park as it is a separate authority¹⁶
- Exmoor National Park and its Planning Policy and Community team¹⁷

B. Our local elected and/or appointed representatives:

- Councillors - Somerset County Council¹⁸
- Members - Exmoor National Parks¹⁹

C. Our Local Member of Parliament, Ian Liddell-Grainger²⁰

What can I do at this stage?

1. Inform yourself. Knowledge is power. Become engaged before it is too late.
2. Spread the word. Inform your family, neighbours, schools, friends, work colleagues, businesses and others who will be seriously affected by this threat such as farmers, tourism attractions and providers, leisure groups including people who fish (river and sea), equestrians, hill walkers, heritage and leisure, etc. Speak to your local elected representatives and have your views known.

** Word of warning: Check the credentials of guest speakers at fracking events for vested interests in oil and gas exploration**

3. If you are a farmer or know farmers/other land owners please inform them asap as they may be approached by oil and gas companies soon (if not already) to lease or sell plots of lands for possible drilling sites. Make them aware of the risk to their long term livelihood.
4. Provide support to Frack Free EQS by distributing information materials, helping at public events, etc. Please note we are a non-political/non-religious group and welcome people from all walks of life. We are ordinary, CONCERNED people, who want our community in Exmoor, Quantocks and Sedgemoor to be informed and have their voice heard.

About/Contact Frack Free EQS (Exmoor – Quantocks – Sedgemoor)

We are a group of local residents from Exmoor, Quantocks and Sedgemoor with BIG concerns about fracking, and our over-riding aim is to raise awareness and to empower our Community on this matter.

For further information visit: www.frackfreeeqs.co.uk or email: frackfreeeqs@gmail.com, mobile telephone: 07561871098

Where to go for further information:

- Although now out of date, *The Truth Behind the Dash for Gas* is a film made when the Mendips was under threat and provides good general information fracking²¹
- Other local groups: Frack Free Somerset²²; Frack Free Chew Valley, Somerset²³; Frome Anti-Fracking²⁴; Weston-Super-Mare and Banwell area group²⁵
- Frack-Off – excellent fracking information resource²⁶

If you notice any errors or omissions within this leaflet please kindly bring to the attention of Frack Free EQS by email: frackfreeeqs@gmail.com

¹ Government only had a consultation process of 6 weeks – half the time needed according to the government’s own guidelines for ‘**new and contentious**’ policies such as fracking. Ministers failed to tell Parliament the extent of the opposition in the consultation – which resulted in 7 being for, and 155 against. Those against included the National Trust.

<http://realmedia.press/trespass-shale-gas-fracking-bypassing-public-opinion-protections-permission/>

² <http://pubs.acs.org/doi/abs/10.1021/acs.est.6b00428>

³ Frack Off <http://frack-off.org.uk/fracking-hell/>

⁴ <https://owenadamssubjectobject.wordpress.com/2016/04/22/south-western-energy-an-investigation/>

⁵ http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2013/dec/11/taxpayers-fracking-pollution-companies?CMP=share_btn_fb

⁶ www.gov.uk/guidance/oil-and-gas-onshore-maps-and-gis-shapefiles.

⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3D1sCEKBk08> ,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k7jpiZ8wweY>

⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QmtFH-PyzA>

⁹ <http://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-britain-shale-third-energy-idUKKCN0YE2DC>

¹⁰ http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jun/01/scottish-parliament-votes-narrowly-in-favour-of-ban-on-fracking-snp?CMP=Share_AndroidApp_Messages

¹¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/about-shale-gas-and-hydraulic-fracturing-fracking/developing-shale-oil-and-gas-in-the-uk>

¹² <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/oil-and-gas-petroleum-licensing-guidance> and <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/17/section/7>

¹³ <http://halsallagainstfracking.org.uk/news/threat-of-seismic-survey/>

¹⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/shale-developments-to-be-banned-in-all-uk-national-parks>

¹⁵ <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/feb/12/fracking-will-be-allowed-under-national-parks> and <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/tories-quietly-legalised-fracking-under-7021280>

¹⁶ <http://www.somerset.gov.uk/policies-and-plans/policies/oil-and-gas/>

¹⁷ <http://www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk/planning/planning-policy>

¹⁸ <http://www1.somerset.gov.uk/council/councillors.asp>

¹⁹ <http://www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk/about-us/staff-and-members>

²⁰ <http://liddellgranger.org.uk/contact-ian/>

²¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cX1bsyDuAfg>

²² www.frackfreesomerset.org

²³ <https://frackfreecv.wordpress.com/home/>

²⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/FromeAgainstFracking/>

²⁵ frackfreebw@hotmail.com and www.facebook.com/groups/984345874970647/

²⁶ <http://frack-off.org.uk>

Research Links:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/440791/draft-shale-gas-rural-economy-impact-report.pdf
http://s234523623453.medact.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/medact_shale-gas_WEB.pdf
<http://concernedhealthny.org/compendium/>
<http://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php/Fracking>
<https://www.nfuonline.com/cross-sector/farm-business/energy-and-renewables/energy-and-renewables-news/shale-gas-nfu-policy-position/>
<http://www.fwi.co.uk/business/frackings-impact-on-farms-left-out-of-government-assessment.htm>
http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/andrew-wasley/fracking-safety-farming_b_4743322.html
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/earth/energy/fracking/11141913/Farmers-fear-fracking-could-spell-financial-ruin.html>