

SCRUTINY STUDY OF THE POTENTIAL FOR FRACKING IN PENDLE

To - Scrutiny Management Team

Date of meeting – 27th January, 2015

Notes of - Scrutiny Manager

BRIEFING NOTES – BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Background

1. At the last meeting of the Team it was agreed to include in the current work programme, a scrutiny review relating to the potential for and implications of hydraulic fracturing (“Fracking”), and to carry this work forward into the next municipal year if necessary.
2. At the subsequent meeting of the full Council it was also resolved as follows –
 - “(1) *That this Council notes that:*
 - (a) *Gas-bearing shales underlie much of East Lancashire (including Pendle other than West Craven) as well as the central and west Lancashire plains, and that exploitation of this gas would involve hydraulic fracturing techniques (“fracking”).*
 - (b) *While companies involved in shale gas exploration and possible development have so far concentrated on the west of the county, there have been calls from a number of quarters for the development of shale gas in East Lancashire as well as opposition expressed by some local group.*
 - (c) *The Government is currently considering the issue of more licences for shale gas exploration.*
 - (d) *The Local Planning Authority for mineral extraction, including shale gas is Lancashire County Council.*
 - (2) *Council therefore considers that at this stage it would be to the benefit of the people of Pendle to gather evidence on the practicability, likelihood and desirability (or otherwise) of possible shale gas exploration and exploitation in this area.*
 - (3) *Council therefore requests the Scrutiny Management Team to carry out this work and report back to the Council”*
3. This briefing note therefore aims to provide some background information to help the Team in scoping this piece of work.

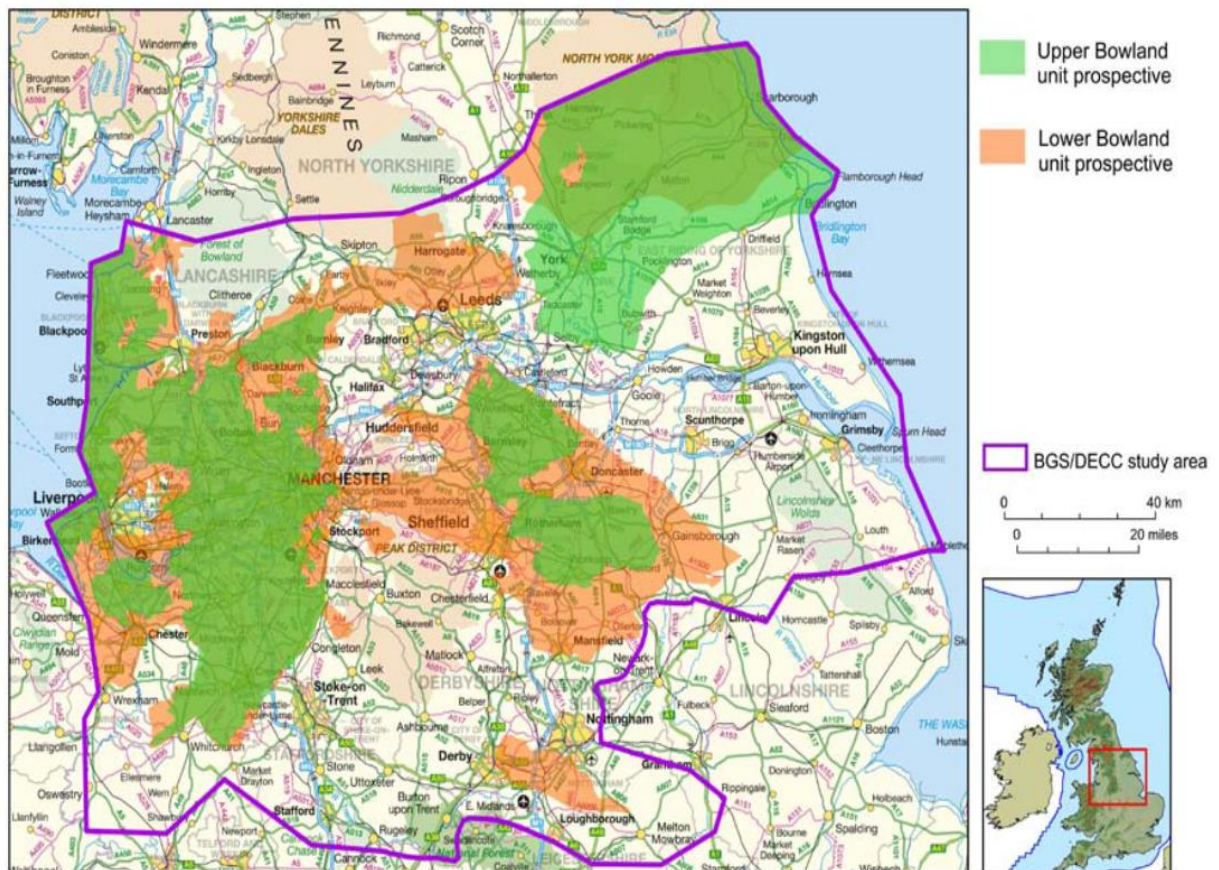
What is fracking?

4. Hydraulic fracturing or 'fracking' refers to a method of extracting gas from mineral deposits and involves the injection of water, sand and chemicals at high pressure into boreholes.

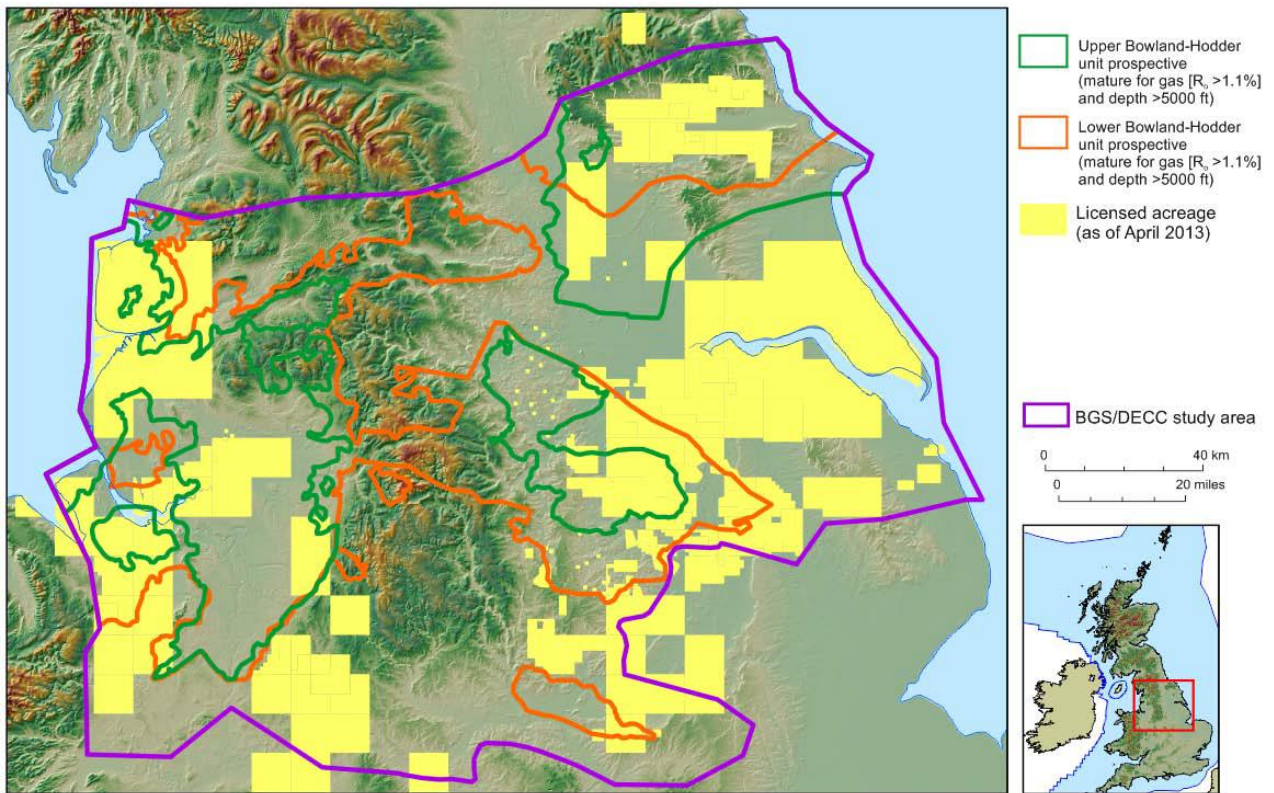
5. Shale gas exploration companies drill boreholes down into the gas-bearing shales, thousands of metres below the surface; drilling may also continue horizontally. The borehole is lined with a steel and concrete casing.
6. A 'perforating gun' is lowered into the borehole to make small holes in the concrete casing at the depth of the shale target.
7. A mixture of water, chemicals and sand is pumped at very high pressure along the borehole and through the perforations that fracture the shale.
8. The water opens up cracks in the rock, and the sand grains lodge into the spaces and keep them open, allowing the released gas to flow out of the rocks and to travel back up the borehole casing.
9. The practice is well established in the United States of America and licences have been granted to exploration companies in various parts of the United Kingdom.
10. The Department for Energy and Climate Change has produced a series of booklets addressing a range of issues, "Facts about Fracking" which can be accessed via this link – <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/about-shale-gas-and-hydraulic-fracturing-fracking>

The potential for fracking in Pendle

11. The British Geological Survey reveals both upper and lower deposits of shale in areas of Lancashire and Yorkshire as shown in the map below.



12. Currently gas extraction is only being explored in relation to the upper deposits.
13. Exploration can only be carried out under license from the Environment Agency.
14. The map below shows the extent of licences in the Lancashire and Yorkshire area. As can be seen, the Pendle area is not currently covered by a licence.



15. Licenses are currently confined to the coastal areas of Blackpool and Southport.

Incentives

16. Communities are being offered incentives to allow fracking to take place under the UK Onshore Oil and Gas (the industry's representative body) Community Engagement Charter.
- 17.
18. This package provides for the operator to
 - at exploration/testing stage, provide £100,000 in community benefits per well-site where fracturing takes place;
 - at production, pay 1% of revenues to communities
 - publish evidence each year on how they have met these commitments.

Planning Policies

19. Lancashire County Council is the Mineral and Waste Authority responsible for dealing with planning applications for shale gas extraction throughout Lancashire and a full Environmental Assessment would accompany any application.
20. Policies relating to Fracking should be set against the National Planning Policy Framework. The Framework seeks to balance social, economic and environmental impacts of

development but it also includes policy requirements which will affect the weight to be given to certain issues above others. For example it indicates that mineral extraction is essential for economic growth and that best use needs to be made of it.

21. Shale gas is seen as having a major longer term potential to support the energy needs of the country. It is likely that significant weight would be given to sites that could produce quantities of gas that would supply national needs. That would have to be balanced against the resulting environmental impact.
22. Fracking involves limited surface impacts compared to other fossil fuel extraction processes. The underground and geological impacts are however far more complex. The impacts would need to be specifically assessed for every proposed development. Fracking should not in any circumstances lead to geological instability.
23. The County Council has recently published a supplementary planning document on onshore oil and gas for consultation. This can be accessed via the following link - <http://www3.lancashire.gov.uk/corporate/consultation/responses/response.asp?ID=259>.
24. The consultation will run until 2 March. The document will then be reviewed and redrafted where necessary with a view to its adoption in May or June.

The Case against Fracking

25. Opponents of fracking are concerned about its environmental impact .
26. Members of the Scrutiny Management Team have received via email a fact sheet produced by the local pressure group Keep East Lancashire Frack Free (KELFF) on the “Dangers of Fracking”.
27. Representatives of the group will attend the meeting to present their case.

Town Hall,
NELSON

Report Author: Kath Haydock (Tel:) (01282) 661607

E-Mail: kath.haydock@pendle.gov.uk

Date: 14th January, 2015