

Shale gas and hydraulic fracturing (fracking)

Ramblers policy position

UK Overview – Fracking

- Hydraulic fracturing ('fracking') is the deliberate fracturing of rock using pressurised liquid to extract unconventional gas resources including coal bed methane, tight gas and shale gas. In the UK this extraction method would primarily be used to recover shale gas. Due to its low permeability, extracting shale gas from sedimentary shale requires drilling into the gas-bearing layer of the rock and using explosives to create small fractures which are in turn widened by injecting water mixed with sand and chemicals under high pressure. The gas, along with the waste water, flows back up the well to the surface to be processed.
- The UK Government is backing the development of fracking with the Chancellor stating that "we should get on with the safe, environmentally protected exploration of our shale gas resources"¹. Currently, only test drilling has been conducted but a large number of sites could move to full production in England if the Government addresses the barriers within the planning and permit systems. The Scottish and Welsh Governments have so far shown less support for fracking. A moratorium on all planning applications is in place in Scotland with full control over fracking due to be devolved after the May 2016 election². In Wales a similar moratorium is unlikely to be tested as the UK Government has said it has no plans for any new licences for fracking to be made before powers are devolved to the Welsh Assembly.
- The UK Government's determination to go "all out for fracking"³ and include gas derived from this method as part of the future energy mix is being driven by an energy policy which is focused on improving energy security, relieving pressure on household energy prices and meeting the UK's commitments on reducing carbon emissions. This sits alongside a radical government agenda of deregulation and the devolution of powers, combined with continuation of a prolonged period of austerity which has placed local highway authorities and planning authorities under unprecedented budgetary pressures.
- Fracking is considered an intensive industrial process and normally has a larger environmental footprint than conventional gas. To start work a site would require planning permission, environmental permits from the Environment Agency, Health and Safety permits from the Health and Safety Executive, and consent to both drill and frack from the Department of Energy & Climate Change.

UK Overview – Impacts on walking and the walking environment

- Fracking could potentially harm the beauty of the countryside: drilling sites are likely to be around the size of a football pitch, with the character and tranquillity of landscapes affected by both the onsite activities and the number of traffic movements associated with them.
- Fracking may also affect access to the places we walk, where operations could require the diversion or stopping up of public rights of way and restrictions to rights of open

¹ Chancellor of the Exchequer George Osborne MP 17 Jun 2015 House of Commons 597 c313

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201516/cmhansrd/cm150617/debtext/150617-0001.htm#15061738001493>

² The town and country planning (notification of applications) (unconventional oil and gas) (Scotland) direction 2015
<http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0046/00469176.pdf>

³ That's why we're going all out for shale". Prime Minister David Cameron - Local councils to receive millions in business rates from shale gas developments - <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/local-councils-to-receive-millions-in-business-rates-from-shale-gas-developments>

access. Further disruption could also occur across a wider area due to the combined effects of several sites.

- Shale gas extracted from fracking is a fossil fuel and so its widespread use is counter to Ramblers policy to see an increase in the amount of energy we derive from renewable sources.
- The impacts on public rights of way, designated landscapes and public access would be addressed via the planning process, but separate orders may be required to divert or stop up public rights of way or restrict any public rights of access under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CRoW Act).
- As planning applications increase, local Ramblers areas and groups require further policy guidance and support in order to respond to them.
- At the time of approval this policy is directly applicable in England, with suitable nation specific policy likely to be required should the situation change post May 2016 elections.

Ramblers policy overview

The Ramblers, policy on fracking interacts with a number of policy areas but overall sits within our countryside development framework and principles.

Countryside protection principles

1. **Protect and enhance precious landscapes**, ensuring new developments are sensitively located and work with the character of their surroundings.
2. **Improve access to the outdoors**, protecting rights of way and securing more open access land so that more people can enjoy the benefits of being outdoors.
3. **Work with nature**, supporting and restoring habitats and species, as well as inspiring people through increased contact with nature.
4. **Support local communities**, so that they can influence the future of their surroundings and benefit from new sources of sustainable economic growth.
5. **Support sustainable development**, in order to reduce our carbon footprint, adapt to a changing climate, and allow future generations to inherit a sustainable legacy.

Climate change

- Climate change, fuelled principally by rising carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions from human activity, is the most serious and pressing problem the world faces today. This affects every place on Earth, including England's most cherished landscapes, which will alter in character as the climate changes; and the public rights of way network, which will have to cope with more extreme weather.
- Tackling climate change involves coordinated international action on a huge range of issues, most of which are beyond the Ramblers charitable objectives. Closer to home though, the Ramblers supports action to reduce the greenhouse gases fuelling climate change, including efforts to increase the amount of energy we derive from renewable sources.

Energy developments

- Energy production sites should be carefully located and all developments should be concentrated in unobtrusive locations as landscapes can be degraded by poorly sited developments. Developers must be required to produce landscape and visual impact assessments, work with planning officers and local residents as early as possible, make use of the local topography, and choose building designs and material which fit the character of the local area.
- No area should be asked to host too many developments and local planning authorities must determine how many are appropriate in consultation with local residents. This decision should be informed by other existing or planned developments, and cumulative impacts must be regularly re-assessed.

Paths and open access

- Paths, gates and stiles should be kept in good repair and free from obstructions to ensure the safe passage of walkers. Rights of way should be signposted and waymarked in accordance with the law, and other paths to which the public has access should be adequately signed.
- Paths affected by development should, wherever possible, be retained as motor traffic-free routes, and where new roads sever rights of way, safe and convenient crossings should be provided.
- Planning permission is a right to carry out development, not to interfere with, move or block a right of way. If the planning authority is satisfied that it wouldn't be possible for a development to go ahead as described in the planning application unless any paths on the site are closed or moved, the authority can make an order to bring about the change. The public has the right to object to these changes and Ramblers policy is to oppose such proposals unless the alternative path either positively improves the route or is only marginally less satisfactory to users.
- The Ramblers believes that there should be a statutory right of access on foot to all common land and open country and any changes to people's ability to enjoy these rights should be resisted. However, a designation as access land under the CRoW Act does not have any specific protection under planning law and so rights of access are not always considered during the planning process.

Fracking policy

- Fracking has an unacceptable impact on the beauty and character of the countryside which is not compatible with areas that are designated for their natural beauty or their irreplaceable biodiversity or geology.
- No fracking should take place within a National Park, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty⁴ or National Scenic Area⁵ as such activity is incompatible with their statutory

⁴ National Parks statutory purposes are to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage and promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of national parks by the public. (The Environment Act 1995)

The statutory purpose of an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty of the area. (Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000)

purposes, and would undermine their designation for the protection of their landscape and scenic beauty.

- No fracking should take place within Sites of Special Scientific Interest or Natura 2000⁶ sites as such activity is incompatible with their statutory designations and would undermine their biodiversity, habitats, geology and physiography.
- Outside of designated areas each application, or combination of applications and sites, should be looked at for the impact it would have on people's ability to enjoy the outdoors via public rights of way and public access land as well on the beauty and character of the countryside and on climate change.

⁵ National Scenic Areas (NSAs) are defined by "the characteristics that, individually or combined, give rise to an area's outstanding scenery". <http://www.snh.gov.uk/protecting-scotlands-nature/protected-areas/national-designations/nsa/special-qualities/>

⁶ Special Scientific Interest are designated when a location is of special interest by reason of any of its flora, fauna, or geological or physiographical features (Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981)
Natura 2000 (Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas) sites are a European Union-wide network of nature conservation sites established under the EC Habitats and Birds Directives to promote the maintenance of biodiversity by requiring Member States to take measures to maintain or restore natural habitats and wild species.
Joint Nature Conservation Committee directory <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-1527>