

## **Motion to Council – 30<sup>th</sup> September 2013**

**Proposed – Councillors Harvey Siggs and Danny Unwin**  
**Seconded – Councillors Tom Killen and Adam Boyden**

Mendip District Council acknowledges the Governments view that the use of shale gas and coal bed methane has the potential to make a significant contribution to the UK's energy needs in the coming decades during the period of transition from the use of fossil fuels to renewable energy sources, and that this could enable Britain to become more energy independent.

The Council acknowledges the Government's overall policy on Unconventional Gas and Oil, and welcomes the additional safeguards as set out by the Secretary of State in December 2012 (Ref: <http://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/written-ministerial-statement-by-edward-davey-exploration-for-shale-gas>)

The Council however recognises the recent concerns expressed by members of the public and Councillors about the likely impacts of unconventional gas exploitation on Mendip's environment, communities and economy. These concerns principally relate to:

- The potential impact in an area significantly covered by an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)
- The importance of protecting local water supplies
- The potential impact on the local transport network
- The proposed close proximity to the district's hamlets, villages and market towns
- The potential risk to the hot springs water supply in the nearby city of Bath
- The potential impact on local air quality and biodiversity
- The potential impact on tourism and recreation

The Council believes that it should adopt whatever measures available to control, and if appropriate seek to prevent the use of unconventional gas exploration and extraction within the Mendip district, recognising however that it is not the Minerals Planning Authority and therefore it is only able to influence decisions made by other bodies in its role as statutory consultee.

Referring to the adopted pre-submission Mendip District Local Plan (para 2.13), this Council would expect that a precautionary principle is applied by bodies considering the use of this gas extraction technique given the importance of the area's geology on water supply, landscapes and biodiversity, and until the impacts, localised and area wide, including knock on effects on the local economy, are understood, the Council would not currently be in a position to support this form of development. The Council would therefore expect appropriately detailed assessments of the environmental effects and risks to be undertaken by other bodies before further decisions are made to pursue or authorise this form of development in Mendip.

Council therefore resolves to:

1. Request the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive to formally register the concerns of the Council regarding the use of unconventional gas exploration and extraction within the Mendip district, and neighbouring areas, with the Department for Energy and Climate Change (DECC) and to inform the DECC that this Council would not currently be in a position to support this form of development.

2. Establish a cross party Working Group comprising the Leader of the Council, the Deputy Leader of the Council, an appropriate Portfolio Holder, an appropriate Shadow Portfolio Holder, the Chair of the Scrutiny Board and five other Members, three being from the Administration and two from the main Opposition Group (substitutes to be agreed by Group Leaders), and supported by Chief Executive, to give further consideration to the potential impact of unconventional gas exploration and extraction within the Mendip district, taking into account all available information, including that commissioned by neighbouring authorities, and to report back to Cabinet and then onto full Council. This should include a consideration of the measures available to the Council to control, and if appropriate seek to prevent the use of unconventional gas exploration and extraction within the Mendip district, recognising however that it is not the Minerals Planning Authority and therefore it is only able to influence decisions made by other bodies in its role as statutory consultee.
3. Request that the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive lobby DECC to ensure that the implications of licensing unconventional gas development within Mendip are fully assessed in the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) now being undertaken by DECC's Consultants, and that this Council is consulted during the SEA to that the highest standards of assessment and environmental protection are applied to protecting the district's sensitive environment.
4. Request that the MPs for Mendip are asked to convey the Council's concerns to Government Ministers
5. Request that the Chief Executive and Officers ensure that Members are provided with the full opportunity to respond to relevant policies and planning applications that are consulted upon by Somerset County Council and DECC on this form of development
6. Continue to support the working group of officers (of this Council, working with Somerset County Council, Bath and North East Somerset Council, North Somerset Council and the Environment Agency) as necessary to examine the technical and environmental issues involved, to support the cross party Working Group

***Information considered in preparing and proposing this Motion:***

- *That parts of the Mendip area are subject to Petroleum Exploration and Development Licenses which expire in 2014, and that the next round of Licensing is being prepared by the Government, to be accompanied by a Strategic Environmental Assessment (ref; Ministerial Statement by Ed Davey, December 2012)*
- *The recent cross party Motion adopted by Bath and North East Somerset Council (B&NES), which raised serious concerns about the potential impact of unconventional gas extraction, in particular in relation to the vulnerability of, and risks to, Bath's hot springs, the potential impacts on AONBs, the Bath World Heritage Site and Green Belt, and water supply*
- *A report commissioned from the British Geological Survey by B&NES which found that the source of Bath's thermal waters remains unknown, and hydraulic fracturing would pose an 'undefinable risk' to the hot springs*

- *A briefing by independent geologists, Integrale, which concludes that unconventional gas exploitation in Mendip is likely to be 'high risk', with a risk of unforeseen ground conditions greater than in other parts of the UK, and that the likely impacts on communities and environment are likely to be unacceptable*
- *Any gas development in the Mendip area would be a matter for Somerset County Council, as the Minerals Planning Authority, subject to the policies in the emerging Somerset Minerals Local Plan (particularly Policy MLP12) and requiring planning permission from the County Council, with Mendip District Council as a consultee*
- *The Energy Minerals Topic Paper (dated June 2013, published late August 2013) prepared by a working group of officers from Somerset County Council, Bath and North East Somerset Council, North Somerset Council, Mendip District Council and the Environment Agency, that collates existing information and will inform minerals planning policy development in Somerset, Bath & North East Somerset and North Somerset (ref. [www.somerset.gov.uk/oilandgas](http://www.somerset.gov.uk/oilandgas))*