



# Fracking: a briefing for Friends

May 2018



Quakers hold a meeting for worship outside the gates of Preston New Road fracking site in April 2018. Photo: Suki Ferguson

In February 2017, Meeting for Sufferings, the representative body of Quakers in Britain, said “We have faith that we can tackle climate change and build a more sustainable future, but we know this is only possible if fossil fuels remain underground [...]. Fracked gas is not the low-carbon solution some suggest that it is and is incompatible with tackling the climate crisis.”

Friends have joined with others to resist fracking locally, and called on local and national governments to ban fracking and support sustainable energy instead. This

briefing explains why our governments should ban fracking and suggests ways that you can take action.

## What is fracking?

Shale gas fracturing, or 'fracking', uses water or chemicals at high pressure to dislodge gas from rock and shale to then use as fuel. It is one of a number of new and intensive fossil fuel extraction methods being used around the world to secure more reserves of gas, oil and coal. These methods, and the fuels they produce when burnt, emit large amounts of greenhouse gases that contribute to climate change. The fracking process may also cause air and water pollution.

In the UK, the fracking industry is in its infancy and no wells are yet operating fully and long-term. Yet companies hope to start full operations at a number of sites in the near future. If these projects are successful, we could see a significant expansion of the industry in the coming years.

## Why ban fracking?

France, Germany, Ireland, Scotland and Bulgaria have banned fracking. Yet the UK government has continued to support the expansion of the industry by offering tax breaks to fracking companies, and has overridden a local planning decision to permit fracking operations in Lancashire. However:

- under the 2015 UN Paris climate agreement, the UK committed to cut greenhouse gas emissions in line with a 2°C temperature rise above pre-industrial levels, and to attempt to limit this to 1.5°C. One estimate suggests we must keep approximately 80 per cent of known global fossil fuel reserves in the ground to achieve this.<sup>i</sup>
- fracked gas is not low-carbon. It is five times as carbon intensive as the target recommended by the government's advisory body for the power sector by the year 2030.<sup>ii</sup>
- fracking can create 'fugitive emissions'. These are gases that may escape during extraction. These include methane, a highly intensive greenhouse gas.

- in 2013, the UK government<sup>iii</sup> and fracking company Cuadrilla<sup>iv</sup> admitted that fracking will not help reduce fuel bills. It is therefore unlikely to help those in fuel poverty.
- in some cases, fracking has been found to pollute local water and air. In the USA and Australia, some people living near fracking sites report symptoms linked to exposure to fracking chemicals, including breathing difficulties, nausea, and throat irritation<sup>v</sup>.

The growth of the fracking industry risks further locking us in to an unsustainable energy system. Instead, we need renewable and efficient energy system that is affordable to all.

## Where is fracking happening in the UK?

As of May 2018, no fracking sites are fully operating in the UK. The fracking industry has also been banned in Scotland following a government consultation, which saw 99 per cent of more than 65,000 responses from individuals and organisations (including Quakers), opposing fracking.

Despite there being no fracking sites that are fully operational, there are a number of sites around the UK where fossil fuel companies hope to start fracking. The UK government has awarded more than 200 licences<sup>vi</sup> to companies for potential fracking operations if planning permission is granted by local authorities. Below are updates from three sites where Quakers have been active in local resistance.

### **Preston New Road, Lancashire**

Cuadrilla, the operator at Preston New Road fracking site, continue to push ahead with their plans to frack for gas. However, they have admitted that ongoing delays in setting up their drill for a shale gas well, and in getting final permission from the government, mean that the fracking will not start until autumn 2018. Works are now running a year behind schedule. In part, these delays are due to strong resistance from the local communities and the wider public.

Quakers have been part of this resistance, primarily though joining with other Faith communities, to form [No Faith In Fracking](#), a group who take peaceful spiritual activism at the gates of the fracking site.

### **Kirby Misperton, Yorkshire**

At Kirby Misperton, Yorkshire, local residents, Friends, and activists from the wider environmental movement were all part of protests and resistance at the fracking site in 2017. Their peace camp became a hub, enabling people to hold a presence at the gate and plan nonviolent direct actions to cause delays at the site. In March 2018 Third Energy, who have the fracking contract at Kirby Misperton, announced that it was postponing all activity at the site until the autumn. The financial and logistical challenges that the resistance created for Third Energy likely contributed to this decision. If Third Energy does choose to come back later this year, they will anticipate returning to renewed resistance.

### **Broadford Bridge, Sussex**

Meanwhile in West Sussex, UK Oil and Gas finished test drilling at the Broadford Bridge site months behind schedule. Multiple unsuccessful drilling tests caused delays, which may be because the area is [geologically unsuited to drilling](#). The company will now analyse what they managed to extract before deciding whether to return. Quakers have been holding regular meetings for worship at the site, and are active in the local anti-fracking group. Their focus will now shift to Horse Hill site nearby, where UK Oil & Gas have invested.

## **The future of the UK's energy policy**

As fracking is a highly carbon-intensive industry, it has no place in a UK economy if we are to tackle climate change. In October 2017 the Government released the 'Clean Growth Strategy', a document which aims to set out how the government will cut greenhouse gasses in line with the UN Paris climate agreement. Within the strategy there were some positive announcements on investments in green technology, energy efficiency and ultra-low carbon vehicles.

However, these recent announcements by the UK government reveal that existing and new policies would fail to meet the UK's legally binding commitments to cut

emissions in line with global warming to well below 2° C, and further pursue efforts to limit warming further 1.5° C above preindustrial levels. Much more progress and ambition is needed to ensure we keep to our commitments.

Among the many omissions in the Clean Growth Strategy is policy on fracking. Quakers are calling on the government to stop the development of the of highly carbon intensive fossil fuel industries, including fracking. Instead, we need investment in renewable and sustainable energy that is affordable to all. As the UK negotiate the process of Brexit, and withdraws from important EU environmental regulations, its essential that the government now determines how it will build a truly sustainable energy system.

## Take action – write to your MP

It's an important time to contact your MP about fracking. Many MPs are new to this issue, and other remain obliged to take your views into consideration. The government also recently announced that they intend to do more to tackle climate change. These factors mean we have an opportunity to influence government policy around fracking and wider climate justice issues. You can find out more about UK climate policy, and the need for more action by government, at [www.quaker.org.uk/climatejustice](http://www.quaker.org.uk/climatejustice).

You could meet with or write to your MP. Ask them to call on the government to:

- Ban fracking and all forms of intensive fossil fuel extraction. You could use the information provided in this briefing to make your case.
- Further develop UK climate policy to fully meet the UK's remaining carbon budgets through domestic action, and do more to achieve the target within the Paris climate change agreement to limit global warming to 1.5 C.

If you'd like to explore other ways that you and your meeting can take action, Quaker Peace & Social Witness can help. We can support you to speak out, organise actions, and work with others to resist fracking and work for a more sustainable future. Please contact Chris Walker on 020 7663 1047 or at [chrisw@quaker.org.uk](mailto:chrisw@quaker.org.uk).

## End notes

---

<sup>i</sup> '80% of fossil fuels 'should stay in the ground''. Oil Change International (17 June, 2013) see [priceofoil.org/2013/06/17/80-of-fossil-fuels-should-stay-in-the-ground/](http://priceofoil.org/2013/06/17/80-of-fossil-fuels-should-stay-in-the-ground/)

<sup>ii</sup> 'Can we safely squeeze on the rocks?' UNEP Global Environmental Alert Service (GEAS), page 4, see <https://www.scribd.com/document/294029548/Can-we-safely-squeeze-the-rocks>

<sup>iii</sup> 'Fracking won't lower energy bills, says Davey.' *The Telegraph*, (9 February, 2013). See [telegraph.co.uk/news/earth/energy/fracking/10296274/Fracking-wont-lower-energy-bills-says-Davey.html](http://telegraph.co.uk/news/earth/energy/fracking/10296274/Fracking-wont-lower-energy-bills-says-Davey.html).

<sup>iv</sup> 'Lord Browne: fracking will not reduce UK gas prices.' *The Guardian*, (29 November, 2013). See [theguardian.com/environment/2013/nov/29/browne-fracking-not-reduce-uk-gas-prices-shale-energy-bills](http://theguardian.com/environment/2013/nov/29/browne-fracking-not-reduce-uk-gas-prices-shale-energy-bills)

<sup>v</sup> 'Overview of Fracking and Unconventional Gas: Friends of the Earth Scotland Supporter Briefing'. Friends of the Earth Scotland, (November 2016) (p.2). See [bit.ly/2IOLwG2](http://bit.ly/2IOLwG2).

<sup>vi</sup> 'government has awarded more than 200 licenses to companies for potential unconventional oil and gas exploration once planning permission has been given' <https://friendsoftheearth.uk/climate-change/fracking>