

Fracking Facts for Parish, Town & County Council Members

You will have heard a lot recently about Fracking and seen and read reports on the events that surrounded Caudrilla's drilling operations at Balcombe in West Sussex.

Much of the reporting of both the technology and the protest was both sensationalised and incorrect. I know this for a fact as I have been very concerned about the dangers and problems regarding the many recorded and verifiable problems surrounding the debatable technology involved in Fracking for some time now, and are also friends with many of those that were protesting at Balcombe.

The following are straight-forward facts regarding Fracking and if you have any comments/thoughts/questions regarding them, please feel free to contact me. Regarding the links, I have checked them all several times and have had no problems. The UK Government link did say on my system that the 'attachment could harm my system', but there were no problems.

First of all, exactly what is Fracking? Basically High Volume Hydraulic Fracking is the process of directional drilling, i.e. first of all drilling down deep vertically for some 4,700 feet or more and then drilling horizontally for a long distance, which can be up to a mile or even a longer distance into the layer of shale rock that holds oil or gas. If you imagine this layer of strata that holds the target material in a 'sponge' like way then you will not be too far wrong.

This drilling then has 'concrete' sprayed on the drillings walls, then a flexible metal pipe with many small explosive charges attached around the circumference is inserted into the drilling and along to its target, which is the horizontal section. These charges are then set off, blowing holes into the horizontal drilling and then this charge holding pipe is removed. The vertical section of the drilling then has a steel tube inserted into it and the entire system has very high volumes of a water/chemical Fracking Fluid mixture injected into it at a very high pressure which blasts out from the holes in the horizontal drillings and fractures the surrounding strata.

The process used is a US process where the amount of Fracking Fluid used is between two and four million gallons. This Fracking Fluid is made up of water which has a high percentage of chemicals has added to it, these dissolve the minerals in the rock and initiate cracks, prevents bacteria build up, prevent the surrounding clays from swelling or shifting, lowers the surface friction etc. The Fracking Fluid also has Silica Sand added to hold open the fractured strata and so if you have heard that these are the sort of things that can be found "under your kitchen sink", you have been very much misinformed. (1)

In theory the majority of the water/chemical/sand mixture should then be forced back by the inflow of whatever hydrocarbons are freed up as the pressure of the collapsing strata that surrounds the pipe-work squeezes it back to be followed by the oil or gas. However

in practice much of the Fracking fluid still remains in the earth and often, due to the seismic damage to the surrounding strata's structure, finds its way to the surface, migrating into groundwater as it does, and bringing the relevant hydrocarbon, oil and gas, with it. This can and does cause enormous health and environmental issues.

Despite the reports you may have read/listened to/been given, this particular process, High Volume Hydraulic Fracking has only been used once so far in the UK by Cuadrilla at the Preese Hall well in Lancashire; this has been confirmed by the Government Department concerned. When the Preese Hall event took place there were earth tremors in the surrounding area and property was damaged. This was confirmed as being due to Cuadrilla's operation in an independent government report.

You perhaps have been informed that Fracking is a safe process and that there have been no reported problems such as environmental or health issues in the US. This is so far from the truth that I personally am seriously concerned as to exactly what is or was the incentives for those that have said such things. (2)

The returning Fracking Fluid is now additionally contaminated with, among other contaminants, low level radiation from Radium as well as containing bromide. (3) The main 'benefit' that is trumpeted about Fracking and shale gas is that it will bring down prices, but that is not what the drilling company says. (4) Or Lord Stern says (5) or Sir David King says (6)

But why should Fracking concern me or us as members of councils? Actually, it should concern us for a very good reason, because according to the following map, many local areas are within one of the 13th onshore round of Fracking Licensing Blocks on offer. (7) The nearest one to the Parish Council I serve that shows as being under licence is in the Heathfield – Horam area.

While it is a planning given that the voices of locals will be taken into consideration regarding wind turbines or solar farms, the same does not apply to Fracking operations, (8) and (9)

Incidentally, all of the main political parties as well as UKIP are in favour of Fracking, (10) and (11) although this vocal support for Fracking has more than somewhat faded recently due to the action in Balcombe...

Other facts that you, as council members should be aware of are that household insurance does not cover Fracking damage and that house prices drop substantially in areas subject to Fracking. (12)

As far as planning permission goes, at the moment both the vertical drilling and the horizontal drilling need permission, but soon the horizontal drilling may not require planning permission, see page 6, items 10 to 12 of (13).

You may well have heard that at the Fracking protest at Balcombe, (much of the reporting was sensationalised and incorrect) the residents of Balcombe were opposed to those that were protesting there and wanted them away, this is not so, please see (14) and read the following

To Ms Goldsmith (leader of West Sussex County Council)

"Dear Ms Goldsmith,

I am a resident of Balcombe. I am concerned that the WSCC's influence and manpower go into ensuring that the company, Cuadrilla, are evicted from Lower Stumble by Saturday 28th September, and that no further planning permission is granted. Today a truckload of their toxic chemicals thundered past our primary school as the children attempted to cross.

It is horrendous for us to see and hear Cuadrilla in operation here, and we would like to use all democratic and legal means to stop them. The County Council's eviction of the protesters is unjust and deeply ironic. Protecting the interests of this company is not the role of our council, nor Sussex's expensive police force. WSCC's safety concerns should focus on Cuadrilla's reckless breaches of agreement, not on the peaceful protest outside the gate. Yours sincerely, Rosalind Merrick"

By Louisa Delpy

"As I sit here wine in hand, waiting for Xfactor in my home on my sofa, 80+ people are camping in tents, in the rain, in horrendous conditions protecting my village and me from something that has hasn't here yet, but is intended for every village and town across our countryside.

These people, heroes in my opinion, have stood up for what they believe in and are divided as to whether they will leave the camp before being evicted or stand strong until the end and be literally thrown off the grass verge. They are sleeping next to a drilling rig, whirring, clanking, droning 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, next to a road in sodden conditions and they have been doing that for 7 weeks. Not only do they have to contend with very little sleep but constant intimidation from our police force - opening their tents, shoving cameras in their faces, shining torches in their eyes. Those police officers are also telling them that Balcombe residents do not want them here, that their belongings will be taken by bailiffs at any moment, that they will be forcibly evicted. Whatever they individually decide to do, stay or go and to all the others who have camped on that verge I say thank you, whether you stay or go thank you."

If you look at a map, you will see that the Cuadrilla site at Lower Stumble Wood is situated close between the B2036 road and the main London to Brighton railway line, near to Balcombe village and the Ardingly Reservoir, and within a couple of miles of the Millennium Seed Bank at Wakehurst Place; it is no wonder so many were so concerned.

These protesters were often called 'rent-a-mob' and some were personally vilified in the media. I know some that are in their 70s and 80s, many that took their holiday time to be

there and others that had time off work to do so; to describe these well informed and concerned individuals as such was not simply far from the truth but, quite frankly, vile.

I have been involved in the area of environmental concern now for well over thirty years and never ceased to be surprised by the attitude of others who appear not to want to notice that which is under their noses, ignoring the obvious does make it go away.

Recently I was sent a newspaper cutting by an anti solar farm individual that had a negative article and picture of a Solar Farm taken from a helicopter. I replied pointing out that it was not possible to see the solar farm from the ground (easy to check using Google Earth) but what could not be missed from the ground was the vast power station building and its tall chimney less than a quarter of a mile away.

Another person, when I spoke of Balcombe, made a 'Rent a Swampy' remark having only seen the TV coverage, which made it painfully aware for me of just how the media slant can 'inform' people.

So, what do you do now? It is easy to blame others, but the facts remain that many have been fiddling while Rome started to burn.

The UK, just like the rest of the Western World and developing nations, exists on energy and the painful fact is that the cost of that energy is going up. We all have become reliant on power surging through small holes in our walls, but how we keep that power going is the question. The Middle East has become ever more unstable in the recent years and oil supplies have now become unpredictable. (15)

At the moment renewables cannot totally replace oil, however the facts are that in the daytime (when we need the power most of all) energy via Solar Farms along with the already existing power from Wind Turbines is generated and then the conventional power stations can be turned right down making a massive saving of the oil and gas that is used for power generation.

Please do not imagine that all Fracking entails is a clearing and a 'Nodding Donkey', that is most certainly not the case; Fracking drills into strata, not an underground reservoir, and so requires a large number of wells. This can be 8 wells or more per square mile and these all require the necessary pads, drilling rigs, pipelines, compressor stations, waste storage ponds, treatment facilities, flaring stack, and the associated transport and tanker movements etc. As I write this the alternative to renewables is Fracking, what would those that you serve prefer, this (16) or this (17)?

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- 1) <http://www.nachicagonorth.com/CHI/October-2013/Fracking-in-Southern-Illinois-Raises-Widespread-Concerns/>
- 2) <http://pennsylvaniaallianceforcleanwaterandair.wordpress.com/the-list/>
- 3) <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2013/oct/02/dangerous-radioactivity-fracking-waste-pennsylvania>
- 4) <http://www.independent.co.uk/environment/green-living/cuadrilla-pr-man-admits-george-osbornes-shale-gas-revolution-wont-cut-energy-bills-8656246.html>
- 5) <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2013/sep/04/david-cameron-fracking-lord-stern>
- 6) <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2013/sep/16/david-king-fracking-shale-gas>
- 7) https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/63941/13r-acreage-on-offer.pdf
- 8) <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/earth/environment/10231717/Theres-no-room-for-wind-farms-but-plenty-for-fracking-says-PM.html>
- 9) <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/10236354/You-must-accept-fracking-for-the-good-of-the-country-David-Cameron-tells-southerners.html>
- 10) <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/earth/environment/10244182/Tory-and-Labour-MPs-join-forces-to-demand-more-money-for-fracking.html>
- 11) http://www.kentonline.co.uk/east_kent_mercury/news/lets-go-for-fracking-says-5203/
- 12) <http://www.paliltd.com/blog/fracking-effects-house-prices>
- 13) https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/236945/Revised_requirements_relating_to_planning_applications_for_onshore_oil_and_gas_-_Proposals_for_comment_2_.pdf
- 14) <http://greatgasgala.org.uk/balcombe/>
- 15) <http://www.mees.com/en/articles/8378-libya-and-iraq-the-weakest-links-in-world-oil-markets>
- 16) <http://blog.ucsusa.org/what-do-food-and-fracking-have-in-common-130>
- 17) <http://www.lightsource-re.co.uk/news/2013/August/land-diversification-project-could-graze-sheep-and-produce-solar/>