



## Letter of recommendation from the Environment, Transport and Locality Services Select Committee

**Title:** Council policy on 'Fracking'

**Committee date:** 4<sup>th</sup> February 2014

**To:** Cabinet Members for Environment and Planning

**From:** Chairman of ETL Committee

### Summary

Due to a significant amount of public and media interest on subject of fracking, questions being raised at Council, and the government's recent drive to promote fracking, the Environment Transport and Locality Services select committee have been building their knowledge on the topic. At its meeting on the 4<sup>th</sup> February 2014, the committee heard from the Lead Officer for Minerals and Waste Planning, and examined the council's current policy in relation to hydraulic fracturing for oil and gas to consider whether it is fit for purpose.

The Buckinghamshire Minerals and Waste Development Plan consists at present of those policies 'saved' from the Buckinghamshire Minerals and Waste Local Plan adopted in 2006, as well as those contained in the Minerals and Waste Core Strategy adopted in November 2012.

Mineral Planning Authorities (such as Buckinghamshire) are expected to include in their Mineral Local Plans:

- Petroleum Licence Areas on their proposals maps;
- Criteria-based policies for each of the exploration, appraisal and production phases of hydrocarbon extraction. These policies should set clear guidance and criteria for the location and assessment of hydrocarbon extraction within the Petroleum Licence Areas.



The committee heard that the Council as Minerals Planning Authority will be developing a new planning policy document- the 'Replacement Minerals and Waste Local Plan' (RMWLP). This will provide the opportunity to have a robust policy or policies with which to determine any planning applications for 'Fracking' for shale gas that may arise in the future. The committee also heard how the Government is to undertake a further round of licensing for onshore oil and gas exploration later this year, and so the Council should wait for this Licensing round, and at that time review whether any new Licences may affect Buckinghamshire.

However, the committee heard how the situation remains that because of the geology of the County that 'fracking' for shale gas remains unlikely in Buckinghamshire in the near future.

Having examined the current situation the committee would like to pass its comments and recommendations onto the Cabinet Member for their consideration in the preparations for developing the Replacement Minerals and Waste Local Plan.

### **Committee Recommendations**

The Committee recommends that the Cabinet Member;

1. should consider producing a formal communication strategy to ensure clear communication at an early stage of the planning process, such as the latest news relating to the 14<sup>th</sup> round of licensing;
2. review and develop a clear timetable for the Replacement minerals and Waste Local Plan at the earliest convenience;
3. review the current policy and consider expediting policies relating to 'fracking' in the minerals and waste local plan to ensure that, should the authority receive applications for 'fracking', its policies are clear and robust;
4. that the committee receive an update on the Replacement Minerals and Waste Local Plan at the appropriate time.

### **Next Steps**

The committee would be welcome your response to the above recommendations at your earliest convenience, briefly outlining whether or not you accept them and any planned activity in relation to them. This letter, along with your response will be published within the papers of the committee's next meeting.

