

Public Questions and Responses to the Council Meeting on 19 January 2015

Q1 County Councillor Steve Holgate (Chorley West Division)

“Whilst it is commendable for the Council to be ambitious and willing to take ground breaking decisions in order to enhance the facilities and services available to those it represents, a very different and cautionary approach needs to be taken when deciding on matters that could have a significant detrimental effect on the Health and Wellbeing of Chorley residents.

There is an obsession of the current government to allow and introduce Fracking irrespective of proven shortcomings relating to the safety of long term well abandonment and deep local disquiet across the community. The Leader of the Council must be aware that the Minister for Communities has indicated that irrespective of the decision of LCC development control committee having reject two planning applications in Lancashire for Fracking after receiving and considering evidence over a four day period or any subsequent decision that may be made by the government planning inspector on this issue, will make the final decision? Surely the Leader must agree that this is an attack on local government democracy and an affront to local decision makers. Well integrity, post well abandonment will eventually fail sooner or later and as a consequence, pollution is sure to occur which will be a blight on the agricultural economy as well as the water supply. I believe we not duty bound to our children, grandchildren and future generations to pass on as clean and safe an environment as we inherited.

Will the Leader of the Council do everything in his powers to ensure that all councillors are fully informed regarding the pros and cons of Fracking and then move to asking the Council to take a public position on whether to oppose or favour Fracking taking place in or under Chorley?”

Response by Councillor Alistair Bradley, Executive Leader of the Council

I completely agree that decisions on applications for onshore shale gas extraction and drilling should be made as locally as possible and not by Central Government. As a Council we cannot just declare that we are opposed to or in favour of fracking in the Borough, we have to consider every application on its merits and individual councillors will all have their own views. Which is why we are trying to increase our knowledge on the subject – to be as informed as we can be through dedicated Councillor briefing sessions on the subject.

In answer to a supplementary question about a report commissioned by the Government on the impact of fracking on local economies which had been subsequently withdrawn, Councillor Bradley said he was unaware of the report but would be interested to see it as the more information Councillors had, the better the decision making would be.

Q2 Gillian Kavanagh resident of Brinscall and founder of Frack Free Chorley & South Ribble.

“From Sept 29th 2015 we have collected over 3,000 signatures from residents and visitors of the Borough for our petition, that calls upon Chorley Borough Council to declare the borough Frack Free and not allow any Hydraulic fracturing , development, drilling, exploration on any land it owns, rents, and to work with agencies like United Utilities to ensure the safety for all the residents.

My main concern is water, West Pennines is the water catchment area for United Utilities and this area is under threat. Hydraulic fracturing requires vast quantities of fresh water and in some USA states, and Australia there have been contamination of the water table and surface water with radioactive waste, methane gas, heavy metals and chemicals making the water unusable. Following the drilling at Preese Hall near Blackpool in 2011 Radioactive contaminated water was actually dumped in the Manchester Ship Canal.

We all remember when we had to boil our water in August and the effects upon our community and families. Following the recent floods in Buckshaw Village, Croston and other areas in the Borough.

If fracking was allowed to go ahead how does the council propose to contain the contamination of water onto our streets, in our homes, our rivers? And at what cost to the Council? At what cost to local businesses, and residents?

United Utilities is 5 yrs into a 30 year plan to restore the peat bogs of our moorlands to ensure a slow run off of water and to help clean it. The drinking water sprouts from many springs on Great Hill runs into Roddlesworth, and the Goit, onto Anglezarke, Rivington reservoirs, from there in to the Manchester Ring way where water can be moved to where it is needed. All areas under threat from the recent fracking licences.

The risks of Hydraulic fracturing are radioactive water contamination. Severe air pollution. Tens of thousands of wells, pipelines and compressor stations devastating and industrializing our countryside, accelerating climate change, affecting farming, agriculture, breweries, tourism and blighting communities for generations to come.

Will Chorley Council be bold and declare the Borough of Chorley Frack Free, protecting residents & generations to come, wildlife, and our natural resources from the toxic effects of fracking?"

Response by Councillor Alistair Bradley, Executive Leader of the Council

If fracking was permitted to go ahead it would be subject to Environment Agency and Health and Safety Executive regulation and monitoring and the granting of required permits. Any problems as a result of fracking raised with the Council would be investigated and we would support residents in that process.

As explained, we cannot at this moment declare that we will make the borough frack free – but we can agree that we will rigorously scrutinize all such applications received and that we will support the fight to keep decisions on fracking being made locally rather than centrally.

In response to a supplementary question regarding whether the Council would show support for Lancashire County Council's stance against fracking in relation to the two applications which had been turned down, Councillor Bradley responded that whilst he empathized with the Group's position, the application related to areas within Fylde and the Council was not in a position to agree to this request.

Q3 David Carpenter/Cathy Maidment - resident of Heath Charnock

"Have the council taken into consideration the health issues raised in Public Health England's paper PHE-GRGE_002 "Review of the Potential Public Health Impacts of Exposures to Chemical and Radioactive Pollutants as a result of Shale Gas Extraction"

And have they taken note of the ramifications for the council and the borough if these potential consequences arise due to them permitting hydraulic fracturing for extraction of methane (and oil)?

Have the council considered how the geology of Chorley and South Lancashire generally, being a syncline is going to ensure that anything released underground (such as fracking fluids, Radon gas, escaped methane etc.) is going to reach the surface and water table eventually through the different layers permeable rock that make up the county?

Is the council willing to take the risk of releasing fracking fluids, Radon gas, methane and other materials into the environment when the drilling pipelines and concrete encapsulation are fractured by earth movements? There has been a 100% record of earth movements due to exploratory drilling so far. (British Geological Survey)

As a consequence of the increased traffic from hydraulic fracturing operations has the council considered the fact that in most states in the USA the rate of road deaths has been reducing significantly and in the 6 fracking states the rate of road deaths has quadrupled and even quintupled?

Is the council aware that the six Hydraulic fracturing states in the USA have had an increase in costs for repairing transport infrastructure over and above the other 44 of approximately £100,000,000 each and has this excessive cost, which isn't covered by the offer of £10,000 per well, been considered in any decisions regarding giving permission for developing fracking sites in our area."

Response by Councillor Alistair Bradley, Executive Leader of the Council

In relation to the first question regarding the geology of the area, Councillor Bradley said that Council Members were aware of the evidence from America but there was a need to distinguish between what would happen here and what had happened internationally – both in terms of geology and also methods of extracting shale gas. Council planning officers would discuss any planning application with Lancashire County Council and other agencies before they made any comment as a consultee. In response to a supplementary question regarding the Council's willingness to challenge Central Government, Councillor Bradley said that the Council did not shy away from lobbying the Government on any issue where it had concerns. It was about local decision making on local issues.

In relation to the second element of the question on the impact on public health, Councillor Bradley responded that the Council had received presentations from Lancashire County Council, the Environment Agency and the Health and Safety Executive which had raised issues of public health and given a number of reassurances. However the Council was aware of its responsibilities for the health and wellbeing of its residents and detailed scrutiny would be undertaken of any application.

Q4 Sue Sumner – resident of Chorley

"Can the Council members guarantee without question that they have been made aware of all the potential implications that could occur regarding the abandonment of fracking wells given the nature of the structure of the well casings and that all the companies have fully identified the potential long term risks involved in this stage of operations?

Can the Council members fully guarantee that they are absolutely aware of where the weight of responsibility of liability lies if absolute long term containment is unsuccessful and what potential long term impacts any containment failure may have in economic terms, environmental and public health and wellbeing?"

Response by Councillor Alistair Bradley, Executive Leader of the Council

Councillor Bradley reported that the Council was making every effort to be well informed about the issues surrounding fracking, receiving presentations and working with partners. There could never be a guarantee that Councillors were fully aware of all the issues, however they were fully aware of their responsibility to residents, to look after their prosperity, health and wellbeing and to maintain green spaces for future generations. In response to a supplementary question regarding the long term maintenance of former fracking sites, Councillor Bradley gave assurances that the Council would ask the right questions at the time and challenge the experts and any different opinions being offered.

Q5 Anne Lineen - Resident of Wheelton

“Shale gas development involves continuous activity conducted over a sustained period of time for the entire course of a day, seven days a week. Noise (from compressors, generators, drilling and heavy trucks); light pollution; bad odours; and heavy traffic can cause distress, fear and anxiety for people living nearby. Will Chorley Council be providing any support to local residents who cannot endure this disruption, or any means of mediating with the drilling companies concerned? Or will residents be left to deal with the situation themselves as best they can?”

Response by Councillor Alistair Bradley, Executive Leader of the Council

In response, Councillor Bradley said it would depend on the conditions being placed on the planning consent and whether the company undertaking the fracking, was in breach of them. There would certainly be disruption, but the Council would only be in a position to challenge if the company was not complying with requirements. He had asked Cuadrilla if they have any plans for the Chorley area and at this stage they say they haven't, but of course that could change.

Q6 Darren Tickle

“Will the council set policy to join and work together with other neighbouring councils to promote and encourage renewable technologies, for example community owned wind or solar farms, in order to work towards a sustainable and secure energy future?”

Response by Councillor Alistair Bradley, Executive Leader of the Council

Councillor Bradley replied that yes the Council was in discussion with energy providers and had taken a number of steps as an Authority with the use of electric vehicles and solar panels. The Council would get involved in larger projects where there was interest and a willingness to engage, however wind turbines and solar farms were not always popular with local residents when it came to considering planning permission. In response to a supplementary question about the introduction of community projects for sustainable energy, Councillor Bradley responded that this had been looked into but the fluctuating energy tariffs meant it was difficult to invest in such schemes in the current financial climate.

Q7 Irene Shorrack/Dave Ashton, residents of Adlington

“I would like the following content, in particular with reference to the cryptosporidium contamination problem to be discussed at your debate on Fracking on the above date.

One of my main concerns about this is the fact that if the Shale Gas Exploration is allowed to go ahead, we would have even more worries about our water supplies both in the East of Chorley, covering Healey Nab, Rivington, Belmont and Horwich and the other is Samlesbury, Wheelton and Darwen. Myself and people I have spoken to are of the opinion that when the explorations took place in Blackpool causing a mini earthquake **cryptosporidium contamination may have resulted from the release of toxic dreadful gases used in order to carry out the exploration** and over a period of time 'travelled' in some way into the water supplies affecting these and other areas in the United Utilities network.

What is even more alarming is that if this is found to be the case, then the **cryptosporidium contamination** could possibly travel to affect the Rivington Reservoirs which are near to the proposed drilling sites particularly around Healey Nab and Rivington. If the reservoirs are contaminated the water supply to Liverpool will be contaminated too and the result will be catastrophic.

In view of the above, do you know whether United Utilities has investigated this possibility? I just find it very strange that we have never had any bacterial contamination problems with our water supplies in these areas previous to the Blackpool mini earthquake.

Furthermore, I dread to think that not only will we be losing our beloved picturesque environment in the areas mentioned, especially Rivington and Healey Nab which will obviously be destroyed and replaced by the horrendous noisy machinery which after pulverising our narrow road system will be used to begin the operation of inserting poisonous gases and liquids into layers of rock in the water gathering areas of Rivington but could also contaminate our water supply permanently so that we will be faced with having to drink bottled water as is the case with Pennsylvania and Oklahoma.

For information, the Fracking investigation in Pennsylvania was carried out quite away from the town(s) but yet still the **cryptosporidium contamination** managed to infiltrate into the water supply in many parts of the country causing people to suffer terribly from this exploration. The danger in my opinion is the fact that the proposed tests to be carried out in the areas mentioned are not situated at a safe distance from these areas particularly dwellings either at Healey Nab or Rivington.

I would like to know what plans are in place with regard to **ALTERNATIVE MEASURES** for everyone if this test drilling all goes horribly wrong and it is found to have contaminated our water supplies even further. How are we going to manage in this area and other areas without our water? In Pennsylvania this has been the case with the result that not only has it destroyed their health and their way of life but there is a terrible lot of unemployment and illness. We could also end up with bottled water being brought into every town and village in the area to use for drinking water, washing, etc. etc.

With regard to providing extra jobs, we will probably find that as in Pennsylvania they were promised the same but they went on to find that after the tests had been carried out, they are now left with a lot of unemployment and an awful lot of health issues causing a complete state of misery. Finally, how can official encouragement of Fracking in this country be compatible with David Cameron's professed aim of making Britain a greener nation?!"

Q7 Response by Councillor Alistair Bradley, Executive Leader of the Council

In response Councillor Bradley said the outbreak of cryptosporidium was still subject to investigation by United Utilities, it was too soon to predict the cause.

Every effort would be made to preserve the areas mentioned around Rivington which were very special to all residents in the area but as with any other part of the Borough, the Council could give no commitment to maintain it as a Frack Free area.