

Statement to Cabinet 14-Nov-12

Ben Eve

I would like to spend a few minutes discussing onshore or unconventional gas exploration, (or fracking or coal bed methane exploration as it has become known) in the context of the Green Strategy to be discussed at this meeting.

I live in Saltford and am very aware that at any time a planning application might be submitted for CBM or Hydraulic fracturing very close to where I live, as has happened in Keynsham. Petroleum Exploration Development Licenses were sold to various companies several years ago that covered this area. The very thought of this industry with an unproven safety track record taking place on my doorstep worries me, and many other residents, greatly.

This area of the south west is one of only a few in the UK, that at present are being targeted for gas exploration. It feels like this county, and this local area, could become the testing ground – or guinea pig – for unconventional gas exploration in this country, or even Europe.

The problem is that there is no defined body of evidence, no long term study nor proof that shows that fracking or CBM production is safe to practice around densely populated areas or safe at all.

However, there is growing body of evidence from other countries that has shown that there are real risks to health of citizens who live nearby gas operations. One study, for example, has shown that in many areas of the Southern US, Cancer rates have fallen, but in areas where fracking has taken place over the last few years, some Cancer rates have risen.

Authorities have chosen to dismiss much of this evidence as alarmist and anecdotal, when in fact governments and councils should be exercising their duty of care and fully examining every shred of evidence.

Our local MP in Saltford said recently that no government would risk public health for cheap gas but I am not convinced that there is a full scrutiny by the authorities of the adverse reports gleaned from other countries to fully understand the potential risks. Rather, they seem to be dismissed. If only 1 per cent of the evidence from the USA is true, then it would still be foolhardy and negligent to continue.

I am urging the council under their new green strategy to reject all calls for onshore or unconventional gas exploration in this county, and set a marker down for the rest of the UK. The lack of safety guarantees in this industry could lead to serious environmental problems for future generations. i.e our children. Instead of a cheap gas, it could lead to health problems, land, air and water contamination.

The BANES green strategy is 'Valuing people, place and nature' and NOT putting each at serious risk.