

4<sup>th</sup> July 2011

John Penrose MP,  
House of Commons,  
Westminster,  
London,  
SW1A 0AA

Dear Mr Penrose,

**Hydraulic Fracturing ('Fracking') in the Mendip Hills for the release of prospective resources of shale gas and coal bed methane.**

You will be aware from reports recently in the local media that significant prospective resources of shale gas and coal bed methane have been identified in Somerset. It is our understanding that in 2008, the then Government Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform granted rights for two companies to search for oil and gas in and around the Mendips.

We also understand that resources of shale gas and coal bed methane, if found, would be released by the process of 'fracking' during which fluid and sand is pumped into a borehole to initiate fractures in rock layers. Whilst a Government inquiry has, to date, found no evidence that 'fracking' poses a direct risk to underground water supplies, provided the drilling well is properly constructed, concerns have been expressed by some environmental campaigners in Lancashire that the process has caused earth tremors and in the US it was claimed that it led to inflammable gas being evident within tap water.

A Commons Committee has, we believe, concluded that there is no need to slow down exploration work but urged the Department of Energy and Climate Change to monitor drilling activity closely in its early stages to assess impacts on water and air quality. Presumably, Government authorisation is required for companies to drill wells and install facilities, while buildings would need planning permission from the local authority?

The AONB Unit stance at this stage is to urge a very cautious approach to 'fracking'. We would have serious reservations about the process taking place within the designated landscape with regard to impacts on the character of the

landscape from buildings and structures, on aquifers and the water table and on SSSI's and biodiversity. Therefore, we would request your support in making representations on our behalf to Chris Huhne, Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change.

Currently, we are not aware that the Government has authorised 'fracking' in the Mendips and assume that, to date, it is only investigation of reserves that has taken place. It would be helpful to know where in the Mendip Hills, if at all, deposits of shale or coal bed methane have been found. We would also request that the AONB Unit is kept informed of any consideration by the Coalition Government to allow fracking authorisation in the Mendip Hills (within the AONB or in East Mendips).

Yours sincerely,

Jonathan Richards,  
Planning Liaison Officer,  
Mendip Hills AONB Unit.

CC Councillor Dawn Hill, AONB Partnership Chair