

Ten days until decision day and Will Holland's PR persona has taken its gloves off! The CEO who has been spreading misinformation about his proposed gas well for over 15 months, who has submitted a planning application whose errors, gaps and misrepresentations have been pointed out repeatedly to North Yorkshire's planners through the consultation process, is now resorting to cheap insults. He portrays carefully researched evidence submitted to the planners as "misleading, false and defamatory". Let's be clear: it is not campaign groups who have been causing "alarm and concern among the public" but Europa Oil and Gas.

1. Fracking definition and the MWJP

Mr Holland puts up a straw person to knock down. No one is saying that low volume hydraulic fracturing (fracking) is illegal. We say it should be. After all, it was low volume fracking that caused the damaging tremors in Lancashire that prompted the current, limited moratorium.

It is disingenuous to state that the evidence base "proves the proposed operation at Burniston is safe and environmentally sound". If there is such evidence, we would love to see it. We have looked for it. It's not in the planning application. We have scanned the scientific literature. We cannot find Mr Holland's evidence. The Lancashire tremors occurred because the fracking fluid under pressure encountered previously unidentified faults – despite the oversight of the regulatory bodies Mr Holland refers to. We do not know – Europa do not know – what faults there are two kilometres below the field in Scalby where they propose to frack sandstone formations at four different depths.

The MWJP requires high standards of information and evidence for proposals that involve hydraulic fracturing. We expect the Planning Committee to be looking for that in the application.

2. Benefits to the local community

Mr Holland's letter, strangely, does not detail any benefits to the local community. Only that residents at Broughton near Scunthorpe regard Europa as a good neighbour! Hardly evidence of likely benefits to our coastal communities. We see no benefits in the proposal. The application instead promises us noise, dust, pollutants, floodlights and HGV traffic.

3. Seismic risks

Mr Holland is wrong to say that risks associated with potential seismic activity fall outside of planning. The Minerals Planning Guidance says Minerals Planning Authorities should satisfy themselves -e.g. by consulting the NSTA - that the mitigation of seismic risks can or will be addressed. North Yorkshire's Minerals and Waste Joint Plan (at para. 5.154) says that proposals where hydraulic fracturing is involved should be supported by "compelling evidence" that induced seismicity can be managed and mitigated to an acceptable level.

4. NPPF proposed changes

We agree that the draft revisions to the NPPF and the clear direction of travel of government policy are material considerations and we expect the planners to treat them as such in weighing up the planning balance.

Mr Holland's assertions about the continued need for natural gas are, as they have been for the past 15 months, devoid of any figures, avoid any acknowledgement of the way the market for gas works (the UK exports considerable quantities of gas each year and 'Burniston' gas is as likely to end up in Ireland or mainland Europe as in houses in North Yorkshire) and do not reference the accelerating downward trend in the demand for gas in the UK which can be seen clearly in government quarterly and annual statistics.

Chris Garforth
for Frack Free Coastal Communities