



Department  
of Energy &  
Climate Change

# Fracking UK shale: planning permission and communities

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Hydraulic fracturing, known as fracking, is a technique used in the extraction of gas and oil from ‘shale’ rock formations by injecting water at high pressure. This guide explains the planning process and what industry is doing to engage communities.

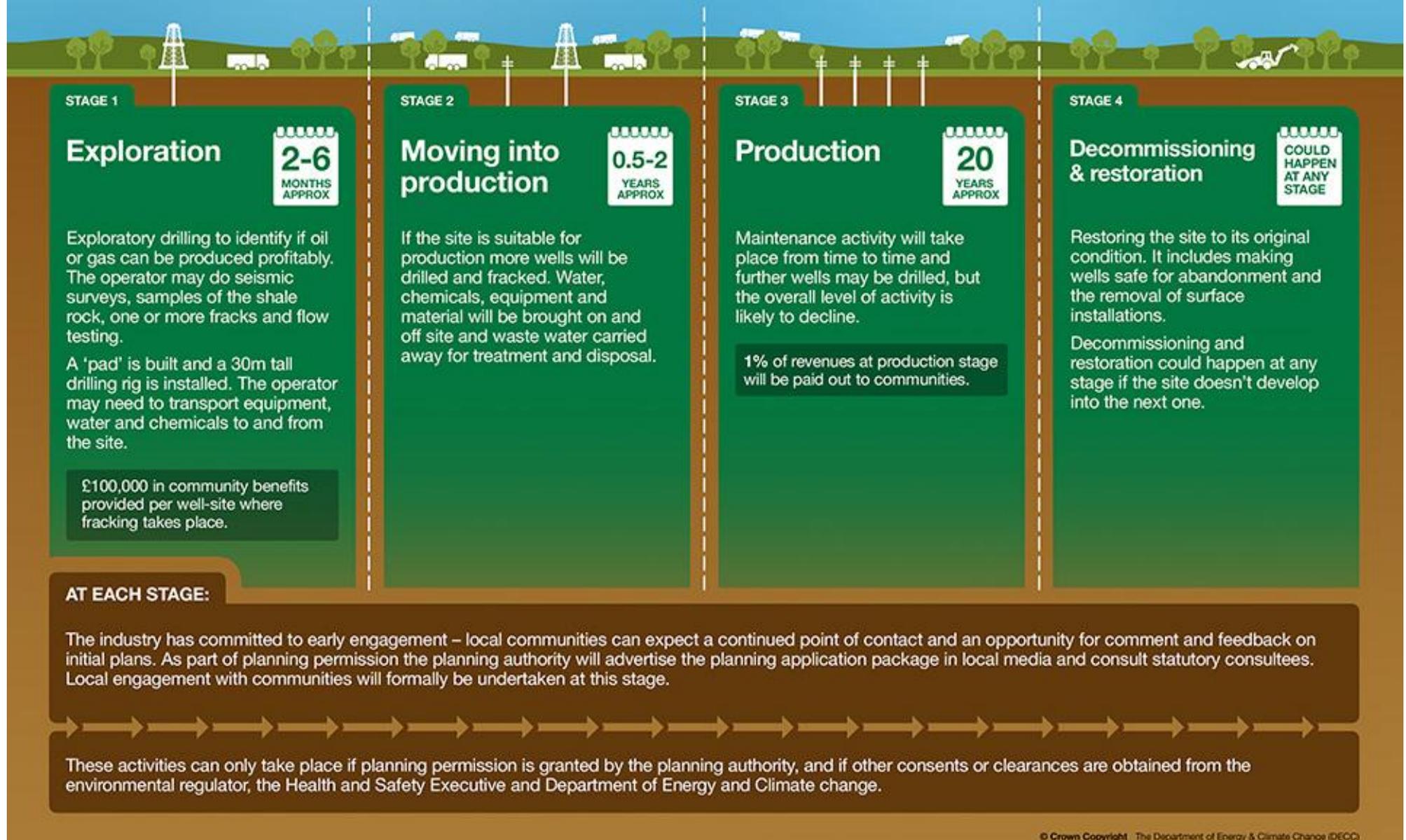
Operations to extract shale gas and oil should have broadly similar impacts on health, local amenities and traffic movements as existing onshore gas and oil extraction methods, and the planning system treats them in the same way. Shale gas and oil developments will be covered by the same robust safety and environmental regulatory regime, supplemented by new controls against the risk of earthquakes.

## Impacts on communities

There are several stages of oil and gas development: including exploratory drilling, testing and then production. Local impacts depend on the site and its state of development. The operator will provide local people with information on their plans, including the approximate timing of each stage.

The industry has made a commitment to work with local communities to minimise the impact of shale gas and oil operations wherever possible.

# Stages of shale gas and oil



## Obtaining planning permission for fracking

Planning permission is one of the approvals required before any activity may start on a site. The planning authority decides whether the activity is acceptable at that particular location, after local communities and other interested people have had the opportunity to set out their view on the benefits and impacts of the proposal. More information is available [see factsheet on regulation and monitoring].

Planning permission is required for each stage of the process (exploration, appraisal and production). For example, if an operator wants to drill additional wells or develop a site into production they will need specific planning permission for those activities.

All applications for planning permission to the mineral planning authority (in England, the county council or unitary authority, in Scotland and Wales the planning authority) include public consultation on the proposals. The planning authority will assess economic, social and environmental factors like noise, dust, air quality, levels of traffic and other important environmental issues before making its decision.

The Government's planning guidance for onshore oil and gas developments in England, highlights some "principal issues" for planning consideration:

- noise associated with the operation
- dust
- air quality
- lighting
- visual intrusion into the local setting and the wider landscape caused by any the placement of any building or structure within the application site area
- landscape character
- archaeological and heritage features
- traffic
- risk of contamination to land
- soil resources
- the impact on best and most versatile agricultural land
- flood risk
- land stability/subsidence
- internationally, nationally or locally designated wildlife sites, protected habitats and species, and ecological networks
- nationally protected geological and geomorphological sites and features
- site restoration and aftercare

You can read [detailed guidance on the planning system](#) in England and [information on the planning framework for minerals in Scotland](#) and [Wales](#).

If significant environmental impacts are likely, the minerals planning authority will require the operator to make an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). In it operators need to assess the potential risks to people, plants, animals, soil, water, climate, the landscape, architectural, archaeological heritage and others as well as how they can be mitigated.

In England and Wales, there is no set minimum distance for any industrial activity from populated areas. Planners assess the effects of each application on a case-by-case basis. The Scottish Government has announced plans to set a minimum distance between sites and populated areas.

## Asking local people for their views

As part of the planning process, mineral planning authorities will make the plans (and EIA where appropriate) available to local people and ask for their comments. These will be considered with the planning application. Other organisations – such as the Environment Agency – will also be consulted on any application.

Each planning application must be publicised by a display on site and in local newspapers and information must also be available on the relevant local authority website. This must include a section on how interested people can submit representations about the application, giving a period of at least 14 days.

All representations must be submitted in writing, either on paper or electronically. Members of the public can also speak at a planning committee meeting if one is held.

The onshore oil and gas industry body, the UK Onshore Operators Group (UKOOG), has produced a [Community Engagement Charter](#) committing to engage with local people, residents and other stakeholders. Operators agree to discuss their plans, and listen and respond to concerns before each of the 3 stages of operation and prior to submitting a planning application.

## Community benefits

In its Community Engagement Charter, the UKOOG committed to a community benefits package. The operator will:

- at exploration/testing stage, provide £100,000 in community benefits per well-site where fracturing takes place
- at production, pay 1% of revenues to communities
- publish evidence each year on how they have met these commitments

The charter and benefits package will be regularly reviewed as the industry develops and operators consult further with communities

## Impacts on farming

The Government is confident that the regulation of shale gas and oil operations, including fracturing, will make any adverse effect on farming unlikely. For information on how risks are managed see the “Water” and “Local air quality” factsheets (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/about-shale-gas-and-hydraulic-fracturing-fracking>) Monitoring of air and water quality will be conducted by the operator and environmental regulators.

## Insurance and property values

While the government does not comment on the commercial practices of individual insurers, there is no evidence that current exploration will adversely affect insurance availability or property values in the vicinity. No effects of this kind have been observed in 50 years of onshore oil and gas exploration and production.

## Fracking in house buyer ‘searches’

When a house is sold, buyers normally organise searches of records held by local authorities and others. This search may show that the site lies within, or near, the area covered by a Petroleum Act licence (PEDL). These areas may be very large – possibly hundreds of square kilometres – and any particular property may lie within a licensed area without being anywhere near any actual or proposed oil or gas operations.

If a licence exists in the area, the search report will name the operator. House buyers should approach the operator if they want to know more about its plans.

You can see whether you live in a licenced area by looking at a:

- [map of locations of licensed areas](#) produced by DECC
- [interactive map of these areas](#) produced by the UK Onshore Geophysical Library

## Operators’ insurance

In its Community Engagement Charter, the industry promises that operators will have ensure they have adequate insurance and response plans.

Operators of oil and gas sites are fully responsible for any damage caused by their activities. DECC checks that they have insurance which is appropriate to the operations proposed.

## Restoring the environment and long-term monitoring

When operations finish, the operator is responsible for safe abandonment of the well and for restoring the well-site to its previous state or a suitable condition for re-use. The relevant planning authority will require suitable restoration of the site as a condition of the planning permission.

The procedures for abandoning a well ensure that all the fluids it contains are permanently sealed. This is done by inserting cement plugs to seal the well, removing some of the steel casing and fitting a steel cap, in compliance with the Oil & Gas UK guidelines for the suspension and abandonment of wells.

DECC is discussing with industry arrangements so site restoration and aftercare (including any monitoring of abandoned wells) will be ensured, even when the operator goes out of business.

## More information

To find your planning authority and find out more about planning across the UK there is more information on the [Planning Portal](#).

[Guidance on the role of planning system in handling applications](#) for all phases of development in England is available on GOV.UK.

[Information on the planning framework for minerals in Scotland.](#)

[Information on the planning framework for minerals in Wales.](#)

The onshore oil and gas industry body, the UK Onshore Operators Group (UKOOG) has committed companies to engage with local people, residents and other stakeholders in their [Community Engagement Charter](#).

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