

Appendix A to the Council Minutes – 22 October 2014

Item 7 - Questions from members of the public

One question had been submitted by a member of the public. As Councillor Fish has submitted his apologies for the meeting, the question was answered by the Leader of the Council.

1. From Mr Perrin to Councillor John Kent

Are there any plans to allow “fracking” in Thurrock?”

Councillor Kent:

Mr Mayor, I know of no plans for fracking in Thurrock. As most local people know, Thurrock geology is based mainly around London clay and chalk, neither of which have the ability to hold gas or oil, but both of which of course have been exploited over the past century or more to create the boroughs somewhat unique topology.

Estimates of the amount of oil and gas bearing shale across Essex as a whole, do vary somewhat, and there is one map which suggests that Thurrock may sit on some deposits of gas and oil, but they would be very, very deep and it would be debatable whether it would be economically viable to release them.

It is also of course worth noting that as the current government wishes to see more fracking, the licenses for companies to explore local geology, are now issued by Central Government not Local Government and the usual planning powers have also been removed from local authorities in this area and given back to Central Government, to the Secretary of State.

Mayor:

Mr Perrin, do you wish to pose a supplementary question?

Mr Perrin:

Thank you Mr Mayor. Fracking is a controversial issue, invoking public concern regarding safety and damage to property. Does the Council have any powers such as granting/refusing permission or like the Thames Crossing issue, the Council and the public can huff and puff and swear blue in the face, but at the end of the day Central Government will have its way.

Risking being censored by the Mayor, I also ask, would you commit the Council to keep the public informed about the location of any fracking operations in Thurrock?

Councillor Kent:

Mr Mayor, fracking is something that is of concern locally. I've had a number of people corresponding with me on the issue and I have always given a commitment to people that as and when requests for fracking would be received, I would make people aware of it so I'm happy to agree and to give that assurance.

As far as the first question, I just have to repeat that licenses for companies to explore the local geology, are issued by Central Government not by Local Government; the powers that this and other local authorities would at one time had, have been removed and put back to the Central Government. I have to say it sounds as though, after many many years, there could be a campaign or a subject on which Mr Perrin would join with the Council and actually be mutually supportive.

Mayor:

Thank you Cllr Kent.