

Britain must seize the benefits of fracking

Here is the opening of this informative editorial from the Daily Telegraph:

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/08/07/britain-must-seize-the--benefits-of-fracking/>

TELEGRAPH VIEW

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For a country as reliant upon imported energy as Britain, the discovery of substantial deposits of shale gas might seem a godsend. In America, the exploitation of shale has been transformative, with the country set to become self-sufficient in energy by 2020. Here, by contrast, nothing much has happened beyond the drilling of a number of test wells, every one greeted by objections from green campaigners and local residents.

The Government recognises the potential and has offered favourable tax treatment to shale gas producers and a fast-track planning procedure to get projects under way. But the biggest barrier to a commercial fracking programme remains public opposition. In order to counter this, wealth funds from the proceeds of fracking were proposed, to pay for new community amenities in affected areas.



Anti-fracking protesters CREDIT: JOHN GILES/PA WIRE/JOHN GILES/PA WIRE

Now, the Government is [proposing a more straightforward approach](#)– direct payments to households. These could amount to more than £10,000 to each family. Inevitably, such a potential windfall has been denounced as a bribe. In fact, there is a case for local people to benefit from the energy bonanza under their feet, just as they can in America. Here, under the Petroleum Act 1988, shale gas belongs to the Crown and not to the landowner and a Government licence is needed to extract it.

It could equally be argued that the entire country should share in the proceeds of shale but this will only happen if it is properly exploited; and that requires persuading the people living close to where the fracking would take place to back it.

If offering them cash to do so changes their minds and gets the necessary schemes off the ground, then so be it.

The fact is that this process needs to be speeded up. Britain's energy policy is a mess, with the future of our nuclear programme in doubt after Theresa May halted a planned deal with China and France to build a new reactor at Hinkley Point. Coal-fired power stations are closing to meet the UK's carbon reduction obligations and we are heavily reliant on imported gas. Fracking offers cheap and plentiful energy, and gas is far cleaner than coal, yet we have been talking about its potential for nearly 10 years without getting anywhere.

One thing is certain: no one will ever benefit from shale if the resources remain in the ground.