

UNDERGROUND COAL GASIFICATION

Proposed by Councillor Geoffrey Watt

Seconded by Councillor Gerry Ellis

- (1) Council recalls that at its meeting on 18th July 2011 it approved, with unanimous (all-party) support, a motion 'Shale Gas Fracking' (minute 28 refers) stating its opposition to shale gas or coal bed methane testing or extraction in Wirral until the Council was satisfied as to the safety of the process and the risk of adverse environmental impacts had been fully addressed.
See:
<http://democracy.wirral.gov.uk/documents/g3562/Printed%20minutes%2018th-Jul-2011%2018.15%20Council.pdf?T=1>
- (2) It has subsequently emerged that conditional licences to explore for underground coal gasification under parts of the Dee Estuary, including the Hilbre Islands and a coastal strip from Caldy to Hoylake have been granted to Cluff Natural Resources Ltd and for an area just off the entire North Wirral Coast to Riverside Energy Ltd.
- (3) Council notes that the Hilbre Islands are within the Dee Estuary Special Area of Conservation and Dee Estuary Special Protection Area (all part of a network of protected sites stretching across Europe called Natura 2000) and therefore covered by the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations which also covers the Dee Estuary Ramsar Site. They are also protected through national legislation under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act as a Site of Special Scientific Interest, as is the North Wirral Coast and the Mersey Narrows.
- (4) Council notes that operations both onshore and above the low water mark would require planning approval to be granted by this authority and also that the Hilbre Islands and much of the coastal strip are within its ownership and thus under its control.
- (5) Therefore, Council:
 - (a) Confirms its opposition to Unconventional Gas Extraction, including Underground Coal Gasification, Coal Bed Methane and Fracking, under Wirral, its offshore coastal waters and the Dee and Mersey estuaries until such time as the Council is satisfied as to the safety of the process and that the risk of adverse environmental impacts have been fully addressed.
 - (b) Instructs the Chief Executive to write to the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change and to Wirral's four Members of Parliament, informing him and them of this decision.
 - (c) Instructs the Chief Executive to write to Wirral's neighbouring coastal local authorities (Sefton, Liverpool, Halton, Cheshire West & Chester, and Flintshire) informing them of this decision and inviting them to pass an equivalent resolution with the intention of protecting our shared environment.