

UK Government, Shale Gas and Climate Change

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Despite falling apart at the seams over its Brexit 'negotiations' with the EU, and its internal fights and scandals, bringing shame and embarrassment to the UK, Theresa May's government is determined to carry on with its money-oriented and earth-trashing policies.

When they help with one hand, they hinder with both. While science says we need to have [zero global carbon emissions](#) by 2040, the government is aiming for a [57% drop](#) by 2030, and doesn't actually have the policies to [achieve](#) that. Even so, 25% of the UK's energy is now generated by renewable sources. Much of that is due to Scotland's [progress](#). Month by [month](#) they improve while elsewhere the Tory government has cut [support](#) for renewable energy projects.

Too many people in England have a NIMBY ('not in my back yard') attitude and the reasons for objecting to renewable developments are often based on spoiling the views across our green and pleasant land. Wind turbines are apparently totally unacceptable as part of the landscape, although people lived for years (and still do in some places) with electricity pylons marching across the land; just as they've mostly stopped objecting to telephone and satellite masts popping up everywhere because they love their mobile phones more than their views.

But offshore wind (and Britain has a lot of 'offshore' in relation to land mass) also comes in for objections, despite the fact it could be a [real bonus](#) to the country.

People who have a sea view don't want to look at wind turbines despite the fact that planned installations are not that close to shore. "They're objecting to some white dots on the horizon!" was one renewable energy supporter's comment. But the UK is a small island nation and we have a lot of traffic in our waters. Do all of those gazing at their precious sea view not notice the huge container ships, oil tankers and all the rest chuntering across the horizon?

Instead of making a genuine push for renewable energy, the government insists that nuclear power, as in new builds Hinkley Point C (being built by the French state-owned company EDF, and others built by [China and South Korea](#)), and fossil fuel in the form of shale gas is the only way to keep the country going. To this end, in December 2015, they made available [93 licences](#) for onshore oil and gas exploration.

Fracking is very much an English project, as Wales has a moratorium on the practice, and Scotland has an outright ban (as does Northern Ireland's neighbour Ireland). Northern Ireland itself is in limbo. Their last Environment Minister was [planning to ban fracking](#), but

the NI Department of the Environment (DoENI) was abolished in May 2016. However, according to Planning Aid England (March 2017), England is the *only* part of the UK where shale gas extraction is [currently permitted](#).

But then England, poor benighted England, is a Tory stronghold and the Tories have pledged '[unprecedented support](#)' for fossil fuels – in return for all the 'donations' they're getting from the oil bosses. In a spirit of generosity, they then decide that communities should be given some money for allowing fracking to ruin their lives, and in August 2016 they launched a consultation on a proposed 'Shale Wealth Fund'. This was to determine how to share out the money, *not* whether they should even consider trying to offer bribes.

So on Saturday November 11th the government published this [announcement](#) – at 12:15 am in the middle of the night, probably hoping that once the sun had risen we'd all be shopping while wearing our red poppies to support our armed forces, and far too busy to notice. They are offering up to £10 million to any community affected by the activities of shale gas companies. Pretty crass, seeing that the UK is also talking about 'leading the world' in cutting carbon emissions at the UN climate change conference in Bonn.

Will it work? Probably not, as all the communities [currently threatened](#) with fracking are either actively protesting or organising their protests. And each year the number of people supporting fracking diminishes. Now [only 16%](#) are in favour of shale gas.

Where's the money coming from? According to one dedicated protestor at the [Preston New Road site](#), there is no way the fracking companies would give away that amount of money; it would be a real dent in their hoped-for profits, and so far, almost all drilling will be exploratory. He also added that they had already tried to pay active protesters to go away by offering £25,000. "That's a lot of money when you're skint" he said, but no one appears to be taking up the offer.

So will the government be using taxpayers' money to prop up a policy that 84% of us don't want? Well, of course it will. The money will come from the tax revenues the government is hoping to collect from shale gas, if and when there's any genuine production. With this money, the government suggests communities could pay for projects such as

- new play parks, community sports facilities and libraries (which means buying back the land that got sold off and reopening the libraries that closed due to lack of funding)
- improvements to transport links (that the government has refused funding for)
- restoration of local heritage sites (that have been neglected or trashed by government schemes)

Back to the protestor who commented,

"Do they really think a play park would be more important than your child drinking poisoned water?"

And they don't mention repairing the damage to the roads, lanes and bridges that the heavy industrial fracking traffic will cause, disrupting any 'improvements' to transport links. Although, if the USA is anything to go by, the bill for that will be much higher. Take [Pennsylvania](#):

In 2012, approximately \$204 million was collected in “impact fees” from fracking companies. ‘Impact fee’ is an appropriate name because Pennsylvania has suffered significant impact from shale gas drilling. But then statistics emerged on the appalling condition of Pennsylvania roads. In 2010, PennDOT estimated road damage from drilling at \$265 million. But by 2013, the state estimated that *\$3.5 billion would be needed just to maintain the states existing assets and \$8.7 billion to make all the necessary bridge repairs.*

The real hypocritical punch-below-the-belt by our ‘leading the world on environment protection’ government is this:

The Shale Wealth Fund principles include:

- a commitment to real local decision-making, by allowing local communities to determine how the Shale Wealth Fund is spent in their area. prioritising the needs of local people first and foremost.
- ensuring that decision-making is locally representative and those who make these decisions are held accountable to local communities.
- The government has confirmed that it will be up to communities to decide where the money should go.

But...

When Lancashire County Council refused permission for Cuadrilla to start fracking operations, citing impact and noise, Cuadrilla submitted an appeal. Sajid Javid, the government’s *Communities* Secretary, [overturned](#) the Council’s decision and gave Cuadrilla permission to drill. Would it surprise you that [Javid has links](#) to the finance sector that bankrolls fossil fuel companies?

So much for committing to local decision making.

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