

A Piece of my mind

By Julie Wassmer

Last Monday (3/7) I was at a public meeting on fracking, organised by Chatham & Aylesford Labour Party which featured, as a key-note speaker, the Labour Shadow Secretary of State for International Trade and Shadow Minister for International Climate Change, Barry Gardiner MP.

Before 2016, only the Green Party opposed fracking but at last year's Labour Party conference, Barry Gardiner announced that Labour was going beyond support for a moratorium on fracking - to an outright ban. At last week's meeting he explained why.

The Paris Climate Change Agreement brought together 195 countries to decide that by the second half of this Century the increase in the global average temperature would be held to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels, and to try to limit that to 1.5°C in order to significantly reduce the impacts of Climate Change. Both China and a pre-Trump America ratified this agreement to avoid what Gardiner described as "wholesale climate dislocation" - the movement of refugees, agricultural changes, desertification and the acidification of our oceans.

The Committee on Climate Change, an independent group of experts that advises the Government, determined that there needs to be a rapid decline in the use of gas between 2030 and 2050 so Gardiner argues it makes no economic sense for us to be locked into an "outmoded, outdated fossil fuel technology", like fracking, when it would be cheaper to produce renewables. Nevertheless, the former Conservative Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne, agreed subsidies of 75% capital allowances for shale gas producers, and, as Gardiner explained: "This huge amount of public subsidy is being shovelled into an area of energy production, surplus to the world's needs and more expensive than we could be producing ourselves, elsewhere."

Gardiner's arguments against fracking were based as much on economics as the environment and he made them strongly and eloquently. But we do not have a Labour government in power. Instead, we have one which another speaker at the meeting, Kathryn McWhirter of Balcombe, claimed has a "fracking fetish".

Here in Kent, we fought a successful campaign against drilling in 2013, but our county is now threatened by drilling in the nearby Weald and the likelihood of transportation of toxic waste to us for treatment.

In Lancashire, drilling is set to take place by Cuadrilla, the company who, in 2011, conducted the only shale fracking ever to have been conducted in the UK. That triggered two earthquakes which led to deformation of the company's well casing, though Cuadrilla "failed even to recognise the significance of that event", wrote Charles Hendry MP, who was Energy Minister at that time.

You won't have heard much in the mainstream media about the direct action protests which have been taking place in Lancashire on an almost daily basis but these have been joined by local county councillors who rejected Cuadrilla's fracking applications only to have the Communities Secretary, Sajid Javid MP, overturn their decision after an appeal by Cuadrilla. So much for democracy.

Last Monday, Barry Gardiner told a packed audience: "I don't "believe" in Climate Change...I "know" that Climate Change is happening. It's happening now."

If we do not support the communities in Lancashire and the Weald, fracking will be happening too.

To support the Lancashire community contact: f Lancashire@gmail.com and <http://frackfreelancashire.org>