

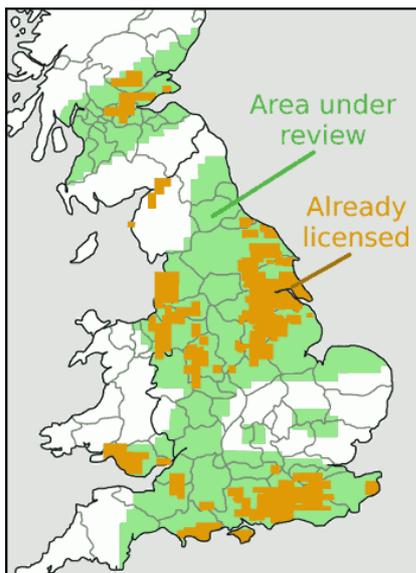
Unconventional gas exploration and production (Fracking)

A CPRE Task and Finish Group is presently preparing a Planning Guidance on fracking. This article does not comment on the drawbacks or risks of fracking planning applications, it is presented as a background document on the various 'unconventional' processes of extracting natural gas from trapped underground sources and is intended to partially supplement the eventual Guidance.

There is already a Planning Practice Guidance that has been issued by the Department of Communities and Local Government. The CPRE guidance will refer to this. However, it should be noted that there are numerous phases of fracking, starting with "exploration", through to "production" and finishing with "restoration". At present CPRE is looking primarily at the exploration phase and it is accepted that the guidance is likely to need constant review as new issues come to light.

The term 'unconventional' extraction is used in contrast to 'conventional' extraction which depends on the free flow of gas or petroleum products to the surface once a reservoir is tapped by the drilling process.

Natural gas is a fossil fuel that is produced through the decomposition and heating of organic matter over many hundreds of thousands of years, producing hydrocarbon gas and oil. With the relatively easy-to-exploit gas reservoirs now drying up, the industry has been developing new techniques in extracting molecular gas trapped inside various rock formations. The UK has potentially vast reserves of unconventional gas trapped inside shale rock and coal seams.



Areas with the likelihood of future "unconventional" gas recovery

The map does show potential reserves in our Region (particularly the west) but at present there is no indication as to whether they will prove to be commercially viable. We are not yet aware of any interest in our Region. As such, we are not expecting any application, based on present information, even for exploration, over the next five years.

There are presently three 'unconventional' methods of extracting trapped gas - Fracking to produce shale gas, Coal Bed Methane extraction (CBM) and Underground Coal Gasification (UGC). All methods involve drilling both exploration wells and production wells to release the trapped gas.