

September 2018

Dear Constituent

Thank you for contacting me about planning practice on shale development.

Shale development has the potential to deliver substantial economic benefits to the UK economy and for local communities where supplies are located. I am glad that the Government remains committed to protecting the environment and ensuring that shale exploration happens safely.

A consultation has been launched to consider whether the early stages of shale exploration should be treated as permitted development, and in particular the circumstances where this might be appropriate. This would allow early exploratory work to proceed without requiring planning applications, although planning applications would still be required for fracking.

Other measures include strengthening community engagement by consulting on the potential to make pre-application consultations a statutory requirement, and launching a new £1.6 million shale support fund over the next two years to build capacity in local authorities dealing with shale applications.

A new Planning Brokerage Service for shale applications will also be created, to provide guidance to developers and local authorities on the planning process in order to speed up decision making. Furthermore, to simplify the complex UK regulatory regime for shale gas, a new Shale Environmental Regulator will also be set up, to act as a single coherent face for the public, mineral planning authorities, and industry.

Some years ago, as a Minister in DEFRA, I was involved in drawing up regulations for fracking. They were, and remain, some of the most rigorous in the world.

I am confident that these new measures will help speed up decision making on shale applications, whilst protecting our environment and ensuring that the voices of local communities are heard.

Yours sincerely



Richard Benyon