

Public engagement with shale gas and oil

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A report on findings from public dialogue workshops

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Foreword

Professor Patrick Devine-Wright - oversight group member

To most people in the UK, shale gas is unfamiliar. This is not surprising, given that little exploration has occurred, and there is uncertainty about the available resource. Yet already controversy exists over its impacts, particularly the method of extraction commonly dubbed 'fracking'.

Given this unfamiliarity, uncertainty and controversy, public engagement is crucial. We no longer live in an age when it is legitimate for organisations to 'Decide-Announce-Defend' proposals to develop controversial energy technologies. Nor is it acceptable to brand objectors as 'NIMBYs' (Not In My Back Yard) that can be discredited, ignored or discounted from public debate.

Public engagement is crucial, not because it is a legal requirement or a fashionable exercise, but because engagement, when done properly, can bring substantive benefits, for example leading to better decision-making and an increase in trust.

This public dialogue represents one part of a wider and on-going process that is needed to engage society over the development of shale gas across the UK. We are only beginning to understand the nature of public concerns, and the dialogue reveals important issues that must be addressed.

It shows how the participants found it difficult to square shale gas with values of affordability, sustainability and security; feared that important decisions were already taken; that risks were being overlooked and that benefit offers were akin to bribes. Participants want information to be provided by credible, impartial and trustworthy sources. They view the role of independent experts, including academics, as not only to bolster public understanding, but to challenge questionable claims.

While engagement is important, it has to lead to something. The principles of engagement identified in the report must guide the actions of policy makers and industry in the months and years ahead.

Shale gas is not just a local issue. Participants call for local engagement to be joined up to a national debate that takes the arguments for shale gas to society and sets them against the values of affordability, sustainability and security. The conversation has only just begun.

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Executive Summary

Introduction

This report summarises findings from a public dialogue which explored participant's views on how to engage the public on shale gas and oil and coal bed methane. Three dialogues were held – in Winchester, Northampton and Liverpool – to allow a diverse mix of participants to: learn from written information and experts; listen to each other, share and develop their views; reach carefully considered conclusions; and communicate those conclusions directly to inform Government's decision making. One day looked at the background to shale gas and oil development and one day was spent working creatively with participants to design public engagement approaches. The dialogue, which was co-funded by Sciencewise¹, was designed to inform the Office of Unconventional Gas and Oil's (OUGO) public engagement policy, inform industry's development of a community benefits package and help stakeholders (from government and industry) to develop appropriate plans for local engagement.

The early stages of exploration of shale gas and oil in the UK have evoked significant media coverage, in part influenced by information from the US (despite the contextual differences). Public dialogues are a useful means of moving beyond top-level impressions, to explore how participants come to views on complex and contentious issues – in this case, what local people would need and want from engagement on shale exploration. The findings of these dialogues do not offer a definitive guide, but can be used alongside other evidence to provide insights into participants' needs and use of information, and their suggestions on engagement.

The context for engagement with the public

Participant's initial views towards shale gas and oil tended to be fairly neutral, though in all three dialogue locations participants' recognised that their baseline knowledge and understanding of shale gas and oil was limited. They were also surprised by information on the current energy supply, particularly the low percentage of overall supply provided by renewables. Few knew much about the processes of exploration and extraction, the potential benefits, or the possible risks. Many were aware of coverage that they did not necessarily feel offered a balanced view, and were prepared to reserve judgement until they had learned more themselves.

The dialogues demonstrated that in considering how to engage the public in shale gas and oil, the following factors are an important part of the context to perceptions:

- Participants found shale gas and oil was difficult to assess against **their energy priorities** of affordability (in terms of customer bills), sustainability (in terms of environmental impacts and long-term availability) and security for future energy decisions (in terms of guaranteed supply and self-sufficiency), particularly in the context of needing to explore it – but uncertainties were heavily weighted against it.

¹ Sciencewise is the UK's national centre for public dialogue in policy making involving science and technology issues. See www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk

- With the exception of a number of participants who had heard of earth tremors in Lancashire or other phenomena attributed to fracking in the US, initial awareness of risks associated with shale gas and oil was also low.
- As exploration for shale gas and oil is at early stages in the UK, it was largely felt to be 'an unknown'. This drove unease and caused participants to categorise it as higher risk and with less clear potential outcomes than other comparator risks such as driving on the motorway.
- Furthermore, those predisposed to negative views about shale were most receptive to information on risks, benefits and regulation that confirmed their ideas – a form of **confirmation bias**.
- Government's commitment to shale development, and the fact licences had been granted, **reduced confidence that decision-making bodies** would be objective or have scope to make independent decisions, despite information suggesting otherwise.
- Finally, participants reacted to complexity within the subject, and questioned the public's ability to engage over processes and governance frameworks perceived as complex.

Within this context, this report sets out what emerged from the public dialogues as a range of potential approaches to successful engagement, while acknowledging the challenges above.

How to engage the public most effectively on developments in their area

Key principles emerged as important attributes of an engagement process, which the later findings provide examples of:

- **Proactivity:** relevant bodies taking the lead on engagement, rather than waiting to be asked.
- **Framing engagement:** directly addressing existing public concern - providing the rationale for shale, including affordability, energy security and sustainability.
- **Empowerment:** using information throughout the process, supporting the public to influence decision-making, giving time for people to consider their views.
- **Transparency:** being clear about what is known about shale gas and what is not; what the public can influence, and what they cannot; as well as about operations, regulatory decisions and progress.
- **Accessibility:** using a variety of channels and forums to make engagement as inclusive as possible, and explaining risks and impacts in terms of how local people might experience them (effect on daily life).
- **Independence:** providing unbiased, balanced information and offering an independently managed engagement process.
- **Accountability:** providing clarity on the stringency of regulation and its enforcement.

Engagement process and preferred channels:

Participants designed engagement processes, using the existing regulatory framework and consultation opportunities. While an 'all channels open' approach was often discussed without reference to feasibility, common themes arose:

- **Proactive notification of proposals** should maximise reach and inclusivity through an 'all channels open' approach such as leaflet drops, social media, travelling displays, and door knocking for those closest.
- A **period of information provision** (national followed by local), e.g. face to face meetings where operators and experts could be asked direct questions, and interactive, visual exhibits to bring issues to life and make them tangible.
- **Collated materials** - 'translated' for local people, so accessible and relevant.
- A **chance for the public to be involved** in shaping plans, through a mixture of online, written, and face-to-face meetings, and an up-to-date, concurrent online presence, e.g. web portal.
- Continued **involvement once exploration goes ahead** was considered the key, including management of community benefits by local people.
- Finally, **monitoring and oversight** from regulatory bodies, e.g. postal and web portal updates.

Trusted messengers

The most trusted messengers were those most likely to have a clear understanding of the issues, and to be honest about them. Non-biased experts deemed most suitable for this role included academics, scientists, and regulatory bodies.

Level of detail

Given requisite time and support, participants engaged with the technical aspects of hydraulic fracturing, helped by images and videos of the drill and the well. They felt that information at the national level should thus be high level and easy to understand, "a layman's guide"; whilst information during local engagement should be more in-depth. In general, comparisons to familiar, everyday concepts were more useful points of reference than statistics, when deemed relevant and accurate.

Community benefit package proposals

Participants discussed the key points of the UK Onshore Operator's Group's community benefits package, which elicited mixed responses. Participants appreciated the flexibility offered, as well as the idea that money could be managed by the 'community' and held by a third party rather than absorbed into a council's general funding. Some concerns were raised in relation to job creation and the financial aspect of the package. Clarity about how local jobs would be ensured, and presenting financial benefit as just one aspect of the proposals, not peculiar to shale gas (i.e. similar benefits for wind farms), would help assuage concerns.

Participants' key suggestions for engagement approaches

These are based on participants' key principles and informed by the current regulatory framework. There are four stages: national debate; a pre-planning application stage; the planning application stage; and activities once exploration has begun.

Stage	Examples of participants' ideas for engagement
National debate: <i>involved in decision-making on policy and licences. Government's rationale for exploration of shale made clear, to relate to local context</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Televised panel discussions with interested groups • DECC-produced booklets detailing risks and mitigations • Online videos (government/media) to improve knowledge of shale • (little knowledge of possible mechanisms)
Pre-application stage (operator activity, pre-planning notices): <i>the opportunity to learn about developments and shape operators' plans while being formulated, before an application had been submitted. Information widely accessible. Two-way engagement (i.e. where the public have a chance to have a say) then critical. There are three stages:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wide-reaching notifications • Accessible information • Chances to shape operator plans, such as conditions on local disruption. 	<p>Wide-reaching notifications</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local authority leaflets inform licence has been granted; provide a layman's guide to shale gas and oil and fracking • Operators identify catchment area, and door-knock • Social media and public stalls <p>Accessible information</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independent third party manages information sourcing and collation - range of voices, a balanced account • Residents' 'community panel' • Scientists' 'expertise' on shale and/or planning process. • Remote options: lighter touch • Living near a site made tangible: hear from residents who had experienced fracking, materials explain impacts in terms of what they would look and feel like • 2-3 months to digest information <p>Chance to shape operator plans</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operators present - explain plans, respond to concerns. E.g. multi-stakeholder panels and debates, streamed online to ensure inclusivity. • 'Independent' bodies mediate, e.g. facilitation experts. • 'Experts' to challenge operator claims -scientists, Environment Agency (EA) • Local survey on support/objection for consultation.
Planning stage (planning applications submitted, consultation period) ensuring the public are equipped to contribute fully to a consultation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community liaison group takes part in consultation, on behalf of public groups • Opportunity to 'drop in' for the first time – face to face or online • Notification of consultation; guided how to participate • Local Planning Authority (LPA) communicates decision: demonstrate transparency
Once exploration goes ahead: <i>operators and regulators keep the public informed about safety, while local groups</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lines of communication with operators: online/ phone • EA and Health and Safety Executive (HSE) reassure the public about safety measures • Information available for other areas to learn from • Clear lines of accountability; an oversight body/ vehicle • Public informed and enabled to complain if needed

1. Introduction

This introductory chapter sets out the research objectives and provides background information on the sample and methodology. More detail on the method is included in the separate Annex, as are examples of materials used.

1.1 Background

Shale gas and oil and coal bed methane are known as 'unconventional', because of the techniques required to extract them. While 'conventional' deposits such as those contained in the North Sea are found in permeable rock and can be easily extracted, shale gas is found onshore in impermeable (shale) rock and requires hydraulic fracturing (or 'fracking') to create fissures that allow the gas to flow. This exploratory technique involves injecting water and usually sand particles at high pressure to create fractures and keep them open, with small quantities of chemicals used to improve effectiveness².

Globally, the United States has been the site of most hydraulic fracturing to date. Little exploratory drilling has occurred in the UK's shale deposits and it is not known how much gas or oil is commercially recoverable. Operations were halted in 2011 over concerns at earth tremors in Lancashire, which were attributed to Cuadrilla's operations there. In 2012 the Royal Society and Royal Academy of Engineering's review concluded that shale gas extraction could be managed safely in the UK if best practice in implementation and enforcement of regulatory safeguards was followed and, since then, Government has approved the resumption of activity.

Public opinion is seen as one of the key challenges for shale gas development. The media coverage of shale gas development and newspapers' representations of risk have been considered quite polarised on the issue, with potential to influence public perceptions accordingly³. Among the general population, awareness of unconventional gas and oil has been low but is increasing – in March 2012 only 37.6 % of a representative sample of respondents correctly identified shale gas from a list of real and imaginary fossil fuels. Over the last two years the percentage of people able to identify shale gas has risen significantly, and in the May 2014 survey 73.7% of respondents correctly identified shale gas⁴. While knowledge of shale gas and oil is increasing, overall support for it seems to be decreasing. In the same survey in May 2014, fewer than 50% of respondents who were aware of shale gas supported it being allowed in the UK, with 31% reporting it should not be allowed. Although this data suggests that public opinion is varied, it does not provide the full picture on public understanding and degrees of support or opposition. There are limitations⁵ to using traditional quantitative surveys to understand public attitudes towards shale gas

² DECC 2013, Developing Onshore Shale Gas and Oil: Facts about Fracking

³ Jaspal and Nerlich, Fracking in the UK press: threat dynamics in an unfolding debate. *Public Understandings of Science*, SAGE 0(0) 1-16, 2013

⁴ University of Nottingham survey of public attitudes to shale gas extraction in the UK, March 2012 – May 2014

⁵ Research has shown that when particular energy technologies are relatively unfamiliar to members of the public (e.g. carbon capture and storage), their opinions about these technologies are likely to be of low 'quality', defined in terms of opinion consistency, stability and confidence. Accordingly, using social research methods that do not inform publics about the topic (e.g. conventional questionnaires or focus groups) has limited value. By contrast, methods that present information to participants and enable them to register their opinions about that topic (e.g. deliberative dialogues, informed focus groups, information choice questionnaires) have more value (ter Mors et al., 2013).

development, which form part of the rationale for the deliberative, qualitative methods adopted in this study.

In view of the Government's forecasts for gas use within the UK's energy mix and our increasing reliance on imports⁶, Government is encouraging the exploration of shale to determine its potential for the UK and to develop the industry. To this end, the Government established the Office of Unconventional Gas and Oil (OUGO) within the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) to enable development, ensure communities benefit, support public and community engagement and build a knowledge base for development. There is currently a gap in understanding of the best approach to public engagement in areas where shale gas is to be explored and may be developed– a gap this public dialogue aims to help fill.

1.2 Research objectives

The Office of Unconventional Gas and Oil (OUGO) with support and co-funding from Sciencewise⁷, commissioned TNS BMRB to conduct public dialogues to help OUGO refine its public engagement policy on unconventional gas and oil, inform industry's development of a community benefit package and help stakeholders (from both government and industry) to develop appropriate plans and materials for engaging the public. The specific objectives were:

- To understand how to engage the public most effectively in unconventional gas and oil developments in their area including:
 - what would a successful process of public engagement look like, and what should it avoid?;
 - how it should work over time: at what stage/s in the process they would want to be engaged/communicated with, why and how?; and
 - who are the most and least trusted sources of information, and why? Exploring the role of national and local information sources.
- To understand how the public engage with issues around unconventional gas and oil, practically and cognitively;
 - using what channels (e.g. online information, face-to-face meetings);
 - at what level of detail/complexity, including explanation of the science;
 - with what perception of risks and the conditions/regulations needed to manage them now and during production in the future; and
 - with what differences there are between different groups/publics e.g. in different parts of the country in these factors⁸.
 - This includes reflecting the sources of information the public have used to date as well as exploring their preferences⁹.
- To identify any gaps where:

⁶ DECC www.gov.uk/oil-and-gas-uk-field-data

⁷ Sciencewise is funded by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS). Sciencewise aims to improve policy making involving science and technology across Government by increasing the effectiveness with which public dialogue is used, and encouraging its wider use where appropriate. <http://www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk/>

⁸ This objective was not part of the original ITT but was added following the first Oversight Group meeting.

⁹ This objective was not part of the original ITT but was added following the first Oversight Group meeting.

- further policy or materials are needed to help the public understand unconventional gas and oil; or
 - the regulatory arrangements are less able to inspire public confidence, even where objectively robust, as this will be an important element of DECC's consideration of the necessary regulatory regime, and how it is communicated, going forward into a potential production phase.
- To explore public understanding and acceptability of the recently published industry community benefit package proposals.

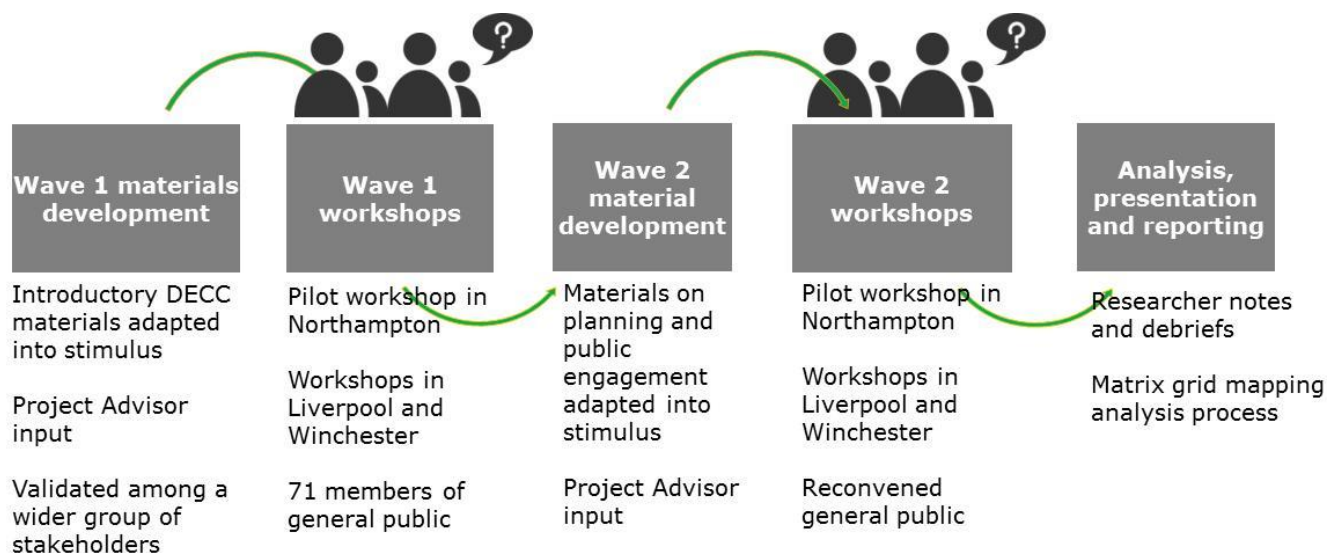
Sciencewise took a role as expert advisers on deliberative processes and commissioned an independent evaluator as part of the work.

1.3 Methodology

This dialogue consisted of a two-wave qualitative and deliberative methodology, used to help participants build knowledge around quite technical information on shale extraction and the regulatory arrangements in place, before focusing on public engagement.

Public dialogues allow a diverse mix of participants with a range of views and values to: learn from written information and experts; listen to each other, share and develop their views; reach carefully considered conclusions; and communicate those conclusions directly to inform Government's decision making. They do not aim to collect statistically robust or nationally representative data on public opinion, but rather focus on building a nuanced understanding of a *range* of opinions, why they are held, and how they change over time.

The approach included the following stages, described in more depth below:



DECC convened an oversight group who reviewed stimulus materials for both waves of the dialogue. To further ensure the information materials provided reflected a balance of views, the research team consulted wider stakeholders to comment on the Wave 1 materials introducing shale gas, risk and regulation¹⁰. Their comments were incorporated into the materials. The research team also consulted Dr

¹⁰ Greenpeace, National Farmers' Union, The Wildlife Trusts, iGAS, a planning officer from Hampshire and 2 academic scientists from the Universities of Oxford and Exeter.

Jason Chilvers¹¹ at several stages through the project, both in developing the stimulus materials and in developing and reviewing the analytical framework and findings. Some of his recommendations were incorporated and some were not acted upon as they were deemed to be outside the scope of the project.

The primary focus of the dialogue was not to explore public attitudes towards DECC's policy on unconventional gas and oil. However, it was recognised that this needed to be covered before the discussion could focus on engaging with the public about these issues. Wave 1 therefore explored participants' initial understanding and beliefs about unconventional gas and oil. It introduced information on science, technology and regulation, as well as a range of perspectives and views on unconventional gas and oil, to enable an informed discussion. Wave 2 then focused on what public engagement should look like, including trusted messengers and desired channels of engagement. Responses to the Community Engagement Charter and benefits package were also explored (see annex 1.4.7 for the stimulus presented to participants).

1.4 Sample

Public dialogues were undertaken in three areas of the UK – Northampton, Liverpool and Winchester – engaging a total of 71 people who attended both waves¹².

The 3 locations were chosen to provide a range of demographic, geological and licencing factors, covering areas that were both prospective and not prospective for shale gas:

Northampton: where shale development is not likely as the area is not considered prospective (given results of the British Geological Survey);

Winchester: where shale development *may* occur, pending a licence being granted and all necessary permissions¹³;

Liverpool: where shale development *may* occur, pending all necessary permissions being granted, where an operator had already obtained a licence.

Note on permissions: Before exploration can begin, operators require a licence to be granted by DECC. In addition, operators must obtain a range of permissions¹⁴, permits and checks before they can begin to drill.

The sample was purposively selected to reflect the make-up of the local areas using quotas based on age, gender, socio-economic status and home ownership. The achieved sample characteristics are given below¹⁵.



Area	SEG	Urban/ rural	Home ownership	Age groups	Gender
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¹¹ Dr Jason Chilvers, Senior Lecturer and Chair of the 3S Research Group at UEA School of Environmental Sciences, was served contracted as the project advisor to provide formative feedback on all key materials and outputs. Dr. Chilvers has over 15 years of experience in public participation research and practice, specialising in science and the environment, and advised TNS BMRB on participatory processes and engagement. <http://www.uea.ac.uk/environmental-sciences/people/profile/jason-chilvers>

¹² There was no attrition between the two waves.

¹³ Understanding of the prospectivity of UK shales is developing and has since been updated with the publication of the British Geological Survey's report on the Weald Basin.

¹⁴ Once they have obtained a license, operators also require: landowner agreement; planning permission – which may require environmental impact assessment; permits from Environment Agency (or Natural Resources Wales or the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency); their plans to be examined by the Health and Safety Executive and an independent competent person to review the well design; and consent from DECC.

¹⁵ Due to flooding and other factors influencing attendance, 24 participants were not recruited in each area, but across the research the intended number of participants was achieved.

Northampton: 25 people	AB: 7 C1C2: 12 DE: 6	Urban: 17 Rural: 8	Privately owned: 16 Social housing: 4 Private renters/Other: 5	18-34: 10 35-54: 9 55+: 6	M: 13 F: 12
Liverpool: 24 people	AB: 4 C1C2: 11 DE: 9	Urban: 24	Privately owned: 11 Social housing: 7 Private renters/Other: 6	18-34: 9 35-54: 9 55+: 6	M: 11 F: 13
Winchester: 22 people	AB: 8 C1C2: 9 DE: 5	Urban: 12 Rural: 10	Privately owned: 12 Social housing: 4 Private renters/Other: 6	18-34: 8 35-54: 8 55+: 5	M: 10 F: 12

Participants were also screened on environmental attitudes, but were not excluded on the basis of it¹⁶. The breakdown of environmental attitudes by area is provided below:

Area	<i>Actively involved in campaigns</i>	<i>Very conscious (recycle etc.)</i>	<i>Some concern</i>	<i>No concern</i>	<i>Neutral/no strong opinion</i>
Northampton: 25 people	2	10	12	1	
Liverpool: 24 people	3	12	9		
Winchester: 22 people		10	11		1
Total	5	32	32	1	1

1.5 Fieldwork and analysis

Wave 1 workshops took place on 8th and 15th February 2014, and wave 2 workshops took place on 1st and 8th March 2014. Both workshops lasted six hours. Three facilitators attended each area event, hosting 3 groups per workshop. Venues provided a plenary space for all participants, and discussions moved between the plenary space and break out groups which comprised 8 participants per facilitator. In attendance at each area event were DECC representatives, a Sciencewise representative, and an independent evaluator.

All workshops were digitally recorded and transcribed. Notes were taken during workshops by moderators and observers, and any workshop materials produced or annotated by participants were kept and analysed (see annex 1.4.6 for an example activity). Analysis entailed a series of researcher brainstorming using notes and stimulus materials, followed by 'matrix mapping', an approach entailing entry of all summarised data into an analytical framework to allow systematic coding, sorting and thematic analysis (see annex 1.1 for more detail on the analytical approach).

¹⁶ Respondents were asked the following question on recruitment: 'How would you describe your environmental views?' A maximum quota of 8 per workshop was set for those who answered: 'Actively involved in environmental campaigns' to this question, otherwise no one was screened out on the basis of their answer. For the full screening questionnaire used, see annex 1.2

2. The context for engagement on shale gas and oil

Effective and appropriate engagement activities for shale gas and oil will need to take people's needs and preferences into account. These needs and preferences will in turn be based on people's knowledge, views and understanding of numerous aspects of shale gas and oil, both initially and as engagement proceeds. This section briefly explores the initial positions of participants in the dialogue with regard to shale gas and oil, and how these shifted in response to new information, in order to set out the key principles on which engagement activities and models need to be based. These activities and models are then described in detail in the sections that follow.

2.1 Starting points and changing perceptions

2.1.1 Beliefs about energy strategies

While most participants started from very little knowledge and relatively neutral initial views around shale oil and gas, they had existing priorities for energy at the outset and these frames became stronger as participants learned more, and that made many more likely to think negatively than positively. This related to their views of how shale gas and oil 'fitted' with their beliefs about appropriate energy sources and strategies for the UK in the future.

At the beginning of Workshop 1, participants were shown the current balance of energy sources in the UK, and the projected energy demand up to 2030 (see Annex 1.3.3 for this material). There was widespread surprise and concern at this information – in particular the perceived small contribution made by renewables in the future. Most participants expressed some or all of the following priorities for energy in the future: affordability (in terms of customer bills); sustainability (in terms of environmental impacts and long-term availability); and security (in terms of guaranteed supply and self-sufficiency). These views were held with little appreciation of the realities around energy supply, but they were often strongly and emotionally felt.

A key issue for shale gas and oil was that many of the participants in the dialogues believed – or came to believe, as they learned more – that it did not fulfil some (or any) of these three priorities in relation to energy.

1. Participants largely did not expect it would reduce their domestic energy bills; a view driven by their negative perceptions of energy companies. This context, together with a lack of belief in other benefits to which they were later exposed (local employment, community benefits packages), made many participants question the rationale for and appropriateness of investing in shale gas and oil rather than other energy sources.

"We haven't benefited from lower prices from North Sea oil so will we benefit from this, I doubt it. This is going to make trillions of pounds so who is going to benefit?" (Liverpool)

2. As a fossil fuel, shale gas and oil was viewed as finite and polluting, and not meeting expectations for the pursuit of renewable energy. This was felt particularly strongly by those with strong environmental views, though was widely shared. This position was also arguably exacerbated by participants' surprise at current renewables projections for the UK¹⁷ being much lower than expected.

"They have had the lower hanging fruits, all the oil and that, that's now running out, they are finding some more oil fields so now they want to squeeze a bit more out of that lemon and I don't think it should be the case. There should be investment in finding other alternatives."
(Winchester)

3. Despite presenting information about dwindling North Sea reserves and the UK's shift from being a net exporter to a net importer of gas (see annex 1.3.4 for the information presented to participants), the participants did not recognise a clear energy security rationale for pursuing unconventional gas. Some participants assumed much of it would be extracted by foreign operators and exported, so doing little to reduce dependency on imports.

"They're not looking at the bigger picture, they're just thinking about a short term fix I suppose."
(Liverpool)

2.1.2 Limited knowledge

In all three dialogue locations, participants' prior knowledge and understanding of shale gas and oil was limited. Few knew much about the processes of exploration and extraction, the potential benefits, or the possible risks. Such knowledge as there was had typically been picked up from the media but the great majority of participants admitted to knowing little for certain, and had not formed strong opinions.

"I am not really too sure like what the purpose of fracking is. I mean, obviously I know it obtains gas, but what I don't understand is what it serves to do in the long run." (Northampton)

Most of those who had been exposed to media coverage described this as having an 'anti-fracking' stance – they referred both to immediate coverage of specific events such as demonstrations, and more general discussion of the issue via documentaries or articles^[1] (with a particular emphasis on experiences in the US). Some had been influenced by this exposure, and expressed negative views from the outset; but the majority were aware that the coverage they remembered did not necessarily offer a balanced view, and were prepared to reserve judgement until they had learned more themselves. Likewise, there were also some who had heard of potential benefits in terms of jobs and energy prices, and were more positive, but were still unwilling to form strong opinions until they knew more.

"I've heard that it creates jobs." (Winchester)

"I know that they want to bring it in so that we can produce energy for ourselves." (Winchester)

2.1.3 Perceptions of risk

A further theme that tended to shape participants' response to new information regarded perceptions of risk. With the exception of a number of participants who had heard of earth tremors in Lancashire or

¹⁷ See annex 1.3.5 for the diagram presented to participants.

^[1] This is not to suggest that media coverage has been predominantly negative. Recent research by Jaspal and Nerlich (2013) has identified two discourses in the UK press which either frame fracking as an opportunity or a threat. The evidence from the deliberative groups can be interpreted as participants being exposed to both discourses, but that for some, it was the more critical viewpoints in wider public discourse that resonated and connected with their own concerns.

other phenomena attributed to fracking in the US, initial awareness of risks associated with shale gas and oil was low. Indeed, most participants found it difficult to reach any view on the scale of risk, as so much about fracking was unknown. When asked to order a number of activities in terms of level of risk, including driving on the motorway and living near a nuclear power station, many recognised that both the scale and the likelihood of a negative outcome need to be taken into account (and most felt motorway driving is the riskier of the two); but few were able to place living near a fracking site in this hierarchy with any confidence. This was due not only to their own lack of understanding but also the knowledge that fracking is an emergent technology with no track record to examine. The fact that shale gas and oil was largely felt to be 'an unknown' caused participants to categorise it as higher risk, almost by default.

"Power plants have been around for quite some time so statistically you know what dangers, what has happened to them, but you don't know what has happened to [fracking]. Not yet." (Winchester)

However, as with perceptions of shale gas and oil's place in the future energy mix, views of risk often became more negative as participants were exposed to more information. Many participants involved in the dialogue came to see fracking as an inherently risky activity, discussing concerns around whether horizontal drilling would undermine land, chemicals would contaminate water supply, and potential for water requirements to adversely affect local supply. Moreover, while it was easy for participants to imagine these risks and even inflate them in their minds, it was less easy to accept the strength and effectiveness of technical and regulatory measures to mitigate them which could, given the nascent nature of fracking, only be described and not proven. Though some were reassured by information about regulation and the specific measures that would be in place, many wanted to reserve judgement or were cynical about the powers regulators would possess in comparison to operators.

2.1.4 Uncertainty over benefits

Building on this context, some participants also expressed scepticism about the benefits presented to them later in the dialogue process (see Annex 1.4.7 for the information presented). Whilst there was general acceptance that shale gas exploration would create jobs for the UK, some participants did not believe that many local jobs could be provided, or were sceptical that community funds would go directly to the community (at least initially). Others felt the financial payments were inappropriate and were suggestive of community 'bribes', (See chapter 5 for more on lessons for community benefits). These perceptions contributed to negativity about the potential local benefits of shale. Overlaying this, some participants generally struggled to recognise the national benefits of shale gas and oil and the overall rationale¹⁸ for why the UK is pursuing it, though a number of participants were more positive.

"How much more it is benefiting the economy in general, so being able to have the product here and instead of bringing it from somewhere else, how that is going to benefit us as a country, as a whole?" (Winchester)

"I tried to find a positive argument in there to balance it out but I couldn't find one. Because I don't feel like the arguments were sustainable, I feel like the arguments against fracking are more sustainable" (Northampton)

2.2 Shifts in outlook

The consequence of the points outlined above was that most participants approached the topic of shale oil and gas with very little knowledge and from a relatively neutral position, and while few were engaged with it on a personal level (for example, few in Liverpool knew that licences had been granted in their

¹⁸ Despite the discussion of energy security and potential benefits, outlined in the introductory presentation (see annex 1.3.6 for the information presented).

area), many wanted to know more. Some perceived benefits, were prepared to accept the measures designed to mitigate risk and/or were sceptical about the objectivity of those with a negative voice on the subject, and therefore remained neutral or became more positive about shale as they learned more. Indeed, there was a degree of confidence in the strength of regulation in the UK as compared with the US, partly due to a sense that the UK has a more robust system, but also as the UK has been able to learn from the US experience.

However, many participants were prone to become more negative as the dialogue progressed, either in response to information, or as result of a lack of information contradicting their assumptions.

"The more I have learnt about it, the more I am against it." (Northampton)

This was a trend that became stronger as the workshops progressed and participants learned more, which will be vital to address when designing engagement activities. The reasons for growing negativity include:

- **Confirmation bias:** participants who were predisposed to negative views on shale, for reasons outlined above or due to their environmental views, were most receptive to information or thoughts that confirmed that negativity as they learned more. Thus the initial knowledge vacuum was easily filled with bad news. The effects of this ranged from imagining risks based on aspects of the fracking process, to questioning the reality of benefits, to doubting the effectiveness of regulation.

"The diagram it says in the bottom right a mixture of water, sand and chemical additives, it is a nice way to just cover up whatever it is." (Northampton)

After being given more detail on risks and mitigations (see annex 1.3.6-1.3.8): *"I think there's more underlying it because they say when they do bring it back up there's these radons in it and things as well...I am wary if somebody just says it's a chemical like lipstick"* (Same respondent, Northampton groups)

- **A sense of the unknown:** participants reacted to the level of unknowns they felt were inherent to shale gas and oil exploration, including whether or not it will ever be viable or profitable, potential long-term health impacts, and the extent or level of other risks. A perceived lack of experience with onshore and unconventional techniques in shale rock as deep as in the UK, and the number of estimates they felt were in the information provided, were major drivers of this fear of the unknown.

"Again it's questioning estimates isn't it? Because nobody actually knows, so it's all estimates and we're just given estimates, that are going to make you want to believe it" (Liverpool)

"If we think they're uncertain, then why should we be confident? If we think they don't know numbers or they're not sure; this might happen or might not happen? ...Then it's a bit scary" (Northampton)

- **Confidence in decision-making bodies:** many questioned the impartiality of the bodies that would be taking decisions, and their ability to act in the face of perceived vested interests. This was a stance taken in response to the information they received, which included assumptions and misinterpretations by some of the information provided.¹⁹ These included: learning that the government had already taken a position on shale gas and oil at a national level if not locally; thinking that licences had been

¹⁹ See Annex 1.3.4 and 1.3.5 for how the topic was initially presented to participants.

granted to operators without public consultation²⁰ and in some cases assuming this meant that exploration would most likely go ahead regardless of public opposition; believing that local authorities stood to receive the financial benefits from operators, thus compromising their neutrality; and that operators would need to invest heavily and riskily in order to see a return. See section 3 for more on the role for stakeholders.

"They should say we've considered other sources and why they are not viable, because at the moment it's a fait accompli, you are going to do this...it should be we've considered this range of choices and the reason we have to go with this is because..." (Winchester)

- **Reactions to complexity:** there was a widespread sense that the science, techniques and processes involved in fracking and extraction, and particularly the governance frameworks that are used to monitor these activities, are complex and require expertise. This made many question the ability of the public to understand things sufficiently to have a voice in decisions, regardless of how important they felt it is to do so.

"[The regulatory map] means nothing to me. It just looks like a load of fancy names and letters."
(Northampton)

There was no clear pattern of response by area; degrees of knowledge as well as positivity and negativity varied within areas, and within groups.

2.3 Lessons from the (deliberative) engagement process

The deliberative dialogue process that participants experienced can serve as a proxy²¹ for the local engagement process over shale gas and oil development, albeit over a longer period of time with different facilitation and with different incentives. This provides insight into how participants related to the process of engaging with information: what was absorbed, ignored, valued or rejected; how it was used, and with what effect on their views and ideas. Our recommendations in this report are therefore drawn from this public dialogue process, as well as participants' stated views on engagement on shale gas and oil. The following points relate to how people engaged with information, and have implications for public engagement more broadly:

- **Knowledge claims and group dynamics:** People started from very different levels of knowledge on shale gas development, which affected group dynamics and the direction of opinion a group took. The propensity to be influenced by those deemed to be better informed or able to understand an issue was surprisingly strong in some groups. Even marginally 'better informed' participants influenced the views of others, as those with little prior knowledge showed less confidence in their own opinions, and required more encouragement from facilitators to challenge presiding views. Members of the public who are even marginally more well-informed may thus be disproportionately influential to others; which will need to be carefully managed in public engagement meetings.

²⁰ See Annex 1.3.4 for information participants were presented with about licensing rounds in wave 1. The public consultation was not explicitly mentioned as part of the presentation. The regulatory process map showed 'DECC: award of exclusive license after open competition'. In wave 2, public consultation is specifically mentioned (see annex 1.4.3) as follows: 'The first step is the national Strategic Environmental Assessment and Public Consultation on Licensing rounds, conducted by DECC every couple of years. As a result DECC issues Petroleum Exploration and Drilling License to operator.'

²¹ Participants themselves often compared the information provision activities to the dialogue process they were taking part in, to help benchmark time required to absorb information, to suggest how activities might be run, and who should attend.

- **Partial information absorption and overload:** Linked to 'confirmation bias' discussed above, participants' initial reactions to information strongly influenced their receptivity to later documents. Those who felt early information was vague or lacked proofs, or by contrast those who felt reassured by information, tended to bear these views out in their reading of further materials. This meant that while participants' appetite and requests for 'hard facts' increased as they became more uncertain and negative about shale gas, further 'facts' were not necessarily accepted or taken on board. In some cases this resulted in clear contradictions between what participants read, and what they interpreted. In other cases, participants tired of attempting to make sense of the information, losing interest or belief in their ability to draw meaningful conclusions. The framing of introductory information is therefore critical to public engagement.
- **The 'balance' of information materials:** Demonstrating that a range of views and perspectives were being shown was important to participants' trust in the validity of the information provided to them. This balance appeared just as important to perceptions of information reliability as the provenance and reputation of the sources.
- **Clarity about public influence:** Whether the public were seen to have influence on shale development, or whether they were seen to have been excluded, made a critical difference to how participants engaged with information, and what they absorbed from it. Participants expressed initial surprise on learning that many activities had already taken place that they had not been aware of (particularly public consultations ahead of previous licensing rounds). The feeling that they themselves had not been adequately informed, and that the public missed their chance to have a say, contributed to an overall sense of disempowerment. For some, particularly those with negative views of national government, this sense of disempowerment over decisions could not be separated from engagement with any other information. Clearly stating upfront where the public do have influence is important to their engagement with all other materials.
- **Locational differences:** Priorities for national engagement appeared to reflect personal interests: participants living in un-prospective areas focused more on debates or votes on the economic impacts of shale gas and the question of how the national population would benefit. Those in prospective and licensed areas focused more on national debate or voting as a means to determine whether national developments should go ahead or not, as another means of preventing developments in their area. This is an important dimension to participants' consideration of entitlement to engagement, and contrasted with views on local engagement, where suggestions were more similar across areas.

2.4 Principles for engagement from this dialogue

The contextual points outlined above regarding participants' initial attitudes to shale gas and oil, and how these developed in response to information given in the workshops, will be relevant for members of the public who engage on local decisions and processes (particularly where similar information is used). It is likely that most will start from a position of low awareness and neutrality; as they learn more, some will become more positive but many will have a tendency towards increasing negativity and suspicion; and either way most will be interested and want to find out more about what they recognise is a complex topic. As a consequence, engagement activities which seek to inform, involve and empower the public without driving negative views will need to be designed with the following principles in mind:

- **Framing:** directly addressing existing public concerns by clearly communicating the rationale for pursuing shale, and the benefits in terms of cost, energy security and sustainability.
- **Pro-activity:** being seen to take the lead on engagement, rather than relying on the public to 'get in touch' or to find out for themselves.
- **Empowerment:** providing enough information and in a way that allows the public to understand the issues and reach a considered view; allowing influence at several points in the decision-making process, and on processes that operate after exploration begins.
- **Transparency:** being clear about what is known about shale and what is not; what the public can influence and when, and what they cannot; and how the overall decision-making process works so the public can see how the various parties relate to one another and what their interests are; as well as about operations, regulatory decisions and progress.
- **Accessibility:** using channels, timetables and mechanisms that allow as many different types of people to participate in engagement as possible; making shale gas relatable by comparing processes to everyday concepts, explaining risks in terms of the potential effects on people's experience, and translating complex language for the layperson.
- **Independence:** using information sources that allow the public to feel confident that the facts they are given are unbiased or at least balanced; including a range of voices; and highlighting governance processes that create confidence that one party or set of interests is not able to dominate decision-making.
- **Accountability:** providing clarity about the strength and stringency of UK regulation, the process of enforcement including any penalties for operators, and clear lines of responsibility. This builds confidence in the ongoing accountability of and restrictions on operators once a decision to allow exploration has been made, and in operators' long-term responsibilities for restoration.

The ways in which participants called for these principles to be expressed in specific engagement activities and across engagement programmes as a whole are discussed in the sections that follow.

2.5 Communication: causes for concern

Participants in this public dialogue picked up on certain messages or presentation very negatively, if they reinforced or failed to alleviate existing concerns. This section sets out a few areas that may provoke negative responses, and that need to be borne in mind when conducting engagement:

- **The perception that decisions appeared to have been taken without a clear evidence base due to the innate uncertainties** undermined trust in government planners and regulators. This was mainly concerned with the technical aspects of shale gas extraction, such as the processes of setting limits around chemical concentrations, earth tremors and other risks. In the face of many unknowns, participants were wary of actions being undertaken based on estimates, or suggestions of 'trial and error'. Participants wanted clear explanations about how decisions have been made and how evidence was used, as well as demonstration of caution, conservative behaviour and a learning process.

"My biggest concern is that the decision has already been made to go ahead with it...We don't know what the risks are... there is no operation in place where we can look at the long term effects over 20 years." (Northampton)

- **Anything that might suggest that decisions are taken without consulting the public** prompts dismissal of the concept of engagement. Some participants, who felt that the public have been 'left behind' on the national policy decision to pursue shale, were highly sensitive to the suggestion that all important decisions had already been made. For example, participants picked up on the message that 'licences have already been granted' and assumed, despite receiving information to the contrary²², that this had taken place without public consultation²³, and effectively meant exploration would most go ahead in an area regardless of public opinion. Likewise, information about potential changes to private property rights²⁴ sparked strong concerns. The result was that participants felt they would have no say about whether exploration goes ahead in their area. However, participants were equally wary of operators or government overstating the potential for public involvement in any decisions. Participants sought frank, clear explanation of the opportunities for and constraints of engagement – to reassure them that it is not merely 'lip service'.

"They should say we've considered other sources and why they are not viable, because at the moment it's a fait accompli, you are going to do this...it should be we've considered this range of choices and the reason we have to go with this is because..." (Winchester)

- **Anything appearing to omit or skim over discussion of risks caused concern**, whereas open discussion of risks and admissions of unknowns implied nothing is being hidden from the public. Participants expected to hear information about risks early on, given their tendency to err towards negativity. For example, participants were unconvinced by comparisons to fracking of conventional oil and gas operations, as they recognised unconventional fracking carried particular unknowns.

"It feels like they're kind of you trying to dupe us into thinking it's been happening for years, people then won't worry so much it's completely different, it's kind of misinforming us" (Winchester)

- Emphasis on **foreign investment** without outlining the British interests is disliked given the clear desire for the UK to benefit. This is based on concerns about a disconnect between those who benefit and those who take on risk.

"The companies that they use; try to keep it within our own country. Not giving it to the likes of Total, who are French, and Cuadrilla who are American. You know? British companies...We should benefit from it, shouldn't we?" (Liverpool)

²² See annexes 1.3.4 and 1.4.3 for the stimulus materials used.

²³ It should be noted that not all participants necessarily had an understanding of the public consultation process, either in terms of the activities or timescales involved. This impacted on their views of the acceptability of government decision-making.

²⁴ This was a response based on a stakeholder perspective included in participant hand outs:

From DECC presentation: "As well as licences, operators need landowner agreement..."

"But only until the government changes the law in order to push fracking onto communities, and removes property rights in order to override people's opposition." - Greenpeace. See Appendix 1.3.4 for full stimulus pack.

3. Role for stakeholders

This section sets out the expectations participants had of different stakeholders' involvement in engagement. Participants identified the characteristics of those they felt should inform, engage with and represent the public's views, and provide oversight, monitoring and feedback. Perceptions of these activities are explored below, followed by discussion of the key roles for each stakeholder.

3.1 Overall stakeholder roles

3.1.1 Informing the public

Participants were interested in hearing a range of opinions and aware of groups with opposing claims about the impacts of shale. This presented challenges for participants, however, as conflicting opinions were difficult to evaluate. Ideally participants sought a **single source of information** – though one that they trusted to take a **large range of views into account** and synthesise them on their behalf.

Participants preferred to hear information from stakeholders who they believed were: (i) most likely to have a **clear understanding of the issues**; and (ii) most likely to be **honest** about them. The 'independence' of the process for synthesising information was therefore vitally important. Participants wanted '**hard facts**', accessible in a form that was **stripped of any potential bias**, which they could then weigh up themselves – though given the difficulties in doing so, they also sought a **representative they trusted to help** to weigh information up for them.

3.1.2 Engaging and representing the public

The public identified stakeholders they felt most appropriate to represent them and support engagement with wider agencies. Stakeholder representation was felt necessary to (i) help the public have a **coherent and powerful voice**, and (ii) to help the public **navigate** and have effective contact with numerous organisations, for example by being a single point of contact.

"I don't know who to contact beyond the local authority – I don't know how to contact Health and Safety Executive and Environmental Groups. If up to us to get answers then it would feel challenging as these organisations are not accessible" (Northampton)

It was important for any public representative to come from a position of relative **neutrality** in regard to shale, but to have **local interests at heart**. It was also important that representatives were both **competent, knowledgeable** and possessed **local influence** – so that they would be a voice that was taken seriously. Finally, it was important for stakeholders to be **accessible** and ideally **familiar** to the public – that people would know how to contact them and would feel comfortable doing so. The degree to which various stakeholders matched up to these requirements is detailed below.

3.1.3 Oversight, monitoring and feedback

Participants felt that stakeholders involved in feeding back information to the community, or taking on an oversight role, should have **specialist knowledge** or an **insider perspective** (that is, both technically knowledgeable and with access to the site), or specific **responsibilities** around keeping the public up-to-date (e.g. regulatory bodies).

3.2 Individual stakeholder roles

This section focuses on perceptions of key stakeholders and the roles participants felt they should play in engagement: Independent scientists; Environment Agency; Health and Safety Executive; DECC; Parish Council; Local Councillors; Local Authorities; locals with experience of sites in their area; and operators.

3.2.1 Independent scientists

'Independent experts' such as scientists e.g. British Geological Society, were widely thought most suitable to provide independent information to the public – being viewed as both the most objective and knowledgeable. Academics were also thought to be best able to provide evidence, and to be able to more accurately estimate (if not predict) potential risks. Participants wanted scientists to help **inform the public**, to translate and explain complex scientific ideas clearly. They also felt scientists have a role in interrogating and **challenging operators' claims** on behalf of a public less able to do so.

"[Scientists] would be impartial. They would have no... monetary gains... they would have a decent... qualification to really talk about it in great depth and understanding." (Winchester)

3.2.2 Environment Agency

The EA was viewed as expert, technically knowledgeable, and able to identify environmental risks early on in the process. They were also trusted to be objective and honest, and committed to transparently reporting the facts. Participants wished them to play a role in **providing information about local environmental impacts**, digestible details about the assessments conducted, and **reassurance about the regulatory processes** they would put in place. The EA was thus key to assuring operator accountability.

"[The EA] have an eye for making sure that everything is meticulous when it comes to ensuring that those risks are minimised ... Whereas the other bodies would only really deal with policy or finance." (Northampton)

3.2.3 Health and Safety Executive

Like the EA, participants felt the HSE had expertise and interest in 'getting it right', and so could provide the public with information about potential risks to safety. Northampton participants felt their meticulous attention to detail was a particular advantage in relation to monitoring and enforcing rules.

"I'd probably put a lot of trust into the Health and Safety Executive because we all know how thorough they are with their protocols." (Northampton)

In terms of information provision, there was a concern amongst some that both regulators, though particularly HSE, had too narrow a remit to be able to present 'the bigger picture' to the public. Thus it was important for other, independent sources to supplement information.

Once drilling went ahead, participants wanted **both regulators** to keep the public updated with monitoring data, translated into something meaningful for the public, in other words highlighting the extent of risk or danger. The information fed back should also highlight any breaches of standards and the steps put in place as a result. Responsible reporting and feedback was important in securing clear lines of accountability. Some concern was expressed about the resource that regulators, especially the EA²⁵, would be able to dedicate to monitoring operators. Participants wanted reassurance that regulators would have adequate capacity to take on these new responsibilities.

"Will there be a set time that they can be there, like a contract of time? ...Because you hear about the Environment Agency, they don't have the staff or they don't have the money. Can they be there every week, or every year?" (Winchester)

3.2.4 DECC

There were two divergent perceptions of DECC that impacted on the role they were expected to have. Many participants were unclear as to DECC's role and their relation to government. This tended to be younger, less politically engaged respondents, who perceived DECC to be distanced from politics and central government. They viewed the department as knowledgeable, particularly in comparison to 'non-expert' stakeholders such as the local council, and it was expected that DECC would have quick and efficient access to a wide range of data. Amongst this group, the department's role was envisaged mainly as being to **provide information and respond to public questions and concerns**. It was also expected to **take part in national debates**.

"I trust [DECC] as it goes through them and they know what's going on." (Liverpool)

Older and more politically engaged participants perceived a much closer connection between DECC and national government, about whom they tended to be fairly cynical. As a result this group was far more dismissive about DECC's ability to be independent. Consequently, these participants suggested that DECC focused on national engagement as an alternative to involvement in and influencing over local planning decisions. As DECC's expertise was seen as both technical and relating to 'bigger picture' issues, rather than local area decisions or engagement, participants did not see them as an obvious candidate to be involved in local decision making.

"If they're going to do it, they're going to be all for it, aren't they? Because DECC are already into fracking." (Liverpool)

"It's nothing personal about shale gas... this is inherent mistrust of politicians." (Winchester)

3.2.5 Local authorities

As local authorities were not necessarily seen as experts in shale gas exploration, their preferred role was in helping **manage engagement activities, facilitating events** and providing representatives to **explain engagement and planning processes** (given they take most of the decisions around planning and licenses). They were also felt to have a responsibility for keeping the public informed and being able to signpost the public to different stakeholders or further information. They could act as a **single point of liaison** for the public, being seen as both

²⁵ This view was expressed in light of and in explicit relation to the flooding that had taken place at the time of the workshops, and news reports about stretched resources at the EA, as well as job and funding cuts.
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accessible and familiar. However, perceptions of the local authority's independence were disrupted by inferences that community benefits payments were like 'bribes'. Participants' support for them was contingent on the benefits package being carefully framed (see section 5).

"Instead of 100 people contacting their council [they] can make one phone call on our behalf."
(Northampton)

3.2.6 Local councillors

Local councillors were suggested as appropriate public representatives, provided they had links to and knowledge of the local area. Councillors were also seen as well placed to help **facilitate public events** where there were multiple stakeholders attending, again helping to empower and **represent local opinions**. However, amongst some participants there was some distrust of local government, and fears of corruption or personal political agendas.

"Once it's been voted on and it's been agreed [by the public], then it would be the councillors...to take that negotiation forward." (Liverpool)

3.2.7 Parish Council

For many²⁶, the Parish Council was the ideal body to **represent public interest**, particularly in terms of standing for local interests whilst being relatively free from other biases. They were also viewed as accessible to local people. Participants in Winchester were particularly supportive of the Parish Council representing the public's voice. Less initial support was expressed for the Parish Council amongst participants who (i) believed them to lack the requisite technical expertise to hold their own in debates with other stakeholders, or (ii) were unfamiliar with their own Parish Council (linked to the size of the area). However, it was widely thought that the Parish Council would at least be an **effective mediator and host for debate** – as even if they did not have expert knowledge themselves, they could gather it from others and facilitate public information exchange.

"The Parish Council know the local community...they may look after your interests.... they could help to speak for us.... they may have inside knowledge." (Northampton)

3.2.8 Locals with experience of sites in their area

Participants were interested in hearing from locals with experience of living near an established exploration site in the UK. People with local experience were expected to **provide an honest account the experiential impact of sites** that would be easily accessible to all. This was important in the absence of a current 'track record' for unconventional shale, as well as an understanding of what it looked and 'felt' like to live near a site.

"We'd want to hear from people who had experience of fracking, seeing it every day and living near it. They'd be able to tell you how loud it is, and whether it's affected...their day-to-day lives."
(Winchester)

²⁶ The Parish Council was one stakeholder amongst several that were presented to participants, which formed the basis of a discussion about the most appropriate roles for each stakeholder. Though the majority of England does not actually have a Parish Council, the strong support for their taking a central role was in part a function of this activity (as other forms of council were not presented as explicit stakeholder options). Moderators also noticed that some participants were unaware of their local government structure (i.e. they did not know whether they had a Parish Council or not). See Annex 1.4.2 for the list of stakeholders used as part of this exercise, and 1.4.1 session on 'Reflections on shale gas' for the discussion itself.

3.2.9 Role for operators

Whilst participants were wary of operators being the only stakeholder at any engagement opportunity, they were keen to hear from them and to be able to ask them questions **face to face**. They supported the idea of **on-going, two-way communication** with operators, throughout the engagement process. **Direct contact** was expected to promote transparency and accountability. Participants felt the operator had a key responsibility to **promote engagement activities**, both in notifying the public early on, but also in **providing funding**. This was important as participants wished to prevent the local authority from taking on the cost of running engagement. This type of operator involvement was not felt to compromise the independence of the process, but rather would demonstrate the operator's commitment to engaging the public effectively and transparently.

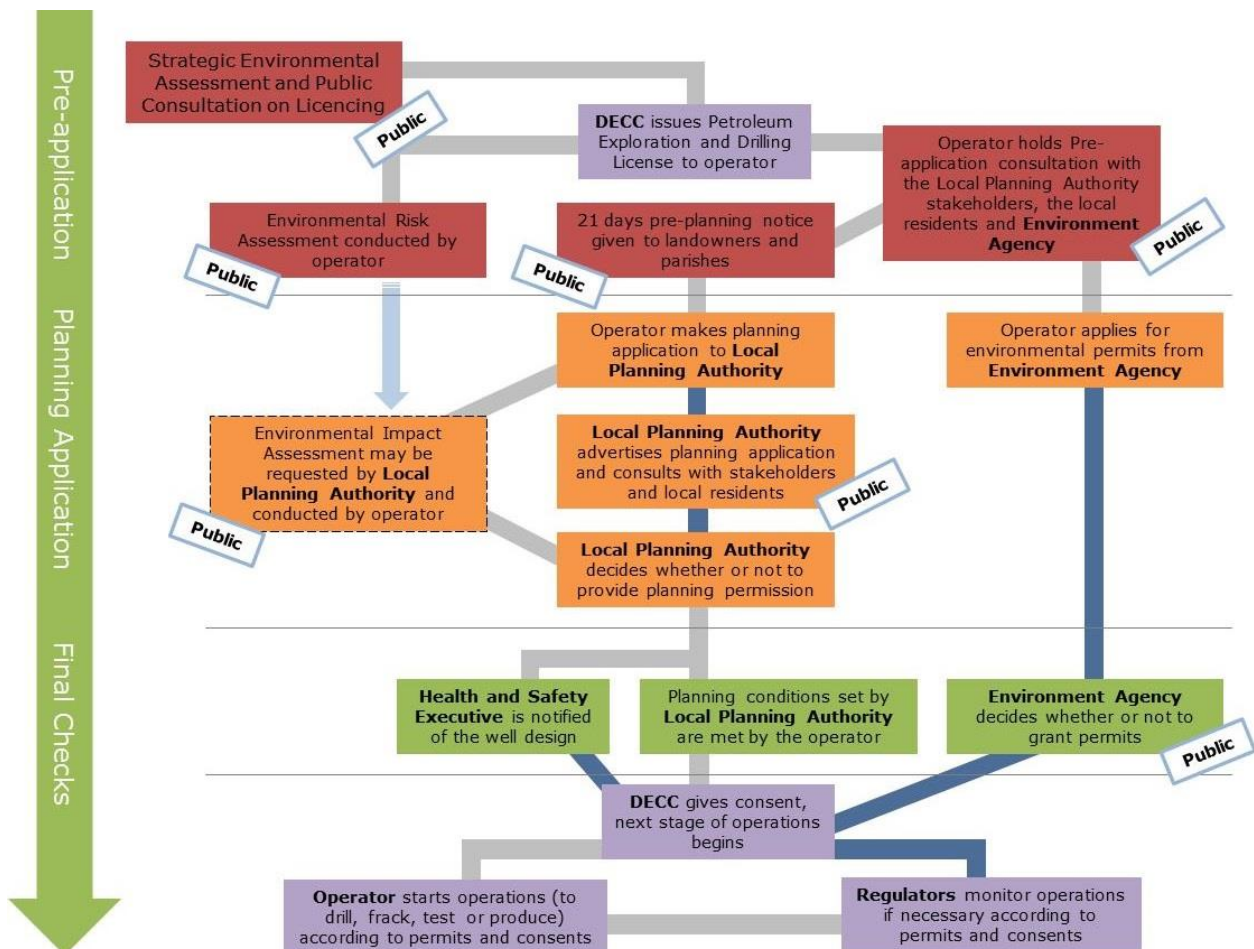
"You could say to operators: 'look guys you're not invited but you're paying for all this, rather than it come out of Council's budgets'" (Liverpool)

4. Potential engagement activities

The public developed suggestions for how they would like to be engaged based on their key principles and informed by the current regulatory framework. Starting with a brief explanation of how they were developed, engagement activities are presented in four stages, following the regulatory process. For each stage, ideal ways of working are presented, with options for how engagement activities would work in practice.

4.1 How models were developed

Participants used the current regulatory framework and permissions process as a basis for discussion about how and when they would want to be engaged if an operator was making plans in their area. This was presented to them over the sessions and summarised in the diagram shown below. They worked in groups to produce models that detailed the activities required at each stage, including the preferred channels and the stakeholders who would be involved.



Boxes marked 'Public' appear on the diagram at all the stages where the public will already be consulted or notified.

4.1.1 Constraints

Though the models were produced alongside the regulatory roadmap above, participants' ideas did not always reflect the reality of the regulatory process. For example, they clearly sought opportunities for a decisive influence on decisions and stated this, but most were unable to determine the exact point on the regulatory roadmap that would be most appropriate for each activity. Thus, the models and activities described here have been developed from 'ideal' models designed by the workshop participants, to make them more consistent with actual opportunities for input into the planning process, and the roles that key stakeholders could play. As these are the suggestions of members of the public rather than engagement experts, they do not offer an exhaustive or definitive engagement strategy. The writers suggest these models are considered alongside other academic work on public engagement²⁷.

4.2 Stages for engagement

Activities are presented in four stages, aligned with the regulatory 'roadmap', with key aims for each stage:

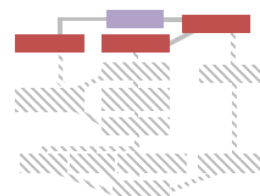
- **National debate** – to frame engagement
- **Pre-application stage** – to notify and inform the local public, and provide a chance for them to shape plans
- **Planning application and permitting stage** – to allow local public interest to be represented
- **Once drilling goes ahead** – to keep the local public informed and allow them to manage community benefits

For each stage, participants' ideas for optimal ways of working are presented, including options and differences of opinion.

The blue boxes that follow show the ideas of activities, mechanisms, and mediums suggested by participants about how each stage could work in practice. They do not represent consensus amongst participants, nor are they exhaustive examples – but are illustrative of how needs might be met and how principles could be demonstrated.

4.2.1 National Debate

Participants' key requirements from this stage were to increase public awareness and understanding of the rationale for pursuing shale gas and oil, and to enable people to have a say at the national level. This would act as a precursor for local engagement, addressing a perceived knowledge gap about the 'bigger picture', which would help people to contextualise local debates.



As such, the key requirements of this engagement stage were to:

- Precede local engagement and skill-up the population with basic information
- Allow the public to have a say on larger (national) decisions

²⁷ <http://www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk/cms/assets/Uploads/Publications/Sciencewise-Guiding-PrinciplesEF12-Nov-13.pdf>

- Avoid predisposition towards negativity caused by media exposure and assumptions



Precedes local engagement, and is on-going and wide-reaching to 'skill up' the population with basic information

It was widely agreed that some form of national dialogue should **precede any local engagement** activities. The idea was to allow the public to **build up basic knowledge**, meaning they would be better placed to engage effectively if operators apply for planning permission in their area. Participants predominantly envisaged this would take place via media channels, particularly on television to reach a broad audience. This would be supported by online and printed information for the public to delve deeper.

Whereas local engagement would focus on what shale gas development would mean for local people, a national dialogue would **engage with the overall rationale** for shale, and how it would impact the UK as a whole. For some, this was motivated by an interest in developing UK industry, economic growth and on energy prices, so this would allow the public to think about the **potential benefits** of shale. All participants were interested in hearing a wide range of views on the issue at this stage – including DECC, operators, scientists and environmental groups who could discuss their arguments about shale gas.

Participant ideas:

- Televised panel discussions with interested groups - multimedia content to ensure information is accessible
- Videos online, advertised and signposted on government and media sites
- DECC-produced booklets on request detailing risks and mitigations

"The public should know why it is necessary and how all that ties in with their aims." (Northampton)

"It would bring out all the points...the different arguments...there might be things we don't like about fracking but it might be the great of good in the long run...so I think it would help our opinions and our maybe ignorance" (Winchester)

Allows the public to be part of larger decisions

For those who had more negative feelings towards national government, this stage was about increasing the public's power over larger decisions and enabling them to say 'no' to the UK pursuing shale. While participants were informed that licences existed, and challenged on feasibility, it is important to recognise its relevance to discussions.

Participants struggled to provide details about how they could play a part in decision making; and were unaware of or unable to come up with any public consultation activities beyond public votes or referendums. Support expressed by some participant for holding a referendum may thus at least partially be driven by a lack of knowledge of alternatives. However, in terms of what they wanted to

achieve at this stage, participants referred both to being able to prevent shale coming to their area at the individual level, and to collective (local or **regional**) representation, with voting at a decisive moment. Participants felt it was important to have **introductory information** prior to this, to prepare them in advance.

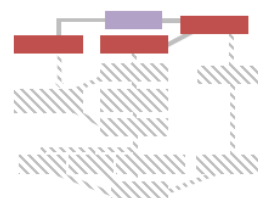
Participant ideas:

- 'Ideal' for some of national referendum on whether the UK pursues shale gas and oil (stronger in Winchester and Northampton) with information prior to voting
- Given referendums were acknowledged unlikely: **regional** debates and votes, e.g. heads of councils in the North West
- National level introductory information about shale gas, to prepare local areas

"A national political debate on TV...to make up your mind as much as you do on political parties. I get political leaflets through my door everyday so there's no reason that can't be leafleted"
(Winchester)

4.2.2 Pre-application stage

This was viewed as a key stage for public engagement, and had two key aims: first, informing the public about local impacts in an accessible way, in addition to broader national information; and second, empowering and supporting people to have a real say in shaping plans.



As detailed below, the key requirements of this engagement stage were to:

- Engage with the public early on in the licensing and exploration process
- Provide as many opportunities to get informed as possible
- Ensure information is independently sourced and/or collated
- Bring information to life – communicate effectively
- Allow long time periods to digest information and research further
- Provide opportunities for the public to shape operators' proposals
- Gather public opinion

Participants supported an 'all channels open' approach for this early stage, with information accessible as widely as possible both in terms of channel and content. Ideally, the maximum of options presented below would be adopted, as younger people or those with less strong views were expected to prefer lighter touch engagement.

Engagement early on

Participants wished to be notified early on that an operator had been granted a licence and was beginning to formulate plans. They wanted to hear from the local authority first to prepare them for a more **formal announcement**. Information should be fairly top level in the first instance with signposting about an option to delve deeper.

The council would liaise with the operator to agree a communications plan, with the underlying principle that initial communications were as inclusive and proactive as possible. Being engaged early on also meant the public would have sufficient notice that any meetings or events were taking

place, giving them sufficient lead in time to organise themselves should they wish to (e.g. setting up petitions).

Participants felt the operator should take responsibility for identifying the groups likely to be most directly affected by shale gas developments, and **notify** them of this fact. Operators were expected to be proactive in contacting people, to ensure that those most affected were engaged – including those less likely to take the lead themselves, such as younger people or those without strong views (e.g. about the environment).

Participant ideas:

- Operator to identify catchment area of those to be engaged locally
- **Simple notification leaflet** from the council: short direct facts about shale gas and oil, and the upcoming plans for engagement (*'a layman's guide' to fracking*)
- Leaflet signposts to government website for more general information; and a 'sub-page' with local information
- Option to request a hard copy for those who need or prefer it
- Operator conducts **door-knocking** (after council's leaflets)

As many opportunities to get informed as possible

The council and operator were deemed best placed and responsible for promoting notices and **announcements** in public places (see Appendix 1.4.4 for the example participants saw).

Participants felt the communication channels they used should not be limited to town halls, libraries and lampposts, but should aim to reach a wide audience – in supermarkets, bus stops, and other public places. These would include some less formal and more familiar, colloquial language to help explain plans to a lay audience (for example, by making reference to 'fracking').

A range of media and **local news** sources could then be used to reach the widest audience possible. Representatives from DECC, the EA and HSE were suggested to volunteer as guests on local radio, answering phone-in questions.

Social media was considered the best channel to reach young people, as well as being a good tool to facilitate word of mouth and community involvement. The council was deemed an appropriate body to keep people updated through Twitter, a role that could continue throughout the process, though their reach may need to have expanded first. It was also suggested that operators, local authorities and local community groups could have a Facebook presence, to help disseminate information and links.

Participants prioritised efforts to increase the reach of information. **Travelling displays** or information stalls in public places such as supermarkets and high streets were suggested as ways to do this. Such activities would be a chance for the public who might be less pro-active but still needed to be engaged, to be notified face-to-face and provided with general information, and to learn how they can get involved. There was some variation in views about which bodies should run these stalls – whilst many felt it was the duty of the operator to fund them, participants felt DECC and the council or planning authority should manage the stalls. Participants thought that DECC would be an appropriate stakeholder to answer more general questions.

Participants also sought to involve **business forums** at the early stages, given they were important local constituents who could be affected. Again, operators were suggested to be responsible for identifying and contacting local organisations and informing them about the upcoming engagement activities, and outlining how they might get involved.

Participant ideas:

- Formal **announcement**: notification letters from the council and operator in newspapers and public places
- **Local news** featuring the operator, DECC and regulators discussing their plans
- **Social media** messaging – tweets and text pushes
- **'Travelling displays'** or stalls, run by DECC or the council
- **Business forums**: accessed by operators through local organisations

"DECC are the ones with the information on it all in the first place and then the local planning authority will just be able to fill in the nooks and crannies of everything else, I would imagine"
(Northampton)

"I've seen them do public consultation before, they put a little yellow wording up on a lamp post ...and unless you are really aware and read what's around you and stop, then you have to write to your council to find out what is happening and they have a meeting, nobody turns up because no-one is informed about it on a big scale. So I think really having a publically interested party to say let's really look at this." (Northampton)

Independent information sourcing/collation

As discussed above, participants felt that sourcing independent information about shale gas was a challenge. There was a tension between participants' desire to hear 'the facts' on the one hand, and their inability to determine who would be able to present this credibly, on the other.

For example, participants prioritised direct access to operators – some proof that engagement was transparent and operators were required to be upfront about their plans. They sought opportunities to hear about operator plans in detail, particularly community benefits, and to question them individually. However, any forum for interaction with operators required other 'voices' represented too, to ensure a balance of information and to improve the 'independence' of the information shared. 'Independent scientists' were considered best placed to bolster the independence and trustworthiness of information and the discussions taking place. The EA and HSE were considered most relevant for information on monitoring safety and standards, and to discuss potential environmental impacts (e.g. explaining what would be covered in the risk assessment).

Participants' suggested solution to the problem of how to include a wide range of voices, yet hear a balanced account, was often to introduce an **independent third party** to manage the process of information sourcing and collation. The third party would take a role in collating and presenting information to the public, and/or facilitating or mediating events attended by a range of stakeholders.

"Why they don't just present it as an impartial third party documentary saying these are the pros, these are the cons, these are all the statistics and then you can go and make a decision?"
(Northampton)

"Do they have an independent third party looking at, or conducting their own studies because... [this information] is from an existing gas company, and then the British Geological society is a government form of society to look at these figures, everything is government run, government backed, corporation owned, they are obviously going to give a point of view from their side"
(Northampton)

To ensure a third party genuinely represented the interests of the local public, participants felt it should include local residents. However, as residents on their own were not considered to hold

sufficient 'expertise', those with more technical knowledge could be brought onto a '**community panel' or liaison group**. Scientists or local council representatives were trusted to represent this 'expertise' in relation to shale gas and/or the planning process. The formed 'panel' would be responsible for collecting stakeholder views, ensuring they were digestible, and ensuring they are presented to the public in a balanced way (at meetings or events that take place later). The panel would keep people updated via a blog and newsletter, maintained throughout the engagement process. Once created, ideally the panel would be closely involved in all subsequent engagement activities. The creation of a successful panel would be contingent on there being enough interested and active individuals in the local area.

"So essentially people from the community nominate themselves to it and the company also puts someone on it and it's a forum for the two lots of people to talk to each other." (Liverpool)

Participant ideas:

- Third **party** managed information sourcing and collation, such as The Royal Society or the Royal Academy of Engineering
- **E.g. Community panel or liaison group** of local residents and expert/ technical representatives

Effective communication: bringing information to life

Given there was no experience of UK sites to draw on, participants wanted the sensory and experiential aspects of living near a site to be emphasised. They also felt it was critical to make technical and complex information more accessible and interesting for a lay audience. Where possible, they favoured visual and interactive methods to convey information to the public.

"It's difficult to imagine...and understand how it feels - if I was in a consultation I might glance over that and think it was ok but how does 51 trucks going past your house each day feel?" (Liverpool)

To ensure a range of views on potential issues and concerns were heard participants suggested a wider information source could be created, such as a hard copy **booklet or website**. Here, all groups (including DECC, EA and HSE, environmental groups and local interest groups) would have a chance to state their position, highlighting any potential issues or concerns. The panel could help manage this process. This could be distributed to the public via post, handed out at road shows or events, and made available online.

A **public exhibition** was suggested as a good way to give the public direct access to a range of stakeholders. Participants felt that information would be more accessible if it focused on visual and sensory representations, such as videos and artists' impressions of a drilling site. They also wanted information that related to their own situation and addressed impacts in terms of residents' experience on the ground. Therefore, whilst covering a range of issues, the overall emphasis of information would be on local impacts and activities to mitigate risks.

"Maybe have like a living room set up with partition walls around it and simulate the vibrations and the sound coming through the walls, maybe to give people an impression of like differing distances from the main drill site, this is how much you can expect without double glazing." (Winchester)

There was support for discussion of 'what if' scenarios, where plans and responsibility would be discussed e.g. in the event of earth tremors. Some participants expressed an interest in hearing specifically about impacts on local wildlife and natural beauty, and would want to hear from specialist groups at this event.

A **live panel discussion** featuring the operator, environmental groups, the local authority and scientists was suggested as a potential part of the workshop, or separate event. The panel would

discuss and debate local impacts, proposed benefits, and take questions from the public. A local councillor or a local community panel could chair the event. It would also be made available online, and promoted via social media, allowing young people and those unable to attend to feed questions in beforehand, and comment on the event afterwards.

Multiple channels for engagement were important here. Local people who were too busy or not interested enough to attend a face-to-face discussion therefore needed **online options** for posing questions and accessing the answers to these. It was hoped that this would allow the public to become informed without requiring a lot from them and was important in terms of feasibility for the public to engage.

Those with stronger political and environmental views were expected to want fuller and more detailed information about potential impacts and wider considerations. **Public lectures** were suggested as a way to explain safety measures to the public in a clear and digestible way, with a key focus on environmental impact. There was also a desire to hear from DECC about the wider implication of shale on climate change.

The results of assessments, such as the Environment Agency's environmental assessment, were of interest – though participants acknowledged most would lack the technical knowledge to interpret them. Participants determined the EA's role in engagement to be one of reassurance, explaining in a clear and simple how they assess plans and how they will protect and assure environmental safety.

Participants suggested the following ways to inform the public in an engaging way:

- **Booklet and/or website** collating perspectives, online and/ or in hard copy
- Public **exhibition** in a locally accessible area – operator to present plans and take questions. Independent scientist to support events²⁸; EA and HSE attend
- Interactive **live panel discussion**
- **Public lectures** by scientists and/or the EA, and potentially DECC

Participants also suggested a variety of **remote options** for lighter touch engagement methods, driven by the recognition that realistically many members of the local public would lack the time or inclination to get heavily involved at every stage of engagement.

- **Online options** for those unable to attend face to face events: answers collected from various stakeholders and published online after the event, alongside a summary of the face to face Q&A.
- **Questions** submitted remotely through online portals, or through '**tear off and reply**' section of announcement letters. Responses from DECC, EA, HSE and operator fed back and published online/ in print on request.
- **Social media involvement:** all engagement activities advertised and linked to, various stakeholders maintaining social media presence
- **Operator free-phone number**, to allow direct questioning or concerns - open throughout planning process and once permissions were granted
- **Results of the EA environmental assessment published** in local newspapers and newsletters, and covered in local radio and news

²⁸ See challenges/stakeholders section about independent scientists
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"Through online media you can have direct access to the company or to environment agency or other specialists". (Northampton)

"...because the things that we want to be informed about here are things that need to be assessed by specialists and in general the public is not a specialist." (Winchester)

Long time periods to digest information, over several sessions

It was important for participants that adequate time was allowed at this stage for the public to go away and do their own research, as well as to digest information. Participants suggested 2-3 months would be appropriate from the time they are first notified to the submission of the planning application (though some felt up to 6 months would be necessary).

Opportunity to shape operators' proposals; direct contact with operators

Once the public has had a chance to become informed about the issues, they wanted a chance to shape operator plans. It was important that operators would be present to transparently explain their plans and respond to concerns, but also that there would be others present: to mediate the information provided by operators, and a locally interested party to facilitate negotiation and support people to voice their opinions. A forum for discussion and negotiation was thus required to facilitate this.

Setting conditions around local disruption was regarded as a key area where the public should have decisive influence. This would mean understanding how local levels would be set around noise and traffic, for example, and being able to negotiate changes if they were deemed unacceptable. Operators would be required to initially present their plans for mitigating local disruption and take questions, where areas for debate would be set out. Another potential area for negotiation suggested was around community benefits (see section 5). It was thought that each community would have their own priorities and demands. Several rounds of negotiation could take place as necessary, allowing some to and fro between the operator and the public, moving their relationship forward, and allowing them to reach a practicable and reasonable resolution together.

"I guess if you're a really awkward community, you could say, yes, okay, but what about 2%? ...If you could negotiate a bit more slice of the cake, you're going to, aren't you?" (Northampton)

Suitable chairs for these included local councillors, as they would help stand for local interests, or a community liaison group, if applicable. Amongst groups where there was greater mistrust of local councillors, 'independent' bodies were suggested as more appropriate, including deliberative or facilitation experts. 'Experts' would also be in attendance to help challenge operator claims – ideally the experts would be independent scientists, though the group could include EA and HSE representatives. Younger participants also felt DECC would be suitable body to provide expertise. Representatives from the council could provide detail on the planning process and to act as a feasibility check in terms of existing processes, challenging public demands when they were unrealistic or unachievable in practice.

Participant suggestions:

- Series of **workshops**, funded but not run by the operators. Larger groups break out for smaller discussions. Facilitators help build a list of desired changes. Range of views presented back for operators to respond to. Outcomes from each meeting made available on the website (summarised and detailed formats, to allow the public to choose varying levels of engagement). Supported by an **online forum** to collect public views, incorporated into negotiations. Online activity as well as workshops promoted via social media.

The option above necessitates a flexible timeline from start of engagement to the LPA decision, to allow for multiple rounds of discussion and negotiation if needed. It also assumes a slightly more engaged public – as there are opportunities for some of them to be very heavily involved over multiple stages (whilst still allowing for lighter touch involvement by others).

Another option was suggested by those who felt they were unlikely to attend face-to-face meetings. This would be used for any and all stages of engagement, acting as an effective alternative channel to provide direct contact with operators.

Participant suggestions:

- **Operator-created app**, providing two-way dialogue, to involve younger people: updated with the operator's plans, outcomes from events/ meetings. Users able to input into other engagement activities via the app, submit their views or ask questions.
- Content linked to social media – enabling users to share submissions.

"In the general scheme of things I wouldn't go to a meeting...but on Facebook I would be quite interested, I would have a read-through and I would join it and I would have a look, just because it's in my comfort zone and it's a convenience" (Liverpool)

Gathering public opinion

It was considered important to capture the extent to which local people supported or opposed proposals, particularly among participants who felt strongly that the public should be able to say no to shale coming to an area. However, there were mixed views about the feasibility and efficacy of a public vote. Participants expressed concerns about who would be voting and whether it would be an accurate representation of public opinion, and struggled to envisage how it would work in practice. However, garnering a sense of relative public support or objection such as through a **survey**, was hoped to feed into LPA's decision-making process in some way. Again it was felt appropriate that the operator should provide funding for the activity but it should be run by a third party.

"Some kind of vote to get a judge on whether the local community is on board or not." (Liverpool)

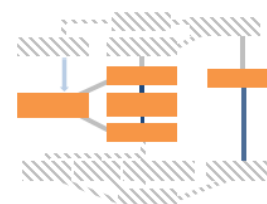
Participant suggestion:

- **Survey** of public views about shale in general – operator-funded, run by a third party (council or external contractor)

"How many people would you canvass to get a greater sense of yes or no?...10,000 people thinks so or 1 person thinks so? I don't know what level that is at. So that's a difficult one for us, we don't know what degree of involvement people can have a hand in." (Northampton)

4.2.3 Planning and permitting stage

At the planning stage, the priorities for engagement were to ensure local public interest was being properly represented, and to maximise the public's ability to have a say in decisions.



Whilst the planning stage includes application to the EA for permits, participants felt it was inappropriate for the public to be involved in this process, even though informed of the public consultation in the EA's permits. Deemed to be competent, specialist experts, participants trusted that the EA would make the right decision and seek appropriate evidence. However, they wished to be notified of the outcome of the decision, and during the information provision stage wished to hear from the EA on how the decision is made and what is taken into account.

"The things that we want to be informed about here are things that need to be assessed by specialists and in general the public is not a specialist." (Winchester)

As detailed below, the key requirements of this engagement stage were for:

- Someone to represent the public interest
- An opportunity for the public to 'drop in' regardless of previous involvement
- The LPA to explain the decision
- The opportunity for the public to appeal the decision

Someone to represent the public interest

The current process of representation and public consultation at the planning stage generally reassured participants. Continuity was important, so participants sought to link up the bodies/individual involved in earlier stages and those already managing representation, for example, **community liaison groups**.

There was support for **local councillors** representing the public's views, taking forward concerns that had been raised throughout the engagement process thus far. The point was raised that in some (larger) councils, members could potentially be fairly distant from the area affected. The councillor/s involved should thus have local connections and knowledge of the area to be able to effectively represent local opinion. In Liverpool, where there was less support for councillors or local government officials managing this process, it was suggested that councils bring in **experts** who had been involved in previous engagement activities and who had listened and responded to residents' concerns.

Participant suggestions for the 'voice of the public' in this consultation were thus:

- **Community liaison groups** to be part of the consultation
- **Local councillors** (with local connections) represent public views and concerns
- (Liverpool): councils bring in **experts** to support them (where less trusted)

"Co-opt other members onto the Council ... to get in some expertise." (Liverpool)

Opportunity for the public to 'drop in' regardless of previous involvement

Participants supported opportunities for people to be able to feed into the public consultation even if they had not been involved in previous stages. This drove their interest in online and newspaper information provision throughout, so any member of the public could be brought quickly up to speed. For some, it also necessitated further activities in the run up to the consultation process to support individuals to feed in at this stage.

To facilitate this accessibility for later introduction to engagement, a **meeting** (run by those previously involved in engagement activities) was suggested as a way to explain previous public involvement, how the operator has responded in their plans, as well as how the public will be represented during the consultation.

This group forum would allow the public to voice their views and concerns, but also to **inform people about the consultation process**, and enable them to feed in separately as an individual. Participants stressed the importance of clear guidance on how to participate and exercise this right effectively. The format and language used in consultations would need to be accessible and inclusive.

Participant suggestions:

- **Meeting** at a community centre when the planning application is submitted. Information also published online and circulated via a newsletter.
- Council send letters **informing the public of the consultation process** and how they can express views. Signposts to guidance on how to do this effectively, e.g. examples or templates to use.

LPA explains decision

Participants felt that the LPA should not just announce their decision to grant planning permission but should be transparent in communicating any aspects of the plan that had caused concern or had to be changed.

- **LPA detail how they came to their decision**, via council's website and posted in public places

Opportunity for the public to appeal decision

Participants strongly felt that the public should have the opportunity to appeal the decision²⁹ if they were unhappy about it, given the operator was able to do so.

Participant suggestion:

- Chance to appeal advertised through newspapers and online, with clear explanation about how to do so

4.2.4 Once exploration goes ahead

Once permission is granted, it was important for operators and regulators to keep public informed and reassure them about safety, whilst local groups take ownership of community benefit management.



As detailed below, the key requirements of this engagement stage were for:

- A local group to manage benefits
- 2-way lines of communication kept open with operators
- Regular feedback from regulators
- Clear lines of accountability

²⁹ It should be noted that although there is currently no way for the public to appeal the decision other than through Judicial review, participants were not commenting on this fact. Rather, they were expressing a perceived inequity between their ability to appeal and the operator's ability to appeal, based on the information provided in the 'regulatory roadmap' diagram.
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A local group to manage benefits

Participants suggested that the public should discuss fairly early on how they would like the benefits to be managed, and put these plans into action once exploration commences. Most recognised that it was unrealistic to undertake a complex process for selecting a group of local residents to manage hereafter, and so expected it would be made up of those who had been closely involved in activities so far.

In Winchester there was suggestion that this process was undertaken in close relation with the local council who would also have projects that they wanted to fund. In Northampton there was some support for the benefits to be managed by the Parish Council, who would also take on responsibility for collecting public votes on what to spend the money on. Others suggested that the council could play an oversight role for the local group. However the majority of participants were concerned with keeping the funds separate from local authority budgets as much as possible, fearing it could be easily absorbed by the council.

In Liverpool it was suggested that a proportion of the funds could be used to fund research into renewable energy, once the site became profitable.

Participant suggestions:

- **Benefits managed by a small group of residents.** Management structure comes under annual review by local people. Group select local projects to fund; local charities or groups apply. Local people **'vote'** on how the money is distributed between projects, e.g. via tokens in local supermarkets or public places, or online

"Being a third party as well it helps ... rather than it being in-house [in LA hands], because in-house always has that tendency for money to be used for things other than it should" (Northampton)

Lines of communication kept open with operators (2-way)

A clear way for the public to feed back their concerns or queries to the operator was deemed important, for example if agreed timing of work was not being upheld; in order to ask questions that arose; or for those who were new to the area.

Participant suggestions:

- **Ongoing online forum**
- **Regular updates:** website and newsletters on developments sent out by operator
- Operator **app** (mentioned above) –updated with progress report data

Regular feedback from regulators

Once exploration goes ahead, participants felt it was important to be kept informed to ensure continuing involvement, and to be reassured that monitoring processes are taking place. EA and HSE were viewed as having an important role to play in reassuring the public about safety measures. They were also interested in other local areas' residents gaining access to these information resources, to inform their own decisions or simply for transparency around the development of shale nationally.

Participant suggestions:

- EA and HSE **progress reports** via a regularly updated website/ newsletters
- Reports on safety checks made public records for other communities

Clear lines of accountability

In order to help ensure the public was still able to challenge operator practices, and that engagement was on-going, ways to contact responsible bodies would be provided. The public would need to be aware of their rights and enabled to make complaints if they wished. Emphasis on plans for restoration of sites would help assuage participants' concerns about long term accountability. Participants also felt that some type of **oversight body** would need to be accessible to the public in case of concerns. The body would have responsibility to oversee operator compliance, beyond the remit of the EA and HSE (for example, impacts on local wildlife and natural beauty, or adhering to pledges about local jobs).

Participant suggestions:

- A published contract and copy of the protocols/rules the operator must follow
- Contact details for an **oversight body** to raise concerns/ complaints with

5. Lessons for community benefits

An industry representative presented the key elements of the Community Engagement Charter that includes the industry's community benefits offer. The version presented to participants can be found in Appendix 1.4.6, but the key points covered and addressed by the charter are as follows:

- For each temporary exploration well, operators will donate £100,000 into a community fund.
- For a production site, operators will set aside 1% of all the revenues, expected to amount to between £5-10 million over the life of the well.
- Operators will be keen to create local jobs, and opportunities for both the supply chain and academic institutions in the area that they operate.
- Communities will have full control over their community funds at exploration stage.
- Operators will provide the money directly to a third party at exploration stage, who will release it to the community.
- The charter promises a minimum standard of community engagement, including proper consultation with local communities on the subjects that matter.
- Each operator will publish transparent data with respect to water use, emissions, seismicity, vehicle management, noise, light, hours of operation, noise, light, and any chemicals used.
- Operators will demonstrate commitment to considerate development, by working with the local community to organise logistics in order to minimise disruption to the community during operations: for example, from noise and traffic.
- The UK Onshore Operators Group reviews this charter and its performance every year

The community benefits package elicited mixed responses, and certain elements were received with more enthusiasm than others. This section sets out which aspects met with the most positive reception, which aspects were less well received and why, and participants' suggestions on how to improve the package overall.

5.1 Best aspects of the package

Operators' open communication and transparency about community benefits was lauded. As with all interaction with operators, participants expected open, up-front information as to what an operator was doing, and why. Participants were especially supportive of the operator holding regular reviews in consultation with the public, which reassured them that operators would be locally engaged in an on-going capacity.

"I just think it should be, they open up and say 'we've been given a licence, this is our responsibility, we will be doing this, and this is how it's going to be dealt with'. So, that's how it can be laid out in straight terms." (Liverpool)

A diverse range of participants strongly valued flexibility and 'community ownership' of how the money was spent, envisaging funding local projects via lottery-like grant funding or in a 'Waitrose model', where locals would vote to distribute the money. It was important to people that the money was spent on certain kinds of projects, such as local charities, restoration or wildlife projects, as this

was seen to directly 'benefit the community' – as opposed to being absorbed by the council. There were thus positive responses to the idea that money would be held by a third party rather than given directly to the local authority, and comparisons were made with trust funds where money could be accessed by the public.

"If it was going to happen then, you might as well get as much out of it as you can, so maybe like the restoration of like a park." (Liverpool)

For smaller communities, the amount of money offered seemed generous and able to make a significant impact. Participants' varying satisfaction with the amount offered depended on whether they noticed that the £100,000 was paid *per well site*– participants suggested this message could be emphasised to overcome perceptions that the amount was too low to be of any significance in areas with high populations. Participants recognised that the number of wells would not be known in advance, but felt that if they could be given an indication of the likely number, this could be more encouraging.

"It's a lot of money if you think about the number of wells that are being proposed, for the economy." (Northampton)

5.2 Potential risks and how to overcome them

The financial aspect of the package was met with discomfort for many, because it was seen to monetise the risk taken on by the community, and was thus seen as a bribe by some. The fact that money was offered was also seen to indicate the activity was extremely high risk and dangerous, as participants were unaware of money being exchanged in other situations. The 1% figure provoked questions and negativity about operator revenue and profits.

"They want to throw the money issue out first rather than everything else, and it's like, it's not about the money, it's about everything. There are more important factors than how much money the community is going to get." (Liverpool)

The approach to presenting this information could in part overcome these concerns. Firstly, normalising the practice of giving money to communities in exchange for other development projects (such as is already the case with wind power) reduces the perception that it signals very dangerous activity. Clarity about why they are being offered money, alongside framing a package of benefits of which the money is just one aspect, should help to mitigate unease.

Messages about local job creation should focus on operators committing to using local contractors and the number of lower skilled jobs that would be recruited from the local area. People also suggested that operators could provide local training or apprenticeships rather than promising general job creation. This would help work against participants' expectations that the majority of jobs would be highly skilled and specialist, and unlikely to be filled locally.

"I don't think there'll be a lot of local employment. They will have gangs of people who are experts and trained and they will move around from well to well as they, most of the employment is during the sort of exploration and installation stage, after that it runs itself. So it is not going to be 20 years." (Winchester)

6. Conclusions

This public dialogue found that effective public engagement on unconventional gas and oil developments should directly address existing public concerns, by clearly communicating the rationale for pursuing shale; who stands to benefit; and the extent of the public's ability to have a say in decisions. In order for arguments to resonate, benefits should be phrased in terms of cost, energy security, and sustainability. Three areas of public concern persisted, despite the existing regulatory framework. These are concerns about the independence of the various bodies involved, long term accountability for operators, and the ability for the public to have a say.

Despite participants' lack of experience in engagement, the key principles they suggested remained constant as important to demonstrate throughout, and they provided numerous suggestions on how to achieve those in practice. The findings within this report, and the suggestions for approaching engagement, are relevant to any of the bodies involved in shale development, both in the immediate and the longer term.