

Social media statements

Conservative MPs who have publicly opposed fracking but did not vote to ban the practice

Source: Facebook

Mark Menzies, Conservative, Fylde

I voted tonight not in favour of fracking but to ensure local people had the final say on whether it ever happens again in Fylde.

I was clear in my view the moratorium should not have been lifted, I remain firm in my opinion fracking should never happen again in our community.

Having pushed the Government to give local people a voice, I want that voice heard loud and clear. I believe people in Fylde share my conviction that fracking should never again take place in our local communities.

This is our chance to say no, not now, not ever.

Lee Rowley, Conservative, North East Derbyshire

Following up from my post last night, I wanted to give a more detailed explanation of what happened yesterday and why I voted in the way that I did. This is likely to be one of my longer posts so apologies in advance ...

Before I do, I have to categorically restate (not least because others are trying to misrepresent my position), that my view on fracking remains unchanged: I will always oppose it if it comes forward in North East Derbyshire and that, whilst others (some members of the Government, some unions etc.) want to have another look at it again, I just don't think it is the answer to the challenges which our country faces.

Last night, I voted against a game-playing, partisan motion in Parliament – deliberately structured to create a social media furore. And so it has proven. That vote is currently being mischaracterised across social media as voting “for fracking”. That is absolutely not true – either in fact or in spirit.

1. THE VOTE CHANGED NOTHING

Firstly, the vote was a procedural one – asking for time in late November for Parliament to debate fracking in more detail. Whether I had voted for, against or abstained, nothing would have specifically changed on the situation on fracking yesterday.

The actual position on shale gas has been the same since 22 September when the Government lifted the moratorium in order that further data could be obtained about the seismic implications of the practice. That didn't mean that fracking could just happen immediately and, at the time, the Government committed to bringing forward further details about what the new approach would look like before anything would happen. That included how local communities would have the final say about whether to allow exploration or not. We are still awaiting that information and, whilst I don't particularly think this is a road we need to go down, I will personally wait for the details before drawing any further conclusions.

2. I DON'T BELIEVE IN BANNING THINGS

As I've said before repeatedly, I don't like banning things unless it is absolutely necessary. I have despaired at the last thirty years in politics when the answer to everything from politicians is that we should just ban something, rather than trusting people to make their own decisions.

Of course, that can never be an absolutist position – there will be times when precluding people from doing things is reasonable and proportionate. Yet, as a principle, I don't advocate banning things unless absolutely required and where there is no other alternative.

And, on fracking, I just don't think a ban is the way to go. Other may take a different view but I think communities can make their own decisions about what to do on this subject. I don't believe in telling Nuneaton, Newcastle or Norwich how to run their affairs and, by extension, I don't want Nuneaton, Newcastle or Norwich to tell us what to do. Instead, I want us, in North East Derbyshire, to decide as much as possible about what happens in our area.

So, on fracking, I don't seek a national ban. I seek only that North East Derbyshire has the right to say "no" if it wants to. The whole frustration when the Bramblemoor Lane application appeared between 2017 and 2019 was that we weren't allowed to stop it locally and were overridden by others from elsewhere. For me, as long as we get the right to make our own choice on this, that's enough for me.

And, for clarity, if we are ever asked in North East Derbyshire to make a choice (which, I hope, we won't be), then I will always advocate that we don't go in for fracking. If a proposal comes forward (which I hope doesn't happen), I will always campaign and work against it – to fulfil the promise I made to you in 2017 and 2019. But I do trust you all to make the right decision about our area – and I don't need a national ban to override your ability to make the right decision.

3. TECHNICALLY, YESTERDAY'S MOTION WAS UNACCEPTABLE

For very technical and procedural reasons, I also couldn't agree with the motion yesterday. The Labour Party put forward a proposal that not just wanted a further debate on fracking in late November but, along with that, that the Opposition should basically take control of Parliament.

By convention, Government's decide what happens in Parliament – they need are the elected administration and they need to have parliamentary time to get their business through. Laws need to be debated which get to the statute book and measures need to be put forward from the governing party's proposals. Whether Labour or Conservative are in power, they get the right to decide what comes to Parliament for debate – and that is a position that has held true for many decades. I cannot, in good faith, give the Opposition control of Parliament. This was last tried in 2017 – 2019 by the Opposition in order to stop Brexit and they are trying again on this. The Opposition, by long-standing convention, get "Opposition Days" to table their ideas (which I agree with) but I don't support giving them further control of Parliament beyond that. Whatever the subject matter and whatever the proposal for a future debate, as a principle, I cannot give control of Parliament away.

4. YESTERDAY WASN'T ABOUT FRACKING – IT WAS ABOUT POINT SCORING

On the matter of Opposition Days (of which yesterday was one), I've written before about how they are specifically designed to embarrass and create social media furores rather than to promote proper discussion and debate. We have a whole litany of examples before about subjects which are brought forward – sewage, free school meals and the like – which are designed just solely to create firestorms on social media, rather than to actually meaningfully discuss things. That was exactly

what was attempted on fracking yesterday. I am in the middle of being told, yet again, that I'm "scum" or I'm "lying" etc etc – just like I am after all of these episodes.

It is ultimately up to the Labour Party to decide what they want to do with their allotted time. Politics is politics and I have no complaint about that. Yet, if they seek to play politics (which they have done here) and if they design motions in Parliament which they claim do one thing but actually don't (as they have done here), they should be called out on it. It's game playing – nothing more and nothing less.

Throughout my time as your MP, I have always tried to approach politics with seriousness. It should be possible for us to accept nuance in debate. We should be able to agree that there is more than one way in which we can achieve an end. We shouldn't boil complicated debates down to single tweets or angry graphics on social media. And, if something sounds like it is contrary to everything that I've consistently fought for over five years, that probably means it isn't true.

I have a record which has consistently opposed fracking in North East Derbyshire. I will continue to try to stop it if it ever comes here. At the same time, that doesn't mean that I will be cowed into doing the wrong thing in Parliament simply because the Labour Party want to unleash the social media hounds on me and misrepresent my votes. I will do what I think is right, will explain myself (as I am doing) and will trust you, as constituents, to draw your own conclusions.

I will just say one further thing if I may before ending. I went into politics to change things and to try to make North East Derbyshire better. Being a politician is a brilliant job but it comes with quite a lot of opprobrium. Throughout, though, it is the best privilege in the world to try to work on behalf of the place where I grew up and where I am so passionate about improving things. Yet, there is a side to politics which is grubby, nasty and sharp – and it frustrates me no end. The last 24 hours is an example of this. I want to do the best for this area and to see us thrive. I don't want fracking to happen – and nothing has changed on that. But I am just not going to play politics or indulge game playing as happened last night – the constituency deserves better than that. If I am to be mischaracterised and misrepresented by some, then I am willing for that to happen. The bottom line: I stand by my vote yesterday. All I can offer is my explanation and continue to work to stop fracking in North East Derbyshire – as I will do.

WHERE NEXT

As with many of these silly votes, they don't actually change anything. The country's approach to fracking is basically the same today as it was yesterday – and nothing in yesterday's vote would have change that this morning.

As we stand, then, the Government needs to bring forward a more detailed proposal about how local communities will get a final say on any exploratory drilling. I understand that this is likely to come forward next month – and I will wait to see what that says. I did speak to the Business Secretary several times yesterday and we did get some more detail about what that is likely to look like. He confirmed to me and then, at my request, repeated on the floor of the House of Commons, that communities will get a "veto" on any proposals. That is exactly what I am seeking – the right for North East Derbyshire to say "no". So long as that is available in the future, then my recommendation to you is that this should be sufficient. We have the right to say no. Other communities get to make their own decisions.

So, when the details are published in the coming weeks, I will look at them and see whether they are acceptable or not. I would welcome your thoughts when they do come out. And, as ever, my

position remains the same – that I will always oppose fracking in our area if it was ever to come forward and, whilst respecting the views of others, I still don't think it will solve the challenges we have in our country.

Alexander Stafford, Conservative, Rother Valley

Today I got a cast iron guarantee from the Business Secretary that local consent will be at the heart of our energy policy. And for the first time ever, local people will be able to decide whether they want this on their doorsteps. This means it would be up to the people of Harthill & Woodsetts rather than Central or local government as to what happens in our area.

If a local vote happens I will not only vote against fracking in Harthill (where I live) and Woodsetts but I vow to lead the campaign against it!

Scott Benton, Conservative, Blackpool South

I am fully aware that the majority of residents in Blackpool do not support the return of fracking to the Fylde Coast and I share this view and always have. The environmental and safety thresholds and protections were breached when fracking previously took place at the Preston New Road site a few miles outside of my constituency, and as a result, fracking stopped in 2019.

The war in Ukraine has demonstrated that we cannot rely on authoritarian foreign regimes for our energy supplies. As such I support the Government in striving to maximise our energy reserves, particularly in exploiting off-sea oil and gas reserves and new nuclear power. Although I can see why the Government has put fracking back on the table, the Government have stated time and again it should only take place if it is safe and supported by local communities.

The views of those living in the vicinity directly affected by the process must be taken into account. I look forward to taking part in the consultation on this issue and I welcome that the Government have promised a vote at the appropriate time.

However, the Labour Party are using an opposition day debate on Wednesday to put forward a motion that would overturn Standing Orders, and the procedure of the House of Commons, which says that only the elected government decides parliamentary business. This motion is not truly about banning fracking, but is an attempt by the Labour Party to take over the functions of our Government.

For this reason, Conservative MPs must vote against the motion to ensure that the Labour Party do not seize control of the order paper, effectively seizing control of Government. This is the reason the motion has been referred to as a 'confidence vote' rather than a vote on fracking.

The Labour Party have used these tricks before as they know that Conservative MPs cannot vote for motions brought forward in Opposition Day Debates. Instead of engineering a constructive and fair debate on this issue Labour have contrived to weaponize the issue of fracking. Playing political games and point scoring in this manner is truly shameful behaviour.

James Grundy, Conservative, Leigh

Yesterday I spoke about my concerns in the debate on fracking in the Commons.

I have worked with other Conservative backbenchers to help secure a local veto on fracking that would prevent local authorities from forcing planning applications for fracking on communities that were opposed to it.

The Government will now engage in a consultation, then set out the details of that community veto power, likely to be a referendum.

I have been very clear that the final veto power on fracking must lie with local communities, and councils such as Wigan Metro must never be able to overrule them.

I don't trust Wigan Council to make the right decisions on fracking, but I do trust local people, and I will back them where they oppose it.

Tom Randall, Conservative, Gedling

Last night, there was a vote in the House of Commons. There are votes in the House most days that it is sitting, but you will have seen that last night's got on to the newspaper front pages for all the wrong reasons.

So what was it all about?

The Government of the day has control over parliamentary business, as you might expect. The Government is elected to govern and it sets out what is to be debated, what legislation is coming forward, and so forth. But over the course of a year there are certain days that are given over to the opposition to debate subjects that are close to their heart. These are called Opposition Day debates.

Of course, because the Opposition's job is to oppose the Government, they often choose subjects that will embarrass the Government or raise the profile of an issue that is important to them. That's understandable. Opposition Day motions are often symbolic, so they generally pass unchallenged. Usually, they are not binding on the Government and will not change Government policy.

But yesterday's vote was different.

The Labour Party wrote their proposed motion in such a way that it would allow them to determine what parliamentary business is – or as they say in SW1, they wanted to take control of the order paper. The Labour Party used the same tactics that Hilary Benn and other pro-EU MPs used when they tried to take control of parliamentary business during the debates over Brexit. This isn't acceptable. And that's why no Conservative MP voted for Labour's motion last night. The Labour Party could have put down a neutral motion about fracking itself, without trying to take control of parliamentary business, but they chose not to.

So last night's vote wasn't really about fracking at all. But I'm sure that won't stop the Labour Party making some great social media graphics out of last night.

And that's a shame because I do appreciate that there are strong views on this subject that are worthwhile debating. While I'm quite open-minded about it in principle, I do get that there are very serious concerns about it. Even if one accepts the scientific arguments for it (which is open to debate) I feel that it's the sort of thing that needs local buy-in from people before it can go ahead.

I filmed this video before the fracking debate started and before I went over to Westminster Hall to lead a debate about Transport in Nottinghamshire. As I say in the video, if anyone wants to talk this over they are welcome to get in touch.

Paul Howell, Conservative, Sedgefield

I would like to address concerns expressed by some of my constituents regarding my vote on fracking yesterday. Indeed, the debate was initiated by the Opposition, not the Government.

For the record, I am neither a strong advocate, nor opponent of fracking. That's why I welcomed the Government's commissioning of the British Geological Survey to advise on the latest scientific evidence around shale gas extraction.

This request was made to simply assess if any progress has been made in the scientific understanding of fracking.

As you may be aware, yesterday I voted with the Government following reassurances from my ministerial colleagues that any exploration or development of shale gas would need to meet rigorous safety and environmental protections both above ground and sub-surface.

However, I do appreciate that the end of the moratorium on shale gas extraction by the new Prime Minister may cause alarm in our rural communities, but I want to assure you that if proven safe, fracking would only proceed in communities where there is strong local support for it. On this basis, fracking is NOT, I repeat, NOT coming to the Sedgefield constituency— there's simply no local support for it.

Similarly, potential fracking sites are located miles away from our constituency.

I have sought assurances from several ministers on multiple occasions that local communities will be at the heart of the decision-making process. I think this is a reasonable and balanced approach to adopt as we look for cheaper, cleaner and more independent sources of energy.

The outcome of this vote does not give shale gas companies carte blanche to frack wherever and whenever they choose. Nobody in their right mind would support that.

Furthermore, as detailed in the Energy Security Strategy, fracking will only form a very small part of the Government's endeavour to boost our long-term energy independence, security and prosperity. Given soaring energy prices, ensuring our long-term energy independence is a responsible move to take. The Government has itself committed to accelerate the deployment of wind, new nuclear, solar and hydrogen, whilst supporting the production of domestic oil and gas from the North Sea in the nearer term – which could see 95 per cent of electricity by 2030 being low carbon. Ultimately the more cheap, clean power we generate in the UK, the less exposed we will be to global gas markets. The last few months have demonstrated to everyone how important this is.

I completely understand people's strength of feeling about fracking and although I voted with the Government on this occasion, I too share many of the concerns.

As your Member of Parliament, I will continue to raise your concerns with my colleagues in the Government.

Neil Hudson, Conservative, Penrith and the Border

Let me be unequivocally clear, I have always stated both in public and in personal correspondence to constituents that I believe fracking is a retrograde and environmentally-damaging practice that I oppose wholeheartedly. The vote last night in Parliament in the end was not about fracking, but became one of confidence in the Government. Despite all the disappointing, chaotic and unedifying political events of yesterday, I will continue to support the Government with the 2019 manifesto on which we were elected.

As such, I humbly ask that you take the time to read my statement on the parliamentary proceedings which I am deeply disappointed have taken place at Westminster.

David Johnson, Conservative, Wantage

Given the media coverage, I want to clarify some points about last night's events.

This was not a vote about fracking. It was a political game by the Labour Party to use the topic of fracking to take control of the 'Order Paper' i.e., determine what happens in the House of Commons, which is the Government's job. It is a tactic that was attempted repeatedly during the Brexit deadlock and one that no Government of any stripe would willingly allow the Opposition to do. For that reason, colleagues of mine who have been consistent campaigners against fracking were able to vote for it.

The Government has been very clear fracking will only happen with local consent and if it is deemed safe. I can categorically say I would vote against any attempt to get around this. If local people in the constituency do not want it, which I know is likely to be the case, it will simply not happen. I should note that there have never been any licenses awarded for fracking in Oxfordshire in any case.

As an aside, the Government is investing billions in renewables and since 2010, UK renewable capacity has increased by 500%. This will only continue and is something I strongly support.

Regarding the allegations of people being manhandled, I had already voted and so did not see any of the scenes that have been described – but the MP in question has himself said he was not pushed or bullied. I can say I have never seen anybody treated in the way that has been alleged, nor has anyone attempted to treat me in that way.