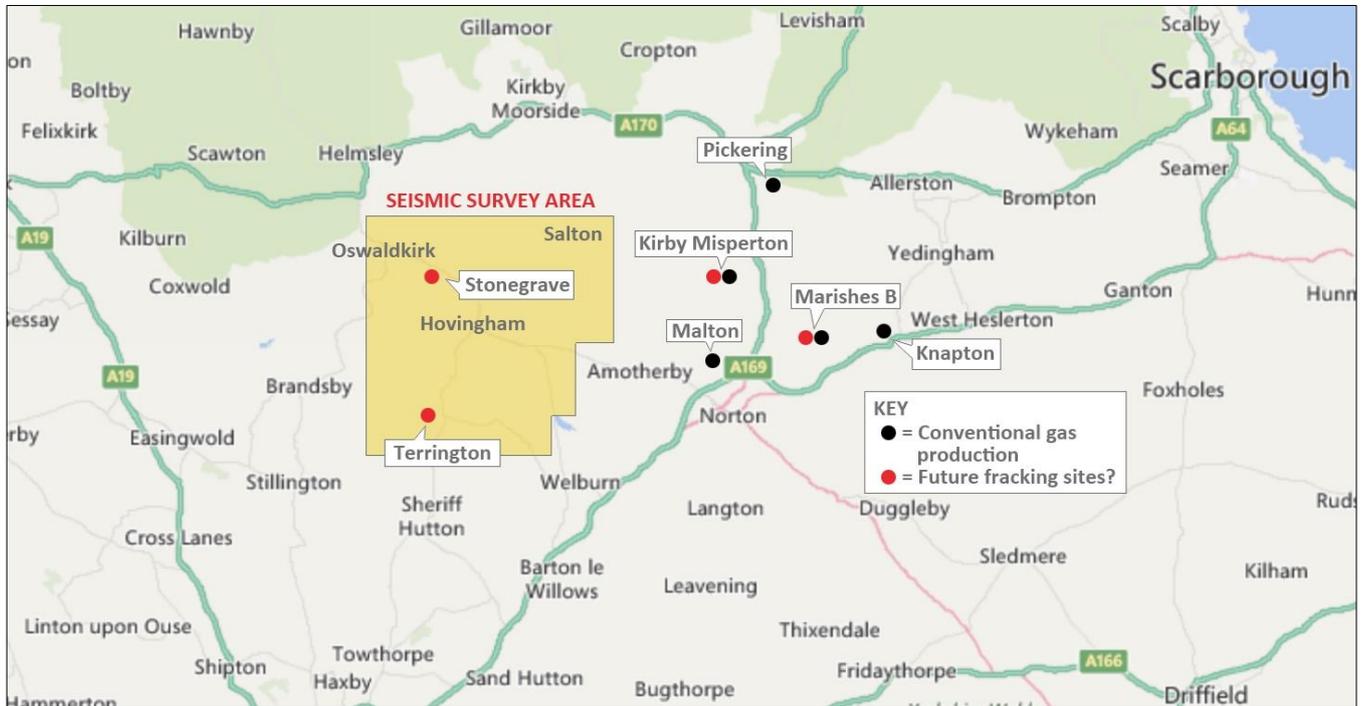


# GAS EXPLORATION IN RYEDALE – FRACKING BY STEALTH?

**Conventional gas** has been produced in Ryedale about 20 years, and there are currently well-sites at Pickering, Kirby Misperton, Malton and Marishes. The gas that is produced at these wells is then transported to Knapton Generating Station via underground pipelines. However, gas production in North Yorkshire may be about to change forever. If **fracking** comes to Ryedale, life in this beautiful part of the world will never be the same again.



**So what evidence do you have that fracking is coming to Ryedale?**

**A 3D seismic survey** was carried out in Ryedale last summer by a company called **TESLA**, who were conducting the survey on behalf of a company called **Third Energy**. The survey began at the beginning of June and lasted about two months. The survey was carried out in the countryside around the villages of **Stonegrave, Terrington, Brawby, Nunnington, Swinton, Hovingham, Slingsby and Coulton**, and included a large proportion of the Castle Howard Estate. The seismic survey area is shown in **yellow** on the map above.

The aim of the survey was to map the underlying rock strata in detail. It has already been established that Ryedale sits upon a large band of **Bowland shale**, which stretches all the way across the north of England. According to TESLA's covering letter in the application, the survey was "aimed at defining the deep geological structural configuration" of the area, which would include the shale rock that lies about 3,500m below the surface. The gas reserves trapped in the Bowland shale can only be exploited by **fracking**.

**Third Energy say that they're only looking for conventional gas in Ryedale. Aren't you being a bit alarmist?**

We accept that Third Energy are also interested in producing more conventional gas in Ryedale, and we expect them to continue doing so. However, Third Energy have a **government licence** to search for shale gas and we would be very surprised if they are not interested in fracking as well.

Third Energy are financed by **Barclays Natural Resource Investments**, which is part of **Barclays Bank**. Interestingly, Third Energy's chief financial officer, David Robotom, is also chairman of the **UK Onshore Operators Group (UKOOG)**, a representative body for the UK onshore oil and gas industry that actively promotes fracking and other related unconventional gas technologies.

However, what really makes us doubt Third Energy's claims that they are not interested in fracking shale gas under Ryedale is what's been going on at their conventional gas well-site at **Kirby Misperton**.



## OK, so what's been happening at Kirby Misperton?

A **planning application** was submitted in October 2012 to drill two new wells adjacent to their existing conventional site at Kirby Misperton. However, while the first well (which was drilled earlier this year) targeted conventional gas at a depth of about 4,000 ft, the second well – referred to as **Kirby Misperton Deep** – drilled down much deeper than originally specified on the original planning application. When asked about this, Third Energy said that they weren't interested in shale gas, and claimed that the drilling target at Kirby Misperton was simply conventional gas.

However, when a North Yorkshire County Council **planning compliance officer** visited the site, Third Energy admitted that they had in fact drilled into the Bowland shale and were already analysing the data they were receiving. They were then required to submit a **revised planning application** to the County Council, asking for permission to drill down to the depth that they had already investigated (yes, apparently they are allowed to do that).



Drilling rig at Kirby Misperton

## OK, I admit that does sound a bit suspicious. What happened next?

Third Energy's chief financial officer was reported in the **Daily Telegraph** (30/11/2013) that if the test results at Kirby Misperton were encouraging, they would seek to drill three or four more **shale gas exploratory wells** "as soon as possible" and that fracking to test the gas flows was "one of a number of options".

This was followed by a **screening opinion** – which is a request to the planning authority aimed at establishing whether an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) would be required for a full planning application – for two more shale gas exploratory wells that would explore the Bowland shale at approximately 3,500 m. We assume they are waiting till they analyse the results of the survey before putting in a full planning application to do more **test drillings** at Kirby Misperton – which, if successful, can only logically lead to an application to begin **fracking**.

## I see what you're getting at. Are there any other screening opinions we should be worried about?

Yes, indeed there are. There's one for **Marishes B**, where conventional gas is currently produced. This screening opinion is proposing to drill two more boreholes to extract more conventional gas at a depth of 1,400-1,700m. However, the application also goes on to say that "Drilling will also target the deeper tight carboniferous and **Bowland shale** at approximately **3500m** for exploratory purposes. Production will be subject to a separate application if exploratory drilling provides **positive results**." By 'production' they can only mean fracking.

## Hmm, I see why you call it 'fracking by stealth'. How many more of these do you know of?



We also know that screening opinions were submitted last year for exploration boreholes near **Stonegrave** and **Terrington**, both within the **Howardian Hills** Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). Both of these applications would be for two boreholes. In the documentation for both applications, the depth of the first well is stated (5,199ft in Stonegrave, 2,000m in Terrington), which is consistent with drilling for conventional gas deposits. However, the depth of the second borehole is not stated and is "**still under review**".

## But aren't National Parks and AONBs protected from fracking by law?

No, they aren't. Although the Government announced on 28<sup>th</sup> July that fracking will only be allowed in National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty in "**exceptional circumstances**", they have yet to define what these circumstances might be.

The announcement also stated that fracking would still be allowed in these areas if they were deemed to be "**in the national interest**" – again with no clarification on how this would be defined. Given that the Government's view is that all fracking in the UK is in the national interest, this feels like no protection at all. What is clear, therefore, is that fracking *can* still take place in these 'protected' areas. **You have been warned ...**

