



Protesters are campaigning against exploratory fracking at Llantrithyd, Vale of Glamorgan

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Peter Bolter

Fracking 'could be a disaster for farming'

FRACKING in Wales could be disastrous for farmland and could poison natural water courses, it was claimed today.

John Fairfax, who farms the 100-acre Wren's Castle Farm in Llantrithyd, near Cowbridge in the Vale of Glamorgan, South Wales, has been a farmer on the land for 70 years.

Now semi-retired, he fears that exploratory fracking has the potential to pollute the natural watercourses on his land and that of his neighbours.

Mr Fairfax said: "Fracking breaks the substructure of rock to get gas out of the ground."

The local community has been told that there has been an application to the Vale of Glamorgan Council (by Coastal Oil and Gas Ltd) for up to 10 boreholes 1,000-feet-deep to try to extract gas in the village and if successful that fracking could start here. For all we know, the successful application could be in our community's direction and on our land. We have no control over this and

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feel that there are no safeguards in place.

"Fracking is a threat to our whole valley because there are gases released in the process that could potentially pollute our natural streams and watercourses that our animals drink.

"I don't see why they can't focus on fracking and alternative energy on industrial land and save farmland for much-needed food production.

"Farmers and residents are extremely angry.

"A recent planning decision by the Vale of Glamorgan Planning Committee has agreed that exploration for shale gas can take place within a mile of St Illtyd's church and the ancient monument of Llantrithyd Place and its gardens.

"A residents' association has been formed to fight this decision, which could decimate the beauty and tran-

quility of this part of the vale.

"This escarpment is extremely rich in wildlife and is mostly tree covered. Many beautiful and clear springs are found in the area.

"This same water is a source for much of the river Nant Llantrithyd which joins the River Thaw some four miles south. Both valleys combine below Flemingston where the true extent of these valleys can be seen.

"There must be 5000 sheep, 100 horses and numerous herds of cattle, all relying on this water to live.

"There is every possibility that should fracking take place, this water will be grossly contaminated and no good for humans, fish or animals."

Resident Marc Howell said: "Just a few hundred metres from the proposed drilling site lies the Llantrithyd Conservation Area, set up in 1973 to preserve "the character or appearance" of an area of special architectural or historic interest. Fracking is an industrial process which will change all that."

Gerwyn Williams, managing director of Coastal Oil and Gas, which has permission to drill at Llantrithyd and elsewhere in South Wales, said: "We have to make a corporate decision on where to drill first. We have the permits and a legal right to drill."

Gareth Clubb, the director of Friends of the Earth Cymru - which has urged the Welsh Government to halt the fracking industry - said: "Wales is rightly famed for our high quality natural environment. Fracking and clean water just don't mix. The Welsh Government could halt the fracking industry in Wales any time it wanted because it has full control over planning laws for onshore oil and gas."

A Welsh Government spokesperson said: "The process of granting UK exploration licenses, well consents and field development consents for unconventional gas are matters for the UK Government. Our planning policy advocates a precautionary approach for mineral development, which includes unconventional gas."