



Department for

Infrastructure

An Roinn

Bonneagair

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**From the office of the Minister for Infrastructure
Nichola Mallon MLA**

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Your reference:
Our reference: CORR-2782-2020
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Dear Mr Downey

LICENCES FOR FRACKING AND EXPLORATION AND EXTRACTION OF FOSSIL FUELS

Thank you for your letter of 19 October 2020 regarding Belfast City Council's motion on a Moratorium on Licences for Fracking and Exploration and Extraction of Fossil Fuels.

Like the Council I also recognise there is a climate emergency and am continually looking at what I, as Infrastructure Minister, can do to address it. As you may be aware, on 5 October I announced my intention to bring forward a package of changes to permitted development rights (PDR), including the removal of PDR for petroleum (oil and gas) exploration. I will be bringing the proposals to the Infrastructure Committee for scrutiny in the coming weeks.

My Department also has responsibility for regional planning policy, including the Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS) provisions that *"there should be a presumption against the exploitation of unconventional hydrocarbon extraction until there is sufficient and robust evidence on all environmental impacts."* My position on this issue is unchanged from my predecessors and I consider that this remains an appropriate precautionary approach.

It is important to note that any proposals for development involving unconventional hydrocarbon extraction are likely to be determined by my Department as regionally significant development. Such proposals would be assessed on their individual merits, taking account of the SPPS, the relevant Local Development Plan (LDP), the views of statutory consultees and all other material planning considerations, including health

and environmental impacts. There are currently no such planning applications before my Department for consideration.

The issuing of exploratory licences is a matter for the Department for the Economy.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'N. Mallon', written in a cursive style.

NICHOLA MALLON MLA
Minister for Infrastructure