

for fiscal discipline. But they also need to be reminded of how the Conservatives have made this a better country, and how they will continue to do so. That is a task which the Prime Minister's interview with us today, and the policies contained within it, will make a great deal easier.

Let the drilling begin

An attempt to halt fracking in Britain failed in the Commons last night, though only after some last-minute footwork by the Government to head off defeat. An amendment to the Infrastructure Bill, which contains provisions to make the extraction of shale gas and oil easier and commercially viable, would have imposed a moratorium on the process for up to 30 months. It was heavily beaten after Labour abstained having forced ministers to agree to tougher regulation. Had the vote been passed it might have sounded the death knell for fracking before it had even got off the ground.

In the event, the Government offered a series of concessions to avoid defeat. These included an outright ban on fracking in national parks and areas of outstanding natural beauty where it previously would have been allowed only in "exceptional circumstances". While this sounds like a good idea, some of our biggest shale reserves are thought to be in protected areas such as the South Downs and the North York Moors. Once the Government starts to make exceptions, opponents just outside such areas will demand to know why they cannot be included.

The anti-fracking lobby will take heart from such backtracking to pursue their cause. They will also have been emboldened by a report from the Commons environmental audit committee which stated that fracking was incompatible with the UK's low-carbon commitment, a questionable assertion that is not supported by peer-reviewed scientific research.

The Coalition Government has put in place a robust regulatory regime for shale extraction and the time has now come to get fracking. The country will simply not understand it if our parliamentarians continue to stand in the way of the opportunities it provides to underpin our energy security.
