

LARBERT, STENHOUSEMUIR & TORWOOD COMMUNITY COUNCIL (LSTCC) UOG COMMUNITY DISCUSSION

- **Group:** The Community Council and residents of Larbert, Stenhousemuir and Torwood.
- **Date of meeting:** Monday 8th May 2017, 7:30-9:30pm.
- **Location address / postcode:** Larbert Old Church Halls, Denny Road, Larbert, FK5 3AG.
- **Number of attendees:** 40.

(i) UOG Community Discussion Process

1. The consultation began with a 30-minute introduction for residents following information slides set out in Scottish Government's Discussion Pack for large groups, and was introduced by Roland Playle from the Community Chartering Network (CCN) and presented by Andy Lippok from Connecting Scotland (CS).
2. The presentation was followed by 70 minutes of two open circle discussions, one led by Roland Playle (CCN) with support from Gordon Carmichael (CS) and the other led by Andy Lippok (CS) with support from May East, and split roughly equally between benefits and risks of UOG. Both groups were given the opportunity to post notes on benefits and separately, on risks, on a flip chart which were then put together for further discussion
3. Outcomes were written up by the facilitators. [These were first verified for accuracy with councillors and participants, and then broadcast for residents who may have been unable to attend].
4. It should be noted that Larbert Stenhousemuir & Torwood Community Council was heavily involved in the planning application by Dart Energy. A representative of the Community Council gave evidence at the hearing. Prior to the Hearing, the Community Council conducted a number of meetings with residents and has been latterly actively engaged with INEOS to hear their proposals. Accordingly, both the Community Council and the residents have a good level of understanding of what is proposed and have a high level of appreciation of the process proposed.
5. The consultation meeting was publicised through posters placed on notice boards and key public places, on the Community Council's website, through social media channels (Facebook, Twitter and Instagram) and via an e-mail to the Community Council's distribution list.

(ii) Outcomes.

1. Overall, and in light of the available evidence, what do you think would be the main benefits, if any, of an unconventional oil and gas industry in Scotland?

The main potential benefits put forward by residents, or emerging in discussion were:

- **No benefits.** Around 62% participating residents who completed and placed post-its on a sheet perceived no potential benefits of UOG whatsoever to the community of Larbert, Stenhousemuir and Torwood, but when asked for a show of hands at the Q & A session at the end of the meeting this was nearer 80%. Having discussed the points raised, 100% of residents felt risks outweighed benefits (this figure does not include 2 participants who abstained from voting at all). Benefits such as possible

local employment and reduction on dependency of imported UOG were thought to be very marginal and short lived as recorded below.

- **Jobs.** Proposed by around a quarter of the participants, the potential benefit most mentioned was the possibility of new local jobs. In discussion, however, it was agreed this was unlikely to be significant, given the small figures predicted for the country as a whole in the Scottish Government research on UOG's economic impacts. It was felt that most of the more technically qualified and skilled jobs would be filled by people from beyond the 'local' area. It was considered that those jobs which could arise would not provide sustainable local employment, but would rather be short-term manual and transport related jobs associated with servicing the initial drilling stage of the industry. It was also questioned as to the definition of 'local', was it within a 5 or 50-mile radius of each pad? The understanding that UOG extraction was a highly technical process caused doubt as to whether specialists would be brought in from afar and that the majority of local jobs were only those that were manual or transport related. Doubts were raised as to whether there would be local training for people due to the short-term nature of the extraction process. It was also felt that UOG could well impact negatively on local jobs, for example, those associated with farming and others leaving due to UOG commencing. In conclusion, the general agreement was reached that there would be no meaningful or desirable impact of UOG on local employment, and it was dismissed as a potential benefit.
- Due to the national circumstances with INEOS in control of the Grangemouth refinery, it was felt that too much influence lay with that company. They talked of INEOS attempting to 'bribe' the community in the past with proposed payments to allow the planning application to proceed once lodged and this led to a high level of mistrust among participants. This past experience led many to believe that the potential benefits in jobs would not be focussed on local level development but led by the profit-making potential of a single company that held that held economics paramount and had little concern for the community.
- **Energy Security.** Three residents proposed that UOG could possibly reduce Scotland's dependency on overseas gas and that this was a potential benefit. In discussion, however, it was felt that this would be somewhat short-term and there was no substantive information on how much and for how long. In conclusion, it was generally agreed that neither the extracted UOG nor the profit would be likely to stay in Scotland, and that the additional energy source created from UOG would be used for production purposes serving industries, and therefore be of no direct benefit to the local community. On this basis, energy security was a weak argument
- **Economic Benefits.** Although the potential economic benefit of UOG was tentatively proposed on 3 post-its, these were based on hopes of some community funding from the industry but people were distinctly reticent, and then heavily caveated them during the discussions. Concerns were raised as to whether the economic benefit would be realised and indeed would be outweighed substantially by the dis-benefits and costs associated with the potential risks and impacts identified, particularly should these be manifested in reality, e.g. road and infrastructure repairs, dealing with safety incidents and accidents, and decommissioning, health costs to the NHS. It was felt that the potential costs to the NHS had not been sufficiently researched and calculated and that this could also be an 'unseen cost' due to the lack of baseline data available in a new industry. The potential fall in property prices were discussed due to the negative impact of the proximity of houses to drilling pads and the fact that the original planning application had proposed drilling beneath houses, causing concerns for structural integrity. Many were sure that property insurance companies

were unwilling to insure against damages and accidents caused by the UOG industry, comparing rises in insurance costs seen in flood-prone areas. These were seen as local economic dis-benefits.

- Detriments to the renewables industry were also discussed as a result of developing another fossil-fuel-based industry instead of focussing national attention on renewables. There would be hidden economic dis-benefits to sustainable development associated with the industrialisation of the countryside, such as impacts on farming and tourism. The point was made that 0.1% of GDP compared poorly with the likes of other companies and industries, Tesco as an example! Significant attention was given to the view that the economic benefits would largely be gained by INEOS, a private company owned by a single person. The level of mistrust felt by most as mentioned above raised strong doubts that this would benefit the community.
- It was noted that the Scottish Government research found that the volumes of natural gas found in Scotland would not have any effect on global gas prices and that there would also be no effect on energy costs for households.

2. Overall, and in light of the available evidence, what do you think would be the main risks or challenges, if any, of an unconventional oil and gas industry in Scotland?

The main potential risks and challenges put forward by residents, or which emerged in discussion were:

- **Impacts on Mental and Physical Health.** The foremost risk for the majority of residents was the potential health risks associated with having the UOG industry in close proximity to houses. It was generally agreed that the range of ways in which local extraction could affect public health increased the probability of impacts. Concerns were expressed regarding the direct effects of air and water borne chemicals associated with the industry, including known and unknown carcinogens and endocrine disruptors. Particular worries were raised about the pollution of air, water and land from the likes of Dioxins, Benzene and Methane, and concoctions of chemicals used by UOG activity, plus the potential release of naturally occurring radio-active material during drilling and in the event of gas pressure venting to the atmosphere during production.

Since each drill site will require its own unique concoction of chemicals and materials and the required concoction can only be determined once drilling has commenced to a significant extent, there was a concern about how any controls could be effected once the process had been started. Full up-front disclosure of all the chemicals and materials to be considered for use ought to be a minimum fundamental pre-requisite prior to any consideration for permission being granted. Residents were aware that there were already emerging reports of health problems in the USA and Australia where UOG was being undertaken. It was felt the potential for exposure would be exacerbated by intensive extraction, the unique geological context, and 'self-regulating' operators motivated by short-term profit.

In addition, residents talked about the intangible, yet potentially significant, impacts that industrialisation, traffic and noise could have on their health. For example, they felt it would mean they might avoid using the local countryside for physical activity such as walking and cycling, and foresaw impacts from various and numerous sources of frustration worry and stress on the mental health of individuals and the wider community. In summary, it was unanimously agreed that it was an unacceptable level of risk which residents were being asked to gamble upon.

Considerable concerns were raised about the absence of any baseline data upon which the regulatory bodies could be relied to provide a regime for effective, strict and coherent monitoring and control when required throughout the extensive lifecycle of the industry including the years well beyond decommissioning and re-instatement phases.

The meeting was extremely concerned that although the Scottish Government had requested a rigorous and robust assessment of the available evidence on the health impacts, the Expert Panel found that there was inadequate evidence available to draw conclusions on the risk to health. That position is totally unacceptable and cannot be allowed to continue

- **Impacts of Traffic, Noise and Infrastructure.** Residents rejected the conclusion of the research commissioned by the Scottish Government that there would be no noticeable impact of UOG traffic at a regional level – as reported in the data an additional truck every 3 minutes day and night would be noticeable on already congested roads network. A substantial majority were of the view that the movement of heavy traffic through the vicinity and on country roads would have significant impacts on the community's health, wellbeing and economy. Issues included the disturbance or dangers for cyclists, horse riders, or residents crossing roads, with particular concerns raised for children. Residents felt there would be significant dirt deposits and surface damage inflicted onto both minor and major roads and the infrastructure which lay beneath them, where the cost for clean-up and repairs would be borne by the taxpayer. Above all, it was generally felt that continuous heavy traffic with associated exhaust emissions, and the noise and light pollution from the drilling pads, would impact adversely on the stress levels and health of the community. . It was felt that the far-reaching effects had not been properly addressed in the independent research. Mention was also made of the significant adverse impact on the already heavily congested local road and rail network were a major incident or accident to occur.
- **Environmental and Ecological Impacts.** Many residents expressed genuine concerns about the potentially significant risks and impacts of this industry on the local natural environment, and there seemed to be a lack of evidence and few guarantees given about how the environment would be protected. They were well aware of the early and continually emerging reports from around the globe where UOG was being undertaken and these were not encouraging. A further concern was the potential cumulative impact from all the similar industries already located in the area. The increase of greenhouse gases would appear to be unacceptable particularly when Scotland has ambitious targets to reduce them.
- **Risks associated with the hydro-geological context.** Many residents felt that extensive mining and faulting in the area (notably the major Campsie Fault) represented a multitude of potential pathways for fugitive chemicals and gases to contaminate the environment, and an earthquake risk. Again, mention was made that modern UOG was a somewhat experimental industry being undertaken in an extensive sub-surface geology that unlike in the typical North Sea oil and gas deposits is completely uncontrollable. It was recognised that drilling had been carried out around Airth for many years but only in small pockets and not to the extent now proposed. Concerns were heightened by the fact that the complexity of the local geological context was further complicated due to historical coal mining in the area and its risks exacerbated due to the extensiveness of the local water table. If something were to go dramatically wrong, who fixes it and who pays the costs and who incurs the price? For the same reason, some suspected historical hydrocarbon extraction in the area may have already impacted negatively on local health, and

residents didn't want to see this repeated. While the view was expressed that it may be possible to mitigate hydro-geological risks with rigorous modelling and monitoring, and the application of best practice, no-one had any faith that this would actually be the case.

- **Ineffective Regulation and Clean-up.** One of the principal discussion themes was concern about the capability of multiple and somewhat un-coordinated and reactive regulators and regime to cope with the industry and protect the community. In a climate of cuts to public spending, residents had little faith in the regulators, believing them to be under-resourced, lacking independent and suitable expertise, and that they had been "called out too many times" and "were evidently struggling with what they do have". The general view was that regulators would farm out their responsibility, leaving the industry to be essentially self-regulating.

There was general mistrust for the profit-motivated oil and gas industry, which has and would play on these weaknesses in the regulatory system. Moreover, it was generally felt that given the number of sources of risk associated with a novel intensive industry in a novel 'real-world' and densely-populated context, the overall probability of harm was high, or in the words of several residents "*how can they regulate the unknown*". Some cited evidence of such occurrences associated with the UOG industry elsewhere in the USA and Australia. The need for rigorous local and national base line measures and monitoring was deemed to be essential before anything was started.

Whilst monitoring of the industry in progress was essential it was more critical to determine and outline in advance a strong regime of prevention and risk mitigation. As was the effective regulation of end-to-end processes to ensure the community would be properly covered for damage to property and environment, and wouldn't be left footing the bill after an operator had left, gone bankrupt or had wriggled out of their contractual obligations. It was generally felt that this needed hard requirements (e.g. bonds, insurance), and close scrutiny and regulation by Government, and involvement by communities to ensure responsibilities for clean-up were being properly met on the ground.

It was suggested that local monitoring might represent employment or training opportunities, but that this was unlikely to happen due to the degree of specialism the job may require. If the insurance industry feels that the risks are too high for them to provide insurance to operators and to local citizens, then that is a key factor in the consideration whether to grant permission for UOG to proceed. Members of the farming community in attendance advised that according to the NFU no insurers will provide insurance cover for the well-heads, and many residents felt that this tells its own story; "if insurers don't want to insure against it, surely this is the best measure we have if something is safe or not", was the comment of one which many agreed with.

- **Miscellaneous unknowns.** Brief mentions were made of the following: decommissioning costs and lack of effective guarantees that this would be undertaken fully and effectively; the SG studies were inadequate and lacking detail in many areas hence the plethora of questions and issues noted; uncertainty around the timing and impact of Brexit meant that the potential to mitigate risks were aggravated; there were simply far too many unknowns to take a risk on proceeding and the potential of the risk was catastrophic or too large to be risked.

3. If you have any other comments on the issues as discussed in this consultation, please provide them here:

This section forms the main substance of our consultation and revolves around the *OUR MESSAGE TO GOVERNMENT* questions (or what we think the Scottish Government need to take into account when considering the future of unconventional oil and gas development in Scotland).

There is one main message or question to the Scottish Government which arose from our consultation:

Our community rejects any proposal for the UOG industry to operate in our area. We have carefully considered and weighed up the potential impacts of a UOG industry, and have concluded the risks far outweigh the benefits both to our community and the nation as a whole. We think the proposed benefits for Scottish communities are negligible, short-term and untrustworthy, and the potential risks of hosting an intensive industry in some of the most densely-populated areas of Scotland, substantial and unacceptable. We have no trust in an extractive industry with a short-term profit motive, and we do not believe the benefits they promise will be forthcoming or that they will take responsibility for their impacts. We have little faith in the capacity of regulators or planning authorities to control a nationwide industry in the interests of public and environmental safety, and think operators will take advantage of this to enhance their profits at our risk.

We also have good reason to believe there are inherent and uncontrollable impacts to human and ecological health associated with the industry, which may be exacerbated by the local hydro-geological context and the intensive nature of UOG industrialisation. We feel that the economic benefits it is proposed UOG may represent, will be offset by hidden costs to the taxpayer such as those associated with subsidies, water supply, road repairs, regulation and clean-up.

We also believe related time and money would be better invested in developing a genuinely sustainable economy, and that UOG short-termism will divert attention and money from necessary transitional strategy and Scotland's leadership in this area. By saying no to UOG now, we will be seen to be upholding that vision and it will provide greater motivation for us to innovate towards a sustainable future where we may not need the gas at all. By saying yes to UOG now, we believe at best this will drive a short-term boom, where the bust may leave our community and the nation worse off than it is now.

In conclusion, through discussion we have agreed that we are not prepared to pass the burden of cumulative risk of UOG to the life of our community, particularly for minimal or no benefit. On this basis, we have reached a position of 100% consensus that we should refuse the proposal for UOG extraction in our community council area.