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Cc: Bill Acraman <bill.acraman@westsussex.gov.uk>

Subject: email re application to test for oil at Balcombe - Planning Committee Meeting March 2nd

Dear Councillors

With respect to the application WSCC/045/20 to test for oil in Balcombe (scheduled for March 2nd Planning Committee Meeting).

Balcombe has been fighting this since 2012 (2013 was the summer of the big protests) and it has caused a great deal of stress on our village.

Recent changes in the legislation has given AONBs more protection (Policies M7a and M13 of the West Sussex Mineral Plan.)

To our great relief in 2020 the Planning Officer recommended refusal for the following reason:
"The proposed development would represent major development in the High Weald Area of

Outstanding Natural Beauty, for which there are no exceptional circumstances, and which is not in the public interest. There are alternative sources of hydrocarbon supply, both indigenous and imported, to meet the national need, there would be minimal benefit to the local economy from the development, and there is scope for meeting the need in some other way, outside of nationally designated landscapes. It would therefore be contrary to Policies M7a and M13 of the West Sussex Joint Local Minerals Plan (2018) and paragraphs 170 and 172 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2019).”

As a result Angus withdrew their application.

Angus have since resubmitted (shortening the application from 3 to 1 year).

We learnt last week that the Planning Officer has now changed his recommendation to approval stating there are exceptional circumstances and it is in the public interest for the application to be permitted.

We believe the Planning Officer’s original recommendation should still stand and that there are no exceptional circumstances that should allow this to go ahead in an AONB, and this is not in the public interest.

The Planning Officers has given as his exceptional circumstances

1. Need for the Development

The Planning Officer is arguing there is a national need for oil and Balcombe is the best place for an oil well in this PEDL license (244) which stretches from Cowfold in the south west and Balcombe in the north east.

We say:

- The UK needs oil but a small well in Sussex will not contribute to energy security. Angus suggests the site will produce about 300 barrels a day; To put it into context, the total oil production in the UK in 2018 was around 1 million barrels of oil a day, most of which is from the North Sea.
- Having a PEDL license gives an operator exclusive right to explore; it does not give them the right to explore, that is dependent upon planning and environmental permitting.
- Since PEDL 244 was issued in 2008 legislation has passed which give much greater protection to AONBs.
- Many PEDL licenses are relinquished without being used. It is common practice. Of the 349 PEDL licenses awarded since 1996, 80% have been relinquished.
- There is an existing producing well 9 miles away at Horse Hill in the same geology. Angus used to own a portion of this. They decided to sell it which was a commercial decision on their part.
- The relevant planning question is what alternatives sources are there for meeting the need for energy. There are many: these include North Sea, Wytch Farm, Rampion Wind

Farm, WSCC Solar Farm.

2. Government Guidance

The latest Government White Paper issued in December quoted by the Planning Officer states there is still a need for domestic oil. However domestic oil in this White Paper refers to North Sea Oil and Wytch Farm not small onshore wells. So this is not relevant.

3. Socio-Economic Benefits

The Planning Officer has accepted a figure of £800,00 as the local economic benefit. We think it would be closer to £80,000. There may be some truck drivers hired locally but the main expenditure will be on specialized equipment and labour brought in from outside the South of England. We do not believe there will be any social or economic benefit from this oil well. It will instead to socio-economic damage.

I have also been asked to send you a link to a letter to the Argus published this week from one of our local Mums.

<https://www.theargus.co.uk/news/19114105.hgvs-will-rumbling-balcombe-year/>

Kind Regards

Sue Taylor

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