

## Text of CPRE Sussex email to members of West Sussex County Council's Planning Scrutiny Committee

I am writing to you as members of the Planning Scrutiny Committee on behalf of CPRE Sussex, the Sussex countryside charity, to urge you to reject tomorrow Angus Energy's application to extend the lapsed exploratory testing period for a further period that, as it stands, could unreasonably extend the decade-long uncertainty for Balcombe residents for another 4 years or more.

WSSC has acknowledged that we face a climate emergency, and this application provides an opportunity to give action to those words. Climate change is unarguably the greatest long term challenge that the world faces, and local planning authorities have a vital role to play in its control. The Climate Change Commission has recently pointed out that local authorities potentially influence around a third of UK greenhouse gas emissions, and that their role is crucial in delivering the nation's commitment to net zero carbon emissions through the use of their planning powers - see See <https://www.theccc.org.uk/publication/local-authorities-and-the-sixth-carbon-budget>.

This application, if given the go ahead, would represent another example of a council over-valuing illusionary economic benefits of onshore fossil fuel exploitation at the expense of our climate - in a similar way to Cumbria Council's very controversial recent (and to be revisited) decision to approve a new coal mine.

The NPPF (para 148) requires that councils should use their planning powers "*to help to shape places in ways that contribute to radical reductions in greenhouse gas emissions*", and it would be irrational for climate change not to be a material factor in this decision. Yet your officer's report makes no mention of para 148 at all. Your planning powers provide you with the discretion to give as much, or more weight, to greenhouse gas emission reduction as to the supposed benefits of hydrocarbon extraction, and they do not preclude you from taking account of the wider ramifications of the burning of fossil fuel that would be extracted from the Balcombe well. Whilst you are not invited to consider climate change implications, you are asked to place great weight on what is, in reality, an illusory argument that future oil production at Balcombe would protect the UK's energy security. That supposed benefit is in fact bogus because the UK has no oil fuelled power stations, and the Government itself accepts that there is no material risk of an oil supply shortage: the Statutory Security of Supply Report 2019 produced by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and its quango, the Oil and Gas Authority in its UK Oil and Gas Reserves and Resources as at the end of 2019 report ([https://www.ogauthority.co.uk/media/6681/uk\\_oil-gas-rr\\_2020.pdf](https://www.ogauthority.co.uk/media/6681/uk_oil-gas-rr_2020.pdf)) both conclude that the UK has "*sufficient capacity to meet demand, as well as respond to supply shocks*"

A decision to approve this application would also be perverse in terms of the local impact of what is accepted as major development on the supposedly protected High Weald AONB. There are no landscape related differences in the latest application for essentially the same works that would justify the different conclusion from that of your officer in relation to last year's withdrawn application. We do not see how the intention to install a new impermeable membrane makes a material difference to landscape impact, and the shorter working schedule has not altered your officer's view that the development will still be a major one for NPPF para 172 purposes. So there is no objective justification for a different conclusion than that reached last year.

For these reasons, as well as the local environmental impacts that so concern Balcombe's residents, we ask you to show the necessary leadership by turning down this application.

If, despite this plea, you were to vote for its approval, we would urge you to impose a condition not only that the approved works be completed within 12 months of the development being commenced, but also that the development must be commenced in a much shorter time frame than the usual 3 years - which could otherwise extend the unfair uncertainty for the community for another 4 years.