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PRESS RELEASE: Dismay over Balcombe High Court decision

Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty remains under threat from shale oil drilling.

Residents in Balcombe face another three years of disruption after a High Court bid to overturn planning permission for oil exploration in the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) failed.

Frack Free Balcombe Residents Association asked the court to revoke Angus Energy's permission for oil exploration, granted at appeal earlier this year.

However, the Honourable Mrs Justice Lieven dismissed residents' six legal arguments.

She concluded the harms of hydrocarbon extraction, and the consideration of other sites, were not relevant in the case of an application for exploration.

However, these issues would be "likely to be highly relevant if there is ever a production application".

CPRE Sussex director Paul Steedman said: "This decision is yet another blow for residents who have spent more than a decade fighting against commercial exploitation of potential shale oil reserves beneath the AONB. Oil exploration in Sussex has no public benefit and can only harm this unique and beautiful landscape."

West Sussex County Council refused Angus Energy permission to do more testing for shale oil reserves in the High Weald AONB in 2021.

However, in February this decision was overturned by a Planning Inspector.

Mr Steedman said: "It is clear planning policy needs tightening so it reflects the latest climate change advice and the need to keep fossil fuels in the ground. We will continue to support Frack Free Balcombe and all residents in their fight against these totally inappropriate plans."

CPRE Sussex opposes oil exploration and exploitation applications in Sussex in all their unconventional fracking and acidising guises.

The charity is calling for tougher regulation to reflect the incompatibility of onshore fossil fuel exploitation with the drive for cleaner energy, reduced climate change and an improved environment.

Find out more about what CPRE Sussex is doing to fight fracking at cpresussex.org.uk/what-we-care-about/fracking

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For press inquiries and interview opportunities contact sheena.journalism@gmail.com.

Notes for editors:

About CPRE Sussex

CPRE Sussex is shaping a greener future for Sussex. Our priorities are:

- Beautiful landscapes, rich in nature and greener towns and cities
- Countryside and green spaces which are accessible to all, enriching lives and health
- Sustainable development for thriving communities
- Effective responses to the climate emergency

We engage with decision makers, influencing them and challenging them to protect the Sussex countryside and green spaces. We inform on environmental issues and empower individuals and communities with robust evidence to defend and enhance the green spaces they love. We believe in collaborating with others to ensure a greener future for our county. We research and provide advice on planning issues. Together we can shape a greener future for Sussex.