

Wiltshire Council

Council

23 February 2015

Public Questions

From Ms Krystyne Freeman

To Councillor Toby Sturgis, Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning, Development Management, Strategic Housing, Operational Property and Waste

Question (P16/04)

With regard to the recent granting of PEDL(Petroleum Exploration and Development Licence) licences in Wiltshire

As residents of Wiltshire, we are all aware that unusually our county contains over 300 square miles of MOD training grounds which are active for an average of 340 days per annum.

MOD training activity involves many heavy impacts from mortars, rockets, mines and heavy artillery. Consequently, the chalklands and surrounding areas are already subject to primary and secondary seismic waves and geological disturbances that are traceable both above and below ground. These surface and underground waves generally possess robust spatial coherence and travel vast distances. Chalkland is particularly easy for seismic waves to travel through. Maintenance & repairs to water supply pipes & couplings feeding farms & homes across the Plains are already a constant & expensive activity.

The consequences of existing military activity and new drilling/explosive fracking activity acting together are unknown. The MOD act within strict safety parameters but even they are subject to miscalculations. (Patney, Devizes. 2014).

Given that potential PEDL sites (and their chemical and drilling tools) fall within this area and will therefore be affected by these regular seismic disturbances, **what monitoring guarantees can WC give to its residents regarding seismic security given that there is no precedent in such a scenario globally, let alone nationally?**

Response

The award is for a Petroleum Exploration and Development License (PEDLs) that covers any hydrocarbon. The licenses for these blocks will contain conditions that prohibits all or specific activities in parts of the block to protect ecological sites. The award of a PEDL does not of itself give permission for operations to begin. The necessary planning and regulatory consents will be required before development can take place. All proposals will be scrutinised by the Environment Agency, and by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE).

The licenses do not grant planning permission which is the role of Wiltshire Council, as Mineral Planning Authority, or Government should an application be called in. Wiltshire Council has not received a planning application to date.

Wiltshire Council cannot comment on the potential impact of hypothesised seismic effects on a site, since no planning application has yet been received.

In the event that a planning application is received, Wiltshire Council will ensure all statutory authorities are consulted including the MoD if appropriate and if there is a requirement that the developer undertakes any form of monitoring, any planning permission granted would contain a condition to cover this.

Further information and guidance on PEDL licensing can be found here- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/about-shale-gas-and-hydraulic-fracturing-fracking/developing-shale-oil-and-gas-in-the-uk>.

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From Mrs Philippa Clarke

To Councillor Toby Sturgis, Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning, Development Management, Strategic Housing, Operational Property and Waste

Question (P16/05)

I would like to ask the following question please, in respect of the licences granted for exploration of coal bed methane in this area:

The evidence, coming from existing explorations in America and Australia, indicates serious dangers to health. Known carcinogens are used in the process, which can enter the drinking water causing sensory, respiratory and neurological damage. Under the Council's Duty of Care, how can the Council protect the health of the population of Wiltshire if the proposed exploration and subsequent mining for coal bed methane is allowed to proceed?

Response

In regard to the award for a Petroleum Exploration and Development License (PEDLs), licenses for these blocks will contain conditions that prohibits all or specific activities in parts of the block to protect ecological sites. The award of a PEDL does not of itself give permission for operations to begin. The necessary planning and regulatory consents will be required before development can take place. All proposals will be scrutinised by the Environment Agency, and by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE).

The licenses do not grant planning permission which is the role of Wiltshire Council, as Mineral Planning Authority, or Government should an application be called in. Wiltshire Council has not received a planning application to date.

During drilling, well operators have a legal duty to manage and control the risks to people. The HSE monitors well operations to check these legal duties are carried out. Its specialists will check construction matches the design by reviewing the weekly operations reports it receives from the well operator. HSE intends to jointly inspect drilling and fracking operations with the Environment Agency during the exploratory phase. HSE inspectors can visit any site at any time if there is a matter of concern.

The Environment Agency will monitor the environmental impacts and inspect the operator's reports. The greater the potential risk, the greater the scrutiny. Conditions attached to permits will set out the minimum level of site-based monitoring and reporting.

The Council, as the Local Planning Authority would be responsible for enforcing any conditions attached to a planning permission. For example, this may include monitoring of noise or dust levels.

Further information and guidance on PEDL licensing can be found here- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/about-shale-gas-and-hydraulic-fracturing-fracking/developing-shale-oil-and-gas-in-the-uk>.

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