

## AVONBRIDGE AND STANDBURN COMMUNITY COUNCIL (ASCC) UOG COMMUNITY DISCUSSION

- **Group:** The Community Council and the Peoples of Avonbridge and Standburn.
- **Date of meeting:** Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> August 2016, 11am-1pm.
- **Location address / postcode:** Avonbridge Community Hall, Blackstone Road, FK1 2NB.
- **Number of attendees:** 30.

(i) **UOG Community Discussion Process** (Precise details of the materials and process employed can be made available on request to [uogconsultation@charteringnetwork.org](mailto:uogconsultation@charteringnetwork.org)).

1. Leaflets notifying residents of the meeting were posted through every door in Avonbridge and Standburn.
2. The consultation began with a 20-30 minute Powerpoint presentation, which aimed to give those unfamiliar with the situation a factual and impartial context for discussion. The presentation was made by Jo Hirst (ASCC Convenor), Doreen Goldie (ASCC Secretary) and Jamie McKenzie Hamilton (Community Chartering Network).
3. Approximately 1½ hours was devoted to a community discussion, facilitated by Jamie McKenzie Hamilton. The discussion entailed residents forming broad circles, and proposing and discussing their hopes and concerns regarding the industry in a local context. Half the time was allocated to listing and discussing perceived benefits, while the second was perceived risks to the community. Topics and time spent on each, and their importance, were determined by the participants and set out on a whiteboard. In the interests of fairness, the discussion began with benefits.

The community were given two handouts to refer to during the consultation. The first was the assets agreed as the cultural heritage in the Falkirk Community Charter. In prior pilot consultations aimed at understanding what processes can help facilitate effective community discussion, it was found that framing conversations around shared assets and values helped to bring forth responses which were grounded in the community experience as a whole. This finding is consistent with empirical research conducted by the Common Cause Foundation (<http://valuesandframes.org>). The second was a bullet point summary of the legal submissions from both sides to the Falkirk public inquiry. While this is only applicable to coalbed methane, similar issues arise with the full spread of unconventional gas including fracking. Providing such a summary sheet was felt to be the fairest way of representing the two perspectives, fairly and impartially.

4. In the last 10 minutes there was a reflection on the process, and how it could be improved.
5. Consensual outcomes were written up by Jamie McKenzie Hamilton. These were verified for accuracy with community councillors and participants, before ASCC submitted this document as a community representation to the 'Talking Fracking' Public Consultation on UOG.

(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?**

Benefits and risks are integrated into the main themes and messages set out in the comments on the issues section.

**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?**

Benefits and risks are integrated into the main themes and messages set out in the comments on the issues section.

**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 are four main messages or themes which arose from our consultation:

**It is necessary to include the broader context of ‘transition’ in any discussion of UOG.** It was felt that exploiting a new fossil fuel could only be compatible with Scotland’s vision of and policy towards a sustainable future if it fulfilled its promise as a transitional fuel. Therefore, our general view was that the broader context of Scottish energy and transition is necessary to any meaningful consultation on UOG. We need more energy efficient local housing (e.g. Passivhaus), better education towards sustainability, and greater investment in renewables and alternative technologies. Fossil fuels are running out and without a corresponding commitment to community transition, UOG seems to us a backward step or diversion. There is need for the Scottish Government and people to collaborate on a convincing roadmap, and properly understand the role UOG plays in this. If UOG is so valuable a resource for Scotland, then we should not rush to exploit it before assessing first together whether we may have greater need for it in the future. Such considerations seem to us fundamental to an effective public consultation.

**There is a need for specifics before our community is properly able to weigh up the economic benefits per locality, against the potential costs.** There was openness to the potential economic benefits for Avonbridge and Standburn, notably, community profit-sharing, employment and cheaper fuel. However, our general view is that much greater clarity is needed on the specific details of these benefits, and / or their local relevance in order to assess whether benefits outweigh the possible costs. For example, while we acknowledged the positive local investment a community fund could bring, we harbour deep concerns that incentivisation of landowners and individuals will divide and disempower our community. Local career and training opportunities are of interest, but we need more clarity on whether the industry intends to source locally or invest in stable long-term careers. We worry also that extraction might affect the jobs we do have, e.g. through unforeseen impacts on local farming or tourism. Lastly, although we would welcome cheaper energy, we would not benefit directly because we are still not connected to the gas network. UOG may constitute a net benefit to our cultural heritage, but without these necessary details we feel unable to make a responsible assessment. Enabling this assessment would seem to us to be the central objective of the public consultation.

**Total transparency between stakeholders should be a basic principle of any consideration of UOG.** Our community bears any burden of potential local risks of UOG to health, environment and economy. On this basis, we consider it reasonable to require total transparency regarding the factual data available on the industry, both to inform an effective public consultation and our monitoring of local developments, should they proceed. We include in this all data disclosed to regulators for assessment: about operators and their intended plans, chemicals and processes, and the criteria by which these are assessed and monitored. Our past local experiences have also led to concerns about the capacity of regulators to properly assess and monitor a new industry in close proximity to where we live and work. We require clarity about different regulators' specific roles, responsibilities and regimes in a local context, including intended consequences for infractions and how cumulative impacts would be measured. We also desire more specific details of any profit-sharing agreements proposed: when they would be paid, on what figures they would be based, and what visibility communities would have over related production and accounting. Without our having equal access to the data available to other UOG stakeholders, we cannot see how the public consultation could be regarded as impartial.

**We do not think the scope of this consultation or the Scottish Government's research programme has been wide enough.** Of the research commissioned for the moratorium where community has been invited by the Scottish Government (via the Broad Alliance), only one featured heavily in our discussion: local economic impacts. While we did touch briefly upon matters pertaining to two others, seismicity and transport, these were largely ancillary to our main discussion, and decommissioning was not mentioned. Three further topics were central to our discussion, namely, the potential health impacts of proximity to an intensive industry, possible contamination of the local environment (farmland, water and wildlife), and the broader context of community sustainability and transition (see below). Our question, therefore, is why this public consultation does not also encompass these topics along with data necessary for proper consideration.