

ROBROYSTON COMMUNITY COUNCIL UOG COMMUNITY DISCUSSION

- **Group:** The Community Council and the Peoples of Robroyston.
- **Date of meeting:** Tuesday 23rd May 2017, 7:15-9:30pm.
- **Location address / postcode:** Wallacewell Primary School, 305 Standburn Road G21 3RH.
- **Number of attendees:** 30.

(i) UOG Community Discussion Process

1. Leaflets notifying residents of the meeting were posted through all doors in Robroyston.
2. The consultation began with a 40 minute introduction for residents, including a presentation followed information slides set out in Scottish Government's Discussion Pack for large groups, which was presented by Gordon Carmichael (Connecting Scotland).

On the basis that residents new to the subject would benefit from a variety of UOG perspectives, a matrix was put together for the purpose. This showed the information summarising the research commissioned by Scottish Government (as set out in their handout cards in the Group Discussion Pack), alongside summaries of legal submissions from the Dart Energy PLI. The matrix was included in the presentation, and as a handout.

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>). For this reason, a list of generic community assets and values that arose through the Community Chartering experience of Falkirk communities (http://faug.org.uk/community_charter.pdf) was also presented and handed out.

3. The presentation was followed by 80 minutes of discussion where residents were split into two equal groups facilitated separately by Gordon Carmichael (Connecting Scotland) and Jamie McKenzie Hamilton (CCN), wherein time was split roughly equally between the benefits and risks of UOG. In the final 15 minutes the two groups reconvened to share the outcomes of their discussions and to agree a collective message to Government.
4. Outcomes were written up by the facilitators. [These were first verified for accuracy with the community councillors and participants].
5. Precise details of the materials and process employed can be made available on request to uogconsultation@charteringnetwork.org.

(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?

The main potential benefits put forward by residents, or emerging in discussion were:

BENEFITS

No benefits. Prior to the discussion, around 60% of the participants felt UOG represented no potential benefits whatsoever of UOG to the community of Robroyston.

Jobs. The discussion of benefits centred mainly on local employment opportunities which may arise from a UOG industry, for which a quarter of residents considered there to be some potential (26%). However, the general view was that any jobs were likely to entail low-wage, manual, service work, such as those associated with catering, labouring and transport. Residents felt that higher-spec positions would go to specifically qualified and trained personnel who would be brought in to the community for only short periods of time. Some thought there may be more interest in UOG if the industry made a contractual commitment to providing long-term high-quality local jobs locally, but also had little trust they would ever provide such guarantees or deliver on them. One participant said, ‘they don’t want to do it, it’ll cost them too much and business is only here to make money’ and another that ‘they’d offer it and then change everything once they’re in’. Many also thought local work would mainly be around the initial set-up, and decline quickly thereafter. In the words of one resident, ‘it’ll be mainly automated after that’, and of another, ‘even if they lasted 2-6 years, it’s not much and it’s hardly sustainable’. In short, it was agreed by the majority of those present that any local employment or economic benefits would be far outweighed by the risks to the local health, economy and the environment as discussed below.

Cheap and secure gas supply. The proposal that UOG might confer a secure and cheaper fuel source for Scotland was discussed. While the idea that a local UOG operator might guarantee local household energy price reductions appealed to some, no one believed they would ever offer or realise such an assurance. As one resident put it, ‘the gas will not be cheaper, the industry controls the sales and the profit, not Scotland, and their commitment is to shareholders, not the Scottish people’.

The control of the UOG supply by multinationals was also considered to weaken any argument for energy security. In the words of one participant, ‘it’s a free market so they can sell it anywhere they like, and they will sell it to the highest bidder because they just want to make money’. Another stated, ‘Ineos threatened to turn Scotland’s lights off a few years back over union interference, so giving them a monopoly over UOG doesn’t sound much like energy security to me’. Many felt that energy self-sufficiency couldn’t be argued given the degree of uncertainty regarding production scenarios in the research commissioned by the Scottish Government. In short, there was almost unanimous agreement that UOG was unlikely to deliver price reduction in household energy costs for the community, or energy security for Scotland.

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?

The main potential risks put forward by residents, or emerging in discussion were:

RISKS

Cumulative Impacts on Health and Environment. The principal concerns for over half of the participants related to the potential short and long-term health risks of a local UOG industry. The general view was that there was not enough information, and too much uncertainty, regarding the impacts. Some felt this could be attributable to the fact that UOG gas fields elsewhere were ‘so much more open and less densely populated’ than the Central Belt. Strong concerns were expressed about the ‘unknowns’ and the withholding of information from the public about fracking chemicals, processes and waste treatment. Some talked about the longevity of carcinogens and other toxins, known and unknown, and that this could mean there was a risk of ‘poisoning the environment permanently, and the health of future generations’. The potential impacts on physical and mental health of traffic fumes and noise were emphasised. So too were the risks of toxins escaping via old mine-workings in the area, and a significant concern for many was the possibility that water courses and supplies could become contaminated. People worried that problems may emerge over time, like cancer or respiratory-related illnesses, by which time intervention would be too late. The view was expressed that this could put more pressure on an already over-stretched health service at the public cost. There was a general agreement that such issues couldn’t be viewed in isolation either, but in the context of the ever-growing cumulative burden of pollution from new local developments which the community was being required to sustain. For one group this led to a focus on the importance of the Scottish Government increasing its drive towards the use of renewable energy, rather appearing to ignore its own green target by focusing on another form of solid fuel extraction after the ‘disasters of previous mining industries’. In summary, the consensus was that the risks to public and environment health, particularly when added to their existing burden of pollution, were too great for the community to bear, which for some was a strong argument for a redoubling of national efforts towards clean and sustainable energy economy.

Geological Impacts. Specific concerns arose in both discussion groups about the history of coal mining in the area. Residents referred to multiple occurrences of local subsidence and the damage this had caused to streets and homes. A significant majority felt that introducing a new extractive industry, one associated with seismic activity, into a ‘fragile’ subsurface context was certain to exacerbate the risk of property damage and environmental contamination.

Ineffective Regulation. Another common theme of both discussion was a lack of faith in the ability of SEPA or HSE to properly control and regulate the industry. Fines were not regarded to be effective deterrents for abuses by the industry, or as one resident put it ‘they make so much, the fines don’t matter to them’. There was little confidence in a rapid and effective regulatory response to reported breaches. Concerns were expressed about the non-disclosure to the public of industrial chemicals, and also with respect to the process by which potentially harmful substances were assessed by regulators. As one resident summarised, ‘when chemical documentation is given to regulators, it’s a fait accompli

– they conduct no independent or real world testing, they just believe what they’re given’. Another was of the view that, ‘neither the industry nor the regulators have any idea what these chemicals will do in combination, or when they’re exposed to the complexity of an ecological system’. In conclusion, a significant majority did not trust the assurances of regulators that the community would be competently safeguarded against any risks of UOG.

Traffic Impacts. Half of the participants ranked traffic high among UOG’s potential risks. In discussion, it emerged that this was rooted in genuine concerns about the rapidly increasing traffic in the area associated with ‘insane’ housing development. In the words of one participant, ‘the traffic is bad enough as it is, and it’s getting busier and busier, and they’re still building new houses’. Another said, ‘I used to have countryside beyond my back fence, now I have trucks thundering past’. Some felt additional heavy traffic would force drivers to seek alternative routes ‘because the main roads will be too busy’, which would take them through housing estates and onto country roads, ‘creating even more danger of accidents’. There was general concern about cumulative impact of UOG traffic on road congestion and air quality, and of the consequences of noise, diesel fumes and dust particles on the physical and mental health of residents. Many thought there would be hidden costs to the public of road deterioration, and to residents personally for the damage to cars which may result. Given these pressures, one resident –a railway worker– questioned why no-one had suggested transporting industrial products and waste by rail, and highlighting a plan to establish a new station in the area, which would enable a direct rail link to the refinery at Grangemouth. Nevertheless, the general consensus was that UOG would considerably exacerbate a traffic problem that was already felt to be impacting significantly on local health and wellbeing.

Impacts on House Prices and Insurance. General worries were expressed about the effects UOG could have on local house valuation and insurance costs. One participant thought UOG could cause house prices to rise in some areas of the country by attracting skilled workers, but most thought it unlikely they would choose to live in or close to the gasfields. Another noted the tendency of the industry to put up transient workers in rental properties. As a general rule, people felt there was a likelihood that local UOG operations would deter incomers, and trigger rising home insurance and falling house prices. In the words of one participant, ‘no-one will want to pay £500K for a house near a gas field’. Some thought Robroyston’s particular circumstances could provoke greater risk because the area was a focus for aspirational first-time house buyers ‘pushing the limit’ with the help-to-buy scheme. Due to this, only a small drop in valuation, could result in many finding themselves in negative equity, or as one resident put it, ‘no-one wants to wait till they’re 95 to pay off their mortgage’. In short, a significant majority were concerned about the widespread loss of property value which could result from local UOG, and considered it a significant factor that had not been taken account of in the economic research commissioned by the Scottish Government.

Impacts on Community and Faith in Governance. A pervading theme of the discussion was the powerlessness the community felt in the face of relentless local development. A particular area of common concern was the loss of greenspace. Residents spoke of how in the past Glasgow used to be called the ‘dear green place’ and how there ‘used to be fields’ surrounding Robroyston. One participant stated, ‘this insane house building is eating up the countryside, and now the wee bit of green space which is left will be taken away by fracking’. The general view was that these green spaces were fundamental to community health and wellbeing. Everyone placed great value on the

wildlife which lived in them, and felt its needs and suffering had been ignored. One resident argued, ‘they’re ecologically rich, we see deer, squirrels, foxes and birds, and they recently found some rare orchids near here and made it a nature reserve’. People were angry at the idea that these ‘shrinking islands’ of habitat might be harmed or contaminated by a UOG industry, and argued strongly that it was in the best long-term interests of the community that they be protected and improved.

The community’s experience regarding unchecked development had given rise to a deep cynicism about formal consultation processes, with most feeling they were just a ‘tick box exercise’. While participants felt the public consultation on fracking was of great importance, there was also a general apathy regarding the possibility of the Scottish Government truly listening to communities. Related comments included ‘as with any local development, they’ll ignore us, because they will have already decided before they consult that it is going ahead’; and ‘they don’t care about us, they just see the £ signs’; and ‘a negligible objective impact doesn’t mean it’s a negligible subjective impact’. One particular remark which was generally acknowledged to summarise everyone’s feelings on the matter was, ‘they go ahead, when they don’t even know what we’re going to lose’.

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)*.

We have agreed on two messages to the Scottish Government as the result of our consultation:

The people of Robroyston do not grant the social license for UOG in our community council area, and ask that the Scottish Government comply with our position. Having weighed up the potential benefits and risks of UOG, we have reached the consensus position that UOG is not right for our community. We live in a densely populated area which is undermined by extensive mine-workings and subject to intensive housing development, and the idea of adding UOG to the cumulative impacts entails intolerable risk. Our roads grow ever more congested, our air polluted, and our countryside around us is being eaten up at an alarming rate. We believe what green space remains should be preserved and enhanced for our health and wellbeing, for wildlife habitat, and for future generations. To see these places used for fracking, and potentially contaminated in the long-term for the short-term gain of the few, is unacceptable. We also have genuine concerns about the uncertainties regarding the risks of UOG, which have not been adequately addressed or resolved in the research commissioned by the Scottish Government. Particular areas include the subsurface context and dense population of the proposed gas fields, the hidden costs to the public purse, and those operational aspects –chemicals, processes, waste– which have not been made available for the public consultation. We believe also that widespread house devaluation in an expensive area such as ours could have significant economic implications if it causes many to go into negative equity. On the basis that we perceive no reward, for potentially significant economic and environmental disbenefits, we refuse outright the social license for any UOG operations in our community council area.

Given the importance of this consultation, we do not feel Scottish communities have been given adequate notice or time for proper consultation. Most of us were not aware of the UOG public consultation prior to this Community Discussion, or had gathered its significance from related communications. Given its potential importance to the future of our community, and others across the Central Belt, we believe strongly that community councils should have been given more notice, time, resources and information to effectively engage with their electorate. We applaud the participatory approach taken in this Community Discussion, which we would recommend as the right approach to community consultation for the Scottish Government going forward. It was a positive experience for all, on which offered opportunities for social learning, and collective discussion and decision-making, not possible with conventional approaches. However, we would still have preferred more time to digest and consider the information and situation, to do our own research, and to engage more of our neighbours in debate. We ask why the Scottish Government did not give communities greater notice, and why they were not willing to extend the consultation period to allow us, and others, the space to properly enact our civic responsibility. This leaves us concerned that our views are not, and will not be, considered material to this consultation, and that it may be just another 'tick box exercise'. We are confident that afforded greater time and resources, the ultimate position of Robroyston on UOG would have been the same as is set out here. Nevertheless, it seems right and proper that the Scottish Government should support and encourage community participation in this or any public consultation of this consequence to the extent possible.