SHIELDHILL AND CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COUNCIL (SCCC)
UOG COMMUNITY DISCUSSION

- **Group:** The Community Council and the Peoples of Shieldhill and California.
- **Date of meeting**: Wednesday 21st September 2016, 7-9:30pm.
- **Location address / postcode:** Shieldhill Welfare Hall, 90 Main Street, Falkirk, FK1 2DT.
- **Number of attendees:** 60.

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

1. Leaflets notifying residents of the meeting were posted through every door in Shieldhill and California.

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 Jit Singh, SCCC Convenor, and Jamie McKenzie Hamilton, from the Community Chartering Network (CCN).

3. Approximately 1½ hours was devoted to a community discussion, facilitated by Roland Playle, with support from Jamie McKenzie Hamilton, both from the CCN. 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 Roland Playle. These were verified for accuracy with community councillors and participants, before SCCC 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?

The majority of assembled participants were challenged when requested to suggest potential benefits. The facilitator encouraged participants to think of potential options, which provoked frustrated responses from some participants. While compiling the potential benefits listed below, concerns were repeatedly raised regarding the UOG industry's accountability for promises made towards community incentives and local jobs. There was concern regarding the industry's intention to deliver any proposed benefits, particularly in cases of a company's insolvency. This also led to questions about remediation and decommissioning of industrial infrastructure and any pollutants in the environment and to human health, such as are outlined in relation to risks.

However, the following potential benefits to the community were discussed:

Jobs. Residents were not confident in the promise of local jobs. They suggested their confidence could be increased by a certain percentage of local jobs guaranteed for a specific period of time, or a recruitment drive aimed at Braes High. The concern was raised that much of the employment would be 'too transient', i.e. given to workers outside of the local area and only for a certain amount of time therefore limiting the economic activity in the local area. However, one participant suggested that if there was an influx of a workforce from outside of the local area, this may create a more diverse for the duration of operations. Nevertheless, casual work which may be associated with the industry was seen as unsustainable. In summary, the view was that employment would be unlikely to benefit local communities significantly.

Community Incentives. The residents recognised the potential benefits of community incentive schemes, but were not confident that these would be realised or would offset other potential negative impacts of UOG. The general view was that iron-clad agreements needed to be in place which would ensure the community incentives delivered benefits as promised, for example, a commitment to long-term community development (i.e. over 75 years), for example, to support sustainable long-term employment (over 75 years), community doctors, local apprenticeships, Park Rangers, or investment in local play groups or education. The view was expressed that, providing Compulsory Purchase Orders were not given, some land owners could potentially benefit from selling their land at a fair valuation.

Compensation. Some residents felt there should be a liability fund which could compensate them should their property prices decrease following industrial operations, or be used to improve road and transport infrastructure to cater for the increased level of activity and scale of transport operations, or which could be used to compensate land owners if their land became unfit for farming on account of the industry. Questions were raised about what would happen to promises if the company were to become insolvent.

Economic Benefits. The main local economic benefits were perceived to be for hotels and food related businesses which may be used by transient workers. However, it was felt that much of the food related economic activity would go to large supermarkets and not benefit the local community significantly.

Cheaper Fuel Bills. While put forward, the general consensus was that this benefit would not be realised.

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?

Having concluded the above list, the assembled were eager to discuss the potential risks associated with the industry. As above, concrete examples were asked about the potential risks to the local area. The following potential risks to the community were discussed:

Impacts on properties: Many residents were worried about the decrease in property prices and rise in liability insurance as a result of proximity to the industry, as well as potential damage to property arising from the industry, from drilling under houses, of unexpected subsidence, or of earthquakes.

Untrustworthy motives of industry: Some felt that they did not have enough knowledge on the subject to make an informed decision and that they could not trust the industry's perspective without further scrutiny. Where profit incentives were involved for particular stakeholders, it was felt that real scrutiny of their claims was necessary.

That under-resourced regulators would mean the industry would be largely 'self-regulating'. The general view that the industry must be policed closely and cannot be self-regulating in any sense. Many felt that regulators would prioritise economic growth above impacts which may arise such as to air, drinking water, land, farming and wildlife. The general view was that regulators may not be strong enough to police the industry, and that it was necessary for there to be 'toothed regulation'. In cases of mismanagement or environmental or human health impacts, fines were not enough but licenses must be taken away in the event of accidents or unforeseen detrimental consequences.

Health Implications: Participants felt much more factual information was needed regarding health risks and their potential before the industry went ahead. The view was that fines or consequences to the industry should be guaranteed to communities should detrimental impacts to health become apparent in the future.

Impacts on Economy (Farming), Environment and Wildlife: The concern was expressed for the environmental impact particularly concerning farming. Residents felt land should be available for people's children to farm. Particular concerns included that the industry could push food prices up, as farming land is taken away.

Hydrogeological impacts: Many were not happy about the idea that toxins which are potentially harmful to environment and human health would be used, and would remain, underground. There were concerns about the unstable geology, and that earthquakes and landslides may cause harm to property. The threats of fugitive gas leaks and emissions was highlighted as an issue which cannot be guaranteed not to occur, cannot be mitigated, and cannot be undone.

Impacts on Local Traffic and Infrastructure: The view was expressed that significant impacts on local infrastructure (e.g. roads), scale of traffic and size of vehicles, were likely and therefore this would need to be monitored by impartial regulators. Concerns were raised about the level of traffic and the condition of the roads being insufficient to carry the load required. This gave rise to the question of who would be bearing the costs of fixing the roads.

A 'Backward Step' for the Community: It was pointed out that the local area had made great strides in the last 25 years, to clean up the environment following industrial activity, and it was felt that UOG operations would undo this hard-won progress. Total community breakdown was also mentioned as a potential risk.

More investment into renewable energy was preferred. UOG was seen as the 'easy option' to make a 'quick buck', but not seen as genuine progress and development consistent with a vision of a better Scotland.

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:

Trust in Regulatory Framework: As the burden of potential risks of UOG operations lie on our community (e.g. human health, water table and courses, air pollution), our localities (e.g. environment, wildlife) and our livelihoods (e.g. farming, tourism, house prices), we see trust in the regulatory systems as an essential criterion to accepting and supporting industrial operations in the SC area. We have genuine concerns about whether regulation is sufficiently resourced and 'toothed' to protect us based on past local experience. Thus, to feel secure about the industry occurring in our locality, we would need upfront agreement, assurance and ongoing visibility over:

- The processes of regulation including what will be assessed and measured, and how.
- Clear and strict accountability structures. We do not think it sufficient nor acceptable that contraventions which put our safety at risk should be penalised by fines. The consequence should be the withdrawal of our social license to operate locally.
- Insurance measures sufficient to ensure our community is directly and fully covered for any operational/clear-up costs, in event of accident, disaster, company liquidation, or harm to roads, property, environment and health.
- Any local incentivisation structures proposed by operators: how and when these are accounted, to whom they are paid, and for what, and appropriate transparent regulation of such activities. We are uncomfortable with incentivisation of individuals, and believe strongly that any financial benefit should be assured to the community as a whole, e.g. a commitment to supporting a particular public service.

Trust in information. We feel more information is required for our community to make responsible decisions about UOG operations in the area, and worry that the evidence presented to us may be weighted towards interests or perspectives other than our own. For these reasons;

- It would help us to hear a plurality of perspectives on the industry during the consultation, and the evidence each uses to support their viewpoints. We believe there should be total transparency with regards to evidence informing all decision-making under the moratorium.
- We ask that all information be made equally available to all stakeholders, including the source and researcher perspective. Otherwise, the process cannot be said to be impartial, and we cannot make informed personal decisions on each piece of evidence independently.
- We believe that the scope of the information provided under this public consultation is inadequate and has been narrowed pre-emptively. To our knowledge, three topics central to our discussion do not fall within the remit of the research commissioned by the Scottish Government which has invited input from Scottish communities. Foremost, is the issue of trust in the regulatory framework, the information available to the consultation process, industry promises, and that our concerns will receive proper consideration by elected

representatives. The other two are the potential human health impacts of the proximity of an intensive industry and the possible contamination of the local environment (farmland, water and wildlife and this impact on current and future generations). Nevertheless, we look forward to the research the Scottish Government *has* commissioned particularly, on economic impacts, transport, seismicity and decommissioning.

Benefits to the community and public services may not outweigh the risks: currently, we do not believe we have the information necessary to properly assess whether the potential benefits would outweigh the risks in UOG operations taking place in Shieldhill and California. This belief is related to the issue of trust outlined above, as well as deep and genuine concerns about potential risks to human health, our community life, cultural heritage and resident's wellbeing, today, and for future generations. Many of us remember a time when local industrialisation made the area a dirty and unhealthy place to live, have enjoyed its change for the better in recent decades, and feel UOG is a backward step in this context. We would welcome local investment in public and children's services, and have considered here the specifics of how local industry incentives or sponsorship could contribute to this. However, while investment may serve as a significant trade-off for the industry operating in our locality, currently, we do not feel assured in any guarantee that promises of jobs or incentives will be delivered by the industry locally, as outlined above. We are also worried that we will be left having to foot the bill for other unexpected costs, as other Scottish communities have in the past, for example, those associated with road damage, subsidence, earthquakes, property price falls, or folding operators.

Trust in our Elected Representatives: We want to have trust in a proper and responsible moratorium and consultation process, and that the outcomes meaningfully reflect and acknowledge our genuine hopes and concerns for our community. However, should this not be the case, and UOG operations should proceed in spite of the wishes of our community and others who may be similarly affected, then this would mean loss of faith in our Government, and possibly what our country means to us as citizens. We would not re-elect representatives who would support such a decision, and some participants would rather emigrate than live in the area with the industry under such conditions.