

SHOTTS COMMUNITY COUNCIL UOG COMMUNITY DISCUSSION

- **Group:** The Community Council and the Peoples of Shotts.
- **Date of meeting:** Thursday 27th April 2017, 7-9:30pm.
- **Location address / postcode:** Springhill Community Centre, 23 Knoll Croft Rd, Shotts, ML7 5JF.
- **Number of attendees:** 20.

(i) UOG Community Discussion Process

1. [The community council posted notices advertising the meeting on their social media and in public places around Shotts].
2. The consultation began with a 35 minute introduction for residents following information slides set out in Scottish Government's Discussion Pack for large groups, and was presented by Jamie McKenzie Hamilton from the Community Chartering Network (CCN).

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 90 minutes of open circle discussion led by Roland Playle (CCN) with support from Jamie McKenzie Hamilton and split roughly equally between benefits and risks of UOG.
4. Outcomes were written up by the facilitators. [These were first verified for accuracy with councillors and participants, and then broadcast for residents who may have been unable to attend].

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:

No benefits. A significant majority of participants foresaw no benefits of UOG at all the community of Shotts, and the remainder considered the only potential benefit (jobs) to be negligible.

Jobs. Several residents proposed jobs as a potential benefit of UOG. However, there was general agreement that should these transpire, they would be short-term and ‘amount to be very little’ even at the peak of activities. At a national level, the overall employment benefits of UOG were regarded to be inconsequential (particularly when spread across many service types), unreliable and unstable compared with other industries. At the community level, it was acknowledged there may be a requirement for a single locally-sourced engineer onsite, but that, in the main, UOG-related work would likely be ad hoc jobs or work around servicing an incoming transient workforce, such as those related to accommodation or catering. Such work was not deemed desirable, or in keeping with the community’s need and aspirations for sustainable local employment and development. Residents felt the possibility that UOG would deliver on its promise of jobs was ‘remote’. They had heard similar arguments from big business before, and in each case the local work failed to materialise, leading to deep scepticism of their proposed incentives. Ultimately, it was concluded to wholly disregard UOG jobs as a benefit in a local context.

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?

Hydrogeological risks (fugitive pollution, mine collapse, subsidence, earthquakes etc.). All felt that the geological context around Shotts would render local UOG extraction irresponsible, and a danger to public and environmental health. Due to centuries of mining, the ground beneath the community was held to be a ‘Swiss cheese’, including 20 known coal mines, shallow and deep, and many others, privately-owned and uncharted. The view was that the land and roads would not be able to bear the load of UOG infrastructure and heavy traffic. Recent instances were cited where country roads had collapsed under a bus, and a car, due to old mine subsidence, and that vulnerable sections included main thoroughfares such as the A71 and Cummins Road. It was noted that the local water table was unusually high, on account of it being an old raised peat bog and having a network of mines underneath, which the industry had flooded when they left but neglected to maintain the pumps. After even a short period of rain, there was extensive surface flooding, such as on the local golf course. Residents in some areas (e.g. Allerton) needed to pump cellars continually to stop water seeping in. The presence of red ochre in the surface water was taken to indicate contamination from old mine workings. In conclusion, it was generally agreed that, given the geological context and related ongoing issues, local UOG extraction would be ‘insane’ and represent uncontrollable risks for the local community.

Impacts on Public and Environmental Health. There was also a general consensus that hosting UOG would constitute a significant additional health risk to the local community. The view was that the local environment was already contaminated by heavy industry, but that it was recovering and needed to be afforded time to do so. Residents cited local bins which were still smoking and initiatives intended to mitigate land and water pollution. They spoke of a local ‘cancer bubble’, often involving the young, and felt certain this was a long-term legacy of their industrial past. They noted how it was impossible to prove any direct connection, and also how this and the context meant it would also be impossible to link any increase in local health or environmental impacts to UOG. Many extended these concerns to the Central Belt as a whole. On the basis that it was heavily mined throughout and also being Scotland’s most densely populated region, they felt there was the potential for catastrophic impacts, or in the words of one, ‘a Chernobyl’.

Community-Level Impacts. One of the strongest themes of the discussion was the deep desire for, and belief in, a better cleaner future for Shotts. Residents spoke of the community as a ‘sleeping giant’, with ‘appetite’ and ‘spirit’ for improvement, and about how hard many were working to realise collective aspirations and attract investment. Shotts was viewed to be ‘ideally suited’ for regeneration, with affordable property, and a train station with only a short trip to Edinburgh or Glasgow. The aim was to attract commuters to live in the area, which would bring money, investment and sustainable employment to the community. This in turn, would spark a virtuous cycle of economic and environmental recovery, and rising attainment and quality-of-life, such as was occurring nearby in Whitburn and Armadale. Many also talked about why positive change was so vital to the community, highlighting ‘pockets of deprivation where there is no hope’, and the high levels of apathy and suicide locally, the latter including a recent tragedy involving two brothers.

There was a powerful consensus that UOG was not compatible with this positive vision, and that it represented an intolerable risk to it. In the words of one resident ‘if they see the rigs, they’ll keep on moving’. Residents were keen to stress they were not Nimby’s. Some present had worked down the mines or in other heavy industries, and acknowledged there was a highly-skilled local workforce appropriate to the needs of UOG operators. However, the general view was that the community ‘had suffered for generations’ from hosting extractive industries, or, as one resident expressed it, ‘we’ve done our bit and now we’re desperate to move on’. As another put it, ‘we’re not afraid of industry, it’s just UOG is not the right industry for us’. The right industry was viewed to be one which would provide an ‘anchor’ in the form of sustainable long-term employment, income and development for the community, or homespun pride, like the Shotts Ironworks had done in the past. The sense was that residents had lost all faith in corporate promises through bitter past experience, and viewed UOG as more of the same. This was summarised by one resident as, ‘no matter what they promise, they bring nothing. It’s just down and down and down, just a business making money at our expense’.

Corporate Power and Unaccountability. Another topic which emerged to become a central theme of the discussion, were concerns about the power of UOG players, particularly Ineos. The view was that the Scottish Government had ‘taken their eye of the ball’ by allowing Ineos to come to control so many assets of national strategic significance, including all the UOG licences, the Grangemouth refinery, and now 40% of the network of BP pipelines linking the North Sea oilfields to the Scottish mainland. The perception was that Ineos was just a vehicle for the personal profit motive and ambitions of CEO Jim Ratcliffe, a ‘global capitalist’ who was essentially unaccountable to anyone

and who had already demonstrated he could ‘hold the Government to ransom’ over Grangemouth union activity. Questions were asked as to why the SNP had abstained on the vote on whether fracking should go ahead, and why Scottish Government and Ineos were investing large sums of money in UOG processing infrastructure in Grangemouth during the moratorium. One resident suggested that on the same day Paul Wheelhouse had made a public statement regarding the public consultation (30th March), Keith Browne had attended a meeting in Grangemouth. All these factors had contributed to the suspicion that Ineos already had the Scottish Government ‘over a barrel’, and to doubts about the impartiality of moratorium-related processes and decision-making. The general view was an expansion of Jim Ratcliffe’s power and influence in Scotland which would result from an Ineos monopoly of a national UOG industry, had serious implications for Scottish democracy and the capacity of Government representatives and regulators to prioritise the interests and safety of communities. In the words of one participant, ‘it is crazy to give so much power to one man’. It was also felt that Ineos’s offshore tax avoidance schemes would mean Scotland would see little of the economic benefits of a UOG industry, which would serve principally to enrich its CEO. It was concluded that, irrespective of any consideration of UOG, Scottish Government needed to act decisively to rein in Ineos’s ambitions, decentralising its power through the nationalisation of the Grangemouth refinery and BP pipelines. This was summarised by one participant as ‘it is general common sense that national strategic assets should be in the hands of the people’.

Climate Change. Some ranked the Climate Change impacts of UOG as high among the potential risks, and all felt a UOG industry was incompatible with the Scottish Government’s ambitions for sustainable energy and development. As one resident put it, ‘we are investing in renewables, so why are we even considering fracking? The whole thing must be wholly and solely based on greed’. While not all were in agreement about the desirability of wind turbines situated in the council area, all acknowledged the benefits of a new trust which was being set up for the community with the wind farm operators. Compared with the source of reliable and sustainable community income this would bring, the conditional local incentives touted by Ineos were seen as dubious and unappealing. A preferred option put forward was to explore geothermal energy production locally. This was viewed as a potential win-win in that it could provide a source of income and low-cost renewable energy for the community, while also capitalising on the extensive network of flooded mines.

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 were three messages or question to the Scottish Government which arose from our consultation:

Shotts wholly rejects our social license for UOG in our council area, on the basis of having had enough of hosting extractive industry, and it conflicting with our positive vision and aspirations for our community. Will our position be accepted by the Scottish Government and UOG operators? Having given due consideration to hosting the UOG industry, we have reached a consensus position that it constitutes significant potential risks for our community, for negligible potential benefit. We feel our unstable geological context would significantly exacerbate risks related

to public and environmental health, and which we already suffer on account of the legacy of past industry. We have a highly-skilled population, neither nimbys nor afraid of industry. However, we are certain UOG is not the right industry for us. We have embarked on a new direction, and are working hard and seeking help towards regenerating and repairing a community which has suffered for decades under the yoke of big corporations who promise the world, but then take everything and leave us to clear up their mess. We are in the process of building a better place to live and work, restoring our landscape and farmland, and attracting new people and investment to the area, and we have the appetite and spirit to fulfil our aspirations. Shotts has had a disproportionate impact via past home-grown industries including the old Iron Foundry, Brickworks and Cummins (diesel) Factory, which exported high-quality products around the world. We also feel our infrastructure means we are well positioned to perpetuate this legacy through environmental restoration, and clean sustainable development, such as servicing a thriving commuter community, exploring geothermal energy generation, or hosting server centres. We believe strongly that a local UOG industry, and related perceptions, will set in motion a vicious cycle which will reverse all our hard work and destroy our aspirations. On these bases, we absolutely and firmly reject the social license for UOG in our council area, and ask the Scottish Government and Ineos to confirm our message has been received and understood, and shall be respected.

Why weren't we given more time and information to support so important a consultation?

Many of the participants in our Community Discussion were democratically-elected representatives of the community, i.e. members of parliament, local authority councillors and community councillors. These felt strongly that, given the significance of the public consultation on UOG, communities had not been given sufficient notification, time or support to properly consult with the residents and respond on their behalf.

In the interest of national security, we also ask that the Scottish Government nationalise assets of strategic significance which are currently in the ownership of Ineos. We find it difficult to understand how the Scottish Government could have allowed Ineos –a private business controlled by one ‘unaccountable’ individual– to have gained control over so many Scottish assets of considerable national strategic importance. We have deep and genuine concerns about the potential of Ineos’s to leverage these holdings in their own interests, and influence the impartial processes under the moratorium in their favour. We also believe that the expansion of their power which might result from their monopolisation of Scottish UOG would only exacerbate these problems, representing a threat to Scottish democracy, responsible governance and sustainable development. We have reached a consensus position that there is an urgent need to decentralise and redistribute Ineos’s assets, particularly, through the nationalisation of the Grangemouth refinery and the pipeline network recently acquired from BP. Otherwise we fear the interests of one man will determine the path of the Scottish nation, and not the interests and democratic will its citizens. We also wish to make clear that this viewpoint is in no way linked to our aforementioned community position on UOG. Even if a UOG industry was nationalised, or under our own community ownership, our decision would be to reject fracking locally on account of those risks to our health, environment and economy which we have set out above.