

## **TORRANCE COMMUNITY COUNCIL (SSCC) UOG COMMUNITY DISCUSSION**

- **Group:** The Community Council and the Peoples of Torrance.
- **Date of meeting:** Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> March 2017, 7-9:15pm.
- **Location address / postcode:** Torrance Bowling Club, Torrance School Road, Glasgow, G64 4BZ.
- **Number of attendees:** 30.

### **(i) UOG Community Discussion Process**

1. Leaflets notifying residents of the meeting were posted through doors throughout Torrance, and left in public places: libraries, clinics etc.
2. The consultation began with a 45 minute introduction for residents following information slides set out in Scottish Government's Discussion Pack for large groups, and was presented by Roland Playle and 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](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](mailto: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.** Around three quarters of participating residents perceived no potential benefits of UOG whatsoever to the community of Torrance.

**Jobs.** Proposed by around a quarter of the participants, the potential benefit most mentioned was the possibility of new local jobs. In discussion, however, it was agreed this was unlikely to significant, given the small figures predicted for the country as a whole in the Scottish Government research on UOG's economic impacts. It was considered that those jobs which could arise would not provide sustainable local employment, but would rather be short-term jobs associated with servicing the industry, such as haulage or catering. It was suggested that local economic benefits might be secured by a contractual obligation by the industry to guarantee the community a number of school apprenticeships or training opportunities. However, it was felt unlikely operators would invest in such an initiative due to the short-term nature of the industry and the availability of skilled workers currently "sitting idle" (e.g. up in Shetland). Thus, while it was acknowledged that the industry might protect or revive some existing jobs in a petrochemical industry in decline, it would not create new ones, and overall, it was a short-term unsustainable economic strategy. The view was expressed that the industry was taking advantage of poorer rural communities by "dangling the carrot" of jobs and incentives which would never manifest. It was also felt that UOG could well impact negatively on local jobs, for example, those associated with the equine or tourist industries. In conclusion, the general agreement was reached that there would be no meaningful or desirable impact of UOG on local employment, and it was dismissed as a potential benefit.

**Energy Security.** Three residents proposed that UOG could reduce Scotland's dependency on overseas gas and that this was a potential benefit. In discussion, however, it was felt that given the short-term nature of the UOG opportunity, the industry would not manage the resources sustainably, responsibly, or in the national interest, but would sell their 'commodity' to the highest bidder and channel their profits offshore. The view was expressed that short-term speculation could cause a 15 year boom-and-bust cycle, at the end of which Scotland would be left without a gas resource which could be important in the future, in a more insecure state regarding energy and the economy, and bearing the burden of UOG's negative impacts. In conclusion, it was generally agreed that neither the extracted UOG nor the profit would be likely to stay in Scotland, and therefore energy security was a weak argument from a free market perspective.

**Economic Benefits to drive Transition.** Although the potential benefit of UOG as a transitional fuel wasn't proposed initially, this did emerge as a topic during discussion. It was suggested UOG could provide home feedstock for materials used in the renewables industry (e.g. to make wind turbine blades). Particularly, it was put forward that UOG might be used to drive transition by way of a hypothecated and 'transparent' tax which channelled investment directly into renewables research and development. However, doubts were raised on three counts. First, was that there would be no significant taxable profits due to the industry's offshore accounting strategies. Second, was that any Government income from UOG would be offset by their subsidising the industry directly (e.g. their investment in infrastructure at Grangemouth), or indirectly through the public cost of road repairs, water supply, regulation, or health and environmental services. Third, was that there would be hidden

economic disbenefits to sustainable development associated with the industrialisation of the countryside, such as impacts on farming and tourism. It was agreed, therefore, that while UOG was an easy option, it was better for Scotland to leave it in the ground, and maintain its world-leading commitment to renewables and climate action. It was noted that investment in renewable technologies had doubled and the cost halved in recent years, and that Scotland was blessed with rich sustainable energy resources such as wind, waves and rain. It was agreed that UOG was a valuable resource for which there may be greater national need in the future, by which time the risks would be better understood than they are now, and extraction safer. Moreover, residents felt strongly that saying no to UOG as a 'prop' would not only send a powerful message to the world, but also force Scotland to focus investment and innovation purely on developing a sustainable economy, wherein UOG may never be needed. Ultimately, it was generally concluded that the argument for UOG as a transition fuel was weak and flawed, and that the industry would be a dangerous distraction which would waste national resources for short-term and minimal reward.

## **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 benefits put forward by residents, or which emerged in discussion were:

**Impacts on Mental and Physical Health.** The foremost risk for the majority of residents was the potential health risks associated with having the UOG industry in close proximity. It was generally agreed that the range of ways in which local extraction could affect public health increased the probability of impacts. Concerns were expressed regarding the direct effects of air and water borne chemicals associated with the industry, including known and unknown carcinogens and endocrine disruptors. Particular worries were raised about the pollution of air by fine particular matter from UOG activities and traffic, which research suggests could represent a similar risk to smoking. It was felt the potential for exposure would be exacerbated by intensive extraction, the unique geological context, and 'self-regulating' operators motivated by short-term profit. In addition, residents talked about the intangible, yet potentially significant, impacts that industrialisation, traffic and noise could have on their health. For example, they felt it would mean they would use the local countryside for physical activity such as walking and cycling, and foresaw impacts of frustration and stress on the mental health of the community. In summary, it was unanimously agreed that it was an unacceptable level of risk which residents were being asked to gamble upon.

**Impacts of Traffic, Noise and Infrastructure.** Residents rejected the conclusion of the research commissioned by the Scottish Government that there would be no noticeable impact of UOG traffic at a regional level. A substantial majority were of the view that the movement of heavy traffic through the village and on country roads would have significant impacts on the community's health, wellbeing and economy. Issues included the disturbance or dangers for cyclists, horse riders, or residents crossing roads, with particular concerns raised for children. Residents felt there would be damage to village roads and the infrastructure which lay beneath them, where the cost for repairs would be borne by the taxpayer. It was mentioned that there thriving equine industry locally, which supported the economy through jobs, tourism, vets and insurance provision, and which would be affected by the heavy traffic and industrialisation of the local countryside. Above all, it was generally felt that continuous heavy traffic, and noise, on the stress levels and mental health of a peaceful community would be significant and intolerable, and that the far-reaching effects had not been properly addressed in the independent research.

**Environmental and Ecological Impacts.** The majority of residents expressed genuine concerns about the impacts of intensive industrialisation on the local natural environment. The view was expressed that it had taken a long time for the hills around Torrance to recover from the industrial past, and it would be a great pity for UOG to reverse all of Nature’s good work and require her to start all over again. It was noted that while there may not be any specially-protected areas, the region – particularly, the Kelvin Valley– was generally regarded to be rich in biodiversity and a nationally-important habitat for migratory birds such as the pink-footed goose or teal. Rare birds were often spotted in the area, drawing many birdwatchers who contributed to the local economy through stopping at local shops and pubs. It was felt there were many pathways by which UOG activities could contaminate the local ecology. This included the use of contaminated limestone for fertiliser by farmers, and seepage into rivers and reservoirs which could cause harmful impacts further afield. Regarding the national context, a quarter of the residents also placed the negative impacts of UOG on Climate Change and Scotland’s reputation for climate action high among their potential risks.

**Risks associated with the hydrogeological context.** Many residents felt that heavy mining and faulting in the area (notably the major Campsie Fault) represented a multitude of potential pathways for fugitive chemicals and gases to contaminate the environment, and an earthquake risk. For the same reason, some suspected historical hydrocarbon extraction in the area may have already impacted negatively on local health, and didn’t want to see this repeated. While the view was expressed that it may be possible to mitigate hydrogeological risks with rigorous modelling and monitoring, and the application of best practice, no-one had any faith that this would actually be the case.

**Ineffective Regulation and Clean-up.** One of the principal discussion themes were concerns about the capability of regulators to cope with the industry and protect the community. In a climate of cuts to public spending, residents had little faith in the regulators, believing them to be under-resourced, lacking independent expertise, and that they had been “called out too many times” and “were evidently struggling what they do have”. The general view was that regulators would farm out their responsibility, leaving the industry to be essentially self-regulating. There was general mistrust for the profit-motivated industry, who would play these weaknesses in the regulatory system. Some felt that if operators were given the green light, they would inundate and incapacitate understaffed local authorities and planning departments with a flood of applications, rendering proper assessment impossible. Moreover, it was generally felt that given the number of sources of risk associated with a novel intensive industry in a novel ‘real-world’ and densely-populated context, the overall probability of harm was high, or in the words of one resident, “*something always goes wrong*”. Some cited evidence of such occurrences associated with the UOG industry elsewhere, including a major Californian gas leak. The need for rigorous local and national base line measures and monitoring was deemed to be essential. As was the effective regulation of end-to-end processes to ensure the community would be properly covered for damage to property and environment, and wouldn’t be left footing the bill after an operator had left, gone bankrupt or had wriggled out of their contractual obligations. It was generally felt that this needed hard requirements (e.g. bonds, insurance), and close scrutiny and regulation by Government, and involvement by communities to ensure responsibilities for clean-up were being properly met on the ground. It was suggested that local monitoring might represent employment or training opportunities, but that this was unlikely to happen due to the degree of specialism the job may require.

**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 is one main messages or question to the Scottish Government which arose from our consultation:

**Our community rejects any social license for the UOG industry to operate in our area, will the Scottish Government respect our collective position?** We have carefully considered and weighed up the potential impacts of a UOG industry, and have concluded the risks far outweigh the benefits both to our community and the nation as a whole. We think the proposed benefits for Scottish communities are negligible, short-term and untrustworthy, and the potential risks of hosting an intensive industry in some of the most densely-populated areas of Scotland, substantial and unacceptable. We have no trust in an extractive industry with a short-term profit motive, and we do not believe the benefits they promise will be forthcoming or that they will take responsibility for their impacts. We have little faith in the capacity of regulators or planning authorities to control a nationwide industry in the interests of public and environmental safety, and think operators will take advantage of this to enhance their profits at our risk. We also have good reason to believe there are inherent and uncontrollable impacts to human and ecological health associated with the industry, which may be exacerbated by the local hydrogeological context and the intensive nature of UOG industrialisation. We feel that the economic benefits it is proposed UOG may represent, will be offset by hidden costs to the taxpayer such as those associated with subsidies, water supply, road repairs, regulation and clean-up. We also believe related time and money would be better invested in developing a genuinely sustainable economy, and that UOG short-termism will divert attention and money from necessary transitional strategy and Scotland's leadership in this area. By saying no to UOG now, we will be seen to be upholding that vision and it will provide greater motivation for us to innovate towards a sustainable future where we may not need the gas at all. By saying yes to UOG now, we believe at best this will drive a short-term boom, where the bust may leave our community and the nation worse off than it is now. In conclusion, through discussion we have agreed together that we are not prepared to the burden of cumulative risk of UOG to the life of our community, particularly, for minimal or no benefit. On this basis, we have reached a position of 100% consensus that we should refuse the social license for UOG extraction in our community council area, and wish to verify that this position will be respected by our Government and the industry.