

WESTFIELD COMMUNITY COUNCIL UOG COMMUNITY DISCUSSION

- **Group:** The Community Council and the Peoples of Westfield.
- **Date of meeting:** Wednesday 17th May 2017, 7-9:15pm.
- **Location address / postcode:** Westfield Community Centre, Westfield Drive, Westfield, Cumbernauld, North Lanarkshire, G68 9HJ.
- **Number of attendees:** 30.

(i) UOG Community Discussion Process

1. Leaflets notifying residents of the meeting were posted through all doors in Westfield.
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 co-presented by Gordon Carmichael (Connecting Scotland) 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) was also presented and handed out.

3. The presentation was followed by 90 minutes of discussion facilitated by Jamie McKenzie Hamilton (CCN) and Gordon Carmichael (Connecting Scotland), and, 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 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. Over 70% of the participants felt UOG represented no potential benefits at all for the community of Westfield.

Jobs. The foremost perceived benefit was the potential for local employment (17%). However, the general view was that skilled work would be performed by teams contracted from outwith the community, and ‘flown in when needed’. Nevertheless, it was acknowledged that servicing these teams could supply some jobs, for example, related to food supply or haulage, and these might represent a notable economic impact over a 15 year period. Some suggested that a commitment to local employment might be embodied in a contract between the community and operators, to ensure skilled work or investment was directed locally. However others felt the industry was designed to be ‘low manpower’, and would be largely automated after initial activities, and therefore that any skilled and secondary work would be unstable, intermittent and decline quickly. In conclusion, there was general agreement that the promise of local jobs was ‘highly speculative’.

Cheap energy. The idea that UOG might bring cheaper energy to the region was put forward and discussed. There seemed general scepticism that industry would pass on any economic benefits to local customers. In the words of one residents, ‘the gas will be sold on to the highest bidder’, and another, ‘even if it has an effect, big business never passes on their profits’. The view was expressed that Ineos had made it known that they would be using UOG primarily as feedstock for manufacturing, and as they were the sole license holder in Scotland, that meant no Scottish gas would be used for energy supply anyway. On this basis, the idea of energy independence as a benefit was also dismissed. In summary, there was a general scepticism regarding cheap energy and energy independence as potential benefits of UOG.

Economic Benefits. That UOG might represent an economic benefit, locally and nationally, was also debated. The view was expressed that the UOG market had delivered notable positive impacts for the US economy. It was also noted that Ineos had proposed incentives to communities (2%) and landowners (5%) who hosted their operations, and that this might bring income in the way that wind farm trusts had elsewhere in Scotland. However, someone put forward that a 2% profit-share of the estimated production of an average well pad for Westfield worked out at around £10 per resident. One resident argued ‘you can’t put a value on health’ and another that ‘there’s no guarantees, all risk, they’re just trying to buy the community off’. It was also suggested that any income from incentives had to be weighed against potentially substantial economic disbenefits to the community. Those mentioned included personal property costs associated with falling valuation and rising insurance, or public costs such as the industry’s water supply or repair to road damage. The view was also expressed that to preserve profits, the industry would probably charge any expenses associated with

incentives onto the end-customer, thus leaving no net public benefit overall. It was also noted that the oil and gas market was increasingly turbulent and unprofitable, and therefore that a finite short-term resource couldn't be regarded as a stable economic benefit. In conclusion, it was generally agreed that there were neither clear, nor persuasive, economic benefits of UOG for the people of Westfield, or 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

Impacts on Public and Environmental Health. For a significant majority the foremost perceived risks of UOG were the potential implications for public and environmental health. Residents referred to research they had read which linked UOG gasfields with 'serious' impacts on respiratory, reproductive and mental health, and contamination of farmland and water supplies. One participant emphasised the fine particulate matter associated with UOG activities and traffic, which they regarded as difficult to monitor and little understood, citing evidence which related it to internal organ damage. Many referred to their concerns about 'unknown' implications for health such as the non-disclosure of industrial chemicals, low level leaks, or the 'carcinogens in air and water, pollution you can't see'. Worries were expressed about processes of bioaccumulation, whereby industrial toxins become more concentrated in the ecosystem over time, the further they move up the food chain. A major concern for most was the extent of old mineworkings in the area, or as one resident put it, 'they are absolutely everywhere'. The general opinion was that these could provide pathways for the 'transient movement' of industrial or natural toxins, including radioactive materials and gases. People also felt strongly that extractive activities, or consequent seismic activity, could spark systemic underground damage, thus seriously exacerbating risks to health and property. In summary, it was collectively agreed that there was an unacceptable degree of uncertainty with respect to the potential immediate and long-term health risks of UOG to 'public, flora and fauna'.

Risks to Property. Around a third of participants ranked the potential risks to their property among their highest. There were genuine concerns that a local UOG industry would cause increasing home insurance, decreasing house valuations, and would deter incomers. Many residents were worried there could be damage to private and public property, for which they would not be properly covered. Some referred to past local experiences for illustration, such as a local quarry where 'when there were explosions they would seem so close: the houses would shake and windows smash'. Others cited the property damage resulting from sinkholes in Clydebank, and felt intensive extraction in a local area which had been heavily mined could trigger similar consequences. The general feeling was that UOG shouldn't be permitted anywhere unless it could be demonstrated to communities and residents that they were completely covered for any property damage by industry bonds or insurance. Ultimately, however, it was concluded that even if such measures were in place, Westfield would still not consider UOG locally.

Traffic Impacts. Impacts associated with UOG traffic were foremost among the potential risks for many residents. Many felt the increased diesel fumes represented a health risk, with specific concerns expressed that carcinogens and fine particular matter ‘may affect the younger people’. Others were worried about the noise of trucks passing regularly, and the possible implications of this for mental health and wellbeing. It was also robustly argued that many local roads were already in very poor condition and that the additional traffic would only ‘add to the problem’. In the words of one resident, ‘we already have a big issue the quality of roads and pavements, which North Lanarkshire Council aren’t taking responsibility for. Communities need iron-clad assurances from UOG operators that they will maintain roads throughout and at the end of the extractive period, and this will not be at the expense of the local public purse’. However, at the close of the meeting, it was concluded that such assurances would still not be sufficient for the people of Westfield to countenance local UOG extraction.

Trust in Proper Regulation. A recurring discussion theme was the general lack of faith in regulation. Most believed that the UOG industry would be self-regulating, due to regulators’ declining resources, and also to the increasing power of operators like Ineos, which some felt meant their breaches would be overlooked or that fines would be immaterial to them. One resident proposed evidence that regulators had allowed Dart Energy to release pollutants into specially protected areas in the Forth, as indication of the protection the community might expect. There was a general desire for total transparency from regulators overall, and sharper clarity regarding specific areas of regulation. Given the population density of the area, people wanted to know precise details of ‘setback distances’ and ‘explosion zones’, and of the rationale for these. Full public disclosure was demanded regarding all industrial chemicals (‘they don’t tell you all the chemicals’), and where and how *waste* chemicals and gases would be disposed of. One resident had heard that fracking waste from England was already coming to Scotland, which was a cause for uneasiness. A notable area of concern was what would happen if issues occurred after *decommissioning* or if an operator went bankrupt. Several cited the recent incidence of opencast mining operators in the Central Belt going bust, and leaving the public to foot the bill for restoration. Participants asked, ‘what system is there to ensure clean-up, whatever happens?’ and ‘what happens if there are gas leaks after drilling? The regulators can’t fix your lungs if they’re broken can they?’ There was a consensus that if UOG did go ahead in Scotland, then licenses and planning applications should only be granted with a bond or insurance in place to cover any eventuality requiring clean-up or compensation, from exploratory drilling through to post-decommissioning. Nevertheless, it was generally agreed at the end of the meeting that this would not be sufficient to alter the decision of the people of Westfield that they should reject UOG extraction in their local community council area.

Trust in Proper Governance. Another emergent and pervading theme of the discussion were community concerns that the industry, particularly Ineos, were influencing the Scottish Government’s decision-making on UOG. Many felt that ‘behind the scenes’ there was a ‘fluid relationship’ between the Parliament and company executives to which the Scottish people were not a party. Questions were asked about the Independent Expert Panel, and whether their conclusions had been biased by industry involvement or other vested interests, and the view was expressed that ‘anyone can be bought off at high levels’. This mistrust of industry was also factor in the lack of confidence in regulators. As one resident put it, ‘who regulates the regulators?’ and another, ‘they’ll be allowed to pollute if they have the money’. In summary, it was generally felt that powerful corporate interests could be steering UOG

decision-making such that (in the words of one resident) ‘we don’t have much confidence in the consultation process, or that our Government will act in the interests of the Scottish people.’

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 one messages to the Scottish Government as the result of our consultation:

We have reached a consensus position that we reject the social license for UOG in our community council area in perpetuity. After due consideration of the potential benefits and risks of UOG for Westfield, we have reached unanimous consensus that the levels of uncertainty and risk we are being asked to tolerate, override any economic benefit. We also suspect the benefits proposed to have been substantially overstated. We live in a heavily populated area with a subsurface geology compromised by centuries of mining, and believe this distinguishes our region from prior UOG gasfields elsewhere in the world, and exacerbates risks to our community and environment. We feel there are still a great many ‘unknowns’, including non-disclosed industrial chemicals, personal and public liability for damage, economic disbenefits, and cumulative community impacts. To resolve these ‘unknowns’ and protect us from harm, we are being asked to place our faith in regulators in whom we have no confidence on the basis of past local experience. This is further undermined by our strong suspicion that powerful corporate interests may be steering the decision-making on UOG of the Scottish Government and their regulators, and that this would continue or worsen if the industry went ahead. We believe strongly that if the decision on UOG was given to the communities of the Central Belt, or was being truly informed by our national commitment to sustainable development, it would not be serious consideration. On this basis we unreservedly reject the social license for UOG in our community council area, regardless of any assurances proposed now or in the future, and ask for confirmation from the Scottish Government that our position will be honoured by them and any industry operators.