

Balcombe Parish Council

Report on a meeting of the Oil Exploration Working Group
with Paul Batty and Simon Deacon of the Environment Agency on 24th June 2013

Risk

The EA considers the activities that Cuadrilla wishes to undertake this summer at Lower Stumble to represent relatively low risk. Similar activities have taken place elsewhere in the county, for example oil has been extracted at Singleton for a number of years, with acid stimulation being employed and gas being flared. Environmental pollution incidents have been very rare, although it is not known whether air quality has been monitored.

Method Statement

To enable the EA to discharge its general responsibility for overseeing activities which might impact on the environment, it has required Cuadrilla to produce a detailed Method Statement covering all aspects of its proposed activities at Lower Stumble this summer. This document is currently work in progress, with the EA reviewing drafts and asking for changes and/or additional information. The final version, which is expected within the next week or two, will be in the public domain and will be placed on the EA website. It will include full details of the ground water monitoring processes that Cuadrilla will employ.

Permit for Mining Waste Management

Meanwhile, to comply with new regulations introduced in 2010, Cuadrilla Balcombe Ltd has submitted an application for a specific environmental permit covering the management of mining waste. This permit is required before Cuadrilla can commence drilling ("spudding") an exploratory well. This application, which can be viewed on the EA website, is open for public consultation until 16th July. Responses are being sought from the statutory consultees (Public Health England, WSCC, MSDC and the H&SE), from stakeholders (which include Balcombe Parish Council) and from the public. The public is encouraged to submit responses, using the on-line response forms, each of which will be read and to which an appropriate response will be given. The EA expects to make a decision on the application, and to notify the DECC, within one week after the end of the public consultation. The timing will depend on how long it takes the EA to consider the 'material' responses, i.e. those responses that are directly relevant to the permit application.

Permit under Radioactive Substances Regulations

Cuadrilla is currently preparing an application for a specific environmental permit under the Radioactive Substances Regulations because underground water may contain small amounts of Naturally Occurring Radioactive Materials (NORMs). This permit is not required before Cuadrilla can commence drilling an exploratory well, but is required before it can commence testing the well. This application will also be subject to a similar public consultation for 20 working days. In due course the EA representatives will be happy to make another visit to Balcombe to review this application with the Group.

Fracking

The EA confirmed that application received from Cuadrilla excludes any form of hydraulic fracturing at Lower Stumble this summer. Well testing would involve dilute acid wash stimulation but no induced hydraulic fracturing.

Monitoring for Pollution

To check compliance with Environmental Quality Standards, Cuadrilla will be required to monitor surface water, ground water and air, before (to provide base line figures), during and after their activities. The EA will conduct its own sampling concurrently, the results of which will be in the public domain. The EA will also make periodic visits to the site to check compliance with any conditions that may be attached to permits.

Miscellaneous matters raised by members of the Group:

1. The type of flaring equipment that Cuadrilla are proposing to employ is different from that described in the appendix C to its 2010 application to WSCC for Planning Consent. Is this material?
2. There is an error in Cuadrilla's Site Condition Report (one of the documents that comprise its current application) regarding the directions of flow of the relevant water courses.
3. There is concern over Cuadrilla's action in seeking permits from the EA in the name of Cuadrilla Balcombe Ltd, a US\$ 100 company. Would this enable Cuadrilla Resources, and its directors, to abrogate responsibility in the event of unforeseen pollution or other problems?
4. Would the EA be making a response to the critical blog by Geoffrey Lean (The Daily Telegraph, Friday 21st June) which suggests that the Agency had been "asleep on the job"?