

Airth UOG Community Discussion Outcomes

Community Discussion: Airth Community Council and the Community of Airth.

Date of meeting: Monday 22nd May 2017, 7:15 - 9:30pm.

Location: Airth Welfare Hall, Main Street, FK2 8LL

Number of attendees: 47

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:

Jobs. The majority of the responses indicated that there were no perceived benefits for individuals or the local community. However a significant number of responses reflected on there being some possibility or potential for employment, but there were misgivings about the security of these jobs and what quality of work was likely to be envisaged. It was considered the jobs would be either too few in number, low-skilled, or short term and the best jobs were unlikely to be for the local people in Airth.

Participants considered the origin of the required skills set amongst the work-force would be provided from the International or National markets and there would be little demand for increased local low-skilled workers. It was strongly felt that any advantages considered in this field would be far out-borne by the disadvantages and some felt there should be more focus on renewable energy. It was recognised by some that Gas Methane is important but there was significant reference to the environmental impacts elsewhere where livestock had suffered because of industrial waste.

In terms of securing existing employment within the petrochemical industry, whilst some highlighted this as a benefit, others felt this alone did not merit the potential risk to the environment and it was strongly felt the jobs at Grangemouth and within the industry at present were not currently dependent on Fracking or CBM.

Roads (Quality): Whilst some highlighted the potential for improving the infrastructure such as roads network and others suggested the benefits would simply fall to the petrochemical industry, (either in the form of increased profits or to workers already employed in the industry) there was general consensus the road system was already in need of significant improvement and this would be a pre-requisite for any increase in industrial traffic.

The group agreed the current local roads system, (described as horrendous) could not sustain any more demand without significant upgrade.

Generation of Community Wealth: Questions were asked about the benefit to the local community in terms of pay-outs from the industry. Others thought this was highly unlikely and the concept was dismissed over concerns being expressed re lack of guarantees and no sum being worthy of consideration due to the risks involved.

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?

Our discussion on the Risks and Challenges reflected that the majority of Post-Its highlighted concerns of Health, Environment and related factors.

Health. The discussions reflected and there was unanimous agreement there was insufficient clarity and simply not enough evidence about the likely risks to the environment and the subsequent health impacts to both the community of today and on the children of the future. Concerns were rife about the various forms of pollution the community would suffer from the impact of local fracking.

It was highlighted the Scottish Governments own research as shown in the presentation reflected the poor or inadequate research resulted in their being many unknowns, and therefore not a reliable guide to the real potential risks to health. INEOS had themselves been unable to

Get in touch

If you want to find out more about Community Charters or how to go about creating one, please email us info@communitychartering.org or call us on 07775 566648 / 0793 508210.

offer any suitable guarantees about the integrity of wells even after decommissioning and many expressed anxiety about what happened if the operator went bust, then who is liable?

The recent activities of leakages and gas escapes and the many risks from the toxic chemicals in the Grangemouth plant, as well as revelations about contaminated waste being dumped into the Forth estuary near Airth rendered little support for the removal of the current moratorium and indeed wanted it to become permanent.

Often the discussion (and apparent strength of feeling or concern) would cause overlap into another area of concern. This was highlighted re the issue of gas seeping into communities through unchartered mine workings and basically the group considered that all fossil fuels that have to be extracted from within the ground should be considered an "energy of the past". Participants were asked to consider if there may be a potential asset worth exploring, but it was felt it should only be removed if it can be proven to be managed safely and many others felt the industry is a long way from offering any form of guarantee on safety.

The legacy of the local mining industry was a deep sore in the minds of those present and many highlighted the issues of the uncharted mines in South Alloa. There were existing concerns about the stability of the groundworks and many felt no satisfactory reassurances had been given. Concerns further intensified when questions were asked about the lubricants and additives being used in the industry, which returned the discussion to health once again.

Such concerns were not restricted to local citizens but it was highlighted that local agriculture farmlands serviced the needs of the food and drinks manufacturers such as locally grown oats for Sots Porridge Oats and Barley for the whisky industry. Many felt the damage to the reputation of the community would render the land as devalued.

Hydrogeology and Environmental Issues. There were considerable arguments presented about the risks of seismic activity. These ranged from the risks of carcinogenic causing waste materials in the soil and water supply and the lack of proven scientific research. The group agreed this should be a priority before further action, "even if it takes another hundred years" to carry this out. The natural and man-made sub-surface geology of the area makes the risk of escape of gas, chemicals and other materials too great. It was agreed a map of the mined areas in the vicinity of Airth shows the subsurface is riddled with old mines and this is only for the mines we know about, many more are unknown and unmapped. The group were asked what would be considered satisfactory to enable further activity and it was felt there had no successful implementation anywhere as yet and they wanted instead clean energy, not "further contamination of their community." If it all goes wrong at any stage, who will be responsible ultimately and who pays?

Local knowledge had identified the industry will not purchase land for well-head operations but merely lease land or threaten compulsory purchase, which it was felt, would render responsibility for restoration lay with owners. Farmers are aware of the problems of insuring against adverse effects and the irrigation of farmland would be rendered unsuitable. Farmers asked about whether a bond could be purchased or provided by operators to cover worst eventualities and they were advised there were so many unknowns that a value could not be calculated for an effective bond to be provided. The group agreed this indicates the risks are far too unknown and high.

Housing. It was claimed and supported that related work would cause major disruption in the Housing Market. The group considered that Fracking would have a serious detrimental impact on Housing Costs, due to reduced sales values, fear of increased insurance costs and fears over structural damage caused by underground exploration. Several members of the group knew where this was already being considered with housing not being sold and some being structurally supported. It was considered the damage to the reputation would also discourage people from moving into the area with house price reductions foreseen as a likely consequence, and people not being able to sell and leave the area.

Regulation. Given the experience of Dart Energy in the past and what often happens in Grangemouth now, participants were unable to express trust in SEPA or the regulators. Fears were expressed about the processes and legal frameworks for granting permission for fracking and if Local Authority were to refuse planning permission could Scottish Govt and the Supreme Court overrule any objections; even on a relatively short-term basis. In considering the issue of decommissioning members of the group highlighted poor supervision in other industries had let them down. Longannet Power Station was cited as an example. The group's distaste of the concept of Fracking and distrust of regulation were obvious. It was agreed there was no trust in the various bodies of regulators based on previous experiences.

Transport and Infrastructure. Local development was another major consideration for the group who agreed the local traffic system was already in need of major upgrade. In particular many pointed the main road through Airth (A905) was poorly maintained and traffic conditions were described as horrendous. There was no support for increasing the volume of heavy good vehicles on this or any other local roads. It was felt that many of the local rural areas were serviced by minor roads similar to farm tracks and these could not be expected to carry industry related vehicles.

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).

Plenary. It seems from the discussion that local people recall the Airth Public Enquiry where many of the community's objections were simply dismissed by the other side including Government and therefore they do not trust anyone. The question was asked, "How do we ensure that the Scottish Government will listen to our and other communities' views and that they work with more than simple 'material considerations'. It was considered " There are simply far too many unknowns and no answers forthcoming."

Through each topic under discussion it was considered there was clearly no appetite for Fracking in the community of Airth. The group agreed that each of the potential benefits previously suggested were far outweighed by negative factors such as Health, Environment, Geology, Transport, Agriculture, Tourism, Economy, Employment and Housing. The group was asked to consider if some of their concerns were to be addressed and reassurances offered, might it be reasonable for the community of Airth to grant social licence to enable Fracking to proceed within the community of Airth. This concept was roundly rejected by all except two participants.

The Community Council and Peoples of Airth Do Not grant social licence to Ineos to embark on a strategy of Fracking within the vicinity of Airth.

Questions/Issues.

Participants within the group were invited to pose questions and outline specific issues of concerns to be forwarded to the Scottish Government. These are outlined below.

- Many questions related to why, "there was so little information about the potential risks for an informed decision to be made," and yet it was felt there was so much relevant data from other countries suggesting this was too risky, so why persist with it?
- Who would compensate property owners for actual loss or relative decline in values?
- What about the Geothermal heating from exhausted holes.
- Why are you bowing to undue pressure from one single business?
- Have you really considered the unique geology of the area of Airth?
- Is the Government going to take responsibility, if it all goes wrong, regarding houses repair prices?
- What is the real benefit to our area?
- Why is more investment not in hydropower and wind power? Forget about Fracking. The negative impact only outweighs any positives.
- High-energy even consider doing this in a built-up area.?
- Will it be possible to have the first well drilled outside the Scottish parliament buildings?
- Regarding house prices, the onus is on the Scottish or taxpayer if there are problems.
- How can industry self-regulate and be held responsible?
- How can SEPA be sure it has experience to deal beyond decommissioning
- Where are the facts of the Australian Gas Industry?
- Cancer risks with methane in the air. Loss of crops from farmland that will become polluted. Hundreds of thousands of acres already been poisoned in the USA.
- What are the health risks? Please quantify risks of excavation!
- How far do visual and noise and health impacts extend from the source?
- Would you like to live near these wells?
- Please ask the government is this a financial decision or a political decision?
- What research has been done into the health risks?
- What are the long-term benefits?
- Are we going to be compensated for the decrease in value of house prices?
- How would a community fund be administered?
- Will SEPA be given extra funding and teeth to deal with problems?
- Will Bonds for reinstatement of wells be set and who sets the level required?
- Who monitors redundant wells?
- What happens if an individual causes damage to health or property?
- Can we as a community afford not to explore the potential?
- With the difficulty in meeting carbon emission targets surely we need to consider all options in Education and we can't do all. What other fuel sources have been considered and how do they compare in terms of benefits and risks against Fracking or CBM?
- How can the government guaranteed compliance with standards?
- How can government ensure Public Safety? Note: the possible leakage, explosion, contamination the release of hazards, fracking induced earthquakes of magnitude of 3 and above?

- Is there a transition plan for when the wells close to cope with the job losses due to dependency?

Working in Partnership to Put People and their Values at the heart of Planning

All content © Community Chartering Network 2017