TO: PLANNING & REGULATORY COMMITTEE

DATE: 9 MAY 2007

BY: PLANNING MANAGER

DISTRICT(S): TANDRIDGE

ELECTORAL DIVISION (S):
GODSTONE
Mrs Marian Myland

GRID REF:
534693e 147961n

PURPOSE: FOR DECISION

TITLE: MINERALS AND WASTE APPLICATION: TA06/1788

SUMMARY REPORT

Land at Kings Farm, Tilburstow Hill Road, South Godstone

Construction of an appraisal wellsite to include plant, buildings and equipment; drilling of, and testing for hydrocarbons from up to two appraisal boreholes; the erection of security fencing; construction of a new access and associated works to an existing access track; construction of a 1km extension to the existing access track with three passing bays, all on some 1.12 ha, for a temporary period of up to 3 years, with restoration to agriculture.

This application is concerned with the second stage of on-shore gas development - gas appraisal. The initial exploration stage carried out in the 1960s determined the presence of hydrocarbons in the Bletchingley gas field; the appraisal stage involves a testing process to determine the scale of the resource. The development involves the drilling of two boreholes at a wellsite and the appraisal of the Bletchingley gas reservoir. The proposed site lies within the Metropolitan Green Belt within a rural farming area in an Area of Local Landscape Significance. The wellsite and access route are close to Birchen Coppice, a potential Site of Nature Conservation Importance (pSNCI) and ancient woodland, which also contains an enclosure, which is designated a Site of Archaeological Importance. The proposed temporary gas appraisal is not considered to require Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) under the Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations 1999.

It is necessary to assess the proposal against European, National, Regional and Development Plan policy, and assess the potential environmental and amenity impacts against those policies and the advice provided by statutory and non-statutory consultees and views expressed by other bodies, groups and individuals. A key issue in determining this application is the need for the development. The Authority must also be satisfied that the potential impacts arising from the development are acceptable in terms of the closest residential properties and the local environment and amenities. The assessment in the report covers such environmental and amenity issues as noise, visual impact, ecology, highways and traffic, archaeology and restoration.

The proposal has generated local concern, which has focussed on the site’s location within an Area of Local Landscape Significance, noise and traffic issues. However, another important factor for local residents has been the consideration of future proposals for the site. The applicant has been open about the potential options were the appraisal to be successful, but this application is for appraisal only and any further development would have to be the subject of a further development consent. Minerals Policy Statement 1 ‘Planning and Minerals’ states that ‘there should be no presumption in favour of consent for subsequent stages if an earlier stage be permitted, nor do possible effects of a later stage not yet applied for, constitute grounds for refusal of an earlier stage.’ Para 3.2.
In terms of need, indigenous supplies of gas have declined to the point where the United Kingdom (UK) is now a net importer and national energy policy seeks to secure reliability in gas supplies. In May 2006, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry made a statement in the House of Commons setting out why additional gas supply infrastructure is important to the future security of the UK’s gas supply. Whilst aimed at large projects, it highlighted the difficulty of the limited location for the exploitation of gas. With this policy background, the applicant has also relied on the need to confirm the extent of the Bletchingley gas field.

There have been some beneficial amendments to the application, resulting in the reduction of the number of flares, the amount of hedgerow loss and the provision of a 10 metre buffer zone between the mature hedgerow/treeline of the parish boundary and the proposed wellsite. Consultees have raised no objections to the proposed development and where safeguards are required, it is considered that these can be secured by planning conditions.

Officers consider that the proposal as it is now submitted should enable high environmental standards to be maintained and the site well restored. Accordingly, the proposal meets the policy requirements for mineral development in the Green Belt. Taking account of the need for the development, and that the proposal accords with the policies of the Development Plan, Officers recommend that the application be permitted.

The recommendation is to PERMIT subject to conditions.

APPLICATION DETAILS

Applicant
Star Energy UK Onshore Ltd

Date application valid
28 November 2006

Period for determination (13 weeks)
27 February 2007

Amending documents
Letter dated 30 March 2007; letter dated 1 April 2007 including details of the CBT flare and Lighting Plan Figure 4.4B and lighting height schedule, Section 5.2 of planning application form; letter dated 22 April 2007 enclosing Figure 4.4 D Lighting Plan, Figure 6.1B Bletchingley Gas Field Geological Model (April 2007), Figure 4.4/C Proposed Site Layout – Drilling, Figure 4.5/B Proposed Site Layout – Appraisal, Figure 4.6/B Proposed Site Elevations Drilling & Appraisal, Figure 13.1/B Restoration Plan – Wellsite Area, Transport Survey Traffic Flow Survey Data 23/11/06 – 29/11/06.

SUMMARY OF PLANNING ISSUES

This section identifies and summarises the main planning issues raised in the report. The full text should be considered before the meeting.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Is this aspect of the proposal in accordance with the development plan?</th>
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<tr>
<td>Need</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td>Green Belt</td>
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<td>Highways, Traffic &amp; Access</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td>Visual Impact</td>
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<td>Category</td>
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<td>Nature Conservation</td>
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<td>Restoration</td>
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**ILLUSTRATIVE MATERIAL**

**Site Plan**

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<td>Plan 1</td>
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<td>Wellsite during the drilling phase</td>
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**Aerial Photographs**

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<td>Aerial 1</td>
<td>Site Location</td>
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<td>Aerial 2</td>
<td>Wellsite, access track and site surroundings</td>
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**Site Photographs**

**Figure 1** The photograph was taken from the site access and shows the existing farm track which runs between hedgerows, to the right, and the corner of the adjoining field to the left, where the re-aligned access would join the existing track.

**Figure 2** Further westwards, the existing farm track runs between hedgerows and trees.

**Figure 3** The new access route would commence at the right hand corner of the field and run parallel with the hedgerow on the right.

**Figure 4** The new access route would follow the hedge and treeline at the far end of the field before turning to run alongside Prickle Shaw, the woodland on the left of the photograph.

**Figure 5** The access route would cross from one field to the next via the gap between Prickle Shaw on the right and Birchen Coppice on the left.

**Figure 6** The oblong shaped area where the proposed wellsite would be located. Ahead and on the left is Birchen Coppice and on the right the treeline and hedgerow which denote the Parish boundary.

**Figure 7** Looking northwards from the proposed wellsite with part of Birchen Coppice on the right and the Parish boundary on the left. The photograph shows that the wellsite area is fairly enclosed other than to the north. The northern boundary would contain the soil bund to help screen the site.

**Figure 8** Looking southwards down Tilburstow Hill Road from the access. The proposed new access would involve the removal of a section of the hedgerow and grass verge and the reduction in height of a further 45 metre section of hedgerow to provide improved sightlines.

**Figure 9** The photograph was taken from public right of way 269. The new access route would run along the edge of the distant treeline.

**BACKGROUND**

**Site Description**

1. The wellsite is located in a rural area within the Green Belt and in an Area of Local Landscape Significance. The site is found some 1.7 km to the west of South Godstone, 2.5 km northwest of Blindley Heath and approximately 3.5 km south of Godstone village.
The Redhill to Tonbridge railway is approximately 580 metres north of the proposed site beyond Lambs Business Park. The land to the north of the railway line rises steeply and falls within an Areas of Great Landscape Value (AGLV). There are two Sites of Archaeological Importance to the east of the proposed wellsite, one within the woodland known as Birchen Coppice and a second within the linked woodland Prickle Shaw. Prickle Shaw is also an Area of High Archaeological Potential.

2 The proposed wellsite is situated within a field used for permanent pasture. Immediately to the south and east is Birchen Coppice ancient semi-natural woodland a potential Site of Nature Conservation Importance (pSNCI). The hedge and treeline on the proposed wellsite western boundary, with farmland beyond is the Bletchingley/Godstone Parish boundary. The businesses and residential property at Lambs Business Park are found at approximately 530 metres to the north of the site. The nearest group of residential properties are located to the south of the site some 630 metres distant. Residential properties are also found to the north east of the site (approximately 750 metres) and there are properties along Tilburstow Hill Road further to the east.

3 There are two nearby rights of way. Bridleway 293 is found some 240 metres west of the wellsite and runs from Lower South Park to South Park north of the railway line. Footpath 269 joins Tilburstow Hill Road some 400 metres south of the existing farm access at Kings Farm, and runs westwards towards Lower South Park. Access to the 1.12 site would be gained via an existing access from the Tilburstow Hill Road, which would then be extended to run approximately 1 km to the wellsite. Tilburstow Hill Road (D395) is a narrow rural road which to the north joins the B2236 just south of Godstone village which later joins the A25 within Godstone, and to the south joins the A22 at a junction known as Anglefield Corner, approximately 1.5 km south of the proposed access.

Planning History

4 There is no planning history associated with the wellsite the subject of this current application.

5 However, during the 1960’s Esso Petroleum Ltd undertook drilling for oil in an area to the south of the Redhill/Tonbridge railway line between Bletchingley and South Godstone. Planning permission was obtained for the temporary installation of drilling equipment at Lagham Park Farm under consent Ref GO/R 7151 in September 1956, Kennels Farm, Bletchingley (Ref: GO/R 7441), King Farm (Ref GO/R7442 April 1966) and at Lambs Brickworks (Ref: GO/R/7666). Three of the boreholes were successful and one was ‘dry’. Natural gas was found at a depth of 1066 metres and permission was given for the installation of equipment to exploit gas at Lagham Park Farm (Ref GO/R 7510) and Kings Farm (Ref: GO/R 7442A). The locations of the previous boreholes are shown on Plan 4.

6 The existing 0.21 ha wellsite at Kings Farm (known as site 1) is located in a northern part of an open field some 100 metres to the west of Tilburstow Hill Road. The wellsite was accessed by a roughly metalled farm track. Kings Farm site 1 is located just to the south of the access route proposed in this current planning application. The wellsite is now capped but when operational, it utilised the existing farm access onto Tilburstow Hill Road.

7 Two schemes for the extraction of gas from the Bletchingley field were permitted in 1977 and 1985, but neither has been implemented. The first in November 1977, involved the transmission of natural gas by underground pipeline from the well at Kings Farm to a gas treatment plant at Lagham Park Farm. This scheme was permitted under Ref: TA77/691. The second scheme was for the production of natural gas from the three gas wells, through a pipeline from Godstone to Redhill to supply the Copyhold Works and British Industrial Sand Holmethorpe Works at Redhill. This consent was issued on 27 June 1985 under Ref: TA85/277 and RE 85/326.

8 Planning permission was granted in May 1989 (Ref: TA89/181) to service the wellhead at Kings Farm to confirm the downhole integrity of the well. This involved the installation of a
‘rambler’ rig at the site for some 5 to 8 days. A similar ‘workover’ programme had been permitted in June 1985 under Ref: TA85/348 but was not implemented at that time.

9 The wellheads at all three Bletchingley sites have been plugged and the sites have been inactive for many years.

THE PROPOSAL

10 A recent seismic survey over the gasfield has indicated the need for a new appraisal wellsites to gain information regarding the quality and quantity of gas flow. This current proposal therefore seeks the temporary construction of an appraisal wellsites for the drilling of, and flow testing for hydrocarbons, from up to two boreholes. The development would comprise of three phases – construction, operation and restoration.

Construction

11 The construction phase would involve the construction of a new access, the preparation of the access track and the preparation and construction of the wellsites.

- **Access/Access Route Construction**

  Access to the wellsites would be gained via a trackway of over 1 km in length. A new access would be created some 15 metres to the south of the existing access to the west of Tilburstow Hill Road, which would involve the removal of approximately 25 metres of hedgerow along Tilburstow Hill Road. To achieve the necessary visibility zones, a further 45 metres of hedgerow to the south of the access would be reduced in height to below one metre. The first 50 metres of the track would be constructed to the south of the existing trackway. 20 metres of the hedgerow to the south of the existing farm track would be removed to allow the access route to re-join the farm track just to the east of the existing wellsites (Site 1). A 1km long new access track would then be constructed across grassland before running north of Birchen Coppice to the wellsites. The route itself would be 4 metre wide but it is intended that the 1300 m$^3$ topsoil stripped from the route would be stored in a 0.5 metre high soil bund to the north of, and adjacent to, the new route. This would increase the overall width of disturbance by a further 3 metres. There is also provision for three passing bays along the trackway. These bays would be a maximum of 40 metres long and be approximately 2 metres wide.

  It is proposed to level and recontour the existing surface of the access track and cover it with a stabilising membrane and approximately 2900 tonnes of crushed stone. The access and access track works are programmed to take approximately 2 weeks.

- **Wellsite Preparation and Construction**

  Prior to the commencement of the construction of the wellsites, vegetation would be cleared and the site fenced. Wellsite preparation and construction would take approximately 2 weeks and involve:

  - soil stripping and storage. Approximately 2500 m$^3$ of topsoil would be stripped and placed in bund approximately 3m high, 20 metres wide and 80 metres long to the north east of the site. This would form part of the visual and acoustic screening;
  - levelling. The site levels currently vary between 72m AOD and rising to 73.5m AOD. The site would be levelled to 72m AOD. Any surplus subsoil would be stored separately from the topsoil in bunds on the north east side of the site and would also form part of the acoustic and visual screening.
  - installation of impermeable membrane and a layer of geotextile, the placement of crushed stone to a depth of 0.3 metres requiring approximately 4200 tonnes of imported stone, and the creation of a PVC lined ditch around the perimeter of the
site to collect surface water runoff. The applicant intends that surface water collected in the perimeter ditch would be used where possible, as a supply for drilling water during the drilling phase. The applicant envisages that beyond this, the ditch may need emptying approximately once per month depending on the amount of rainfall;

- construction of a concrete well cellar at each of the two proposed borehole locations.
- installation of drilling and appraisal facilities comprising a number of enclosed structures between 2 and 7 metres high including a shrouded ground flare and a single storey container unit for messroom and offices.
- installation of a 29 metres high drilling rig, which would take approximately 4 days.

**Operation**

- **Drilling**
  The proposal involves 24 hour drilling for up to two boreholes to a depth of 1,200 metres below ground level. Each borehole would take about 5 weeks to drill. For safety reasons drilling is a continuous 24-hour operation and to allow night-time drilling it is proposed that the rig is equipped with lights focussed downward and inward, to prevent light spillage beyond the site area.

  Once drilling is complete, the rig will be demobilised and removed from the site. The applicant envisages that this would again take about 4 days. Much of the equipment and plant required for drilling is not required for the appraisal stage and would therefore be removed from site.

- **Appraisal**
  The appraisal process consists of flow-testing from one borehole at a time and analysis of the resulting data. The main items of plant and buildings required for the appraisal stage are the enclosed flare stack, the gas/oil/water separator and gas testing unit and a mess room and office. Access to the site would be during 0800-1900 hours Monday to Friday and 0800-1300 hours on Saturdays.

  Gas produced during flow testing cannot be stored or used on the site. It is therefore proposed to flare the gas ensuring safe disposal by combustion. The shrouded ground flare has an approximate size of 3 metres by 2.6 metres and a height of 6.2 m. The applicant envisages that testing and appraisal would take place over a two year period.

**Decommissioning and restoration**

Following appraisal a decision would be made as to the most appropriate course of action. This would either involve the submission of a planning application to produce gas commercially, to store gas in the natural reservoir, or the restoration of the site. The reinstatement of the site to unimproved grassland would involve the following:

- the boreholes being plugged and made safe to a specification agreed with the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) in accordance with the Petroleum (Production) (Landward Areas) Regulation 1984;
- the removal of the plant, equipment and surfaces from both the wellsite and access route;
- the replacement of the stored soils and the regrading of the site to follow the original contours;
- the undertaking of a restoration and a five year aftercare programme.
**Vehicle Movements**

The type, number and frequency of vehicle movements involved in the development would vary according to the stage of the project.

- **Preparation of Access and Access Route**
  Crushed stone would be brought to the site in HGVs via the A22 and Tilburstow Hill Road. Approximately 140 to 145 lorry loads of crushed stone would be delivered to the site at a rate of about 15 to 18 loads per day delivered in 20 tonne tipper lorries. The delivery of the membrane and the removal of some spoil would bring the maximum HGV traffic movements during this two week period to 20 loads (40 movements) per day.

- **Preparation of Wellsite**
  This stage of the process would take place over a two week period and would involve the membrane and the crushed stone being delivered to the wells site in 20 tonne HGVs via the A22 and Tilburstow Hill Road and the newly created access track. These activities are expected to generate a total of 210 loads which would equate to 3 to 5 deliveries per hour throughout the working day. The fencing would involve 5 to 6 loads over a 3 to 4 day period. Spoil from the well cellars will generate 25 to 30 HGV movements over a two day period. Concrete would also be delivered. The applicant anticipates that the total number of construction traffic movements including all car journeys would not exceed 50 movements per day (25 in 25 out).

- **Mobilisation and Demobilisation of Rig**
  Moving the directional drilling rig onto the wells site would take place over a 3 to 4 day period and involve 22 loads of plant and equipment ie 44 vehicle movements. The rig would be delivered on a 15.5 metre long articulated lorry. The applicant states that there is no requirement for any abnormal loads associated with the rig mobilisation. Demobilisation would also take 3 to 4 days and involve the same type, number and frequency of vehicle movements as the mobilisation stage.

- **Drilling**
  During the 10 week drilling period, daily vehicle movements would involve the delivery of steel drilling pipes (approximately 4 to 6 movements ie a maximum of 3 in 3 out, per day). There would also be approximately 8 movements (4 in 4 out) associated with the disposal in skips of inert waste spoil from the drilling work. Other service deliveries and access by site works would be likely to generate up to 20 light vehicle movements per day (10 in 10 out).

- **Appraisal and Testing**
  It is estimated that there would be an average of between 2 and 4 light vehicle movements per day for the period of appraisal. Approximately 2 times a year intensive maintenance work would need to take place generating an additional 4 to 6 movements per day (a maximum of 3 in 3 out).

- **Decommissioning and Restoration**
  The removal of the crushed stone from the site would involve some 30 HGV movements per day.

**Hours of Operation**

12 With the exception of drilling, the site would operate between the hours of 0800 to 1900 Monday to Friday and 0800 to 1300 on Saturdays.
During the 10 week drilling phase, drilling would take place 24 hours per day. At that time there would be a maximum number of 10 personnel working 12 hour shifts and 2 involved in 24 hour shifts. All deliveries during the period would take place during the normal operational hours.

CONSULTATIONS AND PUBLICITY

District Council

Tandridge District Council has objected to the proposal as the Council has the following concerns:

- The entire site is in the Green Belt where development involving the construction of an appraisal wellsite is inappropriate and would be in conflict with Policy RE2 in the Tandridge District Local Plan 2001. In particular, the proposed new access track to the site would be an alien and incongruous feature in the countryside.

- The site is situated in an Area of Local Landscape Significance in open countryside and as such it is considered that the proposed development would have an adverse impact on this part of the District in conflict with Policy RE18 in the Tandridge District Local Plan.

- Access to the site is from Tilburstow Hill Road which is a narrow rural road and unsuitable for HGVs, and is in the opinion of Tandridge District Council not an appropriate route for HGVs to travel along.

- The works required to provide the new access and new access track would involve unacceptable levels of HGV movements.

- In conclusion it is considered that because of the reasons outlined above, the site is unsuitable for the development proposed, and it is considered that granting planning permission in this instance would be in conflict with planning policy for this part of the District.

Consultees (Statutory and Non Statutory)

Environment Agency
No objection subject to the imposition of a drainage condition and informatives 2 to 6.

Health and Safety Executive
No objection.

Natural England
No objection.

Department of Trade and Industry (DTI)
Supports the application to drill appraisal wells, providing it is fully compliant with relevant planning regulations and all local and national environmental controls.

Cablewatch
No views received.

Esso Pipelines
No objections. Has provided a booklet entitled ‘Special Requirements for Safe Working’ and a plan showing the route of the pipeline. The response, plan and booklet would be attached to any permission as an Informative. (See Informative 1).
21 Sutton & East Surrey Water
   No views received.

22 Southern Water plc
   No objection.

23 BAA Safeguarding
   No objection.

24 Surrey Wildlife Trust
   No objection subject to the mitigation set out in the application being carried out. This
   includes the wellsite and access track being located a minimum of 7 metres from the
   woodland edge, lighting being kept to a minimum and the use of directional mercury
   vapour lights and the noise attenuation of the drilling rig.

25 Forestry Commission
   No views received.

26 Surrey Fire and Rescue Service
   No views received.

27 Environmental Noise Consultant
   No objection.

28 Consultant Geologist
   No geological, geotechnical or hydrogeological objection to the proposal.

29 County Highway Authority – Transport Development Control
   No objection but requires the imposition of planning conditions relating to the access.

30 Rights of Way Group
   No objection.

31 Landscape Officer
   No objection.

32 Ecology
   No objection subject to the imposition of planning conditions.

33 Archaeology
   Further comments following the completion of trial trenching. This will be reported by
   update at the Committee meeting.

Parish/Town Council & Amenity Groups

34 Godstone Parish Council
   No objection but concerned about heavy vehicles turning right at Anglefield Corner.

35 Bletchingley Parish Council
   Strong objection on the grounds that the
   • land is Green Belt and an AGLV,
   • the access road, Tilburstow Hill Road, is unsuitable for more HGVs which would also
     need to negotiate a difficult and dangerous junction with the A22
   • should the appraisal wells prove positive, any resultant development for gas extraction
     and storage would be highly unsuitable at Kings Farm.

36 Tilburstow Hill Residents’ Association
   No response received.
37 **Godstone Village Association**
Object. The site is within the Green Belt and the visible development is inappropriate. The local roads are not adequate to cope with yet more HGVs and other ‘industrial’ traffic. The Association do not consider that the applicant’s proposals for the control of traffic off the site are adequate.

Reference is made to a future use for gas storage on the site should gas not be found at the site in commercial quantities, in either case, this will lead to increasing industrialisation of a green belt area. Although the Association realise that gas is a needed commodity for the country as a whole, its abstraction should not be to the detriment of the local area and its residents. The Association has asked that if it is resolved to grant permission that conditions are imposed relating to the spoil from construction, vehicle routing, vehicle numbers, that the Clean Enclosed Burner is the only flare used, hours of working. The Association also asked whether anything could be done to soften or decrease the impact of the new access which will substantially alter the street scene.

38 **British Horse Society**
Object. The proposed site does not impinge on, or require the diversion of, any local bridleways but it will have an affect on the quiet enjoyment by riders of this very peaceful area. The development would seem to be out of scale and context with the area. The tranquillity of the area would be affected by noise and the flare will be plainly visible from Bridleway 293 which is only 200 metres away; thus the amenity value of walking and riding in the area will be diminished. Vehicles of the size envisaged would not be able to access or exit Tilburstow Hill Road at its junction with the A22. If HGVs travel southward there are a number of footpaths and bridleways which terminate on the A22 and any increase of HGVs on this road which is used as a link between bridleways must be seen as a potential danger.

39 **Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) Surrey**
Objects. The site is in the Green Belt and the new access and equipment will reduce openness and be unsightly. The site is in an Area of Local landscape Significance and will be out of character with, and be damaging to the adjacent countryside. The rig will be particularly obtrusive. Tilburstow Road is a narrow rural road, which is unsuited to the high levels of HGV movements that will be generated by the construction of the access, construction of the drilling rig and subsequent appraisal stage.

40 **Surrey Countryside Access Forum**
Do not object but advise the County Council to protect the Tilburstow Hill area from any development, which would spoil it existing character.

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**Summary of publicity undertaken and key issues raised by the public**

41 The application was advertised in the Surrey Mirror on 4 January 2007 and was also publicised by means of 1 site notice and 21 nearby local residents were notified direct by letter.

42 Copies of the application documents were made available for public inspection at the offices of Tandridge District Council, at Oxted, and at Surrey County Council offices, at County Hall, Kingston upon Thames. A total of 22 representations have been received on this proposal all objecting to the proposal.

43 The main points of public objection are set out below:

- The proposal would involve industrialisation of the Green Belt. The development is inappropriate and would unnecessarily erode the Green Belt. This type of activity is not appropriate for agricultural land. **(Comment: See paras 79 to 84.)**
• The site is within an Area of Local Landscape Significance, which deserves protection. (Comment: Issues relating to the ALLS are covered in paras 123 to 130)

• The development would be visible from the footpaths along the top of Tilburstow Hill, off Rabies Heath Road, and will destroy the view across this agricultural and wooded area. The rig would be unsightly and could be seen from many of the public paths and bridleways around the site and would destroy the unspoilt nature of the area. (Comment: Visual impact is covered in paras 121 to 130).

• The new access road will be visually significant from Tilburstow Hill Road and the public footpath immediately to its south. The removal of hedgerows and creation of extended visibility splays will alter the characteristics of the road. The road will be permanent or at the very best semi-permanent. (Comment: See paras 126 to 129, the access road would be removed on the cessation of the development see Conditions 23 and 32).

• Lambs Business Park is already an industrial use in a rural area and gas exploration would be an additional negative impact in terms of noise, pollution, traffic and wildlife. (Comment: Traffic is covered in paras 85 to 105 and nature conservation, noise, pollution and ecology paras 131 to 195).

• Noise. The tranquillity of the area will be significantly disturbed during the drilling phase if the assumed 10dB reduction cannot be achieved. (Comment: See paras 164 to 171).

• The junction with the A22 at Anglefield Corner is not suitable for large vehicles. (Comment: See paras 103 – 105).

• The site traffic would be detrimental to the minor roads serving the site. Tilburstow Hill Road is a narrow country lane not designed for such traffic and which suffers already from the vehicle movements associated with the Lamb’s Business Park. (Comment: See paras 90 to 93 covering highway capacity and safety).

• Tilburstow Hill Road is particularly hazardous even without an additional junction. Sub-standard visibility splays combined with vehicles speeding, will greatly increase the chance of serious accidents. (Comment: Issues relating to highway capacity, safety and access are discussed in paras 85 to 105).

• Access could be gained via Lamb’s Business Park. (Comment: See para 102).

• There are more appropriate brownfield sites in non Green Belt areas that would be more capable of supporting such a site. (Comment: Minerals can only be worked where they are found the policy in relation to minerals and Green Belt is set out at para 79. This issue is also covered at para 60).

• Bats have been identified at the site and should not be disturbed in any way. (Comment: The potential impact on bats and other ecological issues are discussed in paras 145 to 149.)

• The excellent quality of air in South Godstone would be significantly impacted by this development. (Comment: See paras 188 to 189).

• Gas flaring is not an efficient use of energy and nor a good use of natural resources. The site is in a valley, which will funnel the emissions towards South Godstone. The application does not include a breakdown of all contaminants in the flare. Flaring can be dangerous to human and animal life from 2 km up to 35 km. The applicant has failed to substantiate the claims that the flare produces no visible flame, produces no odour or soot and has low noise emissions and totally incinerates sour gases. There is a risk of a smog type situation arising in the South Godstone area. (Comment: See paras 170 to 178)

• Future development of the site for gas storage. There are no details in the application as to what would be required for production or underground storage. A formal Environmental Impact Assessment should have been undertaken as this is a sensitive environment and the site could become a large industrial site. (Comment: The current application is not for gas storage but appraisal of the resource. MPS1 clearly states that each phase of gas development requires a separate planning permission and that the possible effects of a later stage not yet applied for, do not constitute grounds for refusal of an earlier stage. Para 3.2 MPS1. The adoption of a screening opinion for this development is discussed in paras 110 to 115)
• The site is too near the community to have gas storage facilities and would put the community at an unacceptable risk in the event of a major accident at the site. Such a major installation would be an obvious target for terrorism. (Comment: see paras 190 to 195 in relation to leaks and accidents and gas storage and public fear)

• If commercial extraction occurred it would cause housing blight. (Comment: The planning system does not exist to protect the private interest of individuals but to consider whether proposal would unacceptably affect amenities and the existing use of land and buildings that ought to be protected in the public interest. Fear about the potential adverse effect on the value of property is not a material consideration for determination of planning applications.)

PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

44 The activity associated with mining hydrocarbons is considered in three stages: exploration, appraisal and production. This current proposal involves the appraisal stage as the presence of hydrocarbons has already been established. Appraisal involves a testing process to determine the scale of the resource.

45 The licensing of exploration and the regulation of the development of the UK’s oil and gas resources is governed by a separate licensing system operated by the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI). The Petroleum Exploration and Development Licence (PEDL) issued by the DTI covers all the three phases – exploration, appraisal and development. Once a licence has been granted, planning permission must be obtained before the DTI will give consent to either drill a well, or develop an oil or gas field. The existence of an initial licence does not absolve Mineral Planning Authorities (MPAs) from applying proper development control in accordance with the appropriate legislation and guidance.

46 Oil and gas developments fall within the definition of ‘mineral development’ and as such, the County Council as Minerals Planning Authority (MPA) has a duty under Section 38 (6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 to determine this application in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. It is also necessary to assess the application against relevant policies and guidance set at the European, National and Regional levels. In this case the statutory development plan consists of the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) formerly Regional Planning Guidance 9 (RPG9) March 2001 as amended, the Surrey Structure Plan 2004, the Surrey Minerals Plan 1993 and the Tandridge District Local Plan 2001. The emerging South East Plan includes improvements that need to be made to ensure that the South East remains economically successful and an attractive place to live. The South East Regional Assembly (SEERA) formally submitted the draft Plan to Government on 31 March 2006. Consultation on the draft plan ended in June 2006 and the Examination in Public (EIP) has recently taken place. It is anticipated that the Plan is likely to be approved by Government in early 2008.

47 Consideration will need to be given to the potential impacts arising from the drilling of two boreholes at the wells and the creation of a new access and access roadway, both in terms of the closest residential properties and the local environment and amenities. The site lies within the Metropolitan Green Belt within a rural area, which forms part of an Area of Landscape Significance and the site and part of the access route abut the Birchen Coppice pSNCl.
Need for the Wellsite

**Surrey Structure Plan 2004**
- Policy DN7 Mineral Workings and Restoration
- Policy SE2 Renewable Energy and Energy Conservation

**Surrey Minerals Local Plan 1993**
- Policy 15 Exploratory Drilling for Hydrocarbons
- Policy 16 Hydrocarbons Appraisal Drilling

48 The current application is concerned only with gas appraisal, a programme of testing to determine whether production or storage of the gas would be viable. The applicant has sought to demonstrate the need position by identifying the decline in the production of indigenous gas, the increasing demand for imported gas, the seasonal demand variation and the security of gas supplies. In respect of the Bletchingley gasfield, the applicant states that previous appraisal in the area allowed testing within a limited part of the likely extent of the gasfield and that seismic surveys indicate the need for further information on the extent, quality and quantity of the gas flow at Bletchingley. The application site is located in a rural area within the Metropolitan Green Belt. One of the key considerations in determining this application will be the need for the development.

49 There are no specific regional policies regarding hydrocarbons. Both the Regional Spatial Strategy and the emerging South East Plan recognise that ‘hydrocarbons are exploited in modest quantities in West Sussex, Surrey and Hampshire’ but expects Mineral Planning Authorities with such resources within their area, to consider these as part of their plan making function.

50 Policy DN17 of the Surrey Structure Plan 2004 ‘Mineral Workings and Restoration’ states that mineral working will be allowed where the need for the mineral outweighs the adverse impact of the development.

51 The Surrey Minerals Local Plan 1993 includes a chapter on hydrocarbons. Para 5.17 recognises that oil and gas are different in planning terms from other minerals and that there is some limited flexibility in the location of wellhead sites, which are small in relation to the extent of the deposit. Policy 15 ‘Exploratory Drilling for Hydrocarbons’ states that drilling operations for hydrocarbons will ‘be permitted only where the County Council are satisfied that in the context of the geological structure being investigated the proposed site has been selected so as to minimise the environmental and ecological impact of the development’. In terms of appraisal, Policy 16 ‘Hydrocarbons Appraisal Drilling’ states that appraisal drilling and subsequent testing will only be permitted where the County Council is satisfied that the three criteria are met. These include that the ‘development is necessary to confirm the nature and extent of hydrocarbon resources or to assess the feasibility of their recovery’. It is underlined in the Minerals Plan that acceptance of an appraisal scheme does not imply that planning permission would necessarily be granted for any subsequent proposals. Any further proposals would have to be treated strictly on their merits.


53 Annex 4 of MPS1 sets out Government planning policy on planning control of land-based exploration, appraisal, development and production of oil and gas. MPS1 distinguishes between the three stages of exploration, appraisal and development. Each of the stages requires a separate planning permission. MPS1 goes on to make a clear statement that ‘There should be no presumption in favour of consent for subsequent stages if an earlier
stage be permitted, nor do possible effects of a later stage not yet applied for, constitute grounds for refusal of an earlier stage. (para 3.2)

54 This proposal is for the appraisal stage, which involves the longer-term testing of the drilled well. MPS1 recognises that until the extent of a find is clear it is difficult to evaluate the options available and to clarify this it may be necessary to drill further wells at other sites in the area. Under the heading of Appraisal, Para 3.13 of the Annex states that ‘as with all other forms of development, an application for an appraisal well must be considered on its merits. This consideration should take into account the long-term suitability of the site since such wells may subsequently be required for production purposes’.

55 The Government set out its energy policy in the UK Energy White Paper ‘Our Energy Future – Creating a Low Carbon Economy’ DTI 2003. The four main points are to

- cut carbon dioxide emissions by 60% by 2050, with real progress by 2020;
- maintain the reliability of energy supplies;
- promote competitive markets in the UK and beyond; and
- ensure that every home is adequately and affordably heated.

In the short to medium term the Government’s stated aim is to

- Maximise the potential of the UK’s conventional oil and gas reserves in an environmentally acceptable manner;
- Encourage the development of clean coal technologies; and
- Encourage the capture of methane from coal mines where environmentally acceptable.

56 Para 6.37 of the Energy White Paper states that the nation’s oil and gas sector ‘is and will remain important to the wider UK economy in terms of jobs, investment and its contribution to national income. We are keen to continue to encourage investment in both existing and new fields’.

57 A review of progress on the Energy White Paper’s goals, and consideration of further options to achieve the goals, is set out in the Government’s report The Energy Challenge released on 11 July 2006 (Energy Review). The decline in production from mature natural gasfields has meant that the UK has gone from being self sufficient to a net importer of gas within a very short timescale. The Energy Challenge states that by 2010, imports could be meeting up to 40% of the UK’s total gas demand, rising to 80 – 90% by 2020 and therefore making efficient use of the UK’s own energy reserves would bring benefits. The Government believes that the rate of decline could be slowed by investment but accepts that geology and price levels will be key determinants of future investment. The Government’s stated aim is to ensure that the right conditions are in place to attract investment in exploration, development and production. The Energy Challenge confirmed the importance of gas supply infrastructure and highlighted the difficulties facing companies gaining consent to build energy installations.

**Need and national interest**

58 In the short to medium term the Government’s energy policy aim is to ‘maximise the potential of the UK’s conventional oil and gas reserves in an environmental acceptable manner’. This is set against the background of declining UK reserves. To maximise the potential of a reserve, it is important to fully investigate the potential resource. Gas exploration began in the Bletchingley area in the 1960’s. Four wells were drilled into the Corallian Limestone, which is thought to contain the hydrocarbon reservoir. The overlying Corallian sandstone, Portland Sandstone and the Ashdown Sands also showed signs of containing hydrocarbons. The Corallian Sandstone is the reservoir of the Palmers Wood Field approximately 2.5 km to the north of the site. The Geological strata is shown at Figure 6.1b of the application and reproduced as Plan 4 attached to this report.
A seismic survey undertaken in the area during 2001 indicated the need for a new appraisal wellsite to provide clearer information regarding the extent, quality, quantity and pressure of the gasfield. Such information is a prerequisite to any decision to either plug and restore the wellsite or seek further development of the reserve, should this prove viable. A geological model of the Bletchingley gasfield is shown as Plan 4, which provides details of the geophysical interpretation of the most recent seismic survey. The seismic data has been used along with depth maps to evaluate the potential hydrocarbon in the reservoir of the Bletchingley field, however uncertainty will remain until further appraisal can take place.

One local resident has stated that there are more appropriate brownfield sites in non Green Belt areas that would be more capable of supporting such a site. However, quite clearly, the locations available for oil and gas development are limited primarily by geological factors and environmental and landownership issues are also relevant. The location of the wellsite the subject of this current application has been determined to enable a well to be sunk into the ground formations between the fault lines which lie to the north of the proposed compound.

Residents have suggested that gas flaring is not an efficient use of energy, nor a good use of natural resources. Gas would be flared during the initial stage of testing, which could last for 3 weeks per well. Other than that 6 week period, the flaring of gas would be intermittent as required. The DTI controls the amount of gas that can be flared under a consent to flare. The main purpose of this is to ensure that gas is conserved where possible and avoid unnecessary loss of a resource.

In December 2006 the Department of Communities and Local Government issued a consultation on a draft PPS entitled 'Planning and Climate Change' which when finalised, will be a supplement to PPS1. Planning is seen as having a pivotal and significant role in helping to deliver the Government’s ambition of zero carbon development. Spatial strategies should ensure that climate change considerations are being integrated into all spatial planning concerns. The consultation document goes on to say that ‘information sought from applicants should be consistent with that needed to demonstrate conformity with the development plan and this PPS, and be proportionate to the scale of the proposed development and its likely impact’ Para 7.

There must be some consideration of the nature, scale and circumstances of the proposed development. This application involves the carrying out of gas appraisal over a temporary period and does not include the construction of permanent buildings. In addition, if the gas field were found to be unviable, the site would be restored to agriculture. At the same time, whilst the Government has policies on the challenge of climate change and the encouragement for renewable energy projects, it also recognises the role of oil, gas and coal in the UK energy mix. In ‘The Energy Challenge’ July 2006 the Government set out its view that ‘Developments in low carbon technologies and improvements in energy efficiency will act to reduce demand for and thus decrease our reliance on imported fossil fuels. Nevertheless, fossil fuels will constitute the majority of our energy mix for the foreseeable future, particularly oil and gas.’ Page 77.

Clearly there is a move towards renewable energy but such a fundamental change will not happen overnight as currently around 90% of the United Kingdom’s (UK) energy needs are met by fossil fuels. In the meantime, the need for gas will remain to maintain the demand for homes, schools and places of work to be heated. Therefore proposals to investigate potential gas development at existing or new fields are still required.

One of the energy challenges for the UK is that indigenous supplies of gas have declined to the point where the UK is now a net importer and it is necessary to secure the reliability of energy supplies. On 16 May 2006 the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry made a statement in the House of Commons setting out why additional gas supply infrastructure...
will be so important to the future security of the UK gas supplies. Whilst the statement was aimed primarily at large gas infrastructure projects, it highlighted the difficulty that there are limited locations for the exploitation or storage of gas.

66 Oil and gas play a central role in the UK economy and the Government's energy policy is to ensure secure, diverse and sustainable supplies. Onshore oil and gas production makes a small, but important contribution and is beneficial in terms of proximity to demand. To assist the Government's policy to maintain the reliability of supplies and ensure that every home is adequately and affordably heated, the investigation of a known field to confirm its extent and potential should take place. In terms of whether the development is essential and for an indication of its importance nationally, the views of the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) are very relevant. The DTI has considered the planning application and has stated in its response that it fully supports the proposal and goes on to confirm that it is the UK Government's stated objective to maximise the exploitation of national oil and gas resources with due regard to the environment.

Minerals Policy Statement 1: ‘Planning and Minerals’

67 MPS1 makes a clear statement in para 3.2 that in terms of conventional oil and gas development each phase is dealt with separately and there is no presumption in favour of consent for later stages if permission is granted. MPS1 also advises that the possible effect of a later phase of development, which has not yet been applied for, does not constitute grounds for refusal of an earlier stage. The supporting text for Policy 16 of the Surrey Minerals Local Plan 1993, which pre-dates MPS1, refers to the need to take account of the implications of possible future production in the case of appraisal drilling, particularly where further wells are to be sunk at locations other than the initial borehole site. Under the heading of appraisal, MPS1 refers to the fact that an application for an appraisal well must be considered on its merits but goes on to say this consideration should take into account the long-term suitability of the site as the wells may subsequently be required for production purposes. However, MPS1 also tells us that applicants should not be expected to provide a firm development programme before full appraisal has taken place.

68 The above advice requires interpretation. From a practical viewpoint, a detailed assessment of environmental information relating to future development, which may not come to fruition, would add little value to the process. Officers consider that the advice seeks to establish in very general terms the suitability of the site for some form of future use or possible operation in conjunction with other sites. Any future development will require planning permission and it is recognised in MPS1 that most applications for significant gas storage facilities would require EIA. The applicant has been at pains to point out that the long term intentions for the site are hypothetical until such time as the underlying strata can be better understood by means of the appraisal process. Notwithstanding this, the applicant has advised that potential future options are production, storage or site restoration. Officers have considered the suitability of the site on the basis of these options (in no particular order).

69 The first option is the potential for gas production to supply the national gas distribution system. The Onshore Oil and Gas Factsheet produced by the British Geological Survey for the Department for Communities and Local Government in November 2006 states that the planning impacts associated with oil and gas developments are significantly different from most other mineral development. The Factsheet states that ‘the production phase may require the development of various infrastructure works including storage tanks and associated structures, water injection sites and pipelines connecting the various wellheads.’ The applicant has confirmed that such a proposal would potentially involve an additional site area of 2.5 ha over and above the currently proposed 1.12 ha site, to accommodate the necessary infrastructure. Some idea of the general dimensions of the plant and equipment that might be required can be gleaned from the part of the Humbly Grove site in Hampshire, which produces and stores gas. Such a facility would involve the construction of a building to house the compressor equipment and other equipment. The
absorption towers would be the tallest structure at the site, which would stand at a maximum of 16.5 metres.

70 The second option is the potential for gas storage. It is understood that this option would involve a similar landtake to that for production and involve a similar level and size of plant and equipment as set out above. The Onshore Oil and Gas Factsheet accepts that the development of underground gas storage requires an intensive short construction stage of up to three years, which can raise issues of noise, dust, traffic, vibration, industrialisation of the countryside and impacts on designated areas.

71 Locating either a production or storage facility at the Bletchingley site could raise concerns. Any extension of the landtake could impact on the ancient woodland in Birchen Coppice a pSNCI. Additional landtake could not be located south, east or west of the currently proposed wellsite because of surrounding woodland. It is therefore likely that the site would have to extend northwards taking the development outside the currently proposed enclosed area. See Figure 6. Potentially there could be a greater impact on residents in terms of noise as the site is likely to be closer to residential properties and involve a greater visual impact.

72 The point that the extraction site (wellhead) and associated works such as gathering stations can, within limits, sometimes be moved to a less sensitive location is highlighted in the Onshore Oil and Gas Factsheet, and it is possible that a more suitable site could be found for the location of the plant and equipment associated with production or gas storage. Nevertheless, if the field were to prove viable, it could not be entirely ruled out at this stage, that the site could be suitable for some limited production infrastructure. This would of course, be subject to the development meeting the necessary environmental and amenity requirements.

73 Clearly the currently proposed site’s suitability for further development would depend on what that could mean in terms of the noise impact, visual impact and access. If appraisal was successful and the applicant intended to develop further, a new grant of planning permission would be required. At that stage the full details of the development would be assessed very carefully to decide whether or not the very stringent noise levels for permanent installation of plant could be met, whether the applicant could meet the requirements of the legislation regarding protected species and other environmental and amenity requirements. For a more permanent activity, further consideration of the access and access route would be necessary and whether or not the scale and character of the development would be acceptable in the Green Belt.

74 The third option to restore the site if it proves not to be viable forms part of this planning application. This would involve the removal of any hard surface, plant and machinery, and the wellsite, access route and access, returned to a condition suitable for agricultural use, which is appropriate to its location within the Green Belt. Further consideration of the restoration proposals is covered in paras 203 to 206 later in the report.

75 Officers consider that the application satisfies criteria (i) of Policy 16 of the Surrey Minerals Local Plan 1993 in that the development is necessary to confirm the nature and extent of hydrocarbon resources or assess the feasibility of their recovery. Officers are giving strong weight to the views of the DTI in relation to the essential nature of the development and its importance nationally.

76 Taking into account the views of the DTI, and the need to confirm the extent of the gas field, Officers consider that there is a need for the development and that the need can be met at the proposed site. However, the development has to meet the necessary policy tests. In terms of Policy 15 of the Surrey Minerals Local Plan 1993 ‘Exploratory Drilling for Hydrocarbons’, the County Council has to be satisfied that in the context of the relevant geological structure the site selected minimises the environmental and ecological impact of the development. In addition, the development must meet the relevant criteria of Surrey
Minerals Local Plan 1993 Policy 16 ‘Hydrocarbons Appraisal Drilling’. Criteria (iii) is that the proposal is in accordance with the relevant Structure Plan and Minerals Local Plan policies. This is considered further below.

**Metropolitan Green Belt**

**The Regional Spatial Strategy 2001 (RPG 9) (as amended)**
Policy E3 Green Belts

**Surrey Structure Plan 2004**
Policy L04 The Countryside and Green Belt

**Tandridge District Local Plan 2001**
Policy RE2 Development in the Green Belt outside the settlements

77 Kings Farm is located within the Metropolitan Green Belt where policies of restraint apply. The Regional Spatial Strategy states that the Government believes that Green Belts continue to be important in preventing urban sprawl, in preventing coalescence of settlements and in protecting the countryside. Policy E3 states that there is no regional case for reviewing the Green Belt boundaries. This stance is being taken forward in the emerging South East Plan and the commitment in Policy CC10 is that the existing Green Belts will be retained and supported.

78 Protection of the openness and intrinsic qualities of the countryside both within and outside the Green Belt is sought by Surrey Structure Plan 2004, Policy LO4 ‘The Countryside and Green Belt’. Nevertheless there is recognition that some operational development may be acceptable in the countryside, where need is justified and adverse impacts can be satisfactorily managed. Policy RE2 of the Tandridge District Local Plan states that there is a presumption against inappropriate development. The policy does not specifically mention mineral development but states that engineering and other operation and the making of a material change in the use of land are inappropriate unless they maintain openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land in the Green Belt.

79 Tandridge District Council is opposed to the proposal, as it believes the construction of an appraisal wellsite is inappropriate and particularly refers to the new access track, which it states would be an alien and incongruous feature in the countryside. Minerals development is treated differently to other development in terms of Green Belt policy. The advice contained in Planning Policy Guidance Note 2 (PPG2) is that minerals can only be worked where they are found and ‘that minerals extraction need not be inappropriate: it need not conflict with the purposes of including land in Green Belts, provided that high environmental standards are maintained and the site is well restored’. As a consequence, the test of ‘very special circumstances’ does not apply for a temporary mineral activity provided that environmental and restoration issues are dealt with in a satisfactory manner.

80 Local residents have given the site’s location in the Green Belt as one of their main grounds for objection. They are concerned that such a development would compound other developments in the area and further erode the Green Belt. The residents view the proposal as a major industrial development which they consider is ‘wholly inappropriate development for Green Belt’ Rep 17. Another resident refers to more appropriate brownfield sites outside the Green Belt being more capable of supporting such a site. This has already been referred to in para 60 above.

81 The proposal is for a temporary period of three years. The 16 week construction and drilling period would involve the greatest degree of activity and the drill rig at 29 metres high would be seen in the landscape from certain locations. In addition, during the drilling phase, the wellsite would need to be lit during night hours. The subsequent appraisal phase would generate little activity, however the compound, bund, access route and
access would remain for a further 2 years before the decommissioning and restoration of the site commenced.

82 During the appraisal phase the compound itself is unlikely to be particularly intrusive from any public vantage points. The use of the access route to the site and the access itself would be the more noticeable features. The proposed access would be larger than the current farm track access and gate. Tandridge District Council believes the access track would be an alien and incongruous feature. It is accepted that the access road at 4 metres wide with three passing places and the 0.5 metre high soil bunding alongside the track would be more intrusive in the landscape than the current agricultural track and access. The initial section of the track would run between trees and hedges and would not change significantly from the existing track. See Figures 1 & 2. However, as the new section of track runs alongside the field edge of two open fields, there would be an opportunity for it to be seen in the distance from the public right of way to the south see Figure 9. Given the distance from public vantage points and the intervening landform and vegetation, the track itself is unlikely to give rise to a significant impact. The activity of constructing the track and its use by HGVs would have a temporary impact. However, the construction activities would take place over a limited period of 4 weeks. Similarly, the main period of HGV activity would take place over 16 weeks.

83 Lambs Business Park can be found some 380 metres north of the proposed wellsite. The Business Park was designated a Major Developed Site (MDS) within the Green Belt in the Tandridge District Local Plan 2001 and a MDS site brief was adopted by Tandridge District Council in November 2004. Residents’ comments relating to the proposed development compounding with other developments in the area to erode the Green Belt refer mainly to Lambs Business Park and the planning permission to convert la Bonne Auberge north of Kings Farm into 7 houses. Unlike these developments, the proposed appraisal wellsite, would be temporary and the land would be restored to agricultural use. While residents would prefer to see such a site located outside the Green Belt, minerals can only be worked where they are found and therefore locations available for oil and gas development are dictated primarily by geological factors. The Bletchingley field cannot be investigated from a site elsewhere within the UK.

84 The national policy test requires that high environmental standards are maintained and the site is well restored. Technical consultees have considered the proposal and their views are set out in detail in later sections of the report. The applicant has submitted details of the restoration. The applicant proposes that the wellsite and access track be removed and the land reinstated to its current agricultural use. There is no reason to believe that the site could not be well restored to an agricultural after-use, which is consistent with Green Belt objectives. Therefore, provided that high environmental standards can be maintained during working, Officers consider that the proposal would be acceptable in terms of Surrey Structure Plan 2004 Policy LO4 ‘The Countryside and Green Belt’ and Tandridge District Local Plan 2001 Policy RE2 ‘Development in the Green Belt outside the settlements’.

HIGHWAYS, TRAFFIC & ACCESS

Surrey Structure Plan 2004
Policy DN2 Movement Implications of Development
Surrey Minerals Local Plan 1993
Policy 1 Environmental and Amenity Protection
Tandridge District Local Plan 2001
Policy M09 Impact of Heavy Goods Vehicles

85 The site is located in a rural area and the current access onto Tilburstow Hill Road is a small gated farm access. The applicant has provided a section on Highways and Traffic in the planning application that focuses on the baseline conditions, potential impacts and mitigation measures. Traffic survey information is provided in the form of desk-based and
traffic counts. The applicant advises that a Construction and Environmental Management Plan will be prepared to include measures to minimise the impact of the development on local residents and address highway safety.

86 The Surrey Structure Plan 2004 emphasises the environmental implications of movement. Policy DN2 'Movement Implications of Development' seeks to ensure that the movement implications of a development are compatible with the local transport infrastructure and covers the safety, capacity and environmental consequences of development on the surrounding transport network.

87 Surrey Minerals Local Plan 1993 recognises that the issue of traffic gives rise to a great deal of concern. The supporting text to Policy 1 states that the Authority will wish to be satisfied that the volume and characteristics of the traffic generated will not have an unduly adverse impact on the locality and on the highway network. Policy 1 'Environmental and Amenity Protection' requires that the traffic generation, its impact and the suitability of the public highway have been taken into account.

88 Policy M09 of the Tandridge District Local Plan 2001 states that development proposals which would have a detrimental impact on the environment by reason of a material increase in the generation and attraction of heavy goods vehicles within villages and along unsuitable country roads, would be resisted.

89 Government advice with regard to transport matters is given in Planning Policy Guidance Note 13 (PPG 13): 'Transport'.

**Highway Capacity and Safety**

90 The potential impact of the traffic associated with the proposed development has given rise to concern locally. Vehicles would use Tilburstow Hill Road (D395), which at its northern end has a junction with the A22 just south of Godstone and at its southern end, again has a junction with the A22 at Anglefield Corner. Tilburstow Hill Road is a straight rural road of some 5.5 metres in width see Figure 8. The section of the road where the site is located has a speed limit of 50 mph and there are lights controlling the traffic at railway bridge just north of the access to Lambs Business Park some 430 metres north of the proposed site access. The northern section of Tilburstow Hill Road is part of the designated Surrey Cycle Way. In addition, there is a substantial rights-of-way network in the area with a number of footpaths/bridleways crossing Tilburstow Hill Road.

91 Local residents and the Godstone Village Association have stated that they would not wish to see traffic exiting the site turning north on Tilburstow Hill Road through to Godstone Village. They have commented that ‘the northern end of Tilburstow Hill Road is narrow; with adjacent houses and with a dangerous exit onto the Eastbourne Road. Similarly the eastern and western links of Rabies Heath Road and Harts Lane are narrow and unsuitable for use by HGVs’. The applicant proposes that the HGV’s associated with the development use the southern section of Tilburstow Road only and access, or exit from the A22 at Anglefield Corner. This would avoid using the restrictive railway bridge and the northern section of Tilburstow Hill Road. Signs would be erected at the site access telling drivers to turn right onto Tilburstow Hill Road. The Godstone Village Society has commented that they do not believe signing alone would be sufficient and have suggested that the railway bridge should be further restricted. Given the temporary period of development and in particular the fact that the majority of vehicle movements would take place within the initial 4 weeks of a 16 week period of construction, mobilisation, drilling and demobilisation of the drilling rig, further restrictions are not considered necessary. Proposed Condition 26 requires appropriate signing to be erected at the site access informing drivers to turn right only.

92 Tandridge District Council has stated that Tilburstow Hill Road is a narrow rural road and unsuitable for HGVs, and is, in the opinion of the District Council, not an appropriate route for HGVs to travel along. However, HGVs delivering to and from Lambs Business Park
already use the road. Traffic flow data was produced for Tilburstow Hill Road in 2002, which at that time showed that the road was used by 4,000 to 4,500 vehicles per day. The applicant commissioned a more recent volumetric traffic count. This shows that the total 24 hour volume of weekday traffic passing the site is 2,676 vehicles this includes 240 vehicles (9%) that are classed as HGV traffic. This latest traffic flow survey taken 23 to 29 November 2006, indicates a drop in the overall vehicle flows but an increase in the use of Tilburstow Hill Road by HGV traffic.

93 These changes may be accounted for by the introduction of the traffic control at the railway bridge to improve road safety at the bridge, and changes at Lambs Business Park following its designation in the Tandridge District Local Plan as a Major Developed Site within the Green Belt. The Highway Agency's Technical Advice Note, 'Traffic Flow Ranges for Use in the Assessment of New Rural Roads' gives an acceptable flow range for a single two carriageway road as anything up to 13,000 vehicles per day. Even lowering this significantly to account for the varying carriageway widths on Tilburstow Hill Road, a flow of 2,676 vehicles would not be described as a heavily trafficked road. The latest figures indicate that the overall vehicle flows are well within the roads capacity and that the development would involve a small and temporary increase in traffic on a road that is already used by HGVs.

Access and Access Track

94 The gated access to the existing section of unmetalled farm track is located opposite Kings Farm house. The current access could not accommodate the simultaneous entry and exit of two HGVs nor does it have adequate site lines. The applicant proposes to construct a new access, approximately 15 metres further south than the present one. The new access would provide a 2 x 160 metre visibility splay to the north and 2 ½ x 160 metres splay to the south. A local resident has commented that Tilburstow Hill Road is particularly hazardous even without an additional junction and that sub-standard visibility splays combined with vehicles speeding, will greatly increase the chance of serious accidents. Rather than being in addition to the existing access, the new access would replace the farm access, which would be closed for the duration of the development. At the end of the three year period, the new access would be closed and the existing farm access reinstated.

95 To provide a suitable access, the Highway Authority requested sight lines of 4.5 metres ‘x’ by 160 ‘y’. The new access meets the entry and exit requirements but cannot meet the sightlines due to land ownership constraints in terms of the land to the north of the access and ecological impact of the removal of a larger section of the hedgerow to the south. The applicant is proposing a 2.5 metre splay instead of a 4.5 metres splay. The Highway Authority has accepted this as adequate given the temporary nature of the development.

96 The construction of the new access would involve the removal of approximately 25 metres of hedgerow along the western boundary of Tilburstow Hill Road. The Highway Authority has agreed, that the 45 metres of hedgerow to the south of the new access should be maintained below 1 metre in height for the duration of the development in order to provide adequate sightlines. The applicant has confirmed agreement to this approach and proposed conditions 18 and 24 are intended to cover this issue. The alternatives of translocating or replanting the hedgerow and then re-locating it back on its original line in three years time is considered impractical. The removal of the hedgerow altogether would have an impact on the character of the rural lane. The reduction in height of the hedgerow would allow the hawthorn hedge to quickly re-establish when the development ceased.

97 The new access will connect to the south of the existing access track approximately 50 metres from the existing access and a gate would be located 20 metres along the new access route. Figure 1 shows the view down the existing farm track from the current access. The new route from the access would join this track from the left and involve the removal of a section of hedgerow.
The existing track, which runs for approximately 250 metres, would be widened to 4 metres and crushed stone would be laid over a geotextile membrane. At the end of the trackway a new access track would be constructed which would run for approximately 1 km along the boundary of two fields before reaching a gap between Birchen Coppice and Prickle Shaw and then along the southern edge of the field which abuts Birchen Coppice to the proposed wellsite. The access would be 4 metres in width with three passing places of an additional 2 metres in width. The stripped topsoil would be stored in bunds alongside the access route up to 0.5 metres high. The route would be constructed with a geotextile membrane overlain by crushed stone. It is envisaged that the construction of the track would take approximately 2 weeks.

Traffic generation

The applicant has provided information relating to type and number of vehicle movements which vary between the differing phases of the development. Details of the potential traffic generation are set out in 'The Proposal' section of the report in para11. Tandridge District Council has stated that the works required to provide the new access and access track would involve unacceptable levels of HGV traffic. Clearly the heaviest traffic generator would be the site preparation stage, which also involves the mobilization of the rig. The applicant has based the estimates for the duration of particular phases of the development on previous experience of drilling gas exploration wells, however, factors such as particular site details and weather conditions can all influence the timescale. By the very nature of construction work, the number of hourly vehicle movements would fluctuate during the day and over the course of the project. This makes it difficult to aggregate these activities into a consistent average of daily or hourly movements. The applicant states that at most times of the working day construction movements will be around 5 to 6 movements per hour or less, but there could be peaks of up to 8 to 10 movements in one hour. All site deliveries and removals would take place during the normal working hours.

The highest levels of vehicle movements would be generated over an initial period of site preparation and rig mobilization and de-mobilization taking about 6 weeks in total and then following the appraisal period of up to two years, another similar burst of activity to decommission and restore the site. The site preparation and rig mobilization would involve the following:

- The construction of the access, access route and wellsite, would over a four week period, generate a maximum of 50 vehicle movements per day. This figure is predominantly made up of HGV movements but there would be some site personnel light van and cars movements included.

- The mobilisation of the rig would take place over a 3 to 4 day period and involve approximately 44 vehicle movements delivering plant and equipment, in addition to car and light van movements involving site personnel. The decommissioning of the rig post drilling, would involve a similar level of vehicle movements ie 44 HGVs and light vehicle movements for site personnel.

The applicant estimates that during the 10 week drilling phase, service deliveries would involve 14 HGV movements per day and other deliveries and access by site personnel would generate approximately 20 light vehicle movements per day. During appraisal the vehicle movements would fall to 2 to 4 light vehicle movements per day.

Residents have raised concerns regarding the generation of HGV traffic and the use of Tilburstow Hill Road, ‘a narrow country lane, not designed for such traffic and which suffers already from the vehicle movements associated with the development at nearby Lamb’s Business Park’. Rep 4. Several representations mention the cumulative effect of the development in terms of Lambs Business Park. One local resident has suggested that access to the site could be gained via Lambs which already has roadways to within approximately 500 metres of the proposed wellsite and a suitable junction with Tilburstow Hill Road. Whilst this would reduce by half the length of access track requiring
construction, this is not the proposal being put forward for consideration. The applicant
has no control over Lambs Business Park, which is privately owned nor the land between
Lambs and the wellsite. This is a small-scale temporary proposal, if it was for a larger or
more permanent installation, a different method of access may be considered to be a more
appropriate approach.

103 In their representations, residents refer to speeding and overtaking on Tilburstow Hill Road
creating a danger for cyclists and horseriders. One resident acknowledges that in
percentage terms the increase in traffic is small but states any increase is unwelcome.
Several residents have raised concerns regarding the use Anglefield Corner, the junction
with the A22 south of the site, which is viewed as ‘challenging’ even for cars. Rep 7.

104 Notwithstanding the degree of concern of residents regarding the adequacy of the local
road network, the traffic surveys have shown that Tilburstow Hill Road operates below its
capacity. The Highway Authority has looked very carefully at the level of traffic to be
generated and the fact that the highest traffic generation would only occur over a matter of
weeks and has raised no objection to the proposal subject to the improvement of the
access and the closure of the existing access for the 3 year period of development. The
access was the main concern for the Highway Authority particularly in relation to the
reduced visibility splays. The planning conditions relating to the access works requested
by the Highway Authority are included as proposed conditions 23, 24 and 25.

105 Given the level of traffic to be generated and the phased and temporary nature of the
development, the Highway Authority considers there to be no objection to make on safety,
capacity or policy grounds. Taking into account all the highway, traffic and access issues,
Officers conclude that the development does not conflict with Policy DN2 of the Surrey
Structure Plan 2004, Policy 1 of the Surrey Minerals Local Plan 1993 and Policy MO9 of
the Tandridge District Local Plan 2001.

ENVIRONMENT & AMENITY

The Regional Spatial Strategy 2001 (RPG9) (as amended)
Policy E2 Biodiversity
Policy E5 Woodland Habitats
Policy E7 Air and Water Quality
Surrey Structure Plan 2004
Policy SE1 Natural Resources and Pollution Control
Policy SE5 Protecting the Heritage
Policy SE6 Biodiversity
Policy SE7 Nature Conservation
Policy SE9 Trees and Woodland
Policy DN17 Mineral Workings and Restoration
Surrey Minerals Local Plan 1993
Policy 1 Environmental and Amenity Protection
Policy 3 Agricultural land
Policy 5 Restoration
Tandridge District Local Plan 2001
Policy RE15 Landscape Character
Policy RE18 Areas of Local Landscape Significance
Policy NE4 Potential SNCl’s
Policy NE5 Ancient Woodlands
Policy NE7 Protected Species
Policy NE10 Woodlands and Hedgerow Management
Policy HE 5 Ancient Monuments and County Sites of Archaeological Importance
Policy HE 6 Development in Areas of High Archaeological Potential
Policy HE7 Archaeological Monitoring of Development Sites
Policy EV6 Water Quality
Policy EV8 Hazards
The application raises several environmental and amenity issues. Whilst the wellsite itself is within approximately 350 metres of Lambs Business Park, the wellsite and access track are located in a very rural area with no residential properties within a radius of 500 m. The site is in close proximity to a pSNCI, which is also designated ancient woodland, within an Area of Local Landscape Character and close to a Site of Archaeological Importance and a Site of High Archaeological Potential.

The Regional Spatial Strategy 2001 (as amended) recognises that a high quality environment is essential to the future prosperity of the South East. One of its identified key development principles is that ‘there should be continued protection and enhancement of the Region’s biodiversity, internationally and nationally important nature conservation areas, and enhancement of its landscape and built and historic heritage.’ The encouragement of conservation and where appropriate the enhancement of the character, distinctiveness and sense of place of settlements and landscapes throughout the region is sought by Policy CC12 of the emerging South East Plan.

The care of the environment in its broadest sense is an important strategic objective in the Surrey Structure Plan 2004. Policy SE1 ‘Natural Resources and Pollution Control’ seeks to ensure that designated areas and features of acknowledged importance within the natural environment are conserved and enhanced. The policy also promotes the prudent uses of natural resources. There is a requirement within the policy for prevailing standards to be applied to emissions to air, water and land, and that forms of pollution such as noise, odour and light pollution are minimised.

The Tandridge District Local Plan 2001 has a number of environmental and amenity policies covering the rural environment, the natural environment, heritage and other environmental issues. These are referred to under the individual issue headings later in the report.

Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)


The EIA Regulations include Schedule 1, which identifies the types of projects for which EIA is mandatory, such as large scale thermal and nuclear power stations and Schedule 2 identifies the types of development for which EIA may be required. The EIA Regulations provide information about the issues that the planning authority needs to consider when determining whether a project needs EIA including thresholds and criteria that indicate whether a given project is more or less likely to give rise to significant environmental impacts. In addition to the thresholds and criteria, there are other circumstances that may trigger EIA, such as location within or very close to a ‘sensitive area’. The EIA Regulations define ‘sensitive areas’ as including, nature conservation sites with national or higher level designations (e.g. Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Special Protection Areas, Special Areas of Conservation, and Ramsar Sites), Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, National Parks, World Heritage Sites, and Schedule Monuments.

Prior to submitting this current application, the applicant sought a Screening Opinion under Regulation 7 of the EIA Regulations 1999 to ascertain whether the proposal fell within the requirements of EIA.

The site is not covered by any national or higher level nature conservation designations, nor does it lie within an area that is at risk of flooding, or that has been designated as a...
groundwater source protections zone. Nevertheless, the proposal fits into one of the categories of development listed in Schedule 2 of the EIA Regulation (para 2(d)). Whilst the site area exceeds the 1 ha area of works set out in Schedule 2 it does not exceed the relevant thresholds set for deep drilling in the Government's Guidance (Circular 02/99), which advises that ‘EIA is more likely to be required where the scale of the drilling operations involves development of a surface site of more than 5 ha.’ The Circular goes on to state that ‘Regard should be had to the wider impacts on surrounding hydrology and ecology. On its own exploratory deep drilling is unlikely to require EIA. It would not be appropriate to require EIA for exploratory activity simply because it might eventually lead to some form of permanent activity’ (Para A9).

114 The Screening Opinion was issued on 9 November 2005 and recorded that the site is not located within a ‘sensitive area’ as defined by the Regulations and that the temporary small scale development would be unlikely to give rise to significant environmental effects as defined by the EIA Regulations. However it was highlighted that a number of issues would need to be addressed in any planning application in particular the ecological, landscape and noise effect. To that effect, a Screening Opinion under Regulation 5 of the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) (England & Wales) Regulations 1999 was adopted by the Authority on 9 November 2005. Consequently, this application is not accompanied by an Environmental Impact Assessment.

115 It is clear from the representations received that objectors feel that an EIA should have been undertaken. The public consider the site is in a sensitive location as it ‘is Green Belt, an Area of Local Landscape Significance and contains an abundance of flora and fauna (bats etc) which, in some cases are protected’. They are also concerned that EIA should have been carried out to show the potential impacts that could arise should the appraisal be successful and future development are proposed. However, as shown in para 113 above, the Circular is quite clear on the appropriateness of requiring EIA in terms of exploratory drilling. If in the future the applicant proposes further development in terms of storage or production, the requirement for EIA would be considered afresh.

Visual Impact

116 The wellsite is located on an area of unimproved grassland within land designated as an Area of Local Landscape Significance (ALSS). The land rises to the north and south of the proposed site. To the north is Lambs Business Park, the Redhill to Tonbridge railway line and beyond that the land is designated AGLV. The majority of the land surrounding the site is in agricultural use, and there are also patches of woodland. One of Tandridge District Council’s grounds for objection is that site is situated in an Area of Local Landscape Significance in open countryside and as such, the proposed development would have an adverse impact on this part of the District.

117 Policy SE8 of the Surrey Structure Plan 2004 seeks to conserve and enhance the diversity of Surrey’s landscape in areas outside of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and Area of Great Landscape Value (AGLV) and to retain the distinctiveness of the County Landscape Character Areas. Para 3.37 of the text refers to the value of landscape based assessments forming the basis of planning decisions. The supporting text for Policy SE8 also makes reference to the Countryside Character Initiative developed by the Countryside Agency. The national map of countryside character shows seven countryside character areas in Surrey. The proposed site is close to the divide between the Regional Countryside Character Areas known as the Wealden Greensand, and the Low Weald but the site itself lies wholly within the Low Weald. ‘The Future of Surrey’s Landscape and Woodlands’ published by Surrey County Council in 1997 has developed the Countryside Agency’s approach and identifies 25 County Landscape Character Areas. Kings Farm falls within the Open Weald characterised by small irregularly shaped field divided by a strong pattern of low square-cut hedges with regularly spaced hedgerow oaks.
Surrey Structure Plan Policy SE9 ‘Trees and Woodland’ seeks to protect trees, woodlands and to safeguard hedgerows where their landscape, biodiversity or historical interest is significant. The proposed wellsite abuts woodland on two sides and trees and hedgerows on a third. The access route initially runs between trees and hedgerows and after skirting around two fields, crosses between Birchen Coppice and the smaller offshoot known as Prickle Shaw, before running to the north of Birchen Coppice.

While the characteristics of the landscape are not a material factor in the inclusion of land within the Green Belt, PPG2 does state that the visual amenities of the Green Belt should not be injured by proposals, which might be visually detrimental by reason of their siting, materials or design. Para 5.16 of the Surrey Minerals Local Plan 1993 refers to exploratory drilling having been undertaken in the Green Belt, the AONB and AGLV ‘without any marked detriment to the environment’.

The protection and maintenance of the diversity of the countryside is sought by the Tandridge District Local Plan 2001 and in particular, Policy RE15 covers the conservation and enhancement of the landscape within the District. The site falls within an Area identified in the Tandridge District Local Plan 2001 as an Area of Local Landscape Significance and Policy RE18 of the Tandridge District Local Plan seeks to protect and conserve the landscape character and quality in such areas. It is stated in the policy that development should be sited and designed to minimise visual and general environmental impact.

The proposed wellsite and its access are situated within the working farm known as Kings Farm, which lies in a broad valley with Tilburstow Hill to the north. The 0.5 ha wellsite itself, would be located on land that is enclosed on three sides by trees and hedgerows, with the woodland known as Birchen Coppice to the south and east and the mature hedgerow and trees of the Parish boundary on the western side. The applicant proposes to store the stripped top and sub soils from the wellsite in a bund on the northern edge of the site to a height of approximately 3 metres, to act as a further visual screen.

As part of the planning application the applicant has submitted a landscape and visual impact assessment. The assessment has considered local views from the nearby public footpaths and bridleways, from the bridleway near the railway tunnel, Lamb’s Business Park, Tilburstow Hill Road and longer views from Tilburstow Hill. Views from 7 locations have been photographed and considered in terms of the potential visual impact of the wellsite. The landscape and visual assessment found that the wellsite would be essentially be obscured by woodland around the site. The exception would be that the top of the drilling rig would be visible during the 10 week drilling period. There would also be partial views from Tilburstow Hill Road and the properties on that road as the land rises. These would be distant views from a distance of some 1 to 1.5 km. A car park on Tilburstow Hill to the north of the Greensand Way provides panoramic views over the Weald. This, location and the land north of the railway is within the AGLV. It is stated in the visual impact report, that from this location the trees of Furze Wood would obscure the site. The County’s Landscape Officer has commented that there is no direct impact on the AGLV.

The main visual impact would be during mobilisation of the rig and the drilling period. The proposed rig mast is 29 metres in height, which would protrude above the treeline. It is proposed to align the access route around agricultural fields using existing tracks and field gates where possible to minimise visual impact. In addition, the use of bunding to the north of the wellsite and alongside the access track would assist in reducing the visual impact of the proposal. Nevertheless in the short term there is likely to be some disturbance in the landscape. The construction of the access and access route and the activity of constructing the wellsite and mobilisation of the rig would involve the movement of HGVs, plant and materials through fields, which would normally be alien in the agricultural landscape.
In addition, the creation of the access and access route would involve some removal or relocation of hedgerows. The applicant originally proposed that in addition to the 25 metres of hedgerow requiring removal to create the new access, that 45 metres of hedgerow be translocated further back from the roadway to provide adequate sightlines to the south of the new access. In its representation, Godstone Village Association asked whether anything could be done to soften or decrease the impact of the new access. The County’s Landscape Officer felt that there would be implications from the removal of hedgerow both in terms of visual impact and habitat loss and questioned the feasibility and effectiveness of the proposed hedgerow translocation. The hedgerow in question is shown to the right of Tilburstow Hill Road in Figure 8.

The Highway Authority has agreed to the hedgerow remaining in situ provided its height is reduced to below one metre and that it is maintained at that height for the duration of the development. The County’s Landscape Officer and the County Ecologist and Biodiversity Manager both agree that the regeneration of the hawthorn hedgerow at the end of the 3 year development period would be more robust and provide a stockproof hedge if it was cut to within 150 mm above ground level, inter-planted and a secondary row of hawthorn planted between 400 mm and 600 mm behind the hedge. Officers believe this approach would safeguard the hedgerow and maintain its character and landscape interest in accordance with Surrey Structure Plan Policy SE9. Proposed planning conditions 18 and 24 cover these points.

One of a local resident’s grounds for objection to the proposal is that the new access route will be visually significant from Tilburstow Hill Road and the public footpath to the south. There are also two residential properties on the western side of Tilburstow Hill Road to the south of the site. Whilst the construction of the access track itself would involve some disturbance in the landscape, it would mainly be seen from the public footpath 269 from distances between 260 and 500 metres with intervening hedgerows and trees. (See Figure 9). The existing track is fairly enclosed by hedges and trees (see Figure 2). The new part of the route would continue from the existing track adjacent to the hedgerow shown on the right in Figure 3. This would shield the route itself from views from the footpath to the south but it would be possible to see the movement of large vehicles in the landscape. At this point the route would be some way distant from the residential properties and at a largely oblique angle. As the route moves into the next field it keeps adjacent first to the eastern hedgerow and then the northern boundary of the field just south of Prickle Shaw. It would be most open to views as it passes to the south of Prickle Shaw but at that point, would be hidden from residents views and would be at its most distant from the footpath. The applicant intends to store the stripped topsoil in bunds alongside the route, which would assist in screening the route itself, but during the 16 weeks period of construction, mobilisation, drilling and de-mobilisation there would be distant views of moving vehicles.

Drilling would take place continuously over a 10 week period and as a consequence, lighting would be required during night time operations for health and safety reasons. Lighting would be confined to the wellsite and would be required during the drilling period only. The applicant has provided information on the types of lighting to be used and this issue is covered in more details later in the report, see paras 172 to 179. The applicant advises that other than the light shining on the rig for Health and Safety purposes that the lighting would comply with the Institute of Lighting Engineers Guidelines. The lighting is likely to be noticeable in the distance during the drilling period, from the higher land to the north of the site and the residential properties on that section of Tilburstow Hill Road. However, the use of lights would be short lived and although rural, it is not an entirely dark landscape, as there are street lamps on Lambs Business Park to the north of the site.

A single flare would be used during testing. The applicant states that new technology in the form of a completely shrouded flare would be used at the site. The Clean Enclosed Burner (CEB) has a burner deck enclosed by an insulated heat radiation shield and the manufacturer of the flare states that the CEB achieves 99.99% complete smokeless
combustion and no infra red or luminous flames. The British Horse Society is concerned that ‘the flare would be plainly visible from Bridleway 293 which is only 200 metres away.’ The bridleway is located to the west of the site, the other side of the adjoining field. Between the field and the wellsite is the Parish boundary hedgerow that is wooded with mature trees. Figure 6 shows the treeline and hedgerow that denotes the Parish boundary on the right of the photograph. The CEB would be located at the south eastern corner of the site, so the left hand corner of Figure 6. This would be at the very back of the site and given the orientation of the site and the adjoining woodland, its position should ensure that it would not be visible. At 6.2 metres high, the flare stack would be well below the surrounding tree cover, which extends to some 12 metres. During combustion, the flare produces a blue flame within the enclosed burner but no visible flame.

129 During the 2 year appraisal and testing period there would be little activity at the site, the rig and the majority of the containers and equipment would have been removed although the access and access route would remain until the site was finally restored. The restoration of the site at the end of the development would return the site and access route to agricultural use. The new access would be closed, the 25 metres of hedgerow removed to create the access replanted and the existing farm access reinstated. The Agricultural Land Classification for the site is stated to be between 3 and 4. Natural England has made no comments in relation to the agricultural restoration of the site, however a detailed scheme of restoration would be required by condition to ensure that the land is returned to an appropriate standard. See proposed Condition 33.

130 The proposal is for a temporary period of 3 years and therefore would not result in a permanent change in the local landscape. Quite clearly during the period of construction and drilling there would be temporary visual disturbance arising from the activity, in particular, the height of the rig and the lighting during night hours. It is accepted that during this period the development would not protect and enhance the character of the Area of Local Landscape Significance as required under policy RE18 of the Tandridge District Local Plan. Nevertheless, the wellsite and access route would be only partially visible as a result of the intervening woodland and field boundary vegetation. The County's Landscape Officer concerns regarding hedgerow translocation have been resolved. Having carefully considered the application it is the County's Landscape Officer's view that given the location, the extent and nature of the works and temporary nature of the development, visual implications would be minimal. As such, Officers do not consider that either the rig or the development as a whole would have a significant or permanent impact on the character of the landscape or that the harm is so great as to justify refusing the proposal on the grounds of visual impact.

Nature Conservation

131 The proposed wellsite and access is located on unimproved grassland within an agricultural area and is bounded by Birchen Coppice on two sides. The origin of the grassland is relatively recent as the field was sown as permanent pasture from a seed mix in the 1960s and has not been treated with herbicide or inorganic fertiliser since. The field is manured once a year and regularly grazed by cattle. It lacks many vascular plant species that would be indicative of more natural neutral grassland. The proposed access route would run along the south of this grassland, just to the north of Birchen Coppice which has been identified as a potential Site of Nature Conservation Importance (pSNCI), and is listed as ancient woodland and as wet woodland on Natural England’s mapping of Priority Habitats. There are several SNCIs and pSNCI within a distance of 2 km of Kings Farm. The creation of the site access from Tilburstow Hill Road and the access route to the wellsite would also have some impact in terms of hedgerow disturbance or removal.

132 The Region has a wide range of habitats and Policy E2 of the Regional Spatial Strategy 2001 (as amended) seeks to maintain and enhance the Region’s biodiversity. This is being taken forward in the emerging South East Plan in Policy NRM4. Policy E5 states that woodland habitats should be increased whilst protecting the biodiversity and character
of existing woodland resources and other areas of established or potential nature conservation value. The emerging South East Plan recognises that woodland provides many social and environmental benefits for the inhabitants of the south east but that effective management of this resource would be beneficial. Policy NRMS5 requires local authorities to ensure the value and character of the regions woodland is protected and enhanced. One of the measures to achieve this is by protecting ancient woodland from damaging development and land uses.

The Regional Spatial Strategy 2001 (as amended) states that through land use planning and other functions, local authorities have the opportunity to improve air quality and Policy E7 requires that when determining planning applications, ‘air quality is taken into account where appropriate, along with other material considerations’. The emerging South East Plan refers to the primary driver for national, regional and local air quality management being the protection of human health but recognises that there can be concerns regarding the impact of certain pollutants on wildlife habitats and vegetation. Policy NRM5 which reflects the policies outlined in ‘Seeing the Wood for the Trees’ – the Regional Forestry and Woodlands Framework for South East England 2004. Policy NRM7 addresses issues related to transport and air quality.

The protection and enhancement of ecological interests including Sites of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCI) is sought by Policy SE7 of the Surrey Structure Plan 2004. The policy requires that mitigating measures are put in place if development could directly or indirectly harm designated sites. In addition, applicants must demonstrate that the need for the proposal outweighs the need to safeguard the nature conservation importance, and that no alternative site is available. Policy SE9 of the Surrey Structure Plan seeks the protection of trees and woodland and the maintenance of the extent of tree cover in the county. The policy particularly highlights that ancient woodland should be protected. Policy SE6 seeks the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity in Surrey. Development are expected to contribute to safeguarding and managing habitats identified as important. It is also stated within the policy that features within the landscape which are of importance for wild fauna and flora should be protected.

Tandridge District Local Plan 2001 Policy NE4 requires that the Surrey Wildlife Trust are consulted on proposals which are likely to significantly affect a pSNCI. The Trust has been asked for, and has provided its views on this application. Policy NE5 seeks to protect ancient woodlands and states that the Council will take into account any harm to the existing landscape, nature conservation and/or historic value of the wood. Policy NE19 requires the retention and enhancement of woodland and hedgerow features. The loss of such features will be resisted where they make a valuable contribution to the character of the landscape but where the loss is unavoidable, enhanced compensatory planting will be required. Policy NE7 requires developers to clearly demonstrate that animals and plant species protected by law can be conserved before development will be permitted. The loss of woodland and hedgerow features is resisted and their retention and enhancement sought under Policy NE10.

Planning Policy Statement 9 (PPS9) on Biodiversity and Geological Conservation sets out the policies that apply to the integration of the protection of biodiversity and geological conservation and planning. The Government’s objectives for planning are to promote sustainable development, conserve, enhance and restore the diversity of England’s wildlife and geology and contribute to rural renewal and urban renaissance. Para 10 of PPS9 covers the value of ancient woodland as a biodiversity resource both for its diversity of species and longevity as woodland.

The applicant has provided an ecological report in support of the application. Several surveys have been undertaken including an Extended Phase I Habitat Survey, a grassland National Vegetation Classification Survey, surveys for bats, great crested newt and hedgerow and trees. In addition a search was made for badger and common dormouse activity and a desk study undertaken. The important ecological receptors were identified
as: Birchen Coppice, herb-rich neutral grassland, hedgerows and trees, bats, brown hare, birds, reptiles, great crested newt and invertebrates.

138 During the 5 week construction phase the activities, which would potentially impact on the identified receptors would be the removal of hedgerows to create a new access, the reduction in height of 45 metres of hedgerow to provide sightlines for the access, the removal of a section of hedgerow to allow the new access to rejoin the existing trackway, localised pruning of vegetation, loss of herb-rich grassland, visual and noise disturbance from vehicles, plant. During the 10 week drilling phase potential impacts would revolve around visual and noise disturbance from machinery, vehicles, and lighting. Demobilisation of the rig would only take 4 days but would again involve the movement of vehicles and plant and the final decommissioning of the site would have a similar impact to the initial construction.

Birchen Coppice and the Parish Boundary
139 To protect Birchen Coppice, it is proposed to leave a 7 metres buffer zone between the woodland edge and the access track. Surrey Wildlife Trust expressed concern that the hedgerow tree belt to the west of the proposed wellsite is the Parish Boundary, as the Trust felt that it was highly likely to be of significant ecological, landscape and cultural value. The applicant has now advised that a 10 metres buffer zone is to be provided along the Parish boundary to provide protection for this hedge and tree line. It is important that this buffer zone is maintained throughout the development and therefore the County’s Ecologist and Biodiversity Team Manager has requested that a condition be imposed on any planning permission to specifically prohibit the use of, and storage on, either the buffer zone or within Birchen Coppice.

140 Surrey Wildlife Trust and the County’s Landscape Officer have both commented that the ancient woodland at Birchen Coppice is poorly managed and would benefit from long term management. This was put to the applicant Star Energy, who has advised that it has no control over the Coppice and therefore the environmental enhancement that could come from long term management cannot be achieved. The Coppice landowners use it as a grazing area for their beef stock and as a supply of firewood to heat wood burners at the farm. The landowners consider this to be a sustainable approach.

Herb Rich Neutral Grassland
141 The proposed wellsite and much of the access route which runs to the north of Birchen Coppice, falls within a large field of herb rich neutral grassland which is used for permanent pasture. The 0.5 ha of the proposed wellsite and the area covered by the access route is only a small part of the field but this part of the pasture would be lost for the temporary period of the development. At the end of 3 years, two boreholes would be capped and the wellsite and access restored to agricultural use and it is proposed to re-instate the grassland and re-seed with a native seed mixture. There is no reason to believe that the grassland cannot be well restored and none of the consultees have expressed concern regarding this aspect of the application.

Hedgerows and Trees
142 The hedgerow and tree survey concluded that many of the hedgerows on Kings Farm were old. They link woodland sites and contribute to a network of wildlife corridors, as well as being habitats in their own right. Notwithstanding this, the hedgerows survey found that the two hedgerows where sections of 25 metres and 20 metres respectively, would be removed to create the new access and link the new access to the existing farm track, are not important under the Hedgerow Regulations 1997. The 25 metre section of hedgerow south of the existing access is dominated by hawthorn and appears to be annually flailed and the hedgerow that borders the farm track is dominated by hawthorn and blackthorn.

143 The remainder of the access route would utilise existing farm entrances to minimise hedgerow loss. The concerns about the feasibility or effectiveness of hedgerow translocation along Tilburstow Hill Road were discussed in para 124 and 125 above. The
retention of the 45 metre stretch of hedgerow reduces the net loss of hedgerows and the associated habitats. The County’s Ecological and Biodiversity Manager has requested that a planning condition be imposed on any consent, which ensures that hedgerows are fully reinstated at the time of site restoration. This would form part of the overall detailed scheme of restoration that would be required by proposed Condition 33.

There are a number of mature and ecologically valuable trees in the area. Trees line the westernmost section of the existing access track and a number overhang the farm track (see Figure 2). The passage of farm machinery has resulted in a ground clearance of approximately 4 metres and the applicant has confirmed that the maximum height of the plant and machinery associated with this application is 3.6 m. Consequently, it is not envisaged that any boughs would need to be removed along the access track. There is a veteran oak with low boughs in the hedgerow on the field boundary to the south east of Prickle Shaw. The applicant has confirmed that as the access track would run some 15 metres west of this tree, consequently the access track would have no impact on the tree or its branches.

**Bats**

Bats are a European Protected Species under the Habitat Regulations and are protected in English law by Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. English Nature (now part of Natural England) has produced guidelines on what would be expected on a development site where bats are known to be present. Five local residents have cited the impact on bats as one of their reason for objecting to the proposal.

The bat survey found that the area around the proposed wellsite is utilised by a number of bat species for foraging and commuting. No roosts were found but Birchen Coppice could potentially provide tree roosts. The proposal does not involve the removal of trees and branches around the wellsite or along the access route. Consequently, even if trees surrounding the site supported bats, there would be no necessity to close a roost, an activity which would require a licence from DEFRA. Nevertheless, the County’s Ecologist and Biodiversity Manager has requested that a condition be imposed on any planning permission relating to protected species, to ensure that in the event that protected species are unexpectedly found during the carrying out of works associated with this development, that the correct procedures are followed.

The herb rich grassland to the north of Birchen Coppice is likely to encourage flying insects, which would attract bats. Whilst a small area of the herb rich grassland would be temporarily lost, it forms only a small part of a much larger area of grassland, which would remain untouched. During the longer appraisal period, activity at the site would be very low key and at the time of restoration, the herb rich grassland would be reinstated.

There is likely to be some noise associated with the works during the construction and drilling phase. Noise issues are dealt with later in the report but taking into account that the night time noise limits are fairly stringent and the drilling is for a temporary period only, noise is unlikely to cause a significant impact. If bats were to avoid the wellsite area during the 16 week construction and drilling phase, they could maintain their commuting routes from the northern edge of the Coppice.

24 hour drilling would necessitate lighting the wellsite during the hours of darkness. Lighting is covered in a later section of the report. It is not anticipated that there would be light spillage beyond the boundary of the wellsite and the lighting would only be necessary for a temporary period of 10 weeks. The ecological report accompanying the application suggests that night time illumination be avoided if possible, but if that was not practicable then directional mercury vapour lighting be used. The applicant has confirmed that directional mercury vapour lighting would be used. It is also intended to operate a flare although not for the full drilling period. The applicant has supplied more information regarding the proposed flare and this confirms that the flare would be fully shrouded and that it has no visible flame. These measures should prevent any significant disturbance to
potential bat populations. Surrey Wildlife Trust, Natural England and the County’s Ecological and Biodiversity Manager have all considered the application and in particular, the ecological report, and have no objection to the proposed development. However, the County’s Ecologist and Biodiversity Team Manager has requested that a condition be imposed on any planning permission which requires that if any tree boughs do need to be removed that a bat survey is carried out.

**Brown Hare**

150 Two records for Brown Hare were identified by the desk study, one associated with the wellsite area. It is stated within the ecological report that grazing leys and arable fields close to the proposed wellsite could potentially provide suitable habitat for this species. The Brown Hare is a UK BAP priority species. The report identifies the significance of impact as negligible as the small temporary loss of pasture is unlikely to have a significant impact on Brown Hare populations in the area.

**Birds**

151 Under The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, the law protects all wild birds, their nests and eggs, with some rare species afforded special protection. Although originally protection was developed to prevent egg stealing and cruelty to wild birds, its modern interpretation also relates to the activities of land managers and developers. Around the potential wellsite and access, woodland, hedgerows, species rich grassland and farmland potentially provide habitat for a range of birds. Whilst the temporary activity associated with the construction and drilling could potentially cause some disturbance in terms of movement, noise and light, it is not considered that this would give rise to any permanent detrimental impact as this phase of the development is for a limited period and does not involve the disturbance of adjacent vegetation.

152 More important is the removal of two stretches of hedgerow and the reduction in height of another stretch of hedgerow near the access to the development. Whilst these hedgerows have not been identified as of particular importance, breeding birds may nest in them. The County’s Ecologist and Biodiversity Officer has requested that a condition be imposed on any permission, which prohibits the carrying out of any removal or disturbance of hedgerows between the 1 March and 31 August inclusive.

**Reptiles**

153 Potential habitats for reptiles were identified in the ecological report. These include the grass verges alongside the existing farm track and the herb-rich pasture. The desk study also produced records of grass snake within 2 km of the site. Reptiles are protected under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). There would be some loss of potential habitat, particularly along the verges of the existing trackway which would need to be widened. However, this minor loss of suitable habitat is unlikely to have any adverse impact on the populations that may be present in the area.

**Great-Crested Newts**

154 Great-Crested Newts are a European Protected Species under The Conservation (Natural Habitats & c.) Regulations 1994 (Habitat Regulations) and in English law by Section 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). Newts are protected from harm, injury or deliberate disturbance and their habitat from deliberate or reckless damage or disturbance. There are no ponds within the site area, however there are several ponds within 500 metres of the site and great-crested newts have been recorded in ponds as close as 100m and 300 metres to the south of the access route. The habitats around the site provide suitable foraging, resting and hibernating sites for the newts.

155 Natural England has no objections to the proposed development and has stated that in this particular case, the significance of effect is minor. The County Ecologist and Biodiversity Manager agrees, but has requested that a condition be imposed on any planning permission relating to the discovery of any protected species such as great crested newts.
The application has incorporated a number of measures to reduce the ecological impact of the proposal. Whilst the development would take place over a total period of 3 years, the period of greatest impact would be short lived. Both Surrey Wildlife Trust and Natural England were asked to comment on the impact of the proposal on the nature conservation interests at the site. Neither organisation has any objections to the appraisal wellsite. Surrey Wildlife Trust has however, commented that this is a temporary application but would not necessarily accept the site is appropriately located for a longer term installation, or that the area is appropriate for a related use. Taking account of the views of Surrey Wildlife Trust, Natural England and the County’s Ecologist and Biodiversity Manager, it is concluded that subject to the imposition of conditions, the ecological impact aspect of this application complies with the relevant development plan policies.

Noise

The proposed development would involve two areas of focus for noise generation, the wellsite, and the access and access route. The wellsite is some 560 metres distant from the closest residential property, which is situated to the north of Lambs Business Park. Properties at Rushton Avenue, Terracotta Road, and the closest property on Tilburstow Hill Road, are all situated over 750 metres from the wellsite. Birchen Coppice sits between the wellsite and the Lower South Park, which is some 630 metres distant.

Works on the access and the initial section of the access route would take place closer to noise sensitive locations, as there are 8 residential properties within a 200 metres radius of the proposed access. The proposal involves 24 hour drilling over a period of 10 weeks and therefore it is essential that the Authority is clear that the drilling and associated operation can achieve appropriate noise levels, particularly in terms of night-time noise. Consideration also needs to be given to the character of the noise generated by a development at the same time as looking at the actual noise level.

The Regional Spatial Strategy 2001 (as amended) does not have a specific policy on Noise. However, within the emerging South East Plan it is recognised that ‘noise can have a serious effect on the quiet enjoyment of property and places, reducing quality of life.’

Policy SE1 ‘Natural Resources and Pollution Control’ Surrey Structure Plan 2004 requires prevailing standards to be applied to minimise forms of pollution such as noise and the Surrey Minerals Local Plan 1993 Policy 1 ‘Environmental and Amenity Protection’ requires that County Council be satisfied that steps have been taken to minimise the impact on amenity in terms of noise. Surrey has produced its own ‘Guidelines for Noise Control Minerals and Waste Disposal 1994’, based on the approach in Mineral Planning Guidance Note 11 (MPG11). MPG11 has now been superseded by Mineral Planning Statement 2 (MPS2) but the advice in terms of noise remains consistent with MPG11 and the Surrey Guidelines. The Guidelines specifically address oil and gas related development and recognise that noise control is of the utmost importance, as plant would work continuously. The normal requirement is that the noise level of any temporary plant that is in operation at night should not exceed 42 LAeq at the nearest noise sensitive location.

Policy EV10 of the Tandridge District Local Plan 2001 requires applicants to provide adequate information on potential noise generation and any mitigation measures proposed.

Kings Farm is situated in a rural area where the background noise levels are normally low. Noise measurements have been taken at Prickle Shaw, Terracotta Road, Lower South Park and South Park to clarify the day to night variations in the existing ambient noise levels. The main sources of noise would initially be associated with the preparation of the wellsite and mobilisation of the rig, the drilling phase and the demobilisation of the rig over which would all take place over a period of about 16 weeks.
Construction

It has been assumed in the noise report forming part of the planning application, that construction would involve two backactors, a bulldozer, a compacter working and approximately 4-5 lorry movements per hour along the access track. Working on the noise levels for these pieces of equipment the applicant’s noise consultant has calculated the construction noise to be around 40 dB LAeq 1hr or less at the closest noise sensitive property and 53 dB LAeq 1hr at bridleway 293 to the west of the site. The construction of the initial part of the access track would take the noise source much closer to residential properties and is predicted to be 48 dB LAeq 1hr. This level is within the Surrey Noise Guideline limits. The County’s Environmental Noise Consultant has commented that construction noise would be well below the appropriate limit of 70 LAeq and that he agrees with the applicant’s consultant that the additional traffic associated with the development would not increase traffic noise by as much as 1 LA10 although the constant stream of lorries over the construction period would be noticeable to residents. Proposed condition 12 limits the level of noise when work is being undertaken within 200 metres of the public road.

Drilling

The new hydraulic drilling rig that the applicant proposes to use at Bletchingley has only been used outside the UK. The noise report submitted with the application is based on noise measurements taken in Iceland in a location where there was little need for the rig to be silenced. Consequently, the hydraulic unit was noisy and tonal in character and the generators were also a significant source of noise.

To reduce the noise levels by approximately 10 dBA from those measured in Iceland, the applicant has proposed that silencers be fitted to all mechanical plant used on site and that generator sets with a sound power emission level no greater than 95 dB LWA be used for the Bletchingley site. It is also proposed to reduce the noise and source of tonal noise from the hydraulic unit, through the vibration isolation of the hydraulic power pack and hydraulic lines from the enclosure structure and such improvements as sound adsorptive lining and attenuated airways. Acoustic enclosure of the mud pumps and drivers would also assist in reducing noise levels.

The wellsite is enclosed by trees on three sides. The north east side of the site is open to the remainder of the field. To reduce both the visual and noise impact of the development, the applicant proposes to place a 3 metres high soil bund on this boundary. A noise model has been developed taking into account the distance between the site and the closest noise sensitive properties, the ground terrain including the intervening tree belts and the soil bund. It also takes into account the proposed noise reduction measures for specific pieces of equipment forming part of the drilling rig. The noise model shows that during the drilling phase, the highest predicted noise levels at surrounding residential properties would be 30 to 34 dB LAeq.

Whilst the noise assessment is based on assumptions as the applicant has yet to take noise measurements of the actual rig with the noise reducing measures in place, it is clear from the noise report that even without the additional noise attenuation proposed by the applicant, drilling noise levels would still not exceed the night time limit of 42 dB LAeq. Nevertheless, to attain the best standard that can be achieved; the applicant would be expected to mitigate noise levels to the reduced level.

The British Horse Society is concerned that the tranquillity of the area would be affected by noise and particularly refers to Bridleway 293. The Surrey Noise Guidelines do not refer specifically to noise impact on rights of way, nor does MPS2. Experience has shown the emphasis to be on the protection of noise-sensitive properties, as users of rights of way are only affected for a very short duration in time before moving on. In any event, the bridleway is 240 metres distant and beyond an intervening tree and hedgerow belt and as shown above, the noise from the development is expected to meet the Guideline limits.
The one issue that the County's Environmental Noise Consultant has highlighted, is that the noise of tripping, the hoisting of the drill stem from, and returning it to, the wellbore, has the potential to be more noticeable as the drill pipes tend to make impact noise when handled. In addition cementing can also have tonal or impact characteristics. Consequently, the County’s Environmental Noise Consultant has suggested that tripping and cementing are avoided at night and this could be achieved by the imposition of a planning condition. (See proposed condition 15).

**Flaring**

It is proposed to utilise a flare known as a Clean Enclosed Burner (CEB) at the site. This would be situated in the south eastern corner of the wellsite enclosed on the eastern and southern side by Birchen Coppice. The CEB is reported to be quieter than a traditional flare. The applicant has also revised the proposal relating to the number of flares required at the site. The initial intention was to operate with three flares but this has now been reduced to one. The three flares would have elevated the noise level to between 34 and 39 dB LAeq at the various residential locations. However, the latest information from the applicant suggests a similar source level as the rig noise. The County’s Environmental Noise Consultant has commented that the noise from the flare would be quite a broad band noise without tonal components and would sound similar to the rustling of trees.

Whilst it is clear that noise assumptions have been made regarding the ability to achieve a 10 LAeq reduction by silencing measures, the County’s Environmental Noise Consultant recognises that the unattenuated measurements would not exceed the guideline limit and therefore, in his view, that there is nothing to suggest that the work cannot be carried out within the appropriate limits set out in the Surrey Noise Guidelines. The new HH 220 rig that has been secured by the applicant has been erected at a site in Hampshire and it is the applicant’s intention that noise measurements of the noise attenuated rig are taken by the applicant and the County’s Environmental Noise Consultant as soon as the rig has been tested and can operate at full capacity. If by the date the Committee meets the applicant has supplied further information, Members will be informed by an up-date. Nevertheless, as the acceptable noise levels can be achieved and can be maintained by planning condition (see proposed conditions 12 to 16) it is considered that the proposal would not conflict with Policy SE1 of the Surrey Structure Plan 2004, Surrey Minerals Local Plan Policy 1, Tandridge District Local Plan 2001 Policy EV10 and the Surrey County Council Guidelines for Noise Control Minerals and Waste Disposal 1994.

**Lighting**

The site is located within a predominantly rural area. During the 10 week drilling period the site would be operational 24 hours a day and therefore to meet health and safety regulations lighting would be necessary during the hours of darkness. Lighting would be confined to the wellsite only and would only be required during the drilling stage. Outside lights would be filled with controllers, either photo cell or timeclocks, to ensure that the lights only operated during the hours of darkness.

Policy SE1 ‘Natural Resources and Pollution Control’ Surrey Structure Plan 2004 requires prevailing standards to be applied to minimise forms of pollution such as light which would be harmful to the environment of to other land users in the area. Applicants are required by Policy EV9 of the Tandridge District Local Plan 2001 to show that lighting schemes are the minimum necessary for security and working and that they minimise the potential glare and light spillage. It is also stated within the policy that particular attention will be paid to schemes in or close to open countryside, close to residential property and areas important for nature conservation.

The Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) has produced a Good Practice Guide entitled ‘Lighting in the Countryside’ and The Institution of Lighting Engineers (ILE) produces Guidance Notes for the Reduction of Obtrusive Light. The ILE
recommends that planning authorities follow the environmental zones set out in its guidance note. The relevant zone for this site would be E2: Low district brightness areas such as rural, small village, or relatively dark urban locations.

175 The wellsite is in the countryside but is well concealed by the trees and vegetation of Birchen Coppice on its south, eastern and western sides. At 560 metres distant from the nearest property, light trespass (into windows) would not be an issue. The potential for light spilling beyond the boundary of the site could potentially impact on the local bat population and this was discussed in para 149 above. The applicant has confirmed that lights on the rig and surrounding equipment would be directed inward and downward towards the base of the rig and would be fitted with a reflector skirt to direct the light and stop sideways light. In addition, one of the mitigation measures identified within the ecological section of the planning statement is that if night-time illumination is required, that directional mercury vapour lighting is utilised on the drilling rig to minimize light spill into the surrounding trees. The applicant has confirmed that this mitigation measure is to be adopted by the use of mercury vapour lights.

176 The applicant intends to construct a 3 metre high bund to the north east of the site but other than that boundary of the site is open to the land to the north. Beyond the railway north of Lambs Business Park the land rises steeply and it may be possible for properties on higher ground to have distant views of the illuminated site during the 10 week drilling period. It is also important to have regard to whether the lighting of the site could cause sky glow, which could be intrusive in a rural area.

177 The ILE Guidance gives the upward light ratio of the installation ie the sky glow or brightening of the night sky in zone E2 as 2.5. The applicant has submitted a lighting plan and height schedule which shows the proposed location, heights and direction of beam of the 8 strip lights and 15 directional lights that would be required to safely operate the site during the drilling period. The lights would be directed inward and downward towards the base of the rig and would be fitted with a reflector skirt to direct the light and stop sideways light. The applicant's lighting engineer has confirmed that the proposed lighting meets the relevant light emission standards except for one of the lights located on the dog house, and the red civil aviation warning light at the top of the mast. These lights are required for safety reasons. There are two lights situated at a height of 10 metres on top of the doghouse, one illuminates the rig floor and the second is likely to be of most concern as it shines up onto the drilling mast. The ILE Guidance recognises that some lighting schemes will require the deliberate and careful use of upward light and in these cases the sky glow limit cannot apply. Advice is given on the lighting of vertical structures in the situation where there is no alternative to up-lighting. The guidance states that care should always be taken to minimise any upward waste light by the proper application of the use of shields, baffles and louvers to help reduce spill light around and over the structure.

178 A resident has questioned whether the flare produces light. The applicant proposes to install a fully shrouded flare and has provided the manufacturers specification that states that the flare has no luminous flame. It is understood that the flare burns with a blue flame, which is completely shrouded. It is proposed to locate the flare at the south eastern corner of the site which given the orientation of the site, would mean that the flare would be almost completely shielded by trees and vegetation.

179 The lighting is only necessary for the period of drilling which could be for a period of up to 10 weeks. None of the lights are situated higher than the partially surrounding tree canopy. The site lighting can comply with the requirements in term of light trespass, it is the upward light ratio of the civil aviation light and more particularly, the upward light on the drilling mast which cannot. Wasted upward light can be minimised by mitigation measures and given the height of the surrounding vegetation the light should not cause a significant adverse impact. Taking both this and the temporary nature of the development into account, it is recommended that if Members are minded to grant planning permission, planning conditions be imposed requiring the applicant to ensure that suitable directional
luminaries and light controlling attachments are applied and that the main site lighting remains at all times within the limitations for Zone E2 as set out in the ILE Guidelines.

**Pollution, Safety and Fear**

180 Residents have expressed concerns relating to safety at the site and have expressed fears about the risk of accidents.

181 The Regional Spatial Strategy 2001 (as amended) states that through land use planning and other functions, local authorities have the opportunity to improve air quality and Policy E7 requires that when determining planning applications, *‘air quality is taken into account where appropriate, along with other material considerations’.* The emerging South East Plan refers to the primary driver for national, regional and local air quality management being the protection of human health but recognises that there can be concerns regarding the impact of certain pollutants on wildlife habitats and vegetation.

182 Surrey Structure Plan 2004 Policy SE1 ‘Natural Resources and Pollution Control’ seeks to conserve and enhance designated areas and features of acknowledged importance. The policy also requires development to comply with prevailing standards for the control of emissions to air, water and land. The Surrey Minerals Local Plan Policy 1 ‘Environmental and Amenity Protection’ requires that the implications for the health and safety of the public are taken into account and that steps have been taken to minimise any potential impacts.

**Pollution**

183 Development that would adversely affect the quality of surface water or groundwater will be resisted by Policy EV6 of the Tandridge District Local Plan 2001. Policy EV8 of the Tandridge District Local Plan 2001 states that the views of the Health and Safety Executive will be taken into account when considering proposals for development close to hazardous installations.

184 The applicant has advised that a Pollution Prevention Plan would be drawn up prior to the commencement of site preparation. This would identify any hazardous materials and the risk of any contamination. Both the Environment Agency and the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) have been asked for views on the application. The Environment Agency has no objection to the proposal in principle but has requested that issues such as drainage, process water and drilling fluids, dust suppression and cross contamination from Palmers Wood oilfield are addressed either by the inclusion of informatives or conditions.

185 The applicant has confirmed that the site will not contain soakaways and that reference to soakaways in para 13.4 of the planning statement is erroneous. All drainage, process water and drilling fluids would be exported from the site for treatment. Prior to drilling taking place, the applicant would have to provide details to the HSE, of how they are going to drill the well in a safe manner, this includes demonstrating that the risk of release of fluids is as low as reasonably practicable. An impermeable membrane would be used to seal the wellsite and the Environment Agency has requested that an informative is included on any consent regarding the storage of oils, fuels or chemicals to ensure that any spillages are contained thereby preventing pollution of the water environment. Whilst drilling, a sealed system would be used which contains any oily cuttings, these would then be exported from the wellsite for disposal at a suitably licensed site. The details of how the site would be drilled safely and how site operations would be managed are overseen by the HSE.

186 Some time ago there was a proposal to inject leachate into the Palmers Wood oilfield to enhance oil recovery. The Environment Agency raised an issue relating to whether there was a risk of the reserve at Bletchingley being linked to the reserve at Palmers Wood and the potential for fluid transfer. Apart from the installation of infrastructure at Palmers
Wood, the leachate injection proposal was not implemented. The applicant advises that in any event, the two reserves relate to a differing area of underlying strata.

187 There is some potential for dust creation during the 2 week access route construction period. After that, the wells site compound and the access track would be dressed in stone thereby reducing the potential for dust generation and the applicant has advised that the drilling activities would not generate dust. During the construction period the applicant has stated that fine water sprays would be used and vehicle speeds restricted where necessary. A condition relating to dust management has been included as proposed condition 11.

**Flare**

188 Residents have expressed concern regarding the proposal to flare particularly in relation to air quality. The applicant intends to use a Clean Enclosed Burner, which has even flames spread over the burner deck within an insulated heat radiation shield. The shrouded burner compares favourably to traditional flares and it is claimed by the manufacturer that it provides 99.99% smokeless combustion, provides for lower levels of methane and NOx emissions, is quieter and has no luminous flame. It is understood that the flare was initially tested in the UK in 2006, under the guidance of the Environment Agency with the UK Health and Safety Laboratory acting as the independent testing body. The applicant has advised that the flare thermally scrubs out pollutants by mixing gas with air in the burner chamber. As a result, the emission levels are very low and the burner emits clean, highly aerated gas that rise vertically.

189 Each borehole would initially be flared for three weeks and then only intermittently during the main appraisal period if required. The applicant states that the drilling and gas appraisal testing, including the shrouded ground flaring, would be carried out in accordance with accepted international standards and would be approved by the HSE and the DTI. The planning system does not seek to duplicate controls available in other legislation. The DTI, Health and Safety Executive and the Surrey Fire Brigade were all consulted on the application. There has been no response from the Surrey Fire Brigade, however, the views of the HSE have been received and they do not have any comments or objections.

**Leaks and Explosions**

190 Another concern voiced by local residents, is regarding the safety procedures and the risk of explosion or leaks. The applicant maintains that its facilities have to meet the strict safety code of the Borehole Regulations vetted by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). Once a detailed drilling work programme has been prepared a risk assessment would be carried out covering the standard of containment in all operating modes. Details of the casing, tubing and blow-out prevention would all be included. An independent examiner would review the programme and risk assessment prior to it being submitted to the HSE for comment. During flow testing, when the gas is burnt in the flare, the well can be isolated by two barriers. The only gas held at the surface is a small quantity contained within a pipe of six inches in diameter and 40 metres in length. The applicant advises that an automatic shutdown system would close incoming gas flow at the well head in the event of an emergency. An Emergency Contingency Plan would be put in place and emergency equipment would be held on site. This would all be a matter for the Health & Safety Executive.

191 The access route would cross the line of Alton to Purfleet Esso pipeline. Both the Health and Safety Executive and Esso via their representatives have been consulted on the application. Esso has provided plans showing the route of their pipeline and a booklet entitled ‘Special Requirements for Safe Working’. Esso has no objection to the proposal as long as the booklet and the covenants contained in the Deed of Grant are adhered to.
Gas Storage

The issue of gas storage and the company’s long term plans for the site has been raised by local residents and Bletchingley Parish Council. Apart from the concerns relating to any further development at the site, residents expressed concern about the safety of gas storage and mentioned explosions that have taken place in both this country and elsewhere. One resident states that ‘the site is too near the community to have gas storage facilities and would put the community at an unacceptable risk in the event of a major accident at the site. Such a major installation would be an obvious target for terrorism.’ Gas storage does not form part of this planning application, which is purely for appraisal. Any future development at the site would require the benefit of planning permission and any gas storage would also require a Hazardous Substances Consent.

Fear and Apprehension

It is clear that some members of the public are fearful or apprehensive about future gas development at the site, particularly in terms of gas storage and any application for gas storage would need to address public concerns. Public fear may be a material consideration but must be set in the context of all other materials considerations such as government policy and the informed opinion of other agencies and independent advisors. In assessing risk, the question of proportionality arises, where the degree of risk can be considered insignificant because there is no measurable impact. In relation to this current gas appraisal application, it is considered that it would be unreasonable to give weight to unsubstantiated fears in the absence of technical evidence. It is the Officers’ view that more weight should be given to the Health and Safety Executive’s expert opinion, which is that that there are no health and safety objections to the proposal.

Any future development would have to be subject to a new development consent, and gas storage would require a Hazardous Substances Consent. This application is for gas appraisal and it would therefore be unreasonable to refuse permission for this current application to appraise the resource, on the basis of the fear of a future development that would be considered afresh, or which may never come forward.

Taking the pollution, safety and fear and apprehension considerations into account, Officers conclude that the proposal would not conflict with the aims and objectives of Surrey Structure Plan 2004 Policy SE1, Surrey Minerals Local Plan 1993 Policy 1 and policies EV6 and EV8 of the Tandridge District Local Plan 2001.

Archaeology

The location of the proposed wellsite and access route is in an area, which contains a number of historic features. The two closest archaeological features are the earthwork enclosures in Birchen Coppice and Prickle Shaw, which are Sites of Archaeological Importance. Prickle Shaw is also classified as an Area of High Archaeological Potential.

Planning Policy Guidance Note 16 (PPG16) sets out the Government’s advice on ‘Archaeology and Planning’ including how archaeological remains should be preserved or recorded. Surrey Structure Plan 2004 Policy SE5 ‘Protecting the Heritage’ affords protection to features of archaeological importance and requires the recording of archaeological features that are disturbed or removed as a consequence of development.

Tandridge District Local Plan 2001 Policy HE5 presumes against any development that would adversely affect a Site of Archaeological Importance and Policy HE7 requires that the results of archaeological assessment are submitted with proposals larger than 0.4 ha.

The proposed wellsite would be located adjacent to the Godstone/Bletchingley Parish boundary to the south west of what was once known as the Great Broad Field. The two earthwork enclosures of county importance are located in Birchen Coppice and Prickle Shaw. The Birchen Coppice enclosure is probably Medieval or later. It comprises a single bank and ditch and lies almost entirely within the woodland although the north west side
may extent to just within the main field area. The earthwork enclosure at the northern
section of Prickle Shaw is probably a Medieval moated site. It has a dry moat and outside
and adjacent to the bank on the south eastern side is a small rectangular pit.

200 The access route would run between the south western corner of Prickle Shaw and the
north eastern corner of Birchen Coppice. The route is some way south of the Prickle
Shaw enclosure but would pass some 10 metres to the north of the Birchen Coppice
enclosure. Nevertheless, there is potential for archaeological finds to exist.

201 The County Archaeologist had, at the time this report was written, just received a
specification for the archaeological evaluation of the site. It is also understood that
evaluation in the form of 5% trenching is due to take place at the site of the proposed
wellsite during the week beginning 30 April. This fieldwork should reveal if there are
archaeological deposits, the nature of them and as a result, clarify the level of potential
impact.

202 The results of the fieldwork and the subsequent approach in terms of archaeology, along
with the County Archaeologist's views on the written specification, will be reported to
Members by means of an up-date on the day the Committee meets.

Restoration

203 Policy DN17 of the Surrey Structure Plan 2004 seeks to ensure that mineral working does
not result in permanent damage to the environment. Delay in restoration has
environmental costs and the priority is to secure the restoration of this site to a condition
capable of sustaining an acceptable afteruse at the earliest practicable date. This view
accords with the guidance given in Minerals Planning Guidance Note 7 (MPG7), that
mineral workings are to be reinstated to an appropriate afteruse at the earliest opportunity.
MPS1 states that ‘sustainable minerals development aims to preserve the land’s long term
potential to support the widest range of afteruses in the future by achieving high standards
of working and restoration.’ Surrey Minerals Local Plan 1993 Policy 3 seeks the return of
agricultural land to a condition similar to the original quality and Policy 5 requires the
establishment of a framework for the restoration of a site to a condition suitable for the
proposed afteruse.

204 It is proposed to restore the wellsite and access track to agricultural use at the end of the
appraisal period. The soil stripped from the wellsite and access route would be stored in
bunds for use in the restoration. All machinery, plant, structures fencing and surfaces and
liners would be removed from the site and the well heads severed and capped in
accordance with DTI requirements. Once the soils are replaced, the area would be sown
with a suitable grass seed mix to achieve a herb rich neutral pasture. The hedgerow
removed to create the access and the link through from the access to the existing access
track would be reinstated with native species planted at 500 mm centres.

205 The current farm track access onto Tilburstow Road would be reinstated and the larger
access required to service this proposal would be closed and the former farm access
reinstated. More detailed restoration and aftercare proposals would be required by
planning condition. See proposed condition 33.

206 Natural England has made no comments regarding the restoration proposal. Officers
consider that with planning conditions relating to soil placement, restoration, landscaping
and aftercare that there is no reason to believe that the site and its access route cannot be
well restored and integrate back into the surrounding farmland. Accordingly, it is
considered that from a restoration point of view, the proposal would not conflict with the
relevant guidance and Surrey Structure Plan 2004 Policy DN17 and Surrey Minerals Local
Plan Policy 5.
HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS

207 The Human Rights Act Guidance for Interpretation, contained in the Preamble to the Agenda is expressly incorporated into this report and must be read in conjunction with the following paragraph.

208 It is recognised that there would be a short term slight adverse impact in terms of visual disturbance during the construction and drilling phases of the development. Nevertheless, it is the Officer's view that the scale of any potential impacts are not considered sufficient to engage Article 8 or Article 1 and that potential impacts can be mitigated by planning conditions. As such, this proposal is not considered to interfere with any Convention right.

CONCLUSION

209 The proposed development is for the drilling of two new boreholes and the appraisal of the gas resource, a programme of testing, for a temporary period of 3 years. Local residents have expressed concern about the application and about future developments that may arise from it, particularly gas storage. This application is solely for gas appraisal and any future development at the site would require the benefit of a new planning permission and a Hazardous Substances Consent.

210 The currently proposed wellsite would be located in a rural area within the Green Belt, some 600 metres south of the AGLV and within an Area of Local Landscape Significance. The wellsite would abut Birchen Coppice, a pSNCl, which contains ancient woodland and the access route passes archaeological features of importance. The County Planning Authority must be satisfied that the proposed gas appraisal will not give rise to harm to features of importance and local environmental and residential amenity interest and accord with relevant Structure Plan and Minerals Local Plan policies. It is necessary for the Authority to be satisfied that the proposal would not give rise to unacceptable impacts in terms of noise, traffic and visual disturbance.

211 There have been three beneficial changes to the application since it was first submitted. First the applicant has reduced the flaring requirement from three flares to one, second the proposed wellsite has been pulled away from the hedgerow/treebelt which forms the parish boundary to ensure a 10 metre buffer zone protects the trees, and third, 45 metres of hawthorn hedgerow bordering the western side of Tilburstow Hill Road proposed to be removed or translocated would now remain in situ at a reduced height for the duration of the development.

212 The need for the development is one of the key issues in the determination of this application. Previous gas exploration in the Bletchingley area in the 1960s and a recent seismic survey indicate the need for a new appraisal wellsite to provide clearer information regarding the extent, quality and quantity and pressure of the gasfield. Set against the decline in the production of indigenous gas, the increasing demand to import and the seasonal demand variation for gas, national energy policy encourages the security of the supply of natural gas. There is a move towards renewable energy but with 90% of the United Kingdom's energy needs currently met by fossil fuels, until there is a more fundamental change, a need to maintain gas supplies to heat homes, schools and places of work remains. As a consequence, proposals to investigate potential gas developments at existing or new fields are still required. The DTI has advised that it fully supports the proposal and has also confirmed that it is the UK Government's stated objective to maximise the exploitation of national oil and gas resources with due regard to the environment. Taking into account the advice from the DTI and the need to confirm the extent of the gas field, Officers are satisfied that there is a need for the development and that the need could be met at this site.
In their representations local residents have expressed concern regarding the level of vehicle movements involved in the early stages of the development. They also consider that Tilburstow Hill Road is inappropriate for use by HGVs. The construction phase of the development would generate the highest level of vehicle movement, which could reach 50 movements (25 in 25 out) per day. Nevertheless, this phase would be limited to a 4 week period. Vehicle movements decrease during the mobilisation and drilling phases and then again to no more than 4 light vehicle movements during the longer appraisal phase. Clearly the development’s capacity to generate traffic changes according to the phase of the development but the highest traffic generating phases are short lived. Recent traffic counts at Tilburstow Hill Road have recorded a drop in the overall vehicle flows using the road since 2002, but at the same time the level of usage by HGVs has increased. The development involves the creation of a new access onto Tilburstow Hill Road sufficiently wide enough to accommodate simultaneous entry and exit of two HGVs. Whilst this access was in use, the existing farm access would be closed. Overall the development would involve a small and very temporary increase in traffic on a road that cannot be described as heavily trafficked and as such the Highway Authority considers there to be no objections in terms of safety, capacity or policy grounds.

The proposed site lies in a rural area within the Green Belt and an Area of Local Landscape Significance. Nevertheless the wellsite is removed from residential properties and well screened by intervening woodland and vegetation. The proposed access route is less so but as the main impact would be the visual disturbance associated with construction and vehicle movements, this slight adverse impact would be short lived. During the 10 week drilling period the combination of 24 hour working and lighting and the ability to see the top of the drilling rig would have some impact on the local landscape. The County’s Landscape Officer is satisfied that there is no direct impact on the AGLV and that the proposal would have a minimal, if any, adverse impact on the Area of Local Landscape Significance, particularly as the development is temporary and restoration would be accomplished in the short term.

The proposal raised several ecological issues, however, there have been beneficial changes to the application since it was first submitted. The disturbance of bats was a concern raised by several local people. A bat survey has already been undertaken and the applicant has confirmed that it is not intended to remove any trees or boughs to accommodate the wellsite or access. Nevertheless, a requirement to check for the presence of bats if any tree lopping becomes necessary would be imposed by planning condition. Having considered the application the Surrey Wildlife Trust, Natural England and the County’s Ecological and Biodiversity Manager have no objections.

In conclusion, Officer’s accept that there is a need for the development. Whilst residents have expressed concern about the highways, access and traffic, noise, visual impact, pollution and safety aspects of the development, the relevant consultees have raised no objections in relation to these issues. Where safeguards are required these can be secured by planning conditions. Accordingly, Officers consider that the proposal is appropriate development in the Green Belt and otherwise meets the relevant policies of the Development Plan and recommend that planning permission be granted.

RECOMMENDATION

That the application is PERMITTED subject to the following conditions:

Approved Documents

1 The development hereby permitted shall be carried out and completed in all respects strictly in accordance with the terms of this permission, the submitted documents and plans contained in the application and the amending/amplifying letter dated 30 March 2007; letter dated 1 April 2007 including details of the CBT flare and Lighting Plan Figure 4.4B and lighting height schedule, Section 5.2 of planning application form; letter dated 22
April 2007 enclosing Figure 4.4 D Lighting Plan, Figure 6.1B Bletchingley Gas Field Geological Model (April 2007), Figure 4.4/C Proposed Site Layout – Drilling, Figure 4.5/B Proposed Site Layout – Appraisal, Figure 4.6/B Proposed Site Elevations Drilling & Appraisal, Figure 13.1/B Restoration Plan – Wellsite Area, Transport Survey Traffic Flow Survey Data 23/11/06 - 29/11/06 and in accordance with such details as are subsequently approved or amended by the County Planning Authority, and no variations or omissions shall take place without the prior approval in writing of the County Planning Authority.

Commencement

2 The development hereby permitted shall be begun no later than the expiration of three years beginning with the date of this permission. The applicant shall notify the County Planning Authority in writing within seven working days of the commencement of the implementation of the planning permission.

Time Limits

3 The development hereby permitted shall cease no later than 3 years from the date of the implementation of the planning permission referred to in Condition 2 above, or within 6 months of the completion of flow testing, whichever is the earlier. All buildings, plant, machinery (both fixed and otherwise) and any engineering works connected therewith, on or related to the application site (including any hard surface constructed for any purpose), shall be removed from the application site and the site shall be fully restored to a condition suitable for agriculture in accordance with the terms of the application hereby permitted. Notwithstanding this, any plant or equipment required to make the site safe in accordance with DTI requirements at the time and agreed with the County Planning Authority, may remain in position.

4 Unless otherwise agreed in writing by the County Planning Authority, well drilling operations hereby permitted shall cease within 16 weeks of the commencement of the implementation of the planning permission.

Hours of Operation - Reinstatement

5 Except for drilling and gas testing, no operations, including access by HGV’s or site restoration works authorised or required by the permission, shall take place other than during the hours of:-

0800 to 1900 hours on Monday to Friday
0800 to 1300 hours on Saturday

Apart from the exceptions referred to above, there shall be no working at any time on Sundays or Bank or National Holidays.

Limitations

6 Notwithstanding any provision to the contrary under Parts 19 or 22 of the Town and County Planning General Permitted Development Order 1995 or any subsequent Order, no plant, building or machinery whether fixed or moveable, shall be erected on the application site without the prior written approval of the County Planning Authority in respect of the siting, detailed design, specifications and appearance of the installation, such details to include the levels of noise emission and tonal characteristics of any plant or machinery.

Drainage

7 Prior to the commencement of the development hereby permitted a scheme for the disposal of foul and surface waters shall be submitted to the County Planning Authority and
approved in writing. The scheme as approved shall be implemented in full and maintained for the duration of the development unless otherwise agreed in writing by the County Planning Authority.

**Lighting**

8 The wellsite shall only be illuminated during the drilling period and all lighting shall be positioned in accordance with Figure 4.4 D Lighting Plan and at the heights specified in the lighting height specification entitled ‘Height of Lighting on Drillmaster 1’.

9 Other than the civil aviation warning light and the light required for health and safety purposes positioned on the doghouse, the lighting hereby permitted shall be constructed and maintained such that at no time it exceeds the limitations for Environmental Zone E2 given in the Institute of Lighting Engineers (ILE) Guidance Notes for the Reduction of Light Pollution 2005. These are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sky Glow ULR [Max %]</th>
<th>Light Trespass Ev [Lux]</th>
<th>Source Intensity 1 [kcd]</th>
<th>Building Luminance Pre 2300 hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre 23.00 hours Post 23.00 hours Pre 23.00 hours Post 23.00 hours</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2.5 5 1 7.5 0.5 5</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

10 All practical efforts shall be taken to minimise any upward waste of light produced by the non-conforming light situated on the dog house identified in Condition 9 above, by the fitting and use of an appropriate baffle to shield light spillage.

**Dust**

11 No activity hereby permitted shall cause dust to be emitted so as to adversely affect adjacent residential properties and/or other sensitive uses and/or the local environment. Should such an emission occur, the activity shall be suspended until as a result of different methods of working, the addition of additional dust suppression measure or changed weather conditions, it can be resumed without giving rise to that level of dust emissions.

**Noise**

12 Any noise arising from the construction of, or use of, the site access and access road within 200 metres of the public road shall be limited to 70 LAeq when measured at least 3.5 metres from the façade of a residential property or other noise sensitive building at a height of 1.2 metres above ground level.

13 The noise arising from any operation, plant or machinery on the site, when measured or recalculated as at a height of 1.2 metres above ground level and 3.5 metres from the façade of a residential property or other noise sensitive building that faces the site shall not exceed 45 LAeq during any 30 minute period.

14 Notwithstanding the provisions of Condition 13 above, during the hours of 1900 to 0800 hours the level of noise arising from any activity on site including the drilling operations, when recalculated as at a height of 4 metres above ground level and 3.5 metres from the façade of any noise sensitive building that faces the site shall not exceed 40 LAeq, during any 30 minute period and so as to ensure that these levels are not exceeded the following measures shall be undertaken:
(a) the mud pumps and driver shall be fitted with acoustic enclosures
(b) the generator sets shall have a power emission level no greater than 95 dB L<sub>WA</sub>
(c) the power emission level from the hydraulic power pack shall be no greater than 92 dB L<sub>WA</sub>

15 Between the hours of 2100 to 0700 inclusive, no tripping shall be undertaken, nor shall casing be cemented except in cases of emergency or with the prior written agreement of the County Planning Authority.

16 All plant and machinery shall be adequately maintained and silenced in accordance with the manufacturer's recommendations at all times.

Nature Conservation

17 No removal or cutting of hedgerows shall be carried out on site between the 1st March and 31st August inclusive in any year, unless otherwise approved in writing by the County Planning Authority in advance of such works.

18 Immediately following the provision of the new access referred to in Condition 23 below, but otherwise prior to the commencement of any other operation hereby permitted which involves the movement of material in bulk to or from the site, the 45 metres of hawthorn hedgerow directly south of the new access delineated on Figure 8.2 Detailed Site Access dated October 2006 as ‘section of existing fence and hedgerow to be set back to allow 2.5 m by 160 m visibility to south’, shall be reduced in height and maintained strictly in accordance with the following:

(a) the hedge shall be cut back within 150 mm above ground level;
(b) the line of the hedge shall be sprayed to secure a 1 metre wide zone of weed free ground;
(c) the hedge shall be interplanted with 45 cm hawthorn to achieve a minimum of 3 plants per metre infill;
(d) a secondary row of 45 cm hawthorn shall be planted parallel to the existing hedge at a minimum distance of 400 mm maximum distance of 600 mm at 3 plant per metre;
(e) maintain weed free by means of mats or spraying for a three year period to allow plants to establish.

19 All hedgerow planting implemented pursuant to this permission, shall be maintained in good healthy condition and be protected from damage for the duration of the development and for five years from the completion of restoration in any part of the site. During that period any plants that die, or are severely damaged or diseased shall be replaced in the next available planting season with others of a similar size and species.

20 Birchen Coppice and the 10 metre buffer zone between the wellsite and the parish boundary shall be maintained completely free of any use or storage associated with the development hereby permitted at all times throughout the duration of the development.

21 A survey shall be undertaken by a licensed bat worker prior to the felling or lopping of any trees in connection with any works hereby permitted. A written report that sets out the results of the survey and specifies any measures necessary to protect any bat(s) identified and the roost(s) shall be submitted to the County Planning Authority and approved in writing. The measures as approved, shall be implemented and complied with in full.

22 If at any time during the course of the development hereby approved, a great-crested newt(s) protected under the Conservation (Natural Habitats &c Regulations 1994), is discovered, all construction or other site work shall cease until a licence to disturb this species has been granted by Natural England.
Access and Highways

23 Prior to the commencement of the development hereby permitted, the proposed vehicular access to Tilburstow Hill Road shall be constructed and provided in accordance with the Figure 8.2 Detailed Site Access dated October 2006. No other access to the site, whether vehicular or pedestrian, shall be formed or used. The access as approved, is to be maintained for the duration of the development. Subject to Condition 3, on the cessation of development hereby permitted, the access shall be closed and the applicant shall restore the land and reinstate the hedgerow and grass verge.

24 The section of hedgerow referred to in Condition 18 above and the adjacent grass verge, shall not at any time exceed 1 metre in height during the duration of the development hereby permitted. The visibility zone, which includes the grass verge and hedgerow, shall be kept clear of any obstruction.

25 Immediately following the provision of the new access referred to in Condition 23 above, but otherwise prior to the commencement of any other operation hereby permitted which involves the movement of material in bulk to or from the site, the existing access shown on Figure 8.2 Detailed Site Access dated October 2006, shall be closed at the point it meets Tilburstow Hill Road. Prior to the commencement of any operations hereby permitted a scheme shall be submitted for the approval of the County Planning Authority in writing, which sets out full details of the reinstatement of any kerbs, verge, footways. The closure of the existing access and the scheme as approved, shall be maintained for the duration of the development.

26 Immediately following the provision of the new access referred to in Condition 23 above, but otherwise before any other operation hereby permitted which involve the movement of vehicles to or from the site are commenced, a sign shall be erected at the site exit which should not obstruct the sightlines, advising all drivers of HGVs exiting the site to turn right onto Tilburstow Hill Road. The sign shall be retained for the duration of the development unless otherwise agreed in writing by the County Planning Authority.

Soil Placement

27 All topsoil and subsoil shall be permanently retained on the site for subsequent use in restoration. No soils or soil making material for use in the restoration shall be brought onto the site without the prior written approval of the County Planning Authority.

28 The restoration soils shall be spread over the site at an even depth and shall not exceed the final levels shown on Figure 13.1B dated October 2006.

29 All soils and soil making materials shall only be stripped, handled, stockpiled or used for purposes of restoration when they are in such a dry and friable condition so as to prevent compaction.

30 Topsoil and subsoil stripped from the wellsite shall be stored separately in the bund delineated on Figure 4.4/C to a maximum height of 3 metres. Topsoil and subsoil stripped from the access track shall be stored separately in bunds not exceeding 1.5 metre in height which shall be located north of the access track between the wellsite and the field crossing between Birchen Coppice and Prickle Shaw, south of the access route as it run south of Prickle Shaw, west of the access route from the south east corner of Prickle Shaw to the field crossing and north of the access route from the field crossing to the point where it joins the existing farm track.

31 In the first available season following their formation, all mounds of topsoil and subsoil shall be seeded to grass and the sward shall be managed throughout the period of storage.
until the soils are required for use in the restoration of the site, except as may otherwise be agreed in writing by the County Planning Authority.

**Restoration**

32 Within six months of the date of the implementation of the planning permission hereby permitted, a detailed scheme of restoration of the wellsite, access and the access route to a condition suitable for agriculture shall be submitted to the County Planning Authority and approved in writing. The scheme shall make provision for the restoration of the new access with Tilburstow Hill Road referred to in Condition 23 above, and the reinstatement of the hedgerow removed to create the access and the section of hedgerow removed which borders the farm track, shall be submitted to the County Planning Authority and approved in writing. Such a scheme shall include details of:

a) grassland seed mix and method of sowing  
b) the positions, species and initial sizes of all new hedgerow plants  
c) the programme of implementation and phasing of the scheme  
d) the arrangements for subsequent maintenance and replacement

The scheme as approved shall be carried out in full unless otherwise agreed in writing by the County Planning Authority.

**Aftercare**

33 Within six months of the date of this permission, an aftercare scheme requiring such steps as may be necessary to bring the land to the required standard for the use of agriculture shall be submitted to the County Planning Authority for approval in writing. The scheme shall:

a) provide an outline strategy in accordance with Annex A of MPG7 for the five year aftercare period. This shall specify steps to be taken and the period during which they are to be taken. The strategy shall include provision of field drainage system and provide for an annual meeting throughout the five year aftercare period between the landowner or successor in title, and the County Planning Authority.  
b) provide for a detailed annual programme in accordance with Annexe A of MPG7 to be submitted to the County Planning Authority no later than two months prior to the annual aftercare meeting.

Aftercare shall take place in accordance with the approved scheme or any subsequent variation agreed in writing by the County Planning Authority.

**Reasons:**

1 To comply with the terms of the application and to enable the County Planning Authority to exercise planning control over the operation so as to minimise the impact on local amenity and that the site is restored to a satisfactory condition in accordance with the terms of Surrey Structure Plan 2004 Policy L04 ‘The Countryside and Green Belt’, Policy DN17 ‘Mineral Working and Restoration’ and Surrey Minerals Local Plan 1993 Policy 1 ‘Protection of the Environment and Amenities’, Policy 5 ‘Restoration’.

2 To enable the County Planning Authority to control the development and to monitor the site to ensure compliance with the planning permission to comply with Surrey Structure Plan 2004 Policy L04 ‘The Countryside and Green Belt’; and Surrey Minerals Local Plan 1993 Policy 1 ‘Protection of the Environment and Amenities’.

3 To ensure the prompt and effective restoration of the site and to comply with Schedule 5 paragraph 1 of the Town & Country Planning Act 1990.
4 To enable the County Planning Authority to exercise planning control over the operation so as to minimise the impact on local amenity to comply with Surrey Structure Plan 2004 Policy SE1 ‘Natural Resources and Pollution Control’; Surrey Minerals Local Plan 1993 Policy 1 ‘Protection of the Environment and Amenities’; Tandridge District Local Plan 2001 Policy RE18 ‘Areas of Local Landscape Significance’, Policy EV9 ‘Light Pollution’ and Policy EV10 ‘Noise’.

5 To protect the amenities of local residents in accordance with Surrey Structure Plan 2004 Policy SE1 ‘Natural Resources and Pollution Control’; Surrey Minerals Local Plan 1993 Policy 1 ‘Environmental and Amenity Protection’ and Tandridge District Local Plan 2001 Policy EV10 ‘Noise’.


9, 10 In the interests of local amenity and to comply with Surrey Structure Plan 2004 Policy SE1 ‘Natural Resources and Pollution Control’, Surrey Minerals Local Plan 1993 Policy 1 ‘Environmental and Amenity Protection’.

11, 12 To ensure the minimum disturbance and avoid nuisance to the locality to comply with Surrey Structure Plan 2004 Policy SE1 ‘Natural Resources and Pollution Control’, Surrey Minerals Local Plan 1993 Policy 1 ‘Environmental and Amenity Protection’ and Tandridge District Local Plan 2001 Policy EV10 ‘Noise’.

13 To ensure that breeding birds are not disturbed by the removal of habitat to comply with Surrey Structure Plan 2004 Policy SE7 ‘Nature Conservation’; Surrey Minerals Local Plan 1993 Policy 1 ‘Environmental and Amenity Protection’ and Tandridge District Local Plan 2001 Policy NE7 ‘Protected Species’.


23,24 In order that the development does not prejudice highway safety, nor cause inconvenience to other highway users to comply with Surrey Structure Plan 2004 DN2 ‘Movement Implications of Development’; Surrey Minerals Local Plan 1993 Policy 1 ‘Environmental and Amenity Protection’ and Tandridge District Local Plan 2001 Policy MO9 ‘Impact of Heavy Goods Vehicles’.

26 To comply with the terms of the application and reduce to the minimum the impact of the HGV traffic resulting from the proposed development in compliance with Surrey Structure Plan 2004 DN2 ‘Movement Implications of Development’; Surrey Minerals Local Plan 1993 Policy 1 ‘Environmental and Amenity Protection’ and Tandridge District Local Plan 2001 Policy MO9 ‘Impact of Heavy Goods Vehicles’.


30 To prevent loss or damage of soil, or mixing of topsoil with subsoil and to prevent damage to adjacent trees and vegetation and features of archaeological interest to comply with Surrey Structure Plan 2004 Policy L04 ‘The Countryside and Green Belt’, Policy SE8 ‘Landscape’ Policy, Policy SE9 ‘Trees and Woodland’, Policy SE 5


Informatives:

1 The applicant’s attention is drawn to the Fisher German letter dated 1 February 2007 relating to the Esso Petroleum south east pipeline, the attached Route Plan Drawing Nos SEP/OS/TQ3547 & TQ3548, the booklet ‘Special Requirements for Safe Working’ and Esso’s requirement that the covenants contained in the Deed of Grant are adhered to.

2 Care should be taken during and after construction to ensure that all fuels, oils and any other potentially contaminating materials should be stored so as to prevent accidental/unauthorised discharge to ground (for example in bunded areas). The areas for storage should not drain to any surface water system or to the groundwater environment.

   Where it is proposed to store more than 200 litres (45 gallon drum = 205 litres) of any type of oil on site it must be stored in accordance with the Control of Pollution (oil storage) (England) Regulations 2001. Drums and barrels can be kept in drip trays if the drip tray is capable of retaining 25% of the total capacity of all oil stored.

   Any facilities for the storage of chemicals/fuels shall be sited on impervious bases and surrounded by impervious bund walls, details of which shall be submitted to the Local Planning Authority for approval. The volume of the bunded compound should be at least equivalent to the capacity of the tank plus 10%. If there is multiple tankage, the compound should be at least equivalent to 110% of the capacity of the largest tank, or 25% of the total combined capacity of the interconnected tanks whichever is the greatest.

   All filling points, vents, gauges and sight glasses must be located within the bund. The drainage system of the bund shall be sealed with no discharge to any watercourse, land or underground strata. Associated pipework should be located above ground and protected from accidental damage. All filling points and tank overflow pipe outlets should be detailed to discharge downwards into the bund.
3 Deep wells present a risk of cross-contamination between distinct aquifer units. Beneath the Weald clay is the Tunbridge Wells Sand and Ashdown formations – both are important local aquifers, therefore the integrity of the well casing should be tested to ensure leaks to aquifer units are prevented.

4 Under the terms of the Water Resources Act 1991, an Abstraction will normally be required from the Environment Agency for the abstraction (removal) of water (even temporarily) from any inland waters (rivers, streams, ditches, lakes, etc) or underground strata (eg from a well, borehole or catchpit) for such purposes as the drilling process and dust suppression. The granting of a licence will be dependent on the availability of water resources locally and on the acceptability of any resulting impact on the environment and existing licensed abstractors.

5 Under Section 39 of the Water resources Act 1991, there must be no derogation of existing lawful water abstractors.

6 A Pollution Prevention Control (P P C) permit will be required for this site. An application should be made to the Environment Agency.

**Town And Country Planning (General Development Procedure) Order 1995 (As Amended) - Reasons for the grant of planning permission and development plan policies relevant to the decision.**

The summary of reasons for the grant of planning permission is as follows:

1 the development will facilitate the identification of the extent of a hydrocarbon reserve in accordance with national policy for securing reliable energy supplies;

2 it is in accordance with development plan policies so far as they are relevant to the application and there are no material considerations which indicate otherwise; and

3 any harm can be adequately mitigated by the mitigation measures proposed in the application and the conditions subject to which planning permission is granted.

**The proposal has been considered against the following development plan policies:-**

**The Regional Spatial Strategy 2001 (RPG 9) (as amended)**
- Policy E3 Green Belts
- Policy E2 Biodiversity
- Policy E5 Woodland Habitats
- Policy E7 Air and Water Quality

**Surrey Structure Plan 2004**
- Policy L04 The Countryside and Green Belt
- Policy SE1 Natural Resources and Pollution Control
- Policy SE5 Protecting the Heritage
- Policy SE6 Biodiversity
- Policy SE7 Nature Conservation
- Policy SE8 Landscape
- Policy SE9 Trees and Woodland
- Policy DN2 Movement Implications of Development
- Policy DN17 Mineral Working and Restoration

**Surrey Minerals Local Plan 1993**
- Policy 1 Environmental and Amenity Protection
- Policy 3 Agricultural Land
- Policy 5 Restoration
- Policy 15 Exploratory Drilling for Hydrocarbons
Policy 16 Hydrocarbons Appraisal Drilling

**Tandridge District Local Plan 2001**
Policy RE2 Development in the Green Belt outside the settlements
Policy RE15 Landscape Character
Policy RE18 Areas of Local Landscape Significance
Policy NE4 Potential SNCI's
Policy NE7 Protected Species
Policy NE10 Woodlands and Hedgerow Management
Policy HE 5 Ancient Monuments and County Sites of Archaeological Importance.
Policy HE 6 Development in Areas of High Archaeological Potential
Policy HE7 Archaeological Monitoring of Development Sites
Policy M09 Impact of Heavy Goods Vehicles
Policy EV6 Water Quality
Policy EV8 Hazards
Policy EV9 Light Pollution
Policy EV10 Noise

**CONTACT**
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020 8541 9439

**BACKGROUND PAPERS**
The deposited planning application documents and plans, responses to consultations, notifications and representations received, as referred to in the report and included in the planning application file.

**Government Guidance**
Our Energy Future - Creating a Low Carbon Economy - DTI 2003
Energy Review – DT July 2006
Planning Policy Guidance Note 2 (PPG2) 'Green Belts' - January 1995
Planning Policy Guidance Note 13 (PPG13) 'Transport' – March 1994
Planning Policy Guidance Note 16 (PPG16) 'Archaeology and Planning' – November 1990
Planning Policy Statement 1 (PPS1) 'Delivering Sustainable Development' - 2005
Planning Policy Statement 7 (PS7) 'Sustainable Development in Rural Areas' – August 2004
Planning Policy Statement 9 (PPS9) 'Biodiversity and Geological Conservation' – August 2005
Planning Policy Statement 23 (MPS23) ‘Planning and Pollution Control' - November 2004
Consultation – Planning Policy Statement: Planning and Climate Change (Supplement to Planning Policy Statement 1 December 2006

**The Development Plan**
The Regional Spatial Strategy 2001 (as amended)
Surrey Structure Plan 2004
Surrey Minerals Local Plan 1993
Tandridge District Local Plan 2001
Other Documents
Guidelines for Noise Control Minerals and Waste Disposal – Surrey County Council
September 1994
The Future of Surrey’s Landscape and Woodlands’ – 1997
Onshore Oil and Gas Factsheet DCLG November 2006
Guidance Notes for the Reduction of Obtrusive Light – The Institution of Lighting Engineers
2005 Lighting in the Countryside: Towards Good Practice – Department of Communities and
Local Government – July 1997