

Planning and Regulatory Committee

30 October 2024

PROCEDURAL MATTERS – MEMBER QUESTIONS

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1. Question submitted by Cllr Jonathan Essex

In June a Supreme Court ruling quashed the planning permission to drill for oil at Horse Hill. Yet, each month since the oil company has continued to produce oil at Horse Hill and there has been no statement or comment by Surrey County Council. In light of this please can you confirm whether Surrey County Council has the powers and resources needed to enforce where companies choose to ignore the rules and just carry on regardless, in breach of the areas of planning that we hold responsibility for. And please can you publicly state Surrey County Council's position as to the acceptability of this company's actions to send a clear message about our commitment to deliver on our zero carbon targets in Surrey, and provide a progress update on the enforcement action that we are undertaking on this, as over four months have now passed since the court ruling.

Reply:

SCC as a planning authority has powers and duties under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) including those relating to enforcement which are engaged here. Resources are dedicated to planning enforcement matters. The Planning Enforcement team are undertaking active investigations in relation to a number of sites County wide and has to allocate those resources accordingly. Whilst this may mean that investigations can take time due to limited resources within the team, that does not indicate that the matters are not being taken seriously. It is also important that an investigation is thorough to ensure that any formal action subsequently taken is sound.

The County Council's position is that the continued extraction in the absence of planning permission is unlawful. The development continues at UKCOGS own risk.

The Planning Enforcement Team is actively investigating the case, which includes gathering information as to the precise nature of the development at the site. Detailed and precise information gathering is a necessary, but time-consuming, step to inform a sound decision as to whether formal enforcement action is expedient.

Given this is a live enforcement investigation, we cannot comment further at present.

Edward Hawkins
Chairman of the Planning and Regulatory Committee
29 October 2024

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