

Planning and Regulatory Committee

26 February 2025

PROCEDURAL MATTERS – PUBLIC QUESTIONS**1. Question submitted by Deborah Elliott**

As a resident living less than two miles from the oil extraction site known as Horse Hill I would like to know if Horse Hill Developments (HHDL) have submitted new planning applications or given any indication that they intend to? And, whether Surrey County Council have given them a temporary licence or is this being hidden under the term “live application”, if so, how does this legally comply with the Court of Appeal ruling?

Reply:

The quashing of the planning permission by the Supreme Court last year means that the application which was the subject of that decision returns to Surrey County Council (SCC) to make a decision. It is this application that is therefore now live again and will have to be determined by SCC.

No permission, temporary or otherwise, has been granted by SCC for the development at the site.

2. Question submitted by Jacqueline Phillips

I am extremely concerned to learn that UK Oil & Gas PLC (UKOG) were still producing oil from Horse Hill in November, despite having declared that they would ‘voluntarily’ cease production. In December, Surrey County Council said it ‘had made clear its position that the site (Horse Hill) is to be cleared of all plant, machinery, operational development and miscellaneous paraphernalia’. Please could the Committee give assurance that this is still the situation and an update on exactly what equipment has been removed from the Horse Hill site to date?

Reply:

SCC is clear that the development at the site is unlawful and remains engaged in working to remove the unlawful development.

As of our inspection on the 4th February 2025 the equipment noted as having been removed are;

Gas Flare (fundamental to the extractive and production activities)

Generators

The operator has set out that they are working to get other equipment removed and this is being closely monitored.

3. Question submitted by Jackie Macey

The council previously decided not to issue a Stop Notice to Horse Hill Developments Limited stating they were negotiating with them and that they had voluntarily ceased production. However, data published by the North Sea Transition Authority shows that production continued after they declared it had stopped. Will the council now issue a Stop Notice to ensure that oil production does not continue at Horse Hill?

Reply:

SCC was informed by UKOG/HHDL that commercial production had preliminarily ceased on the 25th October 2024. A public statement was also made regarding this cessation. SCC confirmed the cessation of this commercial extraction in an inspection on the 31st October 2024.

Following this initial period of cessation, SCC continued to discuss with the operator how the unlawful development would be removed from the site and asked for their programme to complete this. As part of these discussions, the operator advised SCC that the site needed to enter a period of 'minimum maintenance flow'. SCC remained clear that the development at the site was unlawful and sought to engage with regulatory partners to interrogate the operator's claims that the 'minimum maintenance flow' was necessary for safety reasons whilst they removed the development from the site. SCC remained engaged in these discussions with regulatory partners when the maintenance flow ceased on the 15th November 2024. At a site inspection on the 28th November 2024, the pump was observed to be non-operational and the gas flare was observed being removed from the site, confirming that extraction was no longer practically possible.

4. Question submitted by Aet Annist

What communication has there been between UKOG and Surrey County Council concerning the oil production that occurred after they stated all works had ceased?

Reply:

SCC was informed by UKOG/HHDL that commercial production had preliminarily ceased on the 25th October 2024. A public statement was also made regarding this cessation. SCC confirmed the cessation of this commercial extraction in an inspection on the 31st October 2024.

Following this initial period of cessation, SCC continued to discuss with the operator how the unlawful development would be removed from the site and asked for their programme to complete this. As part of these discussions, the operator advised SCC that the site needed to enter a period of 'minimum maintenance flow'. SCC remained clear that the development at the site was unlawful and sought to engage with regulatory partners to interrogate the operator's claims that the 'minimum maintenance flow' was necessary for safety reasons whilst they removed the development from the site. SCC remained engaged in these discussions with regulatory partners when the maintenance flow ceased on the 15th November 2024.

5. Question submitted by Sarah Freeman

Have there been any monitoring visits carried out by officers in the last three months and, if so, did these visitors realise and report that drilling had continued despite the Supreme Court ruling?

Reply:

In a site inspection by officers on the 28th November 2024, the pump was observed to be non-operational and the gas flare was observed being removed from the site, confirming that extraction was no longer practically possible.

A further site visit was carried out on 4th February with colleagues from the Environment Agency who are also monitoring the site in respect of their regulatory role. At this visit the

cessation of extraction/production was further confirmed and officers are satisfied that the site continues to move towards suspension and this will continue to be monitored.

Edward Hawkins
Chairman of the Planning and Regulatory Committee
26 February 2025

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