

CABINET – 31 MAY 2022**PROCEDURAL MATTERS****Public Questions****Question (1): Sally Blake**

On 31 May 2022, the Council is to consider a further delay to the much-needed update of the Surrey Minerals Plan 2011, with adoption not now proposed until the end of 2024. The update will take account of climate change and biodiversity loss.

In its 'Surrey's Climate Change Strategy', the Council is committed to delivering net zero carbon emissions in Surrey by 2050 and, to achieve this, greenhouse gas emissions must be reduced against 2019 levels by 46% by 2025, 67% by 2030, 80% by 2035, 87% by 2040, 92% by 2045 and 100% by 2050.

Despite this, on 27 April 2022, the Council approved a planning application to drill for oil in Brockham up to 31 December 2036.

Although there are current needs for fossil fuels, in particular due to Russia's war on Ukraine, this should be a short-term issue until the war ends, then decreasing sharply as renewable energy takes over.

The UK's continuing disastrous loss of biodiversity needs to be reversed. The Surrey Minerals Plan needs to reflect the actions that need be taken to achieve this now.

In view of the delay in producing the updated Surrey Minerals Plan, and the urgency of tackling climate change and biodiversity loss immediately, will the Council agree to adopt temporary emergency measures on 31 May 2022 to make additions to its Surrey Minerals Plan to take account of these existential concerns, including:

- a) and increasing biodiversity than to the commercial aspirations set out in the applications. preferably refusing, or limiting to a short period ending before 2030, new and renewed fossil fuel applications that will result in greenhouse gas emissions,
- b) taking account of the direct and indirect effects of fossil fuel applications on all important biodiversity sites, including Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protection Areas, Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Sites of Nature Conservation Importance, Biodiversity Opportunity Areas, Ancient Woodland, and Ancient Trees on the Tree Register, and
- c) in considering applications, giving greater weight to protecting the needs of the environment?

Reply:

The amendment proposed to the Minerals and Waste Development Scheme will not result in a delay in the adoption of the Minerals and Waste Local Plan. Although the amendment would result in a modest delay in the commencement of the Preferred Options (Draft Plan) public consultation, adoption of the plan by Surrey County Council continues to be expected in 2024 as per the originally agreed timescale.

In the meantime, as the Minerals and Waste Planning Authority, Surrey County Council has a statutory duty to determine planning applications for hydrocarbon development in accordance with the Surrey Minerals Plan Core Strategy 2011 and other material considerations including the National Planning Policy Framework 2021 and its accompanying Practice Guidance. The National Planning Policy Framework 2021 is clear that oil and gas continue to be designated as minerals of national importance; the Minerals and Waste Planning Authority must continue to plan positively for all phases of oil and gas development; and the Minerals and Waste Planning Authority must have regard to the economic (and other) benefits of oil and gas development in determining planning applications. There is no policy presumption against oil and gas development as there is for coal or peat development and therefore planning applications for such development cannot be refused on grounds of principle.

There is no mechanism to make or adopt emergency measures in relation to the Surrey Minerals Plan Core Strategy 2011 as suggested. This is a statutory policy document that forms part of the Development Plan for Surrey. The process for updating, amending, or otherwise replacing this development plan document is set out in law and is required to meet a number of tests including proportionate and effective engagement between plan-makers and communities, local organisations, businesses, infrastructure providers and operators and statutory consultees; and consistency with the National Planning Policy Framework 2021.

However, in determining planning applications for oil and gas development, Surrey County Council must ensure that proposals comply with other requirements of the National Planning Framework 2021, including planning for development in ways that avoid increased vulnerability to the range of impacts arising from climate change and help reduce greenhouse gas emissions; integrating opportunities to secure net gains for biodiversity and public access to nature in and around development sites; and refusing planning permission for development that would result in significant harm to biodiversity or adversely impact Sites of Special Scientific Interest or irreplaceable habitats

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