

Comments by Cllr Morwen Millson on approval of Cuadrilla's application at Balcombe by West Sussex County Council planning committee

2nd May 2014

Liberal Democrats recognise that local residents have concerns about this application, and others in the pipeline elsewhere in the County. These were the concerns that were in the minds of the Liberal Democrats when we drafted the Notice of Motion that was debated and amended at the October meeting of WSCC.

We also recognised that commercial exploration for oil and gas, and extraction of these commodities, had taken place in the county for over twenty years, and continues to do so, with no significant problems.

Against that background, I note the points during the debate regarding other organisations and their monitoring responsibilities. We do have to rely on the Environment Agency and the Health and Safety Executive to do their jobs in relation to protection of the environment, in particular regarding the possibility of contamination of water supplies and other accidents.

A number of planning conditions were imposed on the applicant regarding noise levels and light pollution, as well as limits on the number of HGV movements in the area. There are also conditions relating to the restoration of the site following the exploration. Whilst welcome in themselves, some gaps remain.

I am disappointed that the HGV route into and out of the site has not been finalised, and also regret the lack of an Environmental Impact Assessment. I strongly believe that these should be required for almost all applications. I also understand that residents are not satisfied with the level of consultation. However, given the number of responses, consultation clearly had been undertaken.

For these reasons, I think the Planning Committee should have deferred the decision for further work, as requested by the local member. However, the conditions imposed on the applicant largely comply with the requirements of the motion that I seconded.