

Report to the Development Control Committee

Meeting to be held on 4 December 2025

Report of the Director of Environment and Planning

**Fylde Borough: LCC/2025/0018, Land at Preston New Road Exploration Site,
Off Preston New Road, Little Plumpton**
(Appendix 'A' refers)

Part I	Corporate Priorities: Better lives for all/ economic ambition/ stronger communities
Electoral Division(s): Fylde West	
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Summary

Purpose of the Report

To consider and determine the following planning application:

Fylde Borough :Planning application LCC/2025/0018
Amendment of Condition 1 of planning permission ref LCC/2023/0002 to allow the time limit for completion of restoration works to be extended until 30 June 2027 at Preston New Road Exploration Site, Off Preston New Road, Little Plumpton.

Recommendation

That planning permission be **refused** for the following reason:

The proposed extension of time for the retention of the site in its current form would result in unnecessary and unacceptable harm to the rural character of the area. The proposed variation would conflict with the original intention and purpose of the condition, which was imposed to ensure the lifetime of the development was strictly controlled and that the land would be restored to its former condition within the approved timescale. The proposed amendment would not secure the restoration of the site at the earliest opportunity contrary to Paragraph 224 of the National Planning Policy Framework, Policy DM2 of the Joint Lancashire Minerals and Waste Local Plan and Policies GD4 and GD7 of the Fylde Local Plan.

Applicant's Proposals

1. Planning permission for the construction and operation of an exploration site for hydrocarbons at Preston New Road, Little Plumpton was granted by the Secretary of State on 6 October 2016. Condition 2 of that planning permission required all



borehole drilling, hydraulic fracturing, testing and site restoration to be completed within a period of 75 months from the commencement of development. It is understood commencement of development occurred in around April 2017.

2. A subsequent application ref LCC/2023/0002 was made in 2023, for the date for completion of restoration to be postponed until 30 June 2025. This application was approved in June 2023 and amongst other conditions, was subject to condition 1 as follows:-

1. *The decommissioning works required by condition 11a) shall be completed by not later than a period of 18 months from the date of this planning permission. The soil treatment and replacement works required by condition 11 b) and c) shall be completed within a period of 2 years from the date of this planning permission.*

3. There was also a condition requiring six monthly updates to be submitted, detailing the progress that had been made towards the final restoration of the site.
4. The applicant has now applied to vary Condition 1 of Planning Permission Reference LCC/2023/0002, to allow the time limit for completion of the restoration works to be further extended until 30 June 2027, an extended period of 24 months. The applicant has made the application to allow for further time for the Environmental Agency groundwater permit surrender process to be completed and then for the site restoration works to be carried out. Consequently, the site including the drilling platform, perimeter fencing and site access would remain on site for this extended period of time.

Description and Location of the Site

5. The application relates to the existing hydrocarbon exploration site at Preston New Road, located on the north side of the A583 approximately 5 km west of Kirkham and 7km east of Blackpool. The site measures approximately 200 metres by 120 metres and is comprised of a stone surfaced compound area surrounded by noise attenuation and security fencing. The compound is served by a stone access road from the A583. The land surrounding the site is comprised of agricultural grazing land. The nearest residential properties to the site are at Plumpton's Hall Farm, 500 metres to the east (the landowner's property) and at Staining Wood Cottages/Foxwood Chase, approximately 300 metres to the southwest where there are a number of properties.

Relevant Planning policies

6. National Planning Policy Framework – The following paragraphs are particularly relevant 7 – 10 (achieving sustainable development), 131 – 141 (achieving well designed places) and 224 (restoration of mineral workings).
7. Joint Lancashire Minerals and Waste Local Plan

8. Fylde Local Plan

Policy GD4 – Development in the Countryside

Policy GD7 – Achieving good design

Planning History of the Site

9. There are two planning permissions on this site which are relevant to the current proposal:-

- A planning application (ref LCC/2014/0096) for the construction of an exploration wellsite, drilling and hydraulic fracturing of four boreholes, testing and site restoration was refused by the county council in June 2015. The decision was subject to an appeal and planning permission was granted by the Secretary of State in October 2016.
- Application ref LCC/2023/0002 - Variation of Condition 2 of planning permission LCC/2014/0096, to allow the date of final restoration of the site to be postponed until 30 June 2025. This application was granted.

Summary of consultation responses and publicity exercise

10. Fylde Borough Council: Fylde Borough Council raise no objection to the proposal. The council recognises the importance of appropriate remediation of the site and that it is necessary for the monitoring of those works to be undertaken under an extended timeframe to ensure it is effective and then be followed by appropriate decommissioning. The proposed 24-month period clearly allows some flexibility and slippage in the timeframe for these but, given the importance of ensuring effective remediation of the site and the extent of works to be undertaken as part of the site's decommissioning, it is considered to be an appropriate timeframe.
11. Environment Agency: The Environment Agency have stated that they have no objection and go on to state that the applicant should continue to meet the conditions of the Environmental Permit AB3101MW/0548234 until it is surrendered. There is a specific requirement for groundwater to be monitored at the approved locations every month for the first 3 months post abandonment of the wells, reverting to quarterly after this time. As a minimum, monitoring post abandonment should be for a period of 12 months. The applicants have stated that the condition was not met due to matters beyond their control.
12. LCC Highways Development Control: The Highway Authority have no objection to the application.
13. North Sea Transition Authority: The North Sea Transition Authority is satisfied that the wells (subsurface infrastructure) on this site have been plugged and abandoned to industry standards.



14. Westby with Plumpton Parish Council: The Parish Council have stated that they wish to raise the strongest objections to the extension to the applicant's commitment under planning law and that they have received only support in finalising the closing of the site.

Representations

15. The application has been advertised by press and site notice and local residents notified by letter.
16. The following representations have been received in response to the publicity exercise, comprised of 60 letters of objection and one letter of support. The issues raised are summarised as follows:
- The applicant has had plenty of time to complete the restoration work – Cuadrilla will keep applying for extensions as long as the county council is prepared to grant them.
 - There is no reason to extend the period of the planning permission and the site needs returning to its natural state immediately.
 - Any return of fracking activities would be contrary to the Government's green agenda and net zero targets.
 - Fracking activities result in a wide range of environmental impacts.
 - The application is an attempt to prolong a failed and unwanted industrial project which disregards local safety, exacerbates traffic, harms wildlife and supports an unproven energy resource. The original restoration requirement should be enforced as originally stipulated.
 - The applicant has already had enough time to carry out the restoration work – the application is simply a delaying tactic.
 - Cuadrilla have already missed two restoration deadlines for the site.
 - The site remains a blot on the landscape – the access road and the fencing are still clearly visible and are not consistent with the rural landscape of the area.
 - Residents predicted that further time extensions would be requested when the last planning application was considered. Resident's warnings were ignored at that time and have now proven to be accurate.
 - If the application is granted, it should be for no more than 16 months (19 at the most) and should be backdated to June 2025 when Cuadrilla say they started monitoring. Any further approval should also be subject to a restoration bond which the county council can call upon if there is any further failure to carry out restoration works.
 - Any further extension should be limited to a one year period.
 - The company have had plenty of time to clear the site and are now delaying in the hope that they will be allowed to reopen the site and restart fracking once the political landscape changes.
 - The time has come for enforcement – if Cuadrilla won't restore the site, the county council must do the works and send Cuadrilla the bill.
 - The site prevented access to a footpath and therefore should be reinstated immediately.



- Why is the monitoring period so long? – have the county council seen a letter from the Environment Agency which justifies the length of the monitoring period?
 - Delaying site restoration would be contrary to the Fylde Local Plan policies relating to protection of landscape and countryside, and the Lancashire Minerals and Waste Local Plan Policy DM2 which requires restoration of sites within agreed time limits.
 - There is reliable evidence of a risk of financial failure which should be taken into account in deciding the planning application.
17. Letter of Support - Fracking does not cause earthquakes, and the site should not be restored.
18. County Councillor John Singleton JP: Councillor Singleton expresses his concerns for residents and explained that he is happy that the wellbores have been safely plugged with cement and decommissioned. The next stage is a period of post abandonment monitoring to verify the satisfaction of the Environment Agency. He notes the reason for this extension of time is to maintain the existing site for environmental monitoring. This environmental monitoring was always known in order to demonstrate no lasting harm has been caused. This should have been taken into account over the previous 2 year extension. In his opinion, it appears no one from this authority is monitoring the progress or lack of progress on these important milestones concerning the extensions. Council taxpayers, and those of our neighbouring district authorities, must be alarmed at lack of enforcement. The last time an extension was granted in 2023, it included all the decommissioning activities the council is being asked to extend again. In his opinion, the land has not received the attention it should to meet the planning deadlines, and he objects to another 2 year extension as he fears in another 2 years there will be another application asking for another extension. Councillor Singleton asks that in the event the county council do not accept his objection, that the council will reduce this extension to 18 months (minimum) and that some enforcement activities take place as they should have done with this last extension. There are 2 modules on the current application, Stage 1 Environmental Monitoring and Data Collection and Stage 2 Site demolishing and restoration. Councillor Singleton would hope the council take this seriously and put in place some enforcement penalties.

Assessment of Planning Application:

19. Section 38 (6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires planning applications to be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. In considering the issues that arise from the proposed development, it is necessary to take into consideration the relevant policies of the Development Plan, the planning history of the site and all other material planning considerations. Government policy including the National Planning Policy Framework is a material consideration that should be given appropriate weight in the decision-making process.



20. The Development Plan for the site comprises the Joint Lancashire Minerals and Waste Core Strategy, Joint Lancashire Minerals and Waste Local Plan and the Fylde Local Plan.
21. The Preston New Road site is a hydrocarbon exploration site which was granted planning permission on appeal by the Secretary of State in 2016. Condition 2 of the planning permission was worded as follows:-

The site development works comprising the drilling operations of four vertical / lateral exploration boreholes, initial flow testing, extended flow testing, decommissioning and site restoration shall be completed within a period of 75 months from the commencement of development as defined by this planning permission. All drilling and hydraulic fracturing operations shall be completed within a period of 30 months from the date of commencement of the drilling of the first well in accordance with condition 3.

22. The development commenced in April 2017, and two boreholes were drilled to the target reservoir and subject to hydraulic fracturing operations. Since then, there have been a number of changes to the national policy context surrounding shale gas exploration. A moratorium on the process of hydraulic fracturing was first imposed in November 2019, due to concerns surrounding seismic impacts arising from hydraulic fracturing operations at Preston New Road. This moratorium was briefly lifted in September 2022 but was reinstated in October 2022 with no prospect of this being lifted imminently.
23. Under condition 2 of planning permission LCC/2016/0096, the site had to be restored by July 2023. However, in December 2022, the applicant made a planning application to defer the restoration date until 30 June 2025. The background to that application was that Cuadrilla notified the county council in March 2022 that they would immediately commence works to decommission both exploration boreholes. However, in April 2022, the North Sea Transition Authority issued a well suspension notice that effectively allowed both boreholes to be retained for a further one year period until 30 June 2023. The reason for the suspension notice was to allow further research into the seismic impacts of hydraulic fracturing including mapping of geological faults, as part of the British Geological Survey's scientific review of shale gas that was commissioned by the Government in April 2022. This work was undertaken in the context of energy security issues that were raised following the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Whilst the well suspension notice was in place, the operator could do nothing to advance the restoration of the site.
24. Following consideration, the application to defer the restoration date to June 2025 was approved, subject to conditions requiring the site decommissioning works to be completed within 18 months of the date of the planning permission, and for the site to be restored in full within two years. A condition was also imposed requiring six monthly reviews to be submitted, detailing the progress of works towards the decommissioning and final restoration of the site. Under this permission, decommissioning works should have been completed by December 2024, with the final site restoration finished by June 2025.



25. Six monthly review reports were submitted by the company as required by the planning permission. Cuadrilla detailed the arrangements that they were undertaking to advance the restoration of the site within the required timescales. However, no works were undertaken on the site. Following receipt of the December 2024 review report which still did not set out a firm timetable for decommissioning works to commence, the county council wrote to Cuadrilla in January 2025. The letter drew attention to the breach of the existing planning permission timescales for decommissioning and asked the company to provide evidence of a contract with a rig operator and details of the timescale for the works. In response to the letter, Cuadrilla provided evidence of a contract and, in Spring 2025, removed remaining plant and equipment from the site and plugged and abandoned both exploration boreholes on the site, in accordance with the North Sea Transition Authority and Health and Safety Executive requirements. However, the hardcore hardstanding / drilling pad, the surrounding security and acoustic fencing, and the access road and access from the A583 remains in place.
26. The applicant has said that the remaining site restoration works cannot be undertaken immediately due to the need to undertake groundwater monitoring. This monitoring is required to demonstrate that the works to seal and plug the boreholes have been undertaken correctly, and that there is no contamination of groundwater by gas or any other pollutant. Until this has been demonstrated, the Environment Agency permit cannot be surrendered. The Environment Agency require at least 12 months of monitoring, following which an application for permit surrender can be submitted. Once the Environment Agency accept the permit surrender, the applicant would be able to proceed to restore the site to its previous use as agricultural land.
27. The inability to meet the permitted date for restoration of 30 June 2025 is due to the applicant not completing the plugging and abandonment works until Spring 2025. The time required to carry out the 12 months of groundwater monitoring and permit surrender process meant that it was impossible to complete the restoration works by 30 June 2025. The applicant attributed this delay to an inability to procure a rig and well contractor that was able to undertake the plugging and abandonment works.
28. It is understood that the groundwater monitoring programme commenced in June 2025 and would therefore be completed by June 2026. At that point, an application for permit surrender can be made. The Environment Agency would then have to consider the application and, if accepted, the applicant would need to procure a restoration contractor and undertake the restoration works.
29. Whilst the applicant has undertaken some works towards site restoration by plugging and abandoning the boreholes, the remaining works have not been completed within the permitted timescale. Cuadrilla have therefore made this application to defer restoration by an additional two year period, to allow for 12 months of groundwater monitoring, the permit surrender process and restoration works to take place.

30. At present, apart from service vehicles required to carry out routine maintenance and the groundwater monitoring to meet the permit requirements, there is very little activity on the site. Restoration works would give rise to traffic impacts and potentially noise and dust, but these works have to take place whenever the site is restored. The proposed deferment of the restoration date would therefore not result in any greater impacts on the amenities of local residents, compared to the existing situation. The main planning issue arising from the proposal therefore relates to the necessity for the time extension, and to the visual and landscape impacts of retaining the site in its current form over an extended period.
31. The National Planning Policy Framework 2024 affirms that the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. At a very high level, the objective of sustainable development can be summarised as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. In particular, the following elements of the National Planning Policy Framework are relevant. With regards to mineral extraction including exploration, paragraph 224 of the National Planning Policy Framework requires that mineral planning authorities should ensure that there are no unacceptable impacts on the natural environment, and that restoration and aftercare should be provided for at the earliest opportunity and carried out to high environmental standards through the application of appropriate conditions.
32. Policy DM2 of the Joint Lancashire Minerals and Waste Local Plan supports the development of minerals and waste operations if all adverse material, social, economic or environmental impacts can be eliminated or reduced to acceptable levels. Minerals development would normally be considered to be an appropriate activity in the countryside, as its location is governed by the location of the mineral resource. The purpose of Policy DM2 is to mitigate visual and landscape impacts of minerals development, by ensuring that such activities are temporary in nature and are restored to beneficial afteruses within a limited timescale.
33. Policy GD4 of the Fylde Local Plan (Development in the Countryside) limits development to that appropriate for a rural location, including development needed for the purposes of meeting local business need or community needs, for the purposes of agriculture, horticulture, forestry or other uses appropriate to a rural area or development essentially needed for the continuation of an existing enterprise, facility or operation. In all cases, the policy requires that development must be sensitive to its surroundings and be of a type and scale that would not harm the character of the surrounding countryside.
34. Policy GD7, Achieving Good Design in the Development, expects development to be of a high standard of design, taking into account the character and appearance of the local area.
35. This is the second application for an extension of time to the restoration timescale for this site. The county council needs to consider whether granting a second extension of time to the restoration timescale would be consistent with the purpose of the original condition and the requirements of national policy and the development plan.



36. Time limit conditions on mineral working and exploration permissions are imposed to ensure that development progresses within a reasonable period, that the visual impacts of development are acceptable and that land is restored to a beneficial after use within a reasonable period, and to enable the council to control and limit environmental effects.
37. It is accepted that the groundwater monitoring has to be carried out in order for Cuadrilla to demonstrate that the plugging and abandonment works have been carried out effectively, and that there are no residual impacts on groundwater. The site has to be retained in some form for a further period in order to allow this monitoring to be carried out. Although Cuadrilla have submitted the application to retain the site in its current form, officers have requested the Company to investigate whether it might be possible to undertake further restoration works in parallel with the monitoring and permit surrender process. It is considered that these works do not necessarily require the site to be retained in its current form and that in particular, the perimeter and acoustic fencing could be removed at an early stage, thereby significantly reducing the visual impacts of the site. The applicant has said this is not possible as these works would possibly disturb the monitoring boreholes or contaminate the groundwater which would affect the monitoring data. They would also prefer to carry out all the restoration works in one phase. In the circumstances, as the applicant is unwilling to amend the application, it must be determined as submitted.
38. The site is large in scale and the wire mesh security fencing and 4 metre high solid acoustic fencing appears as an alien, incongruous feature contrasting starkly with the surrounding agricultural landscape. The fencing had a security and noise mitigation purpose and its visual impacts justified when the exploration works were underway but, as these works have now been completed, this justification no longer applies. Whilst visual impacts in the countryside are a necessary part of minerals development, there is a policy requirement in paragraph 224 of the National Planning Policy Framework that such development will be temporary in nature and that they will be restored at the earliest opportunity thereby mitigating their visual impacts. The exploration operations on this site ceased several years ago and it is considered that there is no prospect of them recommencing due to the Government moratorium that exists on hydraulic fracturing operations. The retention of the site in its current form for an additional two year period is not considered to be necessary to allow for the monitoring, prolongs visual impacts and conflicts with the requirement in paragraph 224 of the National Planning Policy Framework that sites should be restored at the earliest opportunity. The retention of the site in its current form is also considered to conflict with Policy DM2 of the Lancashire Minerals and Waste Local Plan as it does not provide for all environmental impacts (including landscape and visual) to be reduced to acceptable levels. Retention of the site in its current form would also conflict with Policies GD4 and GD7 of the Fylde Borough Local Plan, as the development is not in scale and keeping with the countryside and is not of a high standard of design taking into account the remaining purpose of the site.

Conclusions

39. The original purpose of condition 1 of planning permission LCC/2015/0096 was to ensure that the site was restored within a strictly limited timescale following the completion of exploration works. As those works were completed some time ago, there was a reasonable expectation by local residents that the site would have now been restored. As the time period for restoration has previously been extended, granting a further time extension would risk undermining public confidence in the planning system, prolong environmental uncertainty and raises concerns about the operator's ability or willingness to comply with the requirements of the planning permission that was granted. Fundamentally, the proposed time extension to retain the site in its current form would unacceptably prolong the visual impacts of the development, contrary to the National Planning Policy Framework and the policies of the development plan.

Recommendation

40. That planning permission be **Refused** for the following reasons:

The proposed extension of time for the retention of the site in its current form would result in unnecessary and unacceptable harm to the rural character of the area. The proposed variation would conflict with the original intention and purpose of the condition which was imposed to ensure the lifetime of the development was strictly controlled and the land would be restored to its former condition within the approved timescale. The proposed amendment would therefore not secure the restoration of the site at the earliest opportunity, contrary to paragraph 224 of the National Planning Policy Framework, Policy DM2 of the Lancashire Minerals and Waste Local Plan and policies GD4 and GD7 of the Fylde Local Plan.

Consultations

41. Consultation and publicity on this application has been undertaken in accordance with the requirements of the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure Order) 2015. In terms of publicity, the application has been advertised by press and site notice, and local residents have been notified by individual letter. The consultation responses and representations that have been received are summarised above.

Context and Implications

Legal (including Human Rights)

42. The Human Rights Act 1998 requires the county council to take into account the rights of the public under the European Convention on Human Rights and not to act in a manner incompatible with those rights. Article 1 of Protocol 1 states that an individual's peaceful enjoyment of their property shall not be interfered with except as is necessary, in accordance with the law and as is proportionate. The applicant also has rights to use his land as desired. However, it is considered that these rights are outweighed by the need to protect local amenity and secure the



restoration of mineral exploration sites in a timely manner as required by national planning policy and the policies of the development plan.

Financial

43. Generally, financial matters are not a consideration in a planning application. There are no financial implications for the county council in following the recommendations of this report.

Equality and Diversity

44. Under the provisions of the Equality Act 2010, specifically Section 149 Public Sector Equality Duty, all public bodies are required in exercising their functions to have due regard to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation or other prohibited conduct because of protected characteristics; advance equality of opportunity of groups who share protected characteristics and foster good relations between different people or communities when carrying out their activities/community cohesion.
45. The protected characteristics groups under the 2010 Act include: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. It should also be remembered that people could have combinations of protected characteristics.
46. The Public Sector Equality Duty has been applied, and balances equalities impacts with the other benefits and/or harms arising from the application in order to come to a decision in the public interest. It is not considered in this case that there will be a disproportionately adverse impact on any protected characteristic.

Risk Management

47. Consideration has been given to the risk management implications associated with this application. The Committee is advised that the decision taken must be based on the evidence and information contained within the report, guidance contained both in the report, supplementary reports, officers' presentation and discussion. Provided any decision is taken in accordance with the above then there are no significant risks associated with the decision making process.

Appendices

Appendix	Title
Appendix 'A'	Presentation

List of Background Papers

Paper	Date	Contact/Tel
None		

Part II Reason



N/A

