

Development Control Committee
Meeting to be held on 09 July 2014

Electoral Division affected: Fylde West
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Fylde Borough: Application number. LCC/2014/0084
Retention of the site compound and access track for a further three years to allow pressure testing and seismic monitoring of the Bowland Shale reservoir, followed by plugging and abandonment of the existing exploratory well and site restoration. Singleton Grange Road Shale Gas Exploration Site, Land south side of Grange Road, Singleton.

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Executive Summary

Application - Retention of the site compound and access track for a further three years to allow pressure testing and seismic monitoring of the Bowland Shale reservoir, followed by plugging and abandonment of the existing exploratory well and site restoration. Singleton Grange Road Shale Gas Exploration Site, Land south side of Grange Road, Singleton.

Recommendation – Summary

That the Development Control Committee visits the Grange Road Shale Gas Exploration site before determining the application.

Applicant's Proposal

Planning permission is sought to retain the drilling platform and associated highways access at the Singleton Grange Road Shale Gas Exploration Site for a further three years to undertake pressure testing and seismic monitoring of the Bowland Shale rock formation. Following the testing, the well would be plugged and abandoned and the site restored back to agriculture.

Planning permission for the temporary change of use of land from agriculture to a site for drilling an exploratory borehole and testing for hydrocarbons including the construction of a drilling platform and highways access was granted on the 21st April 2010 (ref. 05/10/0091). The well testing operations were to involve a process of hydraulic fracturing known as 'fracking'; however, whilst the well has been drilled no 'fracking' has been carried out.

The pressure testing procedure would involve perforating the well casing by the use of a small contained charge. The perforation would extend two to four feet beyond the well casing into the rock formation to allow any gas to flow from natural

pathways/ fractures within the rock to the well. The section/s of the perforated well would then be isolated by the use of 'packers' to create a pressurised 'test zone' which would then be monitored by equipment within the 'test zone' for a period of approximately 12 months. The process would not involve the injection of fluids into the well but existing fluids within the well would be re-circulated. After the testing period, the packers and monitoring equipment would be removed, the well plugged and abandoned and the exploration site restored. The seismic monitors would be installed at the same time as the pressure monitors but sealed in packers in separate but adjoining zones in the well.

The pressure testing monitoring equipment would take 2 weeks to install followed by a monitoring period of approximately 78 weeks (a year and a half). The monitoring equipment would then be removed from the well, checked and the data downloaded. This process would take a maximum of 2 weeks. The monitors would then be re-installed into the well and shut in for a second monitoring period of approximately 56 weeks. After completion of the second pressure monitoring period, the well would be plugged and abandoned, that would take approximately 4 weeks. This would then be followed by a 12-14 week period to fully restore the site. This would equate to a 3 year total timeframe. The applicant is hoping to start the pressure testing and seismic monitoring in summer 2014.

Description and Location of Site

The site is located in a field on the south side of Grange Road approximately 460m to the west of its junction with the A585(T), 830m to the north-west of the village of Singleton and 2.6km to the east of Poulton-le-Fylde. The surrounding area is flat and predominantly agricultural.

The surface area of the works measures 0.99 hectares and consists of the drilling platform and site access. Access to the site is via an existing field access and associated track, which have been upgraded with a tarmac surface for the first 10m leading to a 30m long compacted hardcore track. The edge of the working platform is approximately 25m south of Grange Road, with a 3.5m high soil bund located between the road and the platform. A pond is located approximately 40m from the southern edge of the working platform, and several ponds are located in the surrounding fields. The nearest residential properties are approximately 450m away to the west and east. The site is not affected by any higher tier ecological or landscape designations.

Background

Planning permission for the temporary change of use of land from agriculture to a site for drilling an exploratory borehole and testing for hydrocarbons including the construction of a drilling platform and highways access was granted on the 21st April 2010 (ref. 05/10/0091). Condition 2 of the permission requires the site development works, drilling operations and site restoration to be completed within a period of eighteen months from the commencement of the development, with the drilling operations to be completed within a period of three months from the date of their commencement.

The development of the site commenced on the 20th July 2010; consequently the site had to be restored by the 19th January 2012. The construction of the drilling

platform, creation of access to the highway and the drilling of the exploratory well has been completed.

An application to extend time periods for the completion of well testing and restoration was submitted on 20th December 2011 (ref. 05/12/0003). The application proposed that the well testing operations by fracking and site restoration be completed by 20th July 2013.

Planning Policy

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

Paragraphs 11 – 14, 17, 56 – 66, 87 – 90, 109, 120 – 125, 142, 144 and 147 are relevant with regard to the requirement for sustainable development, core planning principles, the requirement for good design, conserving and enhancing the natural environment and facilitating the sustainable use of minerals.

Technical Guidance to the National Planning Policy Framework – Flood Risk and Minerals Policy.

Paragraphs 33 – 48 are relevant with regards to the restoration and aftercare of minerals sites.

Joint Lancashire Minerals and Waste Local Plan – Site Allocation and Development Management Policies – Part One

Policy NPPF 1 Presumption in favour of sustainable development
Policy DM2 Development Management

Fylde Borough Local Plan

Policy SP2 Development in Countryside Areas
Policy EP11 Building Design and Landscape Character
Policy EP12 Conservation of Trees and Woodland
Policy EP23 Pollution of Surface Water
Policy EP24 Pollution of Ground Water
Policy EP26 Air Pollution
Policy EP27 Noise Pollution
Policy EP28 Light Pollution

Advice

The application is to undertake a test program to obtain information that will be needed for a full evaluation of the Bowland Shale rock formation. The purpose is to understand initial reservoir pressures within the Bowland Shale so as to predict future well performance and the recoverability of the shale gas reserves. The application is also to undertake seismic monitoring of the Bowland Shale rock formation to obtain background seismic data that is needed for a full evaluation of the natural levels of seismicity in the area. Accurate background seismicity measurements are required to be better able to understand and differentiate between seismic events that are naturally occurring and those that are man-made as a consequence of shale gas exploration.

The planning application has generated a considerable amount of interest with 90 representations having been received to date objecting to the proposal primarily in respect of visual, traffic, habitats, noise, pollution and seismic activity. A full summary of the representations received will be provided when the application is reported for determination.

A full assessment of the proposal against national policies and the policies of the development plan along with an assessment of the impacts of the proposal against those policies and in light of advice received from statutory consultees and representations received, will be provided in the report when the application is presented for determination.

However, given the nature of the proposal and level of public interest received to date, it is considered that the Committee visit the site before determining the application.

Recommendation

That the Development Control Committee visits the Grange Road Shale Gas Exploration site before determining the application.

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 List of Background Papers

Paper	Date	Contact/Directorate/Ext
LCC/20140084		Stuart Perigo/Environment/531948
05/12/0003		
05/10/0091		

Reason for Inclusion in Part II, if appropriate

N/A