

Town and Country Planning Act 1990

Notification to Parish Council, Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure)(England) Order 2015 Notice Under Article 25.

PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT: To vary Condition 4 of Planning Permission 1/15/01498/CDM to extend the Evaluation and Restoration period of the site for a further 3 years until November 2023 and relinquish drilling the horizontal well.

LOCATION: Land off Springs Road, Misson, DN10 6ET

Consultation response from Misson Parish Council

Background

The planning consent granted to iGas for their temporary exploratory development at Springs Road comprised a number of distinct phases culminating in the restoration of the site back to its original condition before the end of November 2020.

After drilling the first vertical well during early 2019 and extracting core samples for evaluation, the drilling equipment was dismantled and removed from the site without them taking the opportunity to drill the second horizontal well. The well they had drilled was then capped and the well cellar was effectively sealed by placing shipping containers over the top.

Apart from a number of inspection visits undertaken by both iGas and Nottinghamshire County Council officers during the intervening period there has been no further activity since then so the site has effectively lain dormant.

As the deadline for restoration approached, iGas convened a meeting of the Springs Road Community Liaison Group on Thursday 05 November 2020 and declared their intention to seek a three year extension to the Restoration Phase of the Planning Permission. They also stated that they were not intending to drill the second horizontal well for which permission had already been granted.

It was noted, however, that the evaluation of the cores taken from the first well indicated the presence of 'world class' reserves of gas which they would seek to exploit in future if and when the current government moratorium on fracking for shale gas is lifted. Any such future development of course being subject to new planning approval. This is likely to happen irrespective of the outcome of this application to extend their existing consent.

Our Response

As long as the current site remains dormant, an extension of the current Restoration Phase of the Planning Phase will have no new impact upon the local community. Misson Parish Council nevertheless feels that the extension should not be granted for the following reasons:-

1. iGas have made it clear that their prime reason for seeking the extension is to re-activate the site and apply to drill and frack an unspecified number of wells should the current moratorium on fracking for shale gas be lifted. Recognising that such future aspirations are beyond the scope of this application we nevertheless urge NCC to consider their likely response to an ap-

plication to carry out such work on the current site and consider whether the original suite of planning conditions designed to protect the adjacent SSSI and the local environment would still be appropriate.

2. Over the past five years iGas have, apart from restoring the site back to what it was, done what they initially set out to do which was to determine the nature and extent of the gas reserves at Springs Road. The extension they now seek is for a different purpose (i.e. drilling and fracking) which would generate a range of different impacts that should be subject to a different set of planning considerations. The question is whether, under such circumstances, consent is 'transferable'.
3. When the initial application was granted those objecting to the plans were given the assurance that this was for a *temporary exploratory well site that did not include fracking*. This three year extension not only challenges the concept of temporary but also brings the prospect of fracking on this site a step closer.
4. iGas are also on record as saying that the limitations on the site at Springs Road make it unsuitable for large scale production, the inference being that they would, at some time, require a new site in the area that could accommodate the number of wells needed to optimise production.
5. The fact that iGas waited until almost the last minute to seek this extension has not gone without notice. We note that the construction industry has managed to function throughout the pandemic and feel it somewhat disingenuous for them to leave it this late to make a response. There is no reason why this application could not have been made at a time when they could have undertaken the work within the time specified in the planning permission.
6. The close proximity of the site to the SSSI and concerns about on-site activity having an adverse impact upon bird breeding success suggests that work to restore the site would, in any event, have to wait until Summer 2021 so an extension to the current permission will have been gained by default.
7. This is not the first time that the conduct of iGas has been found wanting; there was an unexplained delay to the completion of the construction phase of the site during 2017 (Condition 21 of the permission) followed by an application to have the deadline extended beyond the start of the 2018 bird breeding season. Apart from creating a significant volume work for all those participating in the consequent consultation (as indeed this exercise is doing) it demonstrates either a lack of competence or a general lack of respect for the planning process on the part of iGas. This time NCC would not appear to be under any obligation to grant permission and we feel that the application should be rejected and not reward them for their non-compliance.
8. If this strikes a sour note then it is born out of a widely held desire to see an end to this development. Since the spectre of shale gas development was first raised in 2014 the lives of many local residents have been blighted, first by the uncertainty of what the enterprise might entail, then by the sheer effort involved making their concerns understood. Many of us have worked very hard to articulate these concerns and engage with a complex and highly technical planning process stacked largely in favour of the applicant. Since permission was granted each new phase of the development has brought new challenges which have impacted upon our daily lives. The secrecy and intimidation encountered during the initial seismic surveys, the influx of protesters squatting on private land near the site, a massive police presence, ad-hoc road closures, trees felled to stop protesters from climbing on trucks, court injunctions threatening members of the local community, on-site security making the area look like a prison are all

things that we have had to contend with over the past five years and quite frankly, we've had enough. Extending the planning permission for another three years, whilst no doubt conferring a financial benefit on iGas, does nothing for the local community other than giving us another three years of uncertainty and anxiety to look forward to.

9. Whatever iGas may wish to do at Springs Road needs to be set against the background of what has been happening in the wider world and a shift towards renewable sources of energy. It is acknowledged that there will be a need for gas supplies to be maintained over the next few years but nobody will be able to exploit reserves of onshore gas in the UK without a fight. A highly motivated and well organised network of activists spells trouble for any future development which, added to concerns about the effect that fracking induced earthquakes may have on local properties does not auger well for this community. It is our hope that the UK government will, as a part of a range of eye catching initiatives announced in advance of the forthcoming COP26 conference in Glasgow, decide to make the current moratorium on fracking permanent. If it does then all well and good, but if it does not there is no reason why NCC might want to give iGas a head start by granting this application and precipitating a conflict any sooner than it has to.

Misson Parish Council therefore OBJECTS to the application to extend the existing planning permission for a further three years and calls upon Nottinghamshire County Council to order the applicant to restore the site, in accordance with the conditions, as soon as is practicable.