

West Newton Community Liaison Committee

7pm on 24th April 2019

Densholme Care Farm, Great Hatfield

Notes of meeting

Attendees:

David Montagu Smith, (Chairman, Rathlin Energy (UK) Limited) – DM-S
Tom Selkirk (Country Manager, Rathlin Energy (UK) Limited) – TS
Stephen Croft (General Maintenance, Rathlin Energy (UK) Limited) – SC
Andy Sloan (Drilling Manager, Dundas Consultants) – AS
Caroline Foster (Operations Engineer, Rathlin Energy (UK) Limited) – CF
Harry Clark (Resident Representative, Ellerby) – HC
Anita Howell (Representing Ellerby Parish Council) – AH
Annette Ford (Resident Representative, Sproatley) – AF
Lisa Brazier (Representing Humbleton Parish Council) – LB
Matthew Grove (Representing Withernwick Community) – MG
Ron Jagger (Representing Burton Constable Parish Council) – RJ
Geoff North (Representing Aldborough Parish Council) – GN
Don Fields (Resident Representative, Sproatley) – DF
Vanessa Nolan (Resident Representative, Humbleton) – VN
PC Neil Fraser (Humberside Police) – PC NF
PC Chris Matthews (Humberside Police) – PC CM
Alex Russen, (Cherry Burton Resident) – AR
Laura James, (Cherry Burton Resident) – LJ
Philip Loades (Rathlin Energy (UK) Limited Communications) – PL

Apologies:

Deborah Stabler (Representing Burton Constable Parish Council) – DS
Darren Chamberlain (Representing Sproatley Parish Council) – DC
Charlie Sharp (Representing Withernwick Parish Council) – CS
Mark Hood (Resident Representative, West Newton) – MH

1. Welcome:

Welcome DM-S opened the liaison group meeting, welcomed everyone and thanked them for attending. The notes from the last meeting on 15 January 2019 were agreed as a true and accurate reflection of the discussions at that time. As there were a few new people at the meeting, everyone briefly introduced themselves.

DM-S reminded committee members that the West Newton Community Liaison Group Meetings are not normally open to the general public. The meetings are attended by nominated community and parish representatives. However, on this occasion, in light of the fact that some inaccurate information about attending the meeting had been circulated locally, AR and LJ would be allowed to stay to observe proceedings. AR and LJ had travelled over from Cherry Burton. Community and parish council representatives agreed to this one-off request in view of the extenuating circumstances.

2. Operations update:

AS gave a brief update about what work had taken place so far and the next steps. He explained about the rig mobilisation and current site layout and said that the mobilisation of equipment was now almost completed. DM-S added the current rig is smaller than the one used when WNA-1 was drilled.

AS explained the depth of the wellbore and formations that will be drilled through, referencing a colour-coded diagram which he used as an aide memoire to highlight the drilling programme for resident and parish representatives.

HC asked what stage of works Rathlin Energy (UK) Limited is currently at. AS explained that the company had drilled, cased and cemented the first section of the wellbore using the smaller conductor setting rig and was now mobilising and rigging up the equipment for the main drilling phase.

TS explained that once drilling has reached the bottom of the well, Rathlin Energy (UK) Limited will assess the data gathered while drilling to decide if the well warrants testing. AS presented a composite slide showing the process of running tubing inside the well and how the rig will be replaced with smaller equipment for any testing operation.

TS explained that the aim of any future testing is to establish the quality of gas, volume present and rate that it can be produced at, which will help determine whether the project is likely to be commercially viable.

HC asked if acidisation is used during exploration to accelerate the flow of gases found. TS explained this is used, as required, during the testing phase, however, this is subject to environmental permits. He explained that a 15% diluted hydrochloric acid solution is used to clean up perforations; a standard oil field technique.

HC asked how far the reaction will extend from the well. TS explained it will be within the range of a couple of metres from the wellbore. CF added that another reason for using acid is to clean up any residual drilling mud left in the formation after drilling, to access porous rock.

HC wanted clarification that large volumes of hydrochloric acid wouldn't be used to accelerate the yield of gas. TS stated the environmental permits are clear on the volumes of acid that can be used. HC asked if it was possible that additional acid could be used in production and it may become a major feature of increasing the yield of the well. DMS said this could not be ruled out, however this would be a completely different operation with different regulatory process. He said nothing can be done beyond the limits of the regulatory regime currently in place for the current operation. HC wanted to clarify that there will be discussion on this held prior to the next phase of operations.

MG asked about what has been put in place to avoid the technical issues encountered at the first well drilling. TS explained that during the testing of the first well the main issue was the regulatory requirement to utilise a flare for well clean-up that was not adequately suited for purpose. TS indicated that this has been addressed in the current Environmental Agency permit application which provides for two separate flare units, one for well clean up and another for extended well test.

3. Regulators:

CF explained that all regulators have been notified of current works and all permits are in place for the drilling programme.

She explained Rathlin Energy (UK) Limited has Environment Agency compliance assessments and expects Environment Agency and Health and Safety Executive audits to take place throughout the drilling programme.

She addressed community concerns regarding lighting and traffic, stating that two residents had called the office regarding lighting concerns. She said that security guards have been instructed not to shine torches out of the site unnecessarily. CF also confirmed that the lighting towers are being continually assessed to ensure they are pointing in the correct direction, to provide a safe working environment on site.

CF stated the traffic management plan allows access to site 24-hours per day, seven days per week. She explained that on Monday 8th April one road was closed by the police and traffic was diverted. She said that two lorries had been released at one time under police instruction - otherwise they have been released at the requisite 10-minute intervals.

CF explained that regular environmental monitoring is taking place at the site, including ground water, surface water and air monitoring. She stated that a reading of nitrogen oxides had been detected as higher than normal at the monitoring point closest to the road but that at the time of detection Rathlin had no operations happening on site. This could have therefore been attributed to an external polluter such as the local farming activities or a fire positioned just outside the site. Noise monitoring was also in place as per the approved Noise Monitoring Plan which would cover a background noise level prior to mobilisation, the mobilisation and a period of drilling.

HC raised the point that during mobilisation he felt the traffic management times should be from 7am to 6pm until the drilling work begins. CF explained that in the original planning statement site construction, including civils work and setting of conductor, is separate to the drilling phase. Although not currently drilling, Rathlin Energy (UK) Limited is regulated under the drilling phase, which consists of mobilisation, demobilisation and drilling. HC said a High Court ruling in 2016 should have seen this modified.

DMS advised that the case HC refers to is a contractual arrangement and does not have relevance to the current situation at West Newton. CF added that the planning conditions require an approved traffic management plan and this is what is being followed. DMS stated that Rathlin Energy (UK) Limited is determined to minimise the effects of traffic disruption and going forward the large traffic movements will be reduced until rig is removed.

MG wanted to clarify that all vehicle movements have been made in accordance with the traffic management plan and this falls within planning approval. CF stated that the only exceptions have been made under Humberside Police instruction.

AH queried why there were problems accessing Fosham Lane due to a closure on April 8th. RJ added he has been denied access to this lane by police several times and it is affecting his business.

CF stated she had spoken with the police regarding this and the road closure on April 8th was due to someone climbing onboard a lorry and on April 10th when two people locked themselves together and laid in the middle of the road leading to a further closure. AH said residents wanted to know why roads were being closed. TS said that decisions are made by Humberside Police. PC NF confirmed this and added that the decision is made by senior officers within the force.

PC NF said that East Riding of Yorkshire Council had also requested the assistance of police officers on another day to facilitate the removal of structures left on the highway which had been judged to be causing danger to a public highway. AH stated that she felt the police presence had been excessive. PC CM advised Humberside Police needed to have enough staff in place to deal with any potential incident.

AH wished to seek assurance that residents will be allowed to use the road in future without police questioning or escorts. PC NF advised that the protection of the community comes first and foremost in Humberside Police's priorities. PC CM stated it is difficult to identify whether members of the public are residents or members of protest groups and questioning people in the area was necessary to make sure that people remain safe at all times.

HC raised complaints of unmarked police cars videoing residents on Lambwath Lane. PC CM advised evidence gathering teams would have been briefed on carrying out filming in this area. HC also raised issue of residents being held in a driveway by police while lorries were being transported with protest groups present.

PC NF advised police were instructed to facilitate free movement of traffic safely without public coming to harm. CF added road closures affect Rathlin Energy (UK) Limited as well as residents.

CF showed the committee photos of the work area and the lighting layout as seen from surrounding areas. RJ questioned why rig was taken down and then put back up. CF explained that drilling rig mast was lowered while awaiting the arrival of additional equipment. SC stated that lights are switched off or taken down when not required.

HC asked if the rig currently used is the one originally planned. TS stated that the original rig wasn't available so an alternative has been selected. CF said that the current rig is 35m in height, approximately two thirds the size of previous rig used in 2014 and is a slightly different type of rig meaning it could be quieter than the one previously used.

MG noted some positive feedback from a neighbour who advised they had raised an issue with lighting and Rathlin Energy (UK) Limited had responded quickly and substantially improved matters.

4. Future Plans:

RJ queried what would happen if significant findings were made during the drilling and testing phase. TS presented a map indicating the potential gas reservoir area at the West Newton A site and explained the plans for exploration at the West Newton B site.

HC asked about the likely density of well sites in the area. TS stated the size of the reservoir is approximately 4,000 acres, this could mean around six or seven well bores into the reservoir could be required. TS added the aim would be to minimise the number of sites and optimise the number of wells per site. RJ asked if subsidence is a risk from the exploration. DM-S explained that the process should not cause subsidence. It was also stated by AS that the oil and gas is not found in a 'pool' below the surface as commonly understood but that it is in tiny pore spaces within a rock. The removal of gas from the rock would be unlikely to destabilise the rock due to the size of the small pores and the fact that other fluids then fill the pore space once the gas has been evacuated from the structure. Therefore, it would be highly unlikely to expect any issues of subsidence.

AH raised concerns that more drill sites may appear as large areas of Yorkshire are licensed for drilling. She said residents are concerned the area may become similar to Texas, where large areas are filled with well sites. TS explained that depending on the nature of the reservoir, Rathlin Energy (UK) Limited may look to drill horizontal or directional wells in future to minimise the number of sites needed.

MG advised that concerns had been raised partly due to a meeting with Friends of the Earth in New Ellerby, where examples of American fracking had been shown that had shocked residents. MG explained that it is the 'worst case scenario' that residents want to know about. AS said that he has worked in Texas and explained the difference where landowners receive royalty income from the oil and gas drilled for, as opposed to the UK where oil and gas is owned by the crown. AS also explained the difference in planning permission and permits in Texas and the UK.

TS described existing gas and oil fields in Lincolnshire. DM-S explained that the location of West Newton sits close to the National Transmission System and that if treatable gas is discovered then Rathlin Energy (UK) Limited will request access to the national grid.

MG advised it would be useful if Rathlin Energy (UK) Limited could tell the wider community what will and won't occur after exploration, as this is what is causing concern. MG referenced Sandbanks, an exploration site that merges a well site that is compatible with the surrounding countryside.

DM-S said the government will determine what Rathlin Energy (UK) Limited is allowed/required to do as any future activities must be undertaken in consultation with the Crown.

CF raised the point that production sites tend to have screening conditions associated with the planning permission, using the Malton and Saltfleetby fields as an example. She also stated that due to the population density, compared to Texas etc, the existing infrastructure and strict UK planning regimes there couldn't be the number or distribution of wellsites as seen in some other areas of the world.

GN asked if/when production starts a Section 106 legal agreement will come into place for the area. DM-S advised this would not be under Rathlin Energy (UK) Limited control, however, there may eventually be a case to be made.

AH asked who would be responsible for installing pipelines if connection to main grid is made and if doing so would involve digging up resident's fields. DM-S said that there is a long way to go before then, but any work would be undertaken alongside specialists in that field such as National Grid. He said that National Grid has compulsory purchase rights, however, these can't be used automatically for third-parties. He said that any proposals would be subject to the required/necessary planning approvals from the relevant authorities and in complete consultation with local residents.

MG asked about the possibility of arranging a bus trip for residents to visit the largest onshore gas field in production as this would help to reassure residents. TS stated this may be possible and the team would look into organising something. TS then provided some further statistics on the density of drilling in the UK, provided by the Oil & Gas Authority, in answer to AH's drilling concerns.

5. Any Other Business:

MG advised he has had six communications from residents who have questions that have been previously answered. He requested previous communications to be repeated for new residents in Withernwick. He reiterated the desire for a planned bus visit to a production site.

HC requested contact details to be provided for liaison committee members to be sent out to community in next communications. Contact details for all local representatives were taken to be distributed into their communities with any further communications.

6. Next Meeting:

DM-S proposed next meeting during week commencing 28 May 2019 when drilling operation is further in progress.

Further updates will be available via Rathlin Energy (UK) Limited's website:

www.rathlin-energy.co.uk

Non-emergency calls should be directed to: 0207 2689860 during office hours. 24-hour emergency number: 0800 1959154.