

LEITH HILL ACTION GROUP

PRESS RELEASE 1-10
15th January 2010
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LEITH HILL ACTION GROUP CHALLENGES EUROPA REVISIONS TO OIL PLANNING APPLICATION

The Leith Hill Action Group has consulted with a number of professional experts and has published its technical response to Europa Oil & Gas' revisions to its planning application for exploratory hydrocarbon drilling at Bury Hill Wood.

Stuart McLachlan, a member of the Leith Hill Action Group Committee, comments:

“Regrettably we have found nothing in Europa’s revisions that alleviates our concerns and gives us any reason to change our stance. We stand firm in our conviction that this application is totally inappropriate for this site, given its fragile environment and completely inadequate infrastructure. It is a classic case of short termism. Short term financial saving at the expense of long term, and in some cases, permanent damage to a nationally acclaimed Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

We have grave concerns about the validity of many statements made in key sections including Site Selection, Traffic and Transport, Ecology and Biodiversity, Effects on Visual Amenity, Lighting, Noise and Vibration and Hydrology and Hydrogeology. Our continuing grounds for objection are listed on www.thevirtualvillage.com.

Surrey County Council has yet to confirm the date of the Planning Committee meeting that will consider the application but if it is held in February then the deadline for objections is 25th January. Hundreds of people have already registered their objections. We are now calling for a renewed effort and urge those who share our concerns to object to the revisions by letter or e-mail to Surrey County Council over the next week to show just how much so many people value the unique and protected natural beauty of the Surrey Hills”.

ENDS

For all media enquiries, please contact:

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For further information log on to: www.thevirtualvillage.com

Notes to Editors

The Leith Hill Action Group’s grounds for objections are summarised overleaf.

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SUMMARY OF GROUNDS FOR OBJECTION TO REVISED PLANNING APPLICATION SUBMITTED BY EUROPA OIL & GAS

Site Selection

- Europa has not undertaken a sufficiently robust review of the alternative sites to Bury Hill Wood in anywhere near enough detail required for an application of such a sensitive nature
- Stated site selection criteria have not been applied consistently across all sites originally considered
- We believe cost has been a hidden criterion.

Traffic and Transport

- The revised traffic management system is flawed and would give rise to unacceptable waiting times caused by traffic lights, 3 banksmen with stop/go boards for 18 weeks; also 6 days closure of Coldharbour Lane from 0900 - 1800 hours
- The revised traffic management scheme does not mitigate in anyway significant road safety hazards and will have a profound effect on Coldharbour Lane and Knoll Road residents. Access for Emergency vehicles will be restricted as there are not sufficient lay bys for drilling vehicles to move into to ensure emergency access
- Automatic Traffic Counters are unreliable and therefore provide inaccurate data with regard to current levels of traffic using Coldharbour Lane
- Europa does not differentiate between the wide range of HGV categories and therefore the damage factor calculations are inaccurate and misleading
- Europa's methodology to calculate necessary tree felling and cutting back on either side of Coldharbour Lane is based on data taken from static vehicles on level ground. Calculations done on moving vehicles manoeuvring winding and steep roads with moving branches on either side and overhead would demonstrate that a greater number of trees will need to be either drastically cut back or felled. It will take generations before any replacement trees reach the same maturity that forms an inherent part of the beauty of the area
- A walkover survey is totally inadequate to evaluate the current condition of Coldharbour Lane. Intrusive surveys are professionally recognised as the best means of evaluating current highway state and therefore the effect of any increase in traffic use.

Ecology and Biodiversity

- No consideration has been given to impact on wildlife surrounding the site. Such wildlife include bats roosting adjacent to the site, and public evidence of greater crested newts surrounding the site. Badger surveys have not covered an adequate area and the dormouse survey is inadequate. There is no consideration of the impact of large vehicles on wildlife adjacent to Coldharbour Lane – noise, pollution and vibration and damage to the embankments.

Effects on Visual Amenity

- All visual impact is focused on the drilling tower and the fact it is a temporary installation
- The visual impact on Coldharbour Lane with felled trees and damaged embankments is permanent and has not been considered
- We do not believe that enough views have been taken into account given that visitors to the area enjoy moving panoramas as they walk/cycle around the area
- The area is prime unspoilt location that provides huge enjoyment through its elevated views. This visual amenity will be severely impacted if the planning application is successful.

Lighting

- Fluorescent strips, flashing red strobes, compound and access lighting operating throughout the night will compromise the rare levels of darkness within this protected environmental area
- Proposed lighting levels will create visual intrusion for the residents of Coldharbour village.

Noise and Vibration

- We believe that claimed allowable levels of daytime noise from the proposed activities is substantially higher than is actually permitted. We would urge Surrey County Council to seek independent expert opinion on Europa's noise and vibration statements.

Hydrology and Hydrogeology

- Europa has not addressed the issue of water testing for potential contamination from the proposed activity. Local aquifers might not be used for drinking water abstraction but that does not mean that there is no requirement to ensure that the groundwater remains uncontaminated. Only periodic independent testing will show that nearby water courses will remain free from contaminants that could affect wildlife.

Impact of Industrialisation

- Approval will set an unfortunate precedent and could have long term consequences for Surrey Hills if this precedent is set, resulting in permanent environmental damage and pollution.