

SCREENING OPINION

THE TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING (ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT) REGULATIONS 2017

Screening Opinion reference: BA/26a

Applicant: Angus Energy

Contact: Nick Mace [REDACTED]

Date Received: 06 February 2026

Site: Lower Stumble Exploration Site, London Road, Balcombe RH17 6JH

Proposal: Exploration and appraisal comprising the flow testing and monitoring of the existing hydrocarbon lateral borehole along with site security fencing, the provision of an enclosed testing flare, and site restoration.

In the Autumn of 2018 Angus Energy carried out a 7 day well test at the Lower Stumble exploration site at Balcombe. Due to leftover drilling fluids in the well, sustained oil flows were not achieved.

Angus Energy are preparing a planning application for a four-phase development which seeks to remove the drilling fluids (phase 1). If the well shows oil following the removal of drilling fluids, then future phases will be operated (phases 2 and 3). If oil is not present, Angus Energy would likely cease the operation and the wellbore plugged and site restored (phase 4).

The phase 1 pumping operation is anticipated to take up to 1 month and will require the following equipment to be used on site. All equipment will be bunded.

- Surge tanks;
- Low pressure separator;
- Associated pipe work & manifold;
- Oil & waste storage tanks;
- LRP-Linear Rod Pump; and
- Vapour Recovery Tank (as per EA Specifications).

Should phase 1 be successful, Angus energy would move to phase 2, upgrading the site with a pad wide impermeable membrane installed by a civil engineering contractor. It is anticipated that equipment used for this operation would include bulldozers, excavators and associated supporting equipment. The works would take approximately 8 weeks to complete, weather permitting, with working hours for this phase being Monday to Friday 07:00hrs to 19:00hrs and Saturday 08:00hrs to 13:00hrs.

Phase 3 would be the extended well test (EWT). The EWT would last approximately 12-14 months in duration. To support the EWT, a number of contingency options are available which include using nitrogen to lift the well fluids, acid wash to clean the borehole or the use of a plug to isolate sections of the formation which are producing water rather than hydrocarbons. The operations will be 24/7.

The EWT operation would use similar equipment and plant to that allowed under temporary planning permission WSCC/040/17/BA. This includes an enclosed flare

(the previously permitted flare was 13.7m in height), a beam pump (nodding donkey), coiled tubing unit (essentially a large roll of tubing), acid pump, generators, tanks for oil, water, acid and nitrogen, a separator (separating material brought to the surface into oil, gas and water) and a nitrogen pump. Application WSCC/040/17 also required a crane of up to 40m in height to help support the coiled tubing but was only required to be on site for less than one week.

The final phase (phase 4) would plug the well and restore the site. This involves removing all the surface plant and equipment from the site as well as plugging the wellbore to the required HSE standards. The plugging of a well involves the use of a workover unit and cementing units to inject cement into the wellbore and provide a barrier preventing the unintended release of fluids.

The total duration of operations is approximately 18 months. However, allowing for pauses between phases, as well as, in a success case, a future planning application for the production phase, a site duration of 3 years is required by Angus Energy

Classification of the Proposed Development

The proposal does not comprise Schedule 1 development, as defined in the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017) ('the EIA Regulations').

The development falls within Part 2(e) of Schedule 2 to the EIA Regulations as it relates to a surface industrial installation for the extraction of petroleum and natural gas.

The application site is located within a 'sensitive area', as defined in regulation 2(1) of the EIA Regulations, namely being in the High Weald National Landscape (formerly known as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty). The site measures 0.73 hectares in area, exceeding the 0.5-hectare threshold set out in column 2 to Schedule 2.

Accordingly, consideration needs to be given, with reference to Schedule 3, to the EIA Regulations, as to whether the development would have the potential to result in 'significant environmental effects' which require an EIA.

Characteristics of Development	
Development Area	Site area – 0.73 hectares including the pad, access road and lateral borehole (already constructed).
Development Nature / Scale	The development would be temporary in nature, for a period of three years. Within this period, operational activities would take place over a period of 18 months consisting of the following activities. 1. The removal of the drilling fluids; 2. Upgrading the site with a pad wide impermeable membrane; 3. An Extended Well Test (EWT) which would last approximately 12 – 14 months in duration; and 4. Plugging and abandonment of the well, and restoration of the site

	The Screening Request states that the development would be the same as previously approved at appeal in February 2023 (APP/P3800/W/21/3282246). The existing site access from London Road (B2036) would be used for all operations. HGVs for the previously approved application were routed to the north, via Balcombe and the A23.
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Screening Criteria	Applicable (and explanation of reasons)?	Is a significant effect likely (and explanation of reasons)?
Natural Resources		
1. Will construction, operation or decommissioning of the project involve actions which will cause physical changes in the topography of the area?	Yes The development is for the exploration of hydrocarbons for a temporary period	No. The proposal is for a temporary use. The site is relatively small and physical changes relatively minor. Drilling of the well has already taken place and no further activity of that nature is proposed. The proposal is unlikely to result in significant effects.
2. Will construction or operation of the project use natural resources above or below ground such as land, soil, water, materials/minerals or energy which are non-renewable or in short supply?	Yes. Some non-renewable fossil fuels would be used by vehicles travelling to/from the site, on-site generators. Some fossil fuels may be extracted for testing and excess gas would be flared.	No. No significant resource use is anticipated as development is for a temporary period, and the scale of fossil fuel use would not be so great as to be considered to result in a significant effect.
3. Are there any areas on/around the location which contain important, high quality or scarce resources which could be affected by the project, e.g. forestry, agriculture, water/coastal, fisheries, minerals?	Yes The site abuts Ancient Woodland and agricultural land.	No. No significant effects are considered likely, given ability of Environmental Permitting regime to control emissions.
Waste		
4. Will the project produce solid wastes during construction or operation or decommissioning?	Yes Waste likely to result from site set-up and during operation.	No Significant volumes of waste not anticipated and would be controlled through the Environmental Permitting regime.
Pollution and Nuisances		

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5. Will the project release pollutants or any hazardous, toxic or noxious substances to air?	Yes. Operations would involve the use of on-site generators and gas flaring may occur. In addition, HGVs and personnel will travel to and from the site.	No. The Environmental Permitting regime would manage gas emissions and any naturally occurring radioactive materials (NORMs).
6. Will the project cause noise and vibration or release of light, heat, energy or electromagnetic radiation?	Yes. Noise, vibration and light are likely during the operation of the development. Heat and energy release also likely from generators and gas flaring. There is no foreseen additional electromagnetic radiation.	No Any noise, vibration, lighting, heat and energy release would be minimal, limited and temporary in nature. Appropriate mitigation could be secured by condition.
7. Will the project lead to risks of contamination of land or water from releases of pollutants onto the ground or into surface waters, groundwater, coastal waters or the sea?	Yes. Operations would result in returned water from the well, and mud and cement from plugging and abandonment.	No The pad will be upgraded with new impermeable membrane and liquid and solid waste would be contained on site before being taken off to appropriate facilities. No significant effects anticipated given limited physical works proposed (no drilling and no hydraulic fracturing), and controls required through planning and Environmental Permitting regime, as well as requirements of HSE regarding well design, construction and integrity.
8. Are there any areas on or around the location which are already subject to pollution or environmental damage, e.g. where existing legal environmental standards are exceeded, which could be affected by the project?	No. Although application site has previously been used for hydrocarbon exploration, there is no indication that environmental standards have been exceeded.	N/A
Population and Human Health		
9. Will there be any risk of major accidents (including those caused by climate change, in	No Operations do not pose significant risk in terms of major accident or disaster,	N/A

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accordance with scientific knowledge) during construction, operation or decommissioning?	particularly given planning, environmental permitting regimes, and HSE controls.	
10. Will the project present a risk to the population (having regard to population density) and their human health during construction, operation or decommissioning? (for example, due to water contamination or air pollution)	No. Controls would be in place to ensure sensitive water bodies are not affected. Air emissions would be controlled through the Environmental Permitting regime.	N/A
Water Resources		
11. Are there any water resources including surface waters, e.g. rivers, lakes/ponds, coastal or underground waters on or around the location which could be affected by the project, particularly in terms of their volume and flood risk?	Yes. The site is within 1 kilometre of Ardingly Reservoir. Other small streams are in the locality. Not within or near groundwater source protection zone.	No. The site would be impermeably sealed and bunded minimising the potential for impacts on surface and groundwater. In addition, the site would be regulated through the Environmental Permitting regime and HSE controls.
Biodiversity (Species and Habitats)		
12. Are there any protected areas which are designated or classified for their terrestrial, avian and marine ecological value, or any non-designated / non-classified areas which are important or sensitive for reasons of their terrestrial, avian and marine ecological value, located on or around the location and which could be affected by the project? (e.g. wetlands, watercourses or other waterbodies, the coastal zone, mountains, forests or woodlands, undesignated nature reserves or parks. (Where designated	Yes. There are sites statutorily designated for ecological reasons within 2km of site. Ashdown Forest Site of Special Scientific Interest, Special Protection Area, and the Special Area of Conservation is located 10.5km to east. A Local Wildlife Site is located 0.6km to north.	No. Significant effects are not anticipated given the distances to such sites, the temporary nature of the proposal and the controls required through planning, and Environmental Permitting and HSE regimes.

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indicate level of designation (international, national, regional or local)).		
13. Could any protected, important or sensitive species of flora or fauna which use areas on or around the site, e.g. for breeding, nesting, foraging, resting, over-wintering, or migration, be affected by the project?	Yes Application site abuts ancient woodland. Historic ecological appraisals have indicated that the site has limited ecological value, but the surrounding woodland is high quality for bat commuting and foraging.	No. Significant effects not considered likely given temporary nature of activity and nature of site (hard-sealed site enclosed with fencing). If potential impacts are identified, conditions could be imposed to ensure that they would not be significant.
Landscape and Visual		
14. Are there any areas or features on or around the location which are protected for their landscape and scenic value, and/or any non-designated / non-classified areas or features of high landscape or scenic value on or around the location which could be affected by the project? Where designated indicate level of designation (international, national, regional or local).	Yes. The site is within the High Weald National Landscape.	No. Significant effects are not anticipated. The largest piece of equipment anticipated to be used on site is a crane around 40m in height, but this would only be onsite for a limited period. An enclosed flare would be onsite, but the site is enclosed with mature trees that help to mitigate any impacts.
15. Is the project in a location where it is likely to be highly visible to many people? (If so, from where, what direction, and what distance?)	No. Site is located between London Road (the B2036) and the London-Brighton railway corridor. People would only have transient views into the site. The development site is enclosed with mature trees that help to mitigate any impact.	N/A
Cultural Heritage/Archaeology		
16. Are there any areas or features which are protected for their cultural heritage or archaeological value, or any non-designated /	No. No such buildings or features are located within close proximity to site.	N/A

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classified areas and/or features of cultural heritage or archaeological importance on or around the location which could be affected by the project (including potential impacts on setting, and views to, from and within)? Where designated indicate level of designation (international, national, regional or local).		
Transport and Access		
17. Are there any routes on or around the location which are used by the public for access to recreation or other facilities, which could be affected by the project?	Yes. The nearest Public Right of Way (PROW) is some 300 metres north of the site, running from London Road under the railway corridor.	No. No significant impacts are anticipated given the distance to PROW, and limited physical works proposed.
18. Are there any transport routes on or around the location which are susceptible to congestion, or which cause environmental problems, which could be affected by the project?	No. No Air Quality Management Areas would be affected. HGV movements not considered significant so as likely to cause congestion.	N/A
Land Use		
19. Are there existing land uses or community facilities on or around the location which could be affected by the project? E.g. housing, densely populated areas, industry / commerce, farm/agricultural holdings, forestry, tourism, mining, quarrying, facilities relating to health, education, places of worship, leisure /sports / recreation.	Yes. Lorries would pass through the village of Balcombe, including a primary school, on route to A23.	No. Significant effects are not anticipated given the limited physical works proposed and temporary nature of the development.
20. Are there any plans for future land uses on or around the location which	Yes. Balcombe Parish Neighbourhood Plan	No. Significant detrimental impact on forthcoming residential development unlikely given

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could be affected by the project?	(September 2016) allocated new residential allocations, one of which is near Balcombe train station on London Road, on the lorry route to be used by the operation.	limited physical works proposed and temporary nature of development.
Land Stability and Climate		
21. Is the location susceptible to earthquakes, subsidence, landslides, erosion, or extreme /adverse climatic conditions, e.g. temperature inversions, fogs, severe winds, which could cause the project to present environmental problems?	No. No such features are present.	N/A
22. Is there potential for the development to impact upon the climate (for example through the nature and magnitude of greenhouse gas emissions)?	Yes. During operations, the proposed development will result in the release of some greenhouse gas emissions from vehicles and plant activities (i.e. generators and flaring).	No. Given the scale/nature of the proposals and any associated emissions (for a temporary period), no significant effects are anticipated within the meanings of the regulations. The Environmental Permitting regime would also regulate emissions from flaring.
Cumulative Effects		
23. Could this project together with existing and/or approved development result in cumulation of impacts together during the construction/operation phase?	No. No significant developments known in the vicinity of the site and no extent permission in place.	N/A
Transboundary Effects		
24. Is the project likely to lead to transboundary effects?	No. Site is not near any boundaries.	N/A

Conclusion

This Screening Opinion relates to a proposal at an existing hydrocarbon site near Balcombe for a temporary period of three years to allow for the removal of the

drilling fluids, upgrade of the site with a pad wide impermeable membrane, an Extended Well Test (EWT), and subsequent plugging of the well and restoration of the site.

The site has previously been used for hydrocarbon exploration, with the most recent application approved on appeal for the same development (APP/P3800/W/21/3282246).

The site is within the High Weald National Landscape (formerly Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty), defined in Schedule 2 to the EIA Regulations as a 'sensitive area'. The site is adjacent to an ancient woodland. The site is not subject to any other ecological, landscape, historic or other constraints, and is not within an area identified as being at risk of flooding, or in a groundwater source protection zone.

Because the proposed operations are in a 'sensitive area' as defined within Schedule 2 of the EIA Regulations, and it exceeds the threshold of 0.5ha set out in column 2 to Schedule 2, consideration must be given to the need for EIA.

Guidance for determining whether a proposal is EIA development is provided in National Planning Practice Guidance: Environmental Impact Assessment to aid local planning authorities to determine whether a project is likely to have significant environmental effects. This includes 'Annex: indicative screening thresholds' which states are *"indicative only and are intended to help determine whether significant effects are likely"*.

For part 2(e) – surface installations for the extraction of oil/gas, the indicative criteria and threshold are the *"development of a site of 10 hectares or more or where production is expected to be more than 100,000 tonnes of petroleum per year."* Neither of these factors apply in this case, because the development proposed is not for hydrocarbon production.

The 'key issues to consider' are identified as the *"scale of development, emissions to air, discharges to water, the risk of accident and the arrangements for transporting the fuel."* In this case, the development site is small in scale, as is the physical development and no further drilling, or is hydraulic fracturing proposed. The site is well-screened, is an existing and historic hydrocarbon well site, and located between a road and the railway corridor, so although it is in the High Weald National Landscape, the potential for impact on the landscape designation is not considered significant. Emissions to air are likely to be limited in nature and scale (and for a temporary period), which would also be controlled through the Environmental Permitting regime, and the risk of accident control by the HSE. The site would be impermeably sealed and bunded, minimising the potential for impacts on surface and groundwater, matters which would also be regulated through the Environmental Permitting and HSE regimes. Should oil begin to flow, crude oil would require exporting from site. Although there would be some increase in vehicle movements on the local highways over the operational period, it is not considered that this would result in significant environmental impact.

Previous approved applications concluded that the development would not result in significant impact on people or the environment, the findings of which were subject to appeals and judgements in court. Given the similarities between this proposal and those previously approved, these conclusions are of relevance when considering whether EIA is necessary.

In this case, taking into account the temporary period over which the operations would take place, the small scale of physical development, and the controls in place through the planning and Environmental Permitting regimes, and through HSE, and taking into account the criterion in Schedule 3 of the EIA Regulations, it is considered that the proposal does not have the potential for significant environmental impact within the meaning of the EIA Regulations.

Screening Opinion

In the opinion of the County Planning Authority the development **would not require** an Environmental Impact Assessment.

Approved by: Rupy Sandhu (County Planning Team Manager)

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Sandhu', with a stylized flourish at the end.

On behalf of the Head of Planning Services

Date: 13 March 2026

Case Officer: Chris Bartlett (Principal Planner)