



Angus Weald Basin No 3 Ltd
Westpoint 4 Redheughs Rigg
South Gyle
Edinburgh
EH129DQ

Chris Bartlett
Principal Planner
West Sussex County Council
Ground Floor
Northleigh
County Hall
Chichester
West Sussex
PO19 1RQ

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Dear Mr. Bartlett,

Proposed Planning Application for the 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

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

Request for an Environmental Impact Assessment Screening Opinion under the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017

Angus Energy is preparing a Planning Application, to carry out hydrocarbon (oil and gas) exploration and appraisal at an existing hydrocarbon site south of Balcombe.

In the Autumn of 2018 Angus carried out a 7 day well test on the Balcombe 2Z well, but due to leftover drilling fluids in the well sustained oil flows were not achieved.

Angus intends to return to the well to carry out the originally proposed 'pumping operation'. If the well shows oil following the removal of drilling fluids, then the next phase would be to prepare the site and carry out the extended well test (EWT). If not, then the operation would likely cease at this point.



Planning application WSCC/045/20 was appealed (Appeal 2021/0004) after the application was refused at committee in March 2021. The application was granted by the Planning Inspectorate in February 2023. The objective of the Proposed Development remains consistent with application WSCC/045/20 and Appeal 2021/0004. As a result of litigation taking over two years resulting in a dismissal at the High Court and Court of Appeal, the Applicant (Angus Energy) is reapplying for the same Proposed Development. This will allow time to complete the necessary design and preparation work before implementing the Proposed Development.

SITE LOCATION AND DESCRIPTION

The site is located in a predominantly rural area and is bounded by the B2036 to the west, an area of forestry storage to the north, and the existing access track to the south and east. Beyond this, is the London to Brighton railway line. Surrounding the site is Lower Stumble Wood and Lower Beanham Wood, both of which have been designated as ancient woodland (see Site Location Plan). The site is located within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

The site is not within an area subject to ecological, heritage or other designations, and is not in an area identified as being at risk of flooding. It is not within a groundwater source protection zone.

The site currently consists of a crushed stone pad which accommodates the Well 2Z borehole, a storage crate and a ground water monitoring borehole. To prevent unauthorised access to the pad, two-metre high security fencing currently surrounds the site on all sides.

BACKGROUND

The Balcombe field is located within exploration licence PEDL244, approximately 8km south east of Crawley near the village of Balcombe. The conventional oil accumulation lies on the downthrown side of the Borde Hill Fault, with dip closure present both to the east and the west at Upper Jurassic Level. The field is positioned in a prime central location of the Weald Basin, where buried rock intervals are at their thickest, and oil source rocks at their most mature.

The discovery well Balcombe-1 was first drilled in 1986 by Conoco, targeting the Great Oolite, Portland Sandstone and Kimmeridge limestones. Approximately 1863ft (569m) of Kimmeridge



Clay was encountered in the well, including thick micritic limestone layers. Balcombe-2 and its associated sidetrack Balacombe-2Z completed drilling in September 2013 to a vertical depth of 2,200 ft TVD (670.5m), and horizontally through the Kimmeridge upper limestone to a length of some 1,714 ft (522.4m).

Following approval of planning application ref: WSCC/040/17/BA (10 January 2018), in September 2018 Angus carried out a 7 day well test on the Balcombe 2Z horizontal well in the Weald Basin, Southern UK. While on test, the well achieved a maximum metered flow rate of 1599.6 bbls/day (254 m3/day) with a water cut averaging 6.63%, thus proving the presence of light moveable oil in the Kimmeridge upper limestone and the possibility to achieve commercial production rates.

DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS

The proposed work on the Balcombe 2Z well will take place in a phased approach, and it is anticipated that the planning and regulatory approvals will be prepared to cover the various directions the operation could take depending on results at each phase.

In the Autumn of 2018 Angus carried out a 7 day well test on the Balcombe 2Z well, but due to leftover drilling fluids in the well sustained oil flows were not achieved. In February 2019 Angus attempted to return to the well to simply pump out the remaining drilling fluids, before then leaving the well suspended in a state ready for an EWT. However, the County Council deemed that the existing planning permission which ran for 6 months from the beginning of the Autumn 2018 test had expired due to notification to the council that the original work had 'finished'. The operation was therefore cancelled.

Angus now intends to return to the well to carry out the originally proposed 'pumping operation' to remove drilling fluids (phase 1). If the well shows oil following the removal of drilling fluids, then future phases will be operated. If not, then the operation would likely cease at this point and the wellbore plugged and site restored (phase 4).

Phase 1 pumping operation is anticipated to take up to 1 month and will use a minimum amount of equipment. All equipment will be banded.

- 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).

Phase 2 will upgrade the site with a pad wide impermeable membrane installed by a civil engineering contractor. It is anticipated that civil engineering equipment including bulldozers, excavators and associated supporting equipment will be used to complete the works, subject to weather conditions, in approximately 8 weeks. The working hours for this phase will be Monday to Friday 07:00hrs to 19:00hrs and Saturday 08:00hrs to 13:00hrs.

Phase 3, assuming the success of phase 1, Angus would operate an 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. In terms of the equipment for the proposed operations, this will largely be the same set of equipment as approved under planning application ref: WSCC/040/17/BA.

The final phase, phase 4 will plug and restore the site. This involves removing all of the surface plant and equipment from the site as well as plugging the wellbore to the prevailing 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. 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 will be required.

EIA SCREENING

The Proposed Development, the subject of this Screening Opinion, is the same as that Approved by the 2023 permission (Appeal 2021/0004), over the existing borehole, and a flare to 13.7m in height (as previously approved) to enable flow testing to establish what hydrocarbon resource is present and whether it can be economically exploited.



Classification of the Proposed Development

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

The application site is located within a 'sensitive area', as defined in regulation 2(1) of the EIA Regulations, namely the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Accordingly, it is considered to fall within Schedule 2 of the EIA Regulations.

In addition, 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 site measures 0.73 hectares in area and so exceeds the 0.5-hectare threshold set out in column 2 to Schedule 2.

Due to the operations meeting Schedule 2 threshold of the EIA Regulations, the site is within a defined 'sensitive area' (High Weald AONB), and it exceeds the area 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 (updated 13th May 2020) 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 installation 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 site is not in production.

Table T-1 sets out a review of all the criteria and requirements addressing the Proposed Development.

Table T-1 Screening Assessment for Proposed Development at Balcombe

SCREENING CRITERIA	PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT
1. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE DEVELOPMENT	
(a) Size of the development	Site area – 0.73 hectares including the pad, access road and lateral borehole (already drilled). The development would be temporary, for a period of approximately 18 months, which includes removing the drilling fluid, upgrading the membrane and the EWT.
Will the development be out of scale with the existing environment?	No, the site has been in existence for over 30 years. The works are temporary with the majority of the equipment low lying. The site is surrounded by trees and a large embankment located on private land set away from the public view. Any views of the site are localised.
Will it lead to further consequential development or works?	No, any future development will require a separate planning application. The Proposed Development is reversible and temporary.
Are there potential cumulative impacts with other existing development or development not yet begun but for which planning permission exists?	No, searches have not identified any proposed or existing developments which could pose a potential cumulative impact.
Should the application for this development be regarded as an integral part of a more substantial project? If so, can related developments which are subject to separate applications proceed independently?	No, it's an isolated development with clear time frames.
5.1 Will construction, operation or decommissioning of the project involve	The site is existing well pad designed for this Development. Phase 2 of the project will involve the improvement of

SCREENING CRITERIA	PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT
actions which will cause physical changes in the topography of the area?	containment but not changes to the topography of the area.
5.2 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?	The Proposed Development is located on an existing well pad and not a new site. The extraction of hydrocarbons is temporary and would not constitute a significant effect. The process of extraction would not consume significant amounts of fossil fuels e.g. HGVs travelling to site and use of diesel to power generators.
5.3 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?	No, the site is adjacent to ancient woodland but has no direct impact on its status.
6.1 Will the project produce solid wastes during construction or operation or decommissioning?	Yes, however, the quantities of waste will be confined to small quantities of general waste. Production waste streams (liquid and gas) are regulated by the Environment Agency permit.
7.1 Will the project release pollutants or any hazardous, toxic or noxious substances to air?	No, the site is regulated by an Environment Agency permit placing strict conditions and prevention on activities which release pollutants.
7.2 Will the project cause noise and vibration or release of light, heat, energy or electromagnetic radiation?	The majority of works are daytime operations. The size and scale of the proposed works are not associated with significant noise, light, vibration, energy or radiation.

SCREENING CRITERIA	PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT
7.3 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?	No, the site is regulated by the Environment Agency permit controlling releases to air, land and water. The HSE regulates well design and the programme of works preventing the unplanned release of fluids. Risks of contamination are managed through the sites control measures to prevent risks from occurring.
7.4 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?	The site continues to monitor groundwater and surface water quality via the Environment Agency permit. Although the site has previously been used for hydrocarbon exploration, there is no indication that environmental limits have been exceeded from the monitoring data.
8.1 Will there be any risk of major accidents (including those caused by climate change, in accordance with scientific knowledge) during construction, operation or decommissioning?	The size and scale of the operation do not pose a major accident risk, nor does the site qualify above the COMAH thresholds for crude oil storage.
8.2 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, the site air quality has regulated standards set by the Environment Agency permit and surface water discharge is not allowed. There are no pathways that could constitute a risk to human health for the proposed size and scale of the operation.
9.1 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?	No, the site is located in flood risk zone 1

SCREENING CRITERIA	PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT
10.1 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 water-bodies, the coastal zone, mountains, forests or woodlands, undesignated nature reserves or parks. (Where designated indicate level of designation (international, national, regional or local).	The is set in the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), and adjacent to Ancient Woodland. The impacts of the site are isolated and unlikely to be of significant effect. No sites statutorily designated for ecological reasons within 2km of site. Ashdown Forest Site of Special Scientific Interest, Special Protection Area, and Special Area of Conservation located 10.5km to east. Several Sites of Nature Conservation Importance in vicinity, at closest 0.6km to north.
10.2 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?	The site has been subjected to several ecology surveys of the surrounding flora and fauna. The site will not directly impact habitats of importance. Historical assessments have concluded that the highest quality habitat will not be physically affected. As a result it is highly unlikely that the Proposed Development will not be detrimental to the local bat population, nesting birds or reptile population.

SCREENING CRITERIA	PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT
11.1 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).	The site is located in the High Weald AONB. The tallest equipment is temporary and will be visible in a localised impact and reversible.
11.2 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, the site is isolated from public view set back in private land from the main road. The majority of equipment will be low lying and be screened by the surrounding vegetation.
12.1 Are there any areas or features which are protected for their cultural heritage or archaeological value, or any non-designated / 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).	None, the site is an established well pad for over 30 years.
13.1 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?	The HGV route will pass the local primary school which has been controlled by planning conditions.

SCREENING CRITERIA	PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT
13.2 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?	None, the route is a well established B road suitable for the temporary and infrequent movements of the HGVs.
14.1 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.	The site is approx. 700m from the edge of Balcombe village with no sensitivity community receptors effected by the Proposed Development.
14.2 Are there any plans for future land uses on or around the location which could be affected by the project?	None that impact the Proposed Development.
15.1 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, the site has no historical records of natural disasters.

SCREENING CRITERIA	PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT
16.1 Could this project together with existing and/or approved development result in cumulation of impacts together during the construction/operation phase?	No, the Proposed Development is isolated to a temporary period.
17.1 Is the project likely to lead to transboundary effects?	No, there are no transboundary effects associated with the Proposed Development of significance.

In approving Appeal 2021/0004, it was considered that the development would not result in significant impact on people or the environment. Given the similarities between this proposal and that approved in 2021, this conclusion is relevant when considering whether EIA is necessary, even when taking into account the increase in the length of time of the operations.

In this case, taking into account the small scale of physical development, and the controls in place through the planning and Environmental Permitting regulations, and through HSE, it is considered that the proposal does not have the potential for significant environmental impact within the meaning of the EIA Regulations.

Although the Applicants conclusion is that this Proposed Development does not require an EIA to be submitted alongside the Planning Application, the following environmental and technical considerations will accompany the proposed planning application:

- Landscape & Visual Appraisal;
- Ecological Assessment;
- Noise Assessment;
- Air Quality Assessment;
- Hydrology, Flood Risk and Drainage Assessment;
- Design Philosophy Statement;
- Socioeconomic;
- Transport Assessment; and
- Pollution Control.



Please do not hesitate to contact us if you need any further information at this stage to inform the Local Mineral Planning Authorities screening decision.

Yours sincerely,



Nick Mace
Angus Energy