

# HOW HAVE OIL AND GAS FIRMS IN THE SOUTH EAST ENGAGED WITH AFFECTED COMMUNITIES?

A report by **Keith Taylor**, MEP for the South East



# INTRODUCTION

**The UK Onshore Oil and Gas Group (UKOOG) is an industry body representing oil and gas firms across Britain<sup>1</sup>. The organisation prides itself on its ‘Community Charter’<sup>2</sup> which promotes good practice among its members in many areas but particularly in how to engage with the local communities in which they propose to undertake oil and gas exploration.**

The charter claims that ‘openness and transparency has to be at the heart of everything we do.’ Alongside other pledges, the charter commits UKOOG’s members to ‘engage with local communities, residents and other stakeholders at each of the three stages of operations – exploration, appraisal or production, beginning in advance of any operations and in advance of any application for planning permission’.

UKOOG’s website says its ‘Community Charter’ applies only to ‘the drilling of unconventional reservoirs’. However, there is a huge amount of controversy and debate over the political and scientific definitions of ‘unconventional’ oil and gas exploration and extraction, and the differences between them.

In the 14th round of PEDL (hydrocarbon licence) allocation<sup>3</sup>, all licensed areas in the Weald area of Sussex and Surrey were declared to be ‘conventional’ – despite much of the limestone in the region proving to be unyielding without the aid of acidisation. The geology of the region also clearly includes unconventional shale resources. Critics have argued that the term ‘conventional’ has been misapplied in an attempt to avoid scrutiny from council planners, industry regulators, media and the public.<sup>4</sup>

UKOOG does not list its membership on its website, and has failed to respond to a request to confirm its members. Additionally, despite repeated requests from Keith Taylor MEP, UKOOG has failed to provide clarity on whether the charter commitments apply to all of the organisation’s members. Europa Oil & Gas, which operates a drilling site in Leith Hill, Surrey, has claimed it is exempt from abiding by the charter because it is pursuing ‘conventional’ extraction’. Europa’s definition of its operation is in contrast to the ‘unconventional’ label applied by its critics.<sup>5</sup>

Whether the work is unconventional or not, the charter is based on principles that should guide good practice for the development and operation of any oil and gas site.

Engaging with individuals and communities from an early stage, monitoring and evaluating the engagement process, listening to concerns and responding appropriately and promptly is essential regardless of the definition applied to the process.

Local communities have a reasonable right to expect the charter is a guide by which firms will be led when proposing oil and gas exploration on their doorsteps. This report seeks to assess whether oil and gas firms in the South East of England have been adhering to the standards set out in the charter.

1 <http://www.ukoog.org.uk/>

2 <http://www.ukoog.org.uk/images/ukoog/pdfs/communityengagementcharterversion6K.pdf>

3 <https://www.ogauthority.co.uk/licensing-consents/licensing-rounds/onshore-licensing-rounds/#tabs>

4 <https://drillordrop.com/everything-you-always-wanted-to-know-about-acidising-detailed-study-by-kathryn-mcwhirter/>

5 <http://www.voiceforleithhill.co.uk/summary/>



## • METHODOLOGY

The Office of Keith Taylor MEP drafted, distributed and promoted a ten-question Google Forms survey to residents living nearby one of at least thirteen oil and gas drilling sites in South East England. The survey sought to assess the residents' opinions on the level, type and quality of any engagement undertaken by the various firms responsible for operating the drilling site(s) in their communities.<sup>6</sup> Residents were invited to participate in the survey through the Office of Keith Taylor MEP's Facebook page, Keith Taylor MEP's Twitter account and official website, via community interest groups and an independent oil and gas drilling news website. The survey was open for approximately six weeks from Friday 15 December 2017 until Thursday 25 January 2018.

In total, there were 113 respondents to the survey. Six respondents made multiple submissions, which were consolidated. Three respondents were adjudged to have clearly supplied false or vexatious responses, which were discounted. Two respondents were from outside the South East region, their submissions were discounted.<sup>7</sup>

Consequently, there were 100 valid responses recorded.

6 The survey <https://goo.gl/forms/bk2PoTWjOWBJQpNt1>

7 A full database of all responses is available in the online annex here: <https://www.dropbox.com/s/z4c9v08na0zit40/Community%20engagement%20by%20oil%20and%20gas%20companies%20%28Responses%29%20-%20annex.xlsx?dl=0>

8 A full database of the valid responses is available in the online annex here: <https://www.dropbox.com/s/7rdlx2os00r07cu/Community%20engagement%20by%20oil%20and%20gas%20companies%20-%20annex.pdf?dl=0>

## • EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# 100

In total there were 100 valid responses recorded.<sup>8</sup>

# 77%

Almost four-fifths of respondents were not consulted before a planning application was made to develop the site about which they were commenting.

# 68%

More than two-thirds of respondents were not consulted at any later stage of the development.

# 42%

Two-fifths of respondents were members of a community or campaign organisation.

# 84%

Of the respondents that felt they were consulted, more than four-fifths believed they were not given an opportunity to fully express their views.

# 75%

The majority of responses related to just five sites in Surrey and West Sussex; Leith Hill, Broadford Bridge, Balcombe, Brockham, and Markwells Wood.

More than two-thirds of respondents were aware of the firm operating the licence for the site about which they were commenting.

# 69%

Of the respondents that felt they were consulted, one-fifth 20% learned of the plans through a meeting between the firm and a local official body such as a parish council; a tenth of people 10% were given the opportunity to attend a staffed exhibition while another 9% received a letter from the firm.

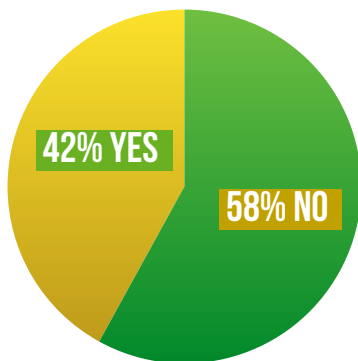
# 84%

When asked to rate their opinion on their experience of the oil and gas industry's approach to engagement, more than four-fifths of respondents were 'very unhappy' and just one was 'very happy'.

# FINDINGS

## • THE RESPONDENTS

All **100** respondents provided their name, the majority provided their full name. All **100** respondents provided at least the first half of their postcode. The majority of respondents, **63**, were from the RH postcode area of Surrey. From the PO postcode area of West Sussex, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, there were **15** respondents. From the BN postcode area of East Sussex, there were **13** respondents. There were also **8** respondents from the GU postcode area of Surrey. One respondent was from the TN postcode area of Tunbridge Wells in Kent.



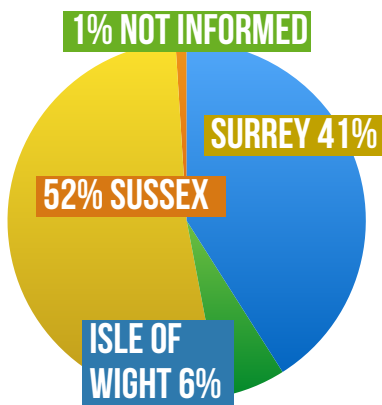
## ARE YOU A MEMBER OF A COMMUNITY/CAMPAIGN/INDUSTRY GROUP OR ORGANISATION?

### 100 RESPONSES

The majority of respondents, **58**, are not part of a community, campaign or industry interest group or organisation. The remaining **42** identified as a member of a community or campaign group. No respondent identified as a member of an industry interest group.

## • THE OIL AND GAS DRILLING SITES

All but two of the **100** respondents submitted a response related to one of the thirteen sites listed in the survey. One respondent commented on a site in Wisborough Green and another noted that they had not 'been informed' of any drilling site in their community.



## WHICH OIL OR GAS SITE ARE YOU COMMENTING ON?

### 100 RESPONSES

**SURREY:** Leith Hill 28%, Horse Hill 4%, Brockham 8%, Albury Park 1%

**ISLE OF WIGHT:** South West Coast 6%

**NOT INFORMED OF ANY COMPANY OR LOCATION:** 1%

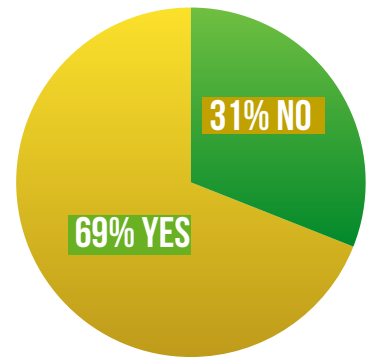
**SUSSEX:** Broadford Bridge 18%, Balcombe 17%, Markwells Wood 5%, Lidsey 4%, Storrington 3%, Singleton 3%, Petworth 1%, Wisborough Green 1%

More than a quarter of the respondents, **28**, submitted their views on the consultation process at the Leith Hill drill site in Dorking, Surrey. Almost a fifth, **18**, expressed their view on the process in Broadford Bridge, West Sussex. A similar number, **17**, commented on the Balcombe site in West Sussex. There were **8** submissions relating to the Brockham site in Surrey; **6** relating to the plan for oil and gas drilling on the Isle of Wight; **5** relating to the Markwells Wood drilling plans in the South Downs National Park; **4** relating to the Horse Hill site in Surrey; **4** relating to the Lidsey site in West Sussex; **3** relating to the Singleton drilling site in West Sussex; **3** relating to the Storrington site in West Sussex; **1** each relating to the Petworth and Wisborough Green sites in West Sussex and Albury Park site in Surrey.

## DO YOU KNOW WHICH COMPANY OPERATES THE SITE ABOUT WHICH YOU ARE COMMENTING?

100 RESPONSES

More than two-thirds of respondents, **69**, were aware of the firm that held the licence for the site about which they were commenting. The remaining **31** were not.

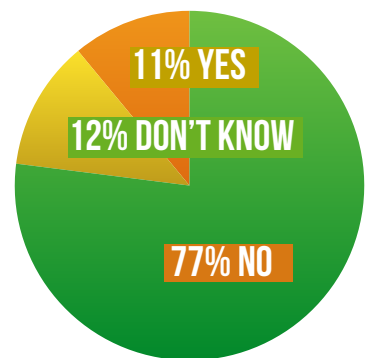


### • THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

## DID THE FIRM CONSULT YOU AND YOUR NEIGHBOURS, DIRECTLY, OR HOST ANY COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT EVENTS PRIOR TO ANY PHASE OF THE DEVELOPMENT?

100 RESPONSES

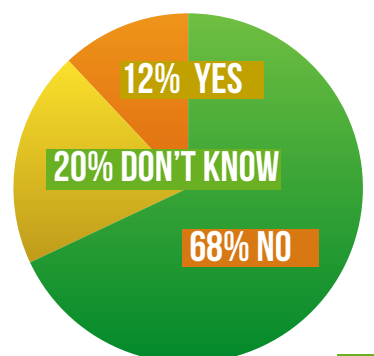
When asked 'did the firm consult you and your neighbours, directly, or host any community engagement events prior to applying for planning permission for any phase of the development?' **more than three-quarters** of respondents answered 'no', **11** 'yes' and **12** 'I don't know'.



## DID THE FIRM CONSULT YOU AND YOUR NEIGHBOURS, DIRECTLY, OR HOST ANY COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT EVENTS AT ANY LATER STAGE?

100 RESPONSES

When asked 'did the firm consult you and your neighbours, directly, or host any community engagement events at any later stage?' more than two-thirds, **68**, of respondents answered 'no', **12** 'yes', and **20** 'I don't know'.



9 Some responses have been edited for grammatical and legal reasons. Full responses can be viewed here: <https://www.dropbox.com/s/7rdlx2os00r07cu/Community%20engagement%20by%20oil%20and%20gas%20companies%20-%20annex.pdf?dl=0>

## IF YES AT WHAT STAGE?

Despite only 12 respondents answering yes, 18 respondents filled out an answer to the follow up question 'if yes, at what stage?' Some of their answers are summarised below.<sup>9</sup>

3rd application phase but it was not widely publicised and was held in a remote village hall.

Site visit for a chosen few.

When Surrey County Council told them to.

Held one community event which they stated did not count as community engagement.

After drilling had commenced.

There were meetings but they were not hosted by UKOG, they did send police with some paperwork.

Late 1980s, early 90s. Things were different then.

In spring of 2013.

They sent us letter informing us about what they intended to do, in weasel words. And during the drilling but I think not at point of application for renewed planning permission to flow test in 2014.

Received a letter regarding the Traffic Management Plan (TMP).

Towards the end. When it was raised at council planning. Only by letter ... and did not outline the full details.

Late 2017 after they were taken to task for saying they had consulted when they had not.

Europa rep knocked on our door in November 2017.

Residents site visits.

May 2013. CE held two day display in Kirdford Parish Hall.

Because I live other side of village not consulted, but maybe will as a closer site to me is planned.

I expressed my views but I don't feel they were listened to ...

The engagement was very light and was presented as the last of the 'old Tech'. 'We will not be involved in Fracking' but when pushed the subject changed.

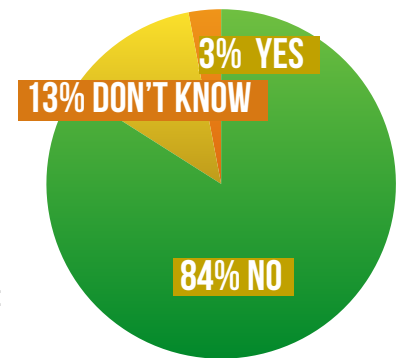


## IF THE FIRM HAS UNDERTAKEN ANY FORM OF ENGAGEMENT, DO YOU FEEL YOU HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO FULLY EXPRESS YOUR VIEWS?

### 100 RESPONSES

When asked to highlight by what means an oil and gas firm had consulted with the members, **20** respondents said the firm had met with an official body such as a Parish Council; **10** said the firm had arranged a staffed exhibition; **9** respondents had received a letter through their door; **6** had attended a public meeting; **5** said the firm had met with a community group; **4** said they had spoken to a representative on their doorstep; the majority of the remaining respondents used the free-text box to explain that the oil and gas firms had not engaged with them at all.

More than four-fifths, **84**, of respondents said that they did not feel as though they were given an opportunity to fully express their views to the oil and gas firms. Just **3** thought they were given a chance to air their views. The remaining **13** said they didn't know whether they had the opportunity to express their views fully.



## DO YOU HAVE ANY COMMENTS ON THE PREVIOUS QUESTION?

Every respondent used the free-text box to answer the optional question 'do you have any further comments on the previous question?' Some of their answers are summarised below.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Some responses have been edited for grammatical and legal reasons. Full responses can be viewed here: <https://www.dropbox.com/s/7rdlx2os00r07cu/Community%20engagement%20by%20oil%20and%20gas%20companies%20-%20annex.pdf?dl=0>

I've no knowledge of any 'engagement' with the public by oil/gas prospectors. I get to know the little I do know from the Internet and what has happened in USA and Queensland Australia frightens me. Governments seem to be in the pockets of oil & gas industry.

UKOG were invited to a public meeting in Pulborough arranged by concerned locals, but declined to attend.

I don't think they care what people think.

The firm has not undertaken any form of engagement with me directly. We are moving into renewable energy, so I think any firm's money would be better spent investing in what we will be using in the near future and they should just get to a point where they just leave the Earth's geology alone to do what it's meant to do.

A letter was sent only after I'd mentioned on social media... There was a 'frank exchange of views' about their traffic plan for Leith Hill and the lack of any previous public consultation. They denied that previous vehicle movements had caused damage, except for when I pointed out a specific incident of it, which they then blamed protesters for... During this meeting, they did not attempt to write anything down or take notes, so I am very doubtful that it will result in them taking concerns into consideration.

It wasn't well advertised, with limited time to attend - Gatwick consultation was much better.

Exhibition was a show-piece charm offensive. Promises for further information never materialized.

I don't trust the information from the Europa. I think we should be given impartial info.

**Angus have not sought my views in any way.**

**A total lack of community engagement in plans to ruin this AONB forever.**

There may have been a local meeting but certainly no effort made to publicise it (if there was one) nothing through our door.

I live in the next village along. As far as I'm aware there was no attempt to contact us or tell us about meetings.

The public engagement in the form of an exhibition was well staffed but not well advertised. It was at the height of summer and leaflets were only put in the doors of those neighbouring the site.

Until I found this consultation questionnaire I had no idea that any oil or gas company was considering the Albury site.

**Cuadrilla were required in the last planning permission to set up a community liaison group. This did not happen. The planning permission expired. No liaison has happened prior to the newest planning permission currently under consideration.**

UKOG have not wanted to engage with those who are in any way critical of their operations and have threatened legal action against local residents who have been critical.

**There should have been a meeting at the start to introduce themselves and explain. Then we could have had our questions answered. They will just do what they want. They don't care about what we will be left with and how this will affect our village.**

The letter contained merely a 'fluffy' version of the traffic management plan, which appeared contrary to what Europa actually wish to do... Also a token letter. Too little too late.

I have not had the opportunity to express my views because I have had zero contact from the company concerned.

**There should be a public meeting where Europa management has to front up and see the depth of community opposition.**

**Very little information from Cuadrilla from day one... seems they want to keep it as low key as possible.**

The PR meeting was a propaganda pushing exercise. There were no facts shared around potential impact or risks.

UKOG have been invited on many occasions to attend public meetings, but have always declined. As far as I am aware, only very immediate residents were informed of the intended work by means of a letter - I live less than 3 miles away, and have had no communication from UKOG at all.

We are being subjected to possible poisoning of our locality without consultation and without even economic gain for either the company doing this or the local area.

Meetings with the Parish Council, and with residents, were several years ago. There has been no meeting with residents or with Parish Council, for their latest application.

Singleton Oil Well have donated to match proceeds from Singleton annual Church Fete, etc.

**I have received no engagement from any company either about Leith Hill or Brockham.**

**My daughter spoke to the Europa rep who said he would try again to speak with myself the next day. He did not return.**

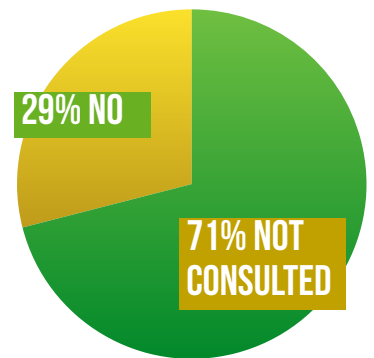
**I have had no communication from Europa.**



## IF YOU HAVE BEEN CONSULTED, DO YOU FEEL LIKE YOUR VIEWS MADE A DIFFERENCE TO THE PLANS AS THEY DEVELOPED?

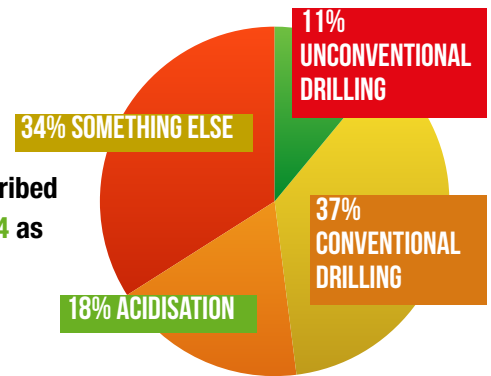
100 RESPONSES

Not one respondent thought, although they had been consulted, that their views made any difference to the oil and gas firm's development plans. More than two-thirds, **71**, of respondents said they weren't consulted, and the remaining **29** respondents answered 'no' to the question 'if you have been consulted, do you feel like your views made a difference to the plans as they developed?'



## TYPE OF DRILLING ACTIVITY

When asked to categorise how the drilling plans about which they were commenting were described to the respondents, **37** said the process was described as conventional drilling, **11** as unconventional drilling, **18** as acidisation, and **34** as 'something else'.



## DO YOU HAVE ANY MORE INFORMATION?

More than two-thirds, **71**, of respondents provided more information on how the plans were presented to them. Some of their comments are summarised below.

I have only read snippets in the local paper, but mainly information about resistance to the drilling has come through my own family who have visited and resisted at the site in solidarity with the local community.

I have found out all I know through TV news, newspapers and social media.

Low key, not of interest to locals.

Presented only via their application to WSCC for planning permission.

Conventional drilling with a minimal environmental impact. Important contribution to national energy resources. Minimal impact on local traffic.

Singleton is one of potentially many sites in my region, it is older than most and is now moving from old tech to new tech, i.e. horizontal drilling and acidisation, like other sites in the Sussex region.

I've read their promotion to investors.

In a manner that will not affect the environment, surrounding areas, will be of benefit to the locals by providing jobs, will boost the local economy. I have found this information for myself, it has never been presented to me as a local resident and I believe none of this to be true.

Only by Leith Hill Action Group.

**It has not been publicly presented.**

As conventional exploration and production from the Portland and Kimmeridge Clay Formation.

**Planning application with much of the pertinent data omitted.**

Contradictory information from the operator. UKOG claim conventional drilling will be used requiring standard levels of acidization. Yet CEO Stephen Sanderson has apparently said publicly that a new industrialised process will be necessary with back to back wells across Sussex.

I have lived local to this site for 8 years, my local community has benefited from funding at the school and on the roads nearby by the company. The site is well managed and access is such that it has no noticeable detrimental impact on the community. The local pubs and guest houses see custom from the employees at this site.

**No presentation.**

**Misrepresentation of the facts e.g. Intention to go for production.**

**To affirm no fracking.**

I don't feel we have been engaged at all. Perhaps I'm not considered to live close enough however this development which will impact us in terms of traffic, pollution, habitat destruction etc. Leith Hill is much further away but as someone who cycles I often go up Leith Hill and use that area for recreation. I don't feel that the people who walk, cycle, ride, run, mountain bike up there have been consulted. The only information I have seen on these developments is from local pressure groups and national information such as 'Drill or Drop'. Interestingly, but perhaps not unsurprisingly, I've not seen anything from my elected member of parliament on these issues.

At first they called it unconventional, then they called it conventional. I think the switch happened around 2014. It was only much later that we discovered that national Mineral Planning Guidance had been altered by the DECC in 2014 to change the definition of 'conventional' to any sources in limestone or sandstone – wrong.

I believe way back they had a public meeting but nothing since. I follow local groups and drill or drop for up to date information.

I have seen nothing whatsoever from the company to engage with the public.

**As exploratory, low risk.**

**It hasn't, I've only read the parish mag, local paper and Twitter.**

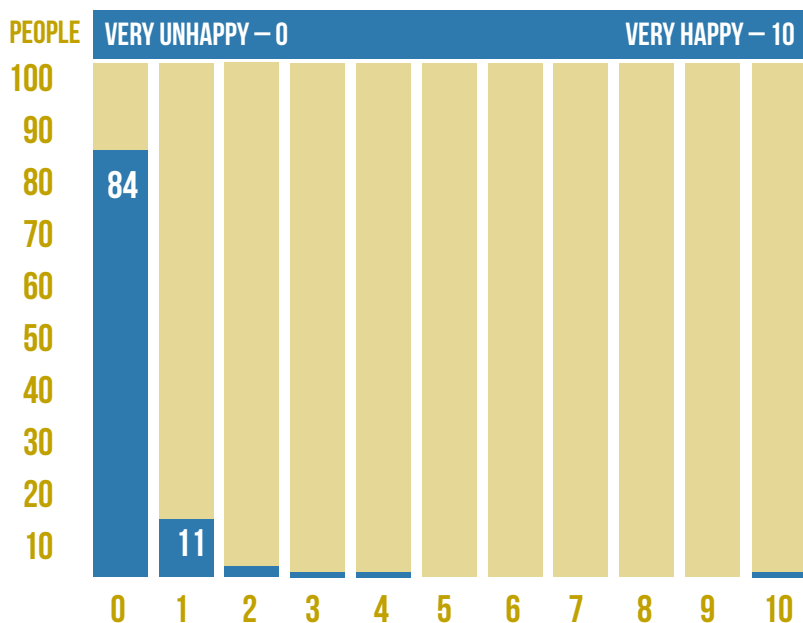
**Done a long way away from the actual source.**

**Only what I've read in the media.**

Very little has been said about the methods to be employed. Most information I have learned from the application documents on the WSCC website.

**Not presented to me.**

## HOW HAPPY ARE YOU WITH THE OIL AND GAS FIRMS' APPROACH TO PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT ON A SCALE ON 0 TO 10? 100 RESPONSES



When asked to rate their view on the oil and gas firms' approach to public engagement, **84** respondents rated themselves **0** on a scale of 0 to 10 where 0 is 'very unhappy' and 10 is 'very happy'; **11** rated themselves 1 on the scale, **2** rated themselves as 2, **1** as 3, **1** as 4, and just **1** rated themselves 10.

### • CONCLUSION

It is clear the vast majority of residents feel incredibly frustrated that the oil and gas industry in the South East has consistently failed to engage with them even when they planned to drill a site in their community.

Of the minority of residents that were consulted, only three thought they were offered a chance to fully express their views on any planned drilling operation while not one thought it made a difference to the subsequent plans in any way.

The overwhelming majority of residents were not consulted about the drilling plans in their community and rated themselves very unhappy with the oil and gas firms' approach to engaging with the public.

These findings should appall UKOOG in light of the commitments set out in its 'community charter'. The fact UKOOG have repeatedly failed to respond to Keith Taylor MEP's questions, despite calling themselves 'good neighbours'<sup>11</sup>, could suggest the community charter is little more than a PR exercise. Should the industry body choose to respond at some point, it will be suggested that UKOOG take action to sanction their members for failing to abide by a charter claimed to be 'at the heart of everything they do'.

Ultimately, however, this exposes a much more widespread problem with the fracking and oil and gas industry across England; the frustration local people feel about being excluded from decisions that not only deeply affect their communities but their local environment and the planet. It also justifies and perpetuates a perception that the oil and gas industry is 'in bed' with the Government and, as such, firms feel they are 'above' listening to the concerns of local residents. The findings from this survey confirm and support a sense from local residents that these operations are often 'pushed' on them from above against their will.

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.ukoog.org.uk/community/benefits>





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