

LEITH HILL ACTION GROUP

14 APRIL 2011

Further Response

to Planning Application M0/2009/0110

This submission is additional to the letter dated 11th April from Peter Tindall, Chairman of Leith Hill Action Group.

1. Traffic and Transportation

Road Conditions

1.1 Previous representations have been made by the LHAG concerning Europa's misleading references to various Highways Guidelines, and unsubstantiated claims as to the material condition of Coldharbour Lane. No correction has been made concerning the Guidelines and no adequate survey has been undertaken of the Lane's condition.

1.2 Europa's proposal for 1050 journeys by HGVs along Coldharbour Lane and Knoll Road is put in the context of the existing use by a small number of HGVs. To bracket together vehicles varying in weight from 3.5 tonnes (most of the current HGV traffic) with those weighing up to 50 or 60 tonnes (the proposed oil-related traffic) is extremely misleading. The damaging power of the proposed very large HGVs is thousands of times more than a Transit van. The total impact of the proposed traffic during an 18 week period is equivalent to more than 10 years impact from normal traffic (see appendix submitted with LHAG January 2010 Response).

1.3 Rectification of the damage, including major structural strengthening, would require further subsequent road closures along the entire route. Reassurance is sought that the Applicant would have sufficient funds to undertake the necessary major repairs to an adequate standard.

1.4 The proposed movement of the very big HGVs (the largest being 3.17 metres wide and more than 18 metres long) along the sunken, narrow, twisting and steep route is of immense concern. Coldharbour Lane is 3.23 metres at the narrowest part and 1:7 gradient in places.

1.5 The applicant's Highways and Foliage Survey (October 2009) claims that '*the impact on trees and foliage along Coldharbour Lane of traffic generated by the proposed development will be minimal, transient in nature and not significant*'. The applicant claims a maximum load height of 4.26 metres from the road surface and states that '*no trees will need extensive surgery*'. The survey concedes that clearance or the **margin for error** at chainage 2734 is zero'. However, the height of a 5000 gallon water tanker, for example, is given as 4.30 metres – a small but significant difference in the context of zero margin. (Letter from Alan Hustings for LHAG, dated 20 March 2011, provides greater detail).

1.6 With a zero margin of error, it is reasonable to expect the applicant to have supplied vehicle dimensions including bed height of low loaders, ground clearance and wheel base, to provide evidence that these vehicles would have the ability to navigate crests in the road (eg. at chainage 2650). These dimensions have not been provided by Europa.

1.7 The applicant's swept path survey was carried out in two dimensions, but a swept **volume** survey is needed to demonstrate the passage of loads where there is a significant change in gradient. Damage will inevitably occur to the ancient, fragile and unstable embankments and to the adjacent overhanging trees, which are a valuable constituent part of the AONB. Such damage would be permanent.

Traffic Management Scheme

1.8 Previous representation has been made by the LHAG concerning the many problems that would arise from the proposed Traffic Management Scheme. No amendments or clarification have since been submitted by Europa, except for a minor amendment to the plan (Fig 5.3) showing the traffic route and signage (in which the different road widths have now been coloured in accordance with a key). The LHAG remains extremely concerned about the likely traffic hazards and the unacceptable inconvenience that would be caused to local residents.

1.9 No Method Statement has been provided by Europa (as is normal in such applications). The complicated combination of three banksmen at different locations, unmanned autonomous traffic lights out of sight of the banksmen, sections of the road remaining 2-way whilst others are 1-way, would pose confusion and give rise to serious traffic incidents. (See appendix 1 with photographs of recent traffic situations caused by abnormally large vehicles on what would remain a 2-way stretch).

1.10 The LHAG has previously recorded concern about the existing dangerous 3-way junction of Knoll Road, Ridgeway Road and Coldharbour Lane where a serious hazard exists because of poor sight lines and traffic (including motorists and pedestrians) moving across oncoming traffic. If HGVs (assembled close by in a 'holding area' prior to being despatched across this junction) are added to this mix, there will undoubtedly be serious accidents. Information recently submitted by Europa about traffic accidents in 2008 records two serious accidents at this location. (See appendix 2 with photographs of traffic conditions at this junction).

1.11 Europa has submitted an updated traffic survey, but this lacks credibility as close inspection of the data reveals errors. For example, 9 buses are recorded passing survey point 7, but only a few hundred metres

along at survey point 8, only 1 bus is recorded. There being no turn-offs between these two points, it is a matter of conjecture where these 8 buses have disappeared to.

1.12 The LHAG has previously raised concerns about Europa's claim that the passage of emergency vehicles will not be affected by the proposed traffic management scheme. The fact remains that there are stretches of Coldharbour Lane of up to 1 ½ miles in which there is no possible passing place for an emergency vehicle to overtake even one large HGV, let alone a batch of three which Europa proposes to despatch. If an emergency vehicle had to trail behind slow-moving heavily laden HGVs for up to 1 ½ miles, the lives of residents in Coldharbour village and of visitors to Leith Hill (such as mountain bikers) would be put at risk.

1.13 The LHAG's concern about the quality of life for local residents has not been abated. Knoll Road residents would be significantly affected over an 18 week period by noise, vibration, severance and delay caused by the HGV and other oil-related traffic waiting for despatch. Likewise, concern remains about the closure of the proposed route for 2 periods of 3 days. The LHAG seeks assurance that residents living alongside Coldharbour Lane would have reasonable access, as there is no alternative exit from their houses.

1.14 Concern also remains about the safety of inhabitants of Coldharbour village who would seek to escape the long delays caused by the traffic controls over an 18 week period, using the single track roads running to the south. The consequent journey from the village to central Dorking would be virtually doubled in distance and time. The cost of taxi fares would rise from £10 to £17/£18 for a single journey. The LHAG urges members of the Planning Authority to visit the roads to the south of Coldharbour village and form a judgement on the potentially dangerous traffic conditions.

2. Alternative Sites

2.1 The Surrey Minerals Plan (Policy 15) states that *'proposals for drilling operations for hydrocarbons whether for exploration, testing to locate and determine the nature and extent of resources or for the production of hydrocarbons will be permitted only where the County*

*council are satisfied that in the context of the geological structure being investigated the proposed site has been selected so as to **minimise the environmental and ecological impact of the development***'.

2.2 Emerging policy (MC12 of the Surrey Minerals Plan Core Strategy Development Plan) adds (at para 5.39) that '*Applications for exploratory or appraisal wells will be expected to show that **alternative locations for well sites have been explored**, including the use of directional drilling where appropriate, to ensure that there are no significant adverse impacts. This will apply in particular to locations within or visible from the Surrey Hills AONB*'. No evidence has been presented of a robust, detailed and consistent analysis of the many factors to be taken into account in the selection of the best available site.

2.3 The LHAG has previously recorded its concerns about the lack of such a comparison of the six "technically feasible" sites initially selected by Europa, and of the further four sites identified as a result of a regulation 19 request from the Planning Authority. Factors that have been variously assessed include ecological issues, historical importance, visual impact, residential amenity, proximity of houses, countryside amenity/recreation, access, traffic management and transport, and technical issues.

2.4 Europa's decision to apply for the Bury Hill Wood site (Site B) is not based on a consistent assessment and comparison of all these factors against all the other sites. For example, Site F was rejected partly because of the need for one traffic control on a bend in the A29 (a situation which occurred over a period of several months when automated traffic lights controlled a single lane round the bend in question), and because of the applicant's concern about possible objections from "high class houses". If Site F were selected, access from the A29 would extend over a public road for a maximum of 1 km or could even be reduced to zero by routing over farmland. If the application were approved for Site B, traffic controls would be in place at three different locations along the 5.2 km route, and the residents of some 70 dwellings in Knoll Road, plus about 17 in Coldharbour Lane would be severely affected.

2.5 There are other potential sites to the south of the target area, with easy access from the A29 and within 1600 metres of the target area, which have not been considered by Europa.

2.6 In its Technical Annexe, Europa has claimed a "practical limit" for horizontal drilling of 1600 metres. This merely reflects the limit of the particular rig which the applicant is proposing to use at the site. Other rigs extend further, but cost more. Longer-distance drilling is used

elsewhere in the UK, including at a site operated by Europa, so it can only be deduced that Europa is seeking to minimize the cost.

3. Ecology and Biodiversity

3.1 Following the initial survey commissioned by Europa in 2005, a Supplementary Ecological Report, undertaken by RPS, was submitted in November 2010. The LHAG has been advised by Jonathan Bradley of Verdant Ecology (see LHAG Responses in April 2009 and January 2010, and recent letters sent by Mr Bradley to the Planning Authority (dated 9 January 2011 and 4 April 2011) that this recent study has still not addressed many of the flaws to which attention was drawn. These are significant enough to mean that the Planning Authority does not have adequate information on which to make an informed decision in line with PPS9.

3.2 No response appears to have been made by the Planning Authority to notification that four species of birds listed on the Royal Society for Protection of Birds 'Red List' of endangered species have been sighted near the proposed exploration site. Should approval be given to Europa's proposal, this would be in contravention of the law.

4. Environmental Pollution

Hydrological Contamination

4.1 No new information has been provided by Europa and the objections previously recorded by the LHAG still stand. The analysis provided by the applicant on the likelihood and consequences of oil polluting the local aquifer lacks scientific objectivity and is derisory. The proposal to contain contaminating liquids is fundamentally flawed, and no mention is made of how any captured pool of oil would be removed from the area in an environmentally controlled manner.

Light Pollution

4.2 No further information has been supplied by Europa and the concerns raised earlier by LHAG in January 2010 remain.

Noise and Vibration

4.3 The LHAG has commented in January 2010 on the inadequacy of the applicant's calculations of noise at the nearest dwelling. A number of these calculations have now been revised using appropriate attenuation factors and distances, resulting in significantly higher levels of noise (6-7dBA) at the nearest dwelling than originally projected.

4.4 Another issue previously raised by LHAG is the contradiction between the input data for the gas flare (CEB4500) noise calculations, and the manufacturer's noise data, the latter giving very significantly higher resultant noise at the nearest dwelling. It is now claimed that reference to the manufacturer's brochure for these units (included at Appendix 5.2 to Europa's Environmental Assessment) was 'an error'. It is asserted that calculations should instead be based on 'a private communication' from the manufacturer, which is very significantly at odds with its own published brochure.

4.5 The issue of MPS2 Noise Limits, raised previously by the LHAG has not been addressed. Para 11.6 of Europa's Environmental Statement states '*so generally the noise limit (at the nearest noise-sensitive property) is 10dBA above background if this is practicable. For construction or temporary works up to 70 LAeq, 1 hour is allowable for up to 8 weeks a year*'. As set out in LHAG's Response of January 2010, neither of the conditions which allow such a derogation to be considered is met. The noise limit at the nearest dwelling to be applied to this development in accordance with MPS2 is therefore 10dBA above background at all times on a 24/7 basis. Furthermore, and again as more fully argued in the January 2010 document, on the basis of the applicant's own figures and its interpretation of MPS2, the limits on noise at the nearest dwelling will be exceeded for more than the 8 weeks which is the maximum period contemplated by MPS2.

4.6 Effect on Wildlife. Appendix 2A to Annex A of MPS2 makes clear that consideration should be given to the effects of noise on wildlife. No such consideration has been given, either in Chapter 8 of the Environmental Assessment (Ecology and Biodiversity) or in the Supplementary Ecological Surveys.

4.7 Equestrian Property. The application has addressed noise at the nearest dwelling. It is also the case that there is a noise-sensitive (equestrian) property with a boundary within 210 metres of the proposed site boundary. This has been ignored.

5. Other Aspects of Europa's Applications

5.1 No further information has been submitted by the applicant in respect of Visual Amenity and the effect on the Landscape, Health and Safety, Archaeology, Impact on Recreation, Socio-Economics, Site Restoration, Conservation Area, Nearby Listed Buildings. The January 2009 Response by LHAG on these aspects still stands, as do our remarks on the

total lack of Public Consultation undertaken by Europa, contrary to what is recommended as good practice in such situations.

6. Conclusion

6.1 After a period of two years, the LHAG continues to object most strongly to this application. Based on support and encouragement received, the Group is confident that its view is supported by a very large number of individuals and groups locally, across Surrey and beyond Surrey, as well as by Mole Valley District Council and Capel Parish Council. The application on many counts remains ill researched and based on spurious argument as detailed above.

6.2 The LHAG does not think that all the necessary impact assessments have been undertaken, and requests that before the Planning Authority considers the application, it should particularly ensure that adequate mitigation measures are proposed.

6.3 Should the planning application be approved, and unless the planning committee is satisfied about the applicant's financial position, a financial Bond should be required of the applicant before work commences, against the cost of reinstating the proposed site and the damaged highways. Unfortunately it would be impossible to reinstate the embankments and ancient trees alongside Coldharbour Lane, however much money was made available.

Appendix A

Abnormally large vehicles on Coldharbour Lane, just south of the Knoll Road /Ridgeway Road junction.



Europa's proposed Traffic Management Scheme proposes that this stretch of road would remain 2-way.

Appendix B

Traffic at the junction of Coldharbour Lane with Knoll Road and Ridgeway Road.

