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| Subject: | Special Meeting re: Exploratory drilling at Woodburn Forest |
| Date: | 27th June, 2016 |
| Reporting Officer: | Siobhan Toland, Head of Environment Health/Lead Operations Officer |
| Contact Officer: | Alastair Curran, Scientific Unit Manger, 3682 Stephen Leonard, Environmental Health Manager (Env. protection), 3312 Louise McLornan, Democratic Services Officer, 6077 |

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| Is this report restricted? | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | No | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Is the decision eligible for Call-in? | Yes | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | No | <input type="checkbox"/> |

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| 1.0 | Purpose of Report |
| 1.1 | To provide Members with information on the exploratory drilling at Woodburn Forest and relevant Council decisions. |
| 2.0 | Recommendations |
| 2.1 | The Committee is requested to note the presentations from NI Water and Stop the Drill and to take such action thereon as may be determined. |
| 3.0 | Main report |
| 3.1 | <u>Key Issues</u> |
| 3.2 | <u>Council</u> Members will recall that, at the monthly Council meeting of 1st September, 2015, the undernoted Notice of Motion was passed: <u>Petroleum Exploration at Woodburn Forest</u> Moved by Councillor R. Brown, Seconded by Councillor Bunting, |

“This Council notes that Woodburn Reservoir in Carrickfergus provides water to a significant part of the City and expresses concern that Infastrata have been permitted development to conduct exploratory petroleum drilling at this location using harmful chemicals;

It notes that the current law governing permitted development in Northern Ireland is less robust than in England, where petroleum exploration requires planning permission and notes further that 75% of fossil fuel reserves must be left in the ground to prevent dangerous climate change and does not regard this process as in line with the legal requirement of the DOE in Article 1 of the 2011 Planning Act to further sustainable development.

This Council therefore expresses concern that no Strategic Environmental Assessment was ever conducted by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment ahead of the adoption of a petroleum exploration plan or the issuing of the East Antrim Petroleum Exploration Licence.

Accordingly, the Council calls upon the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Investment, the Minister for the Environment and Mid and East Antrim Council to urgently review the decision to grant permitted development for exploratory drilling in Woodburn Forest with a view to reversing that permission and for the Minister for the Environment to amend the law so that petroleum exploration always requires full planning permission.”

3.3 A letter was sent from the Chief Executive to the former Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Investment and his response is attached. (Appendix 1)

3.4 A letter was sent from the Chief Executive to the former Minister for the Environment and his response is attached. (Appendix 2)

3.5 A letter was sent to the Chief Executive of Mid and East Antrim Borough Council and her response is attached. (Appendix 3)

Council’s response on Permitted Development Rights for Mineral Exploration

3.6 The Planning Committee, at its meeting on 19th April, 2016, had considered the Council’s response to the Department of the Environment’s (DOE) ‘Call for Evidence’ (Appendix 4) which would inform a future review of Permitted Development Rights for Mineral Exploration as set out in Part 16 of the schedule to the Planning (General Development Order) Northern Ireland (2015).

3.7 At its meeting on 19th April, the Planning Committee considered and approved the draft consultation response (Appendix 5) for submission to the Department of the Environment (DOE), with the addition that any final guidance should require that the DOE or relevant Planning Authority should consult and give notice to neighbouring councils on such matters.

City Growth and Regeneration Committee

3.8 Members will recall that the City Growth and Regeneration Committee, at its meeting on 9th March, 2016, considered the issue of exploratory drilling at Woodburn Forest at the request of Councillor Corr Johnston, who attended in connection with the item.

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| 3.9 | The Member outlined a number of concerns to the Committee regarding a recent decision by the Mid and East Antrim Borough Council which had approved a waste management plan to allow exploratory drilling in Woodburn Forest. She outlined to the Members that Belfast City Council had not been consulted by DETI or NI Water but that she felt there might be a risk to some Belfast residents' water supply. |
| 3.10 | <p>At that meeting, the Committee agreed:</p> <p>“that a letter be sent to NI Water, as one of the Council’s strategic partners, seeking an assurance, either in person or in writing, that Belfast residents would not be put at any risk by the exploratory drilling operation at Woodburn Forest and asking for absolute clarity from NI Water as to what measures are in place to prevent any accidental seepage of chemicals into the reservoir, what plans they have in place should something go wrong, and, furthermore, that NI Water be requested to attend a future meeting of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee specifically in relation to this issue.”</p> |
| 3.11 | The Committee, at its meeting on 11th May, considered the response from the Chief Executive of NI Water (Appendix 6), Sara Venning, in relation to the issue. |
| 3.12 | The correspondence from Ms. Venning stated that NI water was wholly satisfied with assurances that there was no risk to the public water supply by the exploratory drilling project. Members were advised that Ms. Venning had also highlighted that all work was subject to the approval and agreement of the relevant authorities, including the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA), DETI and the Forest Service. |
| 3.13 | <p>At its meeting on 11th May, the City Growth and Regeneration Committee:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. noted the correspondence from NI Water; 2. agreed that the Chief Executive would engage on this issue with the Chief Executives of the other relevant Councils, as well as the relevant departments and agencies and would provide feedback to the Committee; and 3. agreed that a special meeting be held on the issue, to which Northern Ireland Water, representatives from those lobbying against the exploratory drilling and any other relevant persons which the Chief Executive felt appropriate, would be invited to attend. <p><u>Ministerial announcement – 6th June, 2016</u></p> |
| 3.14 | The Members were reminded at its meeting on 8th June, 2016 that, on 6th June, the Minister for Infrastructure announced in the Assembly, that it was his intention to “ <i>remove permitted development rights for oil and gas exploration in the future, under [his] proposals, exploration for oil and gas [would] require the submission of a planning application and [would] be subject to the full rigours of the planning process, including environmental impact assessments (EIA) and public consultation.</i> ” |
| 3.15 | The Minister for Infrastructure announced that he intends to consult on the legislative change shortly. |
| 3.16 | The City Growth and Regeneration agreed that the Special Committee meeting in relation to exploratory drilling at Woodburn Forest should go ahead and would take place on Monday, 27th June. |

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| | <p><u>InfraStrata announcement: Drilling at Woodburn ended – 16th June, 2016</u></p> |
| 3.17 | InfraStrata announced that drilling at Woodburn had finished on Thursday 16th June, 2016. (Appendices 7 and 8) |
| 3.18 | Members are asked to note that InfraStrata was invited to present to the meeting but that no response has, as yet, been received. |
| | <p><u>Mid and East Antrim Borough Council and Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council</u></p> |
| 3.19 | The City Growth and Regeneration Committee had asked for updates from Mid and East Antrim Borough Council (Appendix 9) and Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council (Appendix 10). Appendices 9 and 10 include the relevant minutes from meetings at those Councils where the issue of drilling at Woodburn Forest was discussed. |
| 3.20 | Members are asked to note that a Judicial Review is ongoing in relation to the Mid and East Antrim Borough Council's decision on the Waste Management Plan at Woodburn Forest. |
| 3.21 | <p><u>Financial & Resource Implications</u> None.</p> |
| 3.22 | <p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications</u> None.</p> |
| 4.0 | Appendices – Documents Attached |
| | <p>Appendix 1: Letter from the former Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Investment. Appendix 2: Letter from the former Minister for the Environment Appendix 3: Letter from the Chief Executive of Mid and East Antrim Borough Council. Appendix 4: Former Department of the Environment's (DOE) 'Call for Evidence' on Permitted Development Rights for Mineral Exploration Appendix 5: Cover report with Belfast City Council's response to the Call for Evidence on Permitted Development Rights for Mineral Exploration Appendix 6: Letter from the Chief Executive of NI Water Appendix 7: Infrastrata Press Release, 16th June, 2016 Appendix 8: BBC - Woodburn forest: Infrastrata's drill operation ends without finding oil, 16th June, 2016 Appendix 9: Minutes from Mid and East Antrim Borough Council Appendix 10: Minutes from Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council</p> |