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Date 15 April 2016

Dear Ms Mc Lornan,

Re: Woodburn Forrest

Thank you for your letter dated 13 April 2016 in relation to a recent meeting of Belfast City Council's Growth and Regeneration Committee.

I am grateful to you for raising concerns in relation to ongoing exploratory oil drilling at Woodburn, near Carrickfergus. I can confirm that NI Water is wholly satisfied with assurances that there is no risk to the public water supply by this exploratory drilling project.

This work is being undertaken by an independent company, Infrastrata, under a licence awarded by the Department of Enterprise Trade and Investment (DETI). All work is subject to the approval and agreement of the relevant authorities including the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA), DETI and Forest Service. Infrastrata cannot drill a permanent well without obtaining planning permission, which is the responsibility of Mid and East Antrim Borough Council. NIEA have also issued a Water Order Consent Motion, allowing for the use of wholly conventional chemicals, in common usage throughout the world, in relation to the Woodburn site.

A clause is included in the agreement with Infrastrata that prohibits using the technique known as hydraulic fracturing (fracking), both now and in the future.

I can also confirm that the drilling site is not within the catchment area of the Woodburn North reservoir, which supplies water to thousands of properties, including some within the Belfast City Council area. To provide further protection, a 'triple lock' system is in place in order to safeguard the local water catchment area – this involves securely sealing the drill shaft, amongst other measures. NI Water staff are also conducting regular inspections of the site to ensure that everything is being conducted as it should be.

NI Water will be very happy to attend a future session of the Growth and Regeneration Committee to provide further clarity and reassurance to members on this issue. We will be in touch to discuss a suitable date for this.

I would reiterate that NI Water's number one priority is the protection and safety of the public water supply, and we will not be found wanting in our determination to ensure this.

Yours Sincerely,

Sara 

Sara Venning
Chief Executive