

David 1, Goliath 0

Arreton oil drill plan thrown out but it might not be all over yet

'DAVID overcame Goliath' earlier this week when plans to drill for oil in Arreton were unanimously thrown out.

In a battle between the economy and the environment, the IW Council's planning committee rejected UK Oil and Gas's (UKOG) application for the construction, operation and decommissioning of two boreholes over a three-year period.

Councillors on the committee were not willing to risk the Island's Biosphere status or impact tourism saying they struggled to find a single benefit to the local economy.

Campaigners have since cel-

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ebrated the 'massive victory' but UKOG is still undecided about whether it will appeal the decision to the government's Planning Inspectorate.

In a statement, UKOG said it was disappointed with the decision and would now consider whether to lodge an appeal to overturn the decision.

The company said its plan took considerable care and undertook much research to minimise the potential impacts of the site,

with no objections raised by statutory consultees on environmental, drinking water, landscape or health and safety grounds.

Sylvia May, a member of Don't Drill The Wight, thanked the planning committee, who were the 'stars of the show' for doing 'what is so obviously right for our Island.'

She said: "This may not be the end of the line but it is a massive victory. Our efforts over the past two years have been intensive but it proves David can overcome Goliath. "A special thanks to our hard-working committee, members and subscribers. We could not have done this without you."

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Victory in oil drilling battle

MORE than 1,000 objections were submitted against the application, compared to 70 in favour, along with a petition signed by 4,400 people presented to the council.

The planning committee debated the application for several hours, as 'great weight' had to be given to the extraction of minerals.

Officers admitted in their report recommending approval the economic benefits would be 'relatively minor' at local level but substantial nationally.

Matt Cartwright, UKOG commercial director, told the meeting importing 36 per cent of the UK's energy made no economic sense when there was oil under our feet. He estimated the IW licence could produce up to 18 million barrels."

Mr Cartwright went on to say investment would initially be £6 million, keeping as much money on the IW as possible and if successful, this could rise to £30 million.

Councillor for Arreton, Suzie Ellis, said if UKOG were to appeal the application to the Inspectorate, she would write to the Secretary of State.

Cllr Matthew Price asked officers if they could name a benefit to the economy, to which they replied 'not particularly, no'.

Cllr Price said: "I come from a trade that relies heavily on fossil fuel-powered cars; I love cars and everything about combustion engines but they are last-century technology.

"I wanted to be convinced there was and I can only see negatives at this point."

Chair, Cllr Michael Lilley, said he was finding it difficult to see any benefits.

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