

Surrey MPs oppose each other on drills in the hills

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Jeremy Hunt MP has said it is “disappointing” that plans to drill for oil and gas in Dunsfold have not been “formally shelved” altogether. The Chancellor of the Exchequer issued the statement after the High Court ruled the government-approved exploratory drilling in his South West Surrey constituency would go to Judicial Review.

The High Court ordered the review on the grounds that there was “inconsistency in decision-making” by Secretary of State **Michael Gove**, and that Dunsfold bordered the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty – where great weight should be placed on “conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty”.

Mr Hunt, who has campaigned against the planning application in Dunsfold before, said: “Despite the latest judicial review, it is again disappointing that plans for this potential gas exploration have not been formally shelved. The idea of drilling on this beautiful area continues to be inappropriate – what’s more UKOG’s data and mapping of the sub-surface is sparse, old and simply not detailed enough. I hope to meet with Protect Dunsfold again later this month to continue discussions.”

The Conservative MP has form in the matter. In June 2022 he wrote that DLUHC’s decision to overturn Surrey County Council’s initial refusal was “bitterly disappointing and wrong both economically and environmentally”.

He also wrote a letter to Housing Secretary **Michael Gove** that said the project had been strongly opposed by both county council and “the entire local community”, going as far as accusing DLUHC of “ignoring the strength of local opinion”.

After news of the judicial review broke, UK Oil & Gas (UKOG) issued a statement to the London Stock Exchange.

It said: “Mr **Justice Lane**, dismissed five of the opponent’s grounds seeking to reverse the Secretary of State’s grant of planning consent as being unarguable. Two remaining grounds were given leave to be argued at a further hearing at some time in the future, as yet unknown.”

It added that full planning and environmental consents remain in force.

Stephen Sanderson, UKOG’s chief executive, said: “The company’s legal team remains robustly confident that following the extensive Loxley public inquiry, the secretary of state’s decision to grant planning consent was thoroughly considered and entirely lawful. Consequently, we will continue to move our project ahead.”