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Balcombe villagers today expressed their disbelief in Cuadrilla's claim that they have no intention of fracking in the village. We are in any case opposed to any form of exploration for gas or oil in our village, whether fracked or not. Both conventional and unconventional oil wells spell unacceptable dangers to health, environment and climate.

Balcombe village has been misled by Cuadrilla before. In December 2012 they wrote to us to say that they would not be drilling at all in Balcombe, they were too busy in Lancashire. In May 2013 suddenly we got a letter to say they were coming in June to drill.

Every new oil and gas planning application nowadays avoids the 'f' word. Claiming 'no fracking' aims to sooth local opinion, make permits easier to get, and make all this a 'non-story' for the press. It's a general industry ruse. Here and elsewhere, oil and gas exploration companies will need to frack these 'unconventional' rocks - and licences will soon cover two thirds of the British Isles.

Actually it is true that Cuadrilla will not frack in Balcombe. There are a prospecting company, and would sell on to a production company if oil or gas reserves are discovered in viable quantities. The production company would then frack, not Cuadrilla. The flow test now being sought in Cuadrilla's application would be a precursor of fracking – and the fracking would be done by someone else.

It is no news to us in Balcombe that Cuadrilla drilled into a shallow layer of micrite. We knew this back in May. Micrite is a loose-textured rock, principally calcium carbonate, made up of ancient sea creatures and/or solidified limey mud. Natural fractures were to be expected. We were told in May that Cuadrilla would use a 15% solution of hydrochloric acid (plus other chemicals) to dissolve pathways into this micrite layer – acid dissolves lime. Cuadrilla reduced the proposed hydrochloric acid strength to just under 10 per cent on discovering that the Environment Agency considered anything over 10% to be toxic. They planned, they said, to top it up with citric and acetic acids. They would take the test pressure up to just below rock fracturing point, so that technically they would not be fracking.

According to David Smythe, Emeritus Professor of Geophysics, University of Glasgow, Balcombe's geology is deeply faulted, and unsuited to drilling of any kind for hydrocarbons, let alone to fracking. Faults, as well as the well itself, can act as conduits for liquid or gaseous pollutants.

Cuadrilla's horizontal well will have intersected with the Paddockhurst Park Fault, says Professor Smythe, and possibly with other faults as well. The micrite layer, only 33 metres thick, will have slipped 30 or 40 metres lower along these faults. It will have been 'all-but impossible to keep the drill string within the 33 m thick micrite layer, due to insufficient geological information.' The horizontal well will therefore have entered shale, and Cuadrilla will have information not just on the micrite, but also on the shale layer above. Is the proposal to investigate oil in micrite 'a cover-story for investigating the shales?' he asks.

<http://www.davidsmythe.org/fracking/cuadrilla%20sussex%20critique%20V1.pdf>



Balcombe mother of two and film producer Juliette Harris has lived in the village for over 35 years: 'We know Cuadrilla are desperately trying to raise funds in the City and we know their American backers and parent company AJ Lucas were furious Cuadrilla ever chose Balcombe, given the publicity we have generated worldwide. Cuadrilla (and the Government) will do anything they can to remove the fracking' word from any future exploration. With a 30 year lease signed with the Balcombe Estate, fracking is clearly their intention. Whatever they wish to call their activities, Cuadrilla have no social licence to be in our community. The protest is alive and kicking.