# Coal Bed Methane EIA, Airth, Falkirk

## Key Issues

RPS coordinated the EIA, PPC and RSA process and provided specialist input for the Environmental Statement (ES) and Expert Witnesses to Public Inquiry.

Key issues included:

- The importance of public consultation from the outset, given the difference in public perception and actual proposals.
- Engagement with stakeholders throughout the process, given the emerging regulatory regime.
- Importance of a thorough assessment of all potentially significant effects, taking into account proposed mitigation.
- Development of a transparent process for scoping out potential impacts.
- Importance of ensuring sufficient information available for assessment, bearing in mind planning is the first step in a range of technical and environmental consents for the process.

## Purpose of the project

Dart Energy commissioned RPS to provide environmental advice for their application for the first commercial development of coal bed methane – CBM - in Scotland.

The project aimed to produce gas from coal seams by reducing hydrostatic pressure in the coal, and to provide infrastructure to treat and dispose of the produced water and to inject the gas into the grid.

## Description of the project

The project comprised drilling of 22 wells, well site establishment at 14 locations, development of inter-site connection services, site tracks and a gas delivery and water treatment facility, and an associated water outfall point.

The site is located around Letham Moss in Falkirk, and aims to link together existing CBM sites in the area which have formed exploration and appraisal sites since the 1990s.
Lessons learnt

- The importance of involving local communities in the development evolution, rather than informing them of proposals. Dart Energy and RPS arranged an extensive series of participation events, and liaised with community councils and local groups. However, at Inquiry the consultation process was criticised as local groups felt they had limited input into the process.

- The necessity to have a transparent process for scoping out any impacts. With respect to hydrogeological impacts, mitigation imposed, including a monitoring plan was considered sufficient to ensure no significant environmental impacts were predicted to occur – however the reasoning behind this scoping was not clearly outlined in the ES and required additional information to be presented at appeal, which supported the original scoping decision.

- Importance of ensuring sufficient information is available for a robust assessment, given that planning is the first step in a range of technical and environmental consents for the process, dealt with separately by other consenting bodies, each requiring specific and detailed information.

- Liaison with stakeholders including SEPA, SNH and Historic Scotland to resolve issues throughout the process. SEPA in particular is currently amending regulation to address unconventional gas – including in relation to the Pollution Prevention and Control Regulations, and Management of Extractive Waste (Scotland) Regulations. None of the statutory bodies objected to the application.

- The importance of developing Management and Monitoring Plans as mitigation, in consultation with stakeholders.

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