

Additional safety precautions taken ahead of ground investigations in Bedford

March 2025

We take the health and safety of the communities we operate in, as well as that of our team members, very seriously. That's why we paused ground investigations in Bedford borough following the tragic incident at Cleat Hill in October 2024, which gave us more time to consider and apply additional safety precautions that go beyond standard industry practice.

The risk of our ground investigations encountering methane or other ground gases is already very low. The boreholes that we need to drill will be much shallower than the hole drilled at Cleat Hill, which encountered a pocket of natural gas at approximately 100m below ground level. The vast majority of our boreholes will be between 10m and 20m below ground level, other than just three boreholes in Bedford borough that will be no more than 40 metres below ground level – all much lower than the depths where gas was encountered at Cleat Hill.

Despite this low risk, following the incident at Cleat Hill we've undertaken additional work to stress test our approach, including:

- **Engaging Steve Wilson, who is:**
 - reviewing our survey contractor's procedures for dealing with ground gas should it be encountered
 - providing specific advice for the three boreholes that extend into the Lias Group of rocks, up to 40 metres below ground level. In our initial phase of ground investigations beginning in March, this is limited to three boreholes around Paula Radcliffe Way. We're putting robust measures in place to ensure it's safe for us to drill these boreholes.
- **A full review of our procedures for drilling boreholes and managing the risk of encountering ground gas, including:**
 - a desk-based review of the geology at Cleat Hill, which showed that we will not be drilling into the same composition of rock found there
 - a review of our risk assessment, which confirmed that sufficient consideration is being given to how we would manage ground gas if it is encountered during our surveys

- a review of our ground investigation contractor's procedures, which confirmed they have robust procedures in place for the management of ground gas.
- **Appointing an independent expert to make sure we are going above and beyond typical ground investigation safety procedures. The appointed expert will:**
 - inspect our drilling rigs prior to use to confirm that they comply with relevant standards and legal requirements
 - audit the drilling crews to confirm that the rigs are operated in accordance with British Drilling Association standards and legal requirements
 - assist with training and assurance of the borehole logging (the process of recording the geological formations a borehole penetrates) to create a record of the ground conditions encountered during drilling.

This work has provided us with additional reassurance that:

1. The risk of our ground investigation surveys encountering this type of geological methane deposit is very low.
2. We have robust and safe methods of operation.

The additional precautions and findings described above mean that our contractors are now ready for enabling works to begin in Bedford borough at the end of March, ahead of ground investigations starting in April.