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Reclaim the Power

Balcombe, Sussex
16-21 August 2013

Press pack

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1. What is Reclaim the Power?

Reclaim the Power is a five day camp organised by an unprecedented coalition of climate, social and economic justice activists. The camp will see skill shares in campaign building and direct action as well as talks, assemblies, workshops. It will be taking place in the centre of the fracking controversy, Balcombe, West Sussex.

From 16 – 21 August, we will respond to the call for support from the community in Balcombe opposing fracking. We share their serious concerns about the environmental and social impacts of fossil fuel extraction in their area. Balcombe is a test case for the fracking industry and, if successfully pushed through, could lead to an estimated two thirds of the UK being covered by fracking rigs.

Fracking is an integral part of the dash for gas. Our governments, and the corporations they are inextricably bound with, are pushing for the extraction, transportation and combustion of more fossil fuels to make huge profits. For people in Balcombe this means fracking on their doorstep, for millions in the UK it means fuel poverty, for the planet it means climate crisis. We see community-controlled renewables as the basis of a sustainable and just future energy system. The alternative is a senseless plummet towards short terms profits for the few while the rest of us pick up the pieces of a corporate led environmental disaster for generations to come.

Reclaim the Power have established a coalition of groups including Occupy, UKUncut, Disabled People Against The Cuts, the Greater London Association of Pensioners, Fuel Poverty Action, UK Tar Sands Network. We are all disgusted by a monopoly on fuel prices, a government that is controlled by corporate influence and a level of cronyism that beggars belief. All of us are together in fighting this crisis in democracy.

2. Why are we in Balcombe?

Last October, twenty activists shut down West Burton power station for a week, as part of the No Dash For Gas direct action climate justice group. They stopped a colossal quantity of gas carbon emissions from being pumped into the atmosphere and sent a powerful message to EDF – one of the ‘big six’ energy corporations that have a monopoly over UK energy – that their addiction to gas was neither just, sustainable or democratic. We decided to go back this year in our hundreds to make sure they understood that we were serious.

Months of organising by dedicated individuals passed. We were on the cusp of return. But then something happened...

Cuadrilla, a well established fracking company, started exploratory drilling outside of Balcombe. Cuadrilla knew the risks: water contamination, earth tremors, poisoned water aquifers, poisoned groundwaters, exhaustion of fresh water supplies, methane expulsion, flaring and yet more climate damaging fossil fuels. But they went ahead anyway in pursuit of enormous profit.

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It became increasingly clear that Balcombe was where we needed to be. Cuadrilla's operations are planned to last for six weeks – so that was the window of opportunity to stop them. It happened to collide with the Reclaim The Power camp's planned dates. Balcombe is a test case. We must stop this irrational energy choice or suffer the consequences for generations.

It wasn't an easy decision. Much of our work had to start again. However, there are hundreds of dedicated, determined and experienced people at Reclaim the Power who have the potential to stop fracking in its tracks

There are two stories that could emerge from Balcombe this summer. It could be the place that paved the way for a dirty and dangerous method of fuel extraction to tear up the country, or it could be the place where a group of ordinary people inspired the world by taking back the power. We are here, together with dedicated people from Balcombe, to make sure that it's the latter.

3. Timeline and filming opportunities

Friday 16th

1pm - public meeting to 'swoop' the site - Balcombe rail station

3.30pm - briefing at media tent

Saturday 17th

9am - briefing at media tent

1pm-3pm - filming welcome hours - guides available at media tent

All day - workshops - call to arrange filming

Sunday 18th

9am - briefing at media tent

1pm-3pm - filming welcome hours - guides available at media tent

3pm onwards - March for a Frack Free Future - from Balcombe station to Cuadrilla drill site

All day - workshops - call to arrange filming

Monday 19th

9am - briefing at media tent

All day - actions - follow @nodashforgas or call for updates

Tuesday 20th

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9am - briefing at media tent

All day - actions - follow @nodashforgas or call for updates

Wednesday 21st

Camp clear-up

4. Code of conduct

We are keen to communicate our reasons for being in Balcombe as widely as possible; this means proactively engaging in mainstream, alternative, and social media. But it is also vital that our engagement with the media is balanced with participants' ability to live, learn, socialise, and plan for action.

For this reason, we have put together a media policy to guide both participants and journalists alike. Please do adhere to these basic requests for media conduct as non-compliance will result in you being escorted off the site:

General information

- A media tent is placed outside the camp for interviews outside of media access hours.
- We will be holding media briefings at 9am daily to provide the media with the latest information and give interviews. Meet at media tent.
- During Sunday 18th August, much of the day will be spent planning for the mass action the following day. Therefore, mission groups planning for the action will have the opportunity of opting out of being filmed on this day and the media group will ensure this is enforced. If print or web journalists join a mission group they must identify themselves to their group so the group can make an informed decision on what can be reported.

Film and TV

- TV and film camera crews will ordinarily be allowed on site during a two hour time slot (1pm–3pm) each day. Filming outside of this slot should be pre-arranged with the media group (see contacts). All TV and film camera crews should be accompanied by a member of the camp's media team.

Print and online

- Print journalists and bloggers should introduce themselves to the media team that they are in the camp; they should also introduce themselves at village morning meetings if they are camping. They should have press ID on them at all times. This enables participants to make an informed choice about whether or not to speak with those who are planning to publish their writing.

Photography

- All photographers must get permission before taking photos of people, whether working for the media or not. Everyone is asked to be mindful of the fact that many people attending will not want to be photographed and are probably enjoying a week away from techno-gadgetry overload, so give them a break if they want it.

Documentation Working Group

- A Reclaim the Power documentation working group will be working to produce a range of images, footage, and writings from the camp; if you would like to contribute to their work, please introduce yourself at the media tent.

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- If you are a print or online journalist/blogger and you would like images or footage from the camp, please also speak to the documentation group.

5. The birds have gone silent: how a fracking company is changing my village

This blog first appeared on: <http://www.greenpeace.org.uk/blog/climate/birds-have-gone-silent-how-fracking-company-changing-my-village-20130808>

I'm just back from the local anti-fracking camp outside Balcombe in Sussex, where Cuadrilla workers are noisily drilling their oil well despite not having the necessary permits and huge local opposition. Many hugs from the campers and villagers down there, and frankly too many Balcombe courgettes: I've brought mine back home due to lack of demand.

I also had to bring back my offer of showers – everyone at the camp had already showered at other residents' houses in Balcombe and Cuckfield (the village on the other side of the drilling site).

We are hugely grateful for the brave people from elsewhere who are helping us. Balcombe people are about as likely as Jane Austen to [superglue ourselves](#) to the Cuadrilla gate.

Our jaws dropped when this week Balcombe residents received [a letter of apology](#) from our county council. Not for the tankers, noise, disruption and potential pollution the village is facing from the drilling site, but for "the disruption caused by the protesters".

How insensitive. How wrong.

We've tried our best to use all the formal processes to stop this awful project and it hasn't worked. The Environment Agency swept aside our representations. Our councillors, council officers and MPs are not protecting us. We hope our protests will make them listen and act.

The news that the [Reclaim the Power climate camp switching venue to Balcombe](#) is very good. The more the merrier, and it's as much their business as ours.

Fracking is coming to [two-thirds of England](#) if the government and the oil and gas industry get their way, and it's in the interest of the whole country to make sure fracking does not get a foothold in Balcombe, or a foot in the door to the UK.

We here in Balcombe will welcome all legal activities by people who come to help us.

It's quiet down there the last two days. Tuesday saw one arrest under the Trade Union and Labour Relations Act – stopping people getting on with their work. But today the focus is an all-day "knit-in" (crocheting also encouraged!).

The Super Whip was down again yesterday. No, not the police (but what an eye-opener the violent police action so far has been to law-abiding local residents like us!). I mean the ice cream van, with a notice in its window: "Super Whip against fracking". Thank you, Super Whip.

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But the birds have gone since Cuadrilla started drilling, which is a huge change. Much of Balcombe is forest, and there's ancient woodland adjoining the site. Our dawn chorus is amazing. One camper told me the chorus has been absent these last few mornings.

No doubt [the bats](#) will soon have moved house too. West Sussex failed to demand a bat survey for the original planning permission, although the permission mentioned the bats.

Thankfully, for the planning extension in September, the council has decided one is required. Stay around bats. We need you.

Kathryn lives in Balcombe and is part of the [No Fracking In Balcombe Society](#).

6. Resources

1. No Dash for Gas: Disaster Gas - An overview of why the government's plans to build 30 new gas-fired power stations is a disaster for people and the climate: <http://www.nodashforgas.org.uk/why-we-must-stop-gas/>

2. No Fracking in Balcombe Society <http://gasdrillinginbalcombe.wordpress.com/>

3. Frack Free Sussex: Interview with Vanessa Vine in the Argus:

http://www.theargus.co.uk/news/10589288.Your_interview_Vanessa_Vine_Frack_Free_Sussex/

4. Fuel Poverty Action: Why Gas is a fuel we can't afford - a short, introductory guide to why our bills are rising, what's going on with climate change, the situation with UK energy policy and the emerging social movement against the 'dash for gas'. <http://fuelpovertyaction.org.uk/2013/04/23/new-resource-gas-a-fuel-we-cant-afford/>

5. Platform: Connecting the dots - A blog from oil and gas watchdog Platform outlining why frontier gas means more repression and environmental injustice: <http://platformlondon.org/2013/07/12/reclaim-power-no-dash-for-gas/>

6. Frack Off: Briefing Sheet: A short introduction to the dangers from fracking: <http://frack-off.org.uk/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/ExtremeEnergyBriefingJuly2013e.pdf>