

Protests Build in advance of Coal Mine Decision

Press Release for Immediate Use

Campaigners concerned about plans for a controversial new coal mine in West Cumbria are staging protests across Cumbria this week and next, ahead of the county council's decision on whether to approve the development.

The council had previously given planning approval for the mine but the developers, West Cumbria Mining, were forced to amend their application after legal challenges by campaigners.

Councillors will make a decision on the amended application on Thursday 20 August, when there will be a demonstration at 8.30am on New Road Common in Kendal.

The campaigners, from Extinction Rebellion (XR) and South Lakes Action on Climate Change (SLACC), have been dropping banners from bridges reading "No Future in Coal: We need climate jobs, not dole". They're calling on the councillors to fully consider evidence that they argue shows the mine will not produce the promised benefits and will have much more negative impacts than those acknowledged in the application.

"The council has said that job creation was its main reason for approving the earlier application, but West Cumbria Mining's claim of 500 jobs for 50 years is another false promise for West Cumbria," said Maggie Mason, one of the campaigners involved in the legal challenge.

"That's because this mine will produce coking coal for steel making, which is changing rapidly to use more environmentally friendly alternatives that don't need coal. The UK steel industry is already switching to electric arc furnaces using scrap steel, and UK and EU governments are also investing heavily in steel making using hydrogen instead of coal. Demand for the coal is set to reduce significantly by 2030 and will definitely not persist for the 50 year life of the mine. In fact West Cumbria Mining's own expert has given presentations in the past saying that there is an oversupply of coking coal.

West Cumbria Mining's claims about future demand for coking coal to make steel are not true. It's actually very hard to understand how any developer could see a business case for the mine at all."

Maggie added: "On top of that, WCM's own documents admit they don't know at this stage how much coal it would be possible to extract from the more challenging offshore seams, which make up most of the area they want to mine. It's impossible to say for sure that mining would continue for 50 years, even setting aside the falling demand for the coal and economics of it."

Adrian Porter from Staveley argues that the other wider economic benefits to the UK will be minimal "West Cumbria Mining is owned by Cayman Islands registered EMR Capital who would reap the largely untaxed profits. Instead of this mine, we're asking for green jobs that will benefit the community in the long term".

All of WCM's assessments of the low impact of the mine on the global carbon emissions causing climate change are strongly disputed by campaigners and climate experts. In their protests, campaigners are highlighting that the burning of the coal extracted at the mine must be considered by WCM instead of being ignored and that if the mine goes ahead, it

would breach the UK's legal obligations to reduce carbon emissions under the Paris Agreement on climate change.

"The council has already received evidence from the eminent economist, Professor Paul Ekins, that opening the mine would add significantly to global carbon emissions, contrary to West Cumbria Mining's claims" said Kendal's Rhod Vaughan. "He states clearly that the increased supply would reduce the price of coal, delay the necessary switch to lower carbon steel-making and result in additional coal being burnt over the lifetime of the mine"

The county council made its previous decision on very flimsy evidence and put the claimed jobs potential of the mine ahead of the negative impacts. Given the overwhelming case against the coal mine the Committee is now obliged to consider the factual, legal and scientific evidence of environmental and social harm and how unlikely it is that the promised jobs will materialise. They have a chance to act for the long-term benefit of west Cumbria and refuse this planning application"

Cumbria's on the front line of the climate emergency, with several coastal towns projected to be underwater from annual flooding by 2050. This development would lock West Cumbria into a dying industry instead of investing in the thousands of long term, decent low carbon jobs that we need. This is an opportunity to move away from business as usual, build a future for our children and really build back better after Covid-19, as communities and future generations deserve".

ENDS

Notes for Editors:

- The letter from Paul Ekins and a critique (from the Materials Processing Institute) of West Cumbria Mining's claims on the future need for coking coal can be found on <https://slacc.org.uk/campaigns/cumbria-coal-mine/>
- The decision making committee meet at 10 am on 20th August to make a decision about the first deep coal mine in the UK in 30 years - a mine with the emissions of a million citizens
- The County Council had to delay their decision from the 8th July because of the huge number of objections they have received
- There has been significant exaggeration about the economic and employment benefits of the mine. Only 3% of the value of the coal will be spent on wages and 87% of the coal would be exported.
- There will be a demonstration at New Road Common, Kendal at 8.30 am on 20th. Details here: <https://www.facebook.com/events/1210240402648520>
- Earlier small, socially distanced demonstrations will take place this week in Carlisle on Tuesday afternoon, and in Penrith and Kendal on Wednesday
- **For further information contact: see www.slacc.org.uk/campaigns**
- **Please contact Maggie Mason on 07551180221 for further information**