

ALSTON MOOR PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of Alston Moor Parish Council held on Monday 26th March 2018 at 7pm in Nenthead Village Hall.

Present: Cllrs: T. Haldon (Chair), B. Aves, P. Godwin, H. Ho, D. Phillips. Approx 35 local residents.

Apologies: Cllrs: E. Grew, A. Martin, R. Miller, D. Athey.

Absent: .J. Glendinning, A. Green, C. Harrison, G. Wright.

Declarations of interest: none.

1. **To consider planning application 3/18/9001 Establishment of a scheme for minewater treatment comprising construction of an interceptor manhole chamber; provision of transfer pipes; erection of 2no. buildings to house respectively, pumping and odour abatement equipment; creation of 3no. compost based treatment ponds and 2no. aerobic reedbed ponds; construction of outfalls; creation of access tracks and hardstanding areas; and associated development. Land between Blagill and Nentsberry, Alston, Cumbria.**

The chair explained that it was decided to hold an extraordinary parish council meeting to give local residents the opportunity to present their views on the application. The Coal Authority application has many pages of technical detail, and employ experts in the field, so the parish council cannot realistically challenge the technical aspects, this is the job of the county council planners. The parish council can however, amplify views of the community. Individuals can write in to the county council with their views, and are encouraged to do so.

2. **Public Participation – invitation to residents to speak for a maximum of 5 minutes on the above planning application. *The views stated below are from those who took part.***

A number of residents spoke of their concerns about the application, noting that there had been extensive consultations. The application covers a large area of land, with the mine water to be pumped from Haggs into an anaerobic composting scheme consisting of three lagoons and 2 reedbeds Soluble metals are removed from the water, and insoluble sulphates salts are produced within the compost. This is expected to be replaced every 10 years, or possibly more frequently. Hydrogen Sulphide is a by-product of the process, it is level 4 on the toxicity scale and causes nerve and respiratory damage. It is released continuously from the lagoons, and in large amounts when the compost is removed. As a heavy gas it does not disperse easily, and can be smelt for 10-15 minutes, after which people lose the ability to smell it. The CA have answered questions and say they will treat the water, with odour abatement measures and it will be filtered into two large reedbeds, but have not explained or planned to do anything about the toxic gas released into the atmosphere.

Canada deals with its composted waste in airtight sheds. This scheme should be better regulated, using enclosed processes. Costs would rise, but the risk to public health should be taken into account.

The main concern is the public health risk, and animals including sheep that are at risk of losing weight if exposed to the gas in the air. The adjoining road is surprisingly well used and visitors many not be aware of the hazard.

The odour from Craig Force in the Lake District can be smelt from 2 miles away, but there are no people living in the vicinity, whereas here there are residential properties, a hotel and caravan park close by. Craig Force is the first such scheme in the county and no odour abatement measures were built in, so there is no data available on what can be done to control the odour. The CA said at a meeting that they would close the site down if they couldn't control the odour, but what will really happen if odour is detected? There are no plans to man the site, so it is likely to take at least 2 hours for a response.

Another question concerned the weather and what would happen if the site was covered in 4 ft or so of snow, as happened recently. Residents were told by the CA that the water from Haggs will remain warm and will melt the water in the pool.

Another resident questioned why a feasibility study had not been done on piping the water to Tyneside for treatment there.

It was stated that people living close by had been told very little and told there would be very little odour, the CA are keen to progress, but this is an inhabited area and people should have the right to live safely. It is an experimental scheme, and a risk if it goes wrong, plus there are plans to repeat the scheme in Nenthead and eventually Alston.

One person disputed the distances quoted by others, and pointed out that the land is at the bottom of a slope.

Another expressed concern that Alston Moor was trying to promote tourism and businesses, and that the scheme would be detrimental to this image.

It was noted that the scheme is supported by Rory Stewart, MP, and has been justified as saving 10,000 jobs in the Port of Tyne.

It was confirmed that those present were not against the principle of cleaning up the Nent, but wanted the task done properly in the interest of human and animal welfare.

Residents agreed to produce a pro-forma letter to leave in the Community Shop.

3. **Recommendation to be submitted to Cumbria County Council planning authority.**

The chair summed up by stating that the parish council had listened to the serious concerns raised about the release of toxic gas, the view that the lagoons should be covered, and the question about what would happen in extreme weather.

RESOLVED that the parish council held an extraordinary meeting attended by 30-40 residents and received their views on the application. The community fully supports the aim of removing heavy metals from the Nent, however it believes the proposed location, design and operation of the site will cause serious public health risks from the uncontrolled release of Hydrogen Sulphide. The parish council would not want a scheme to proceed unless we have confidence these risks can be removed. (nem con)

The meeting closed at 8.35pm