

TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1990

**Application by West Cumbria Mining Ltd
Development of a new underground metallurgical coal mine and associated development
at Former Marchon Site, Pow Beck Valley and area from Marchon Site to St Bees Coast**

Planning Inspectorate Reference: APP/H0900/V/21/3271069

Local Planning Authority Reference: 4/17/9007

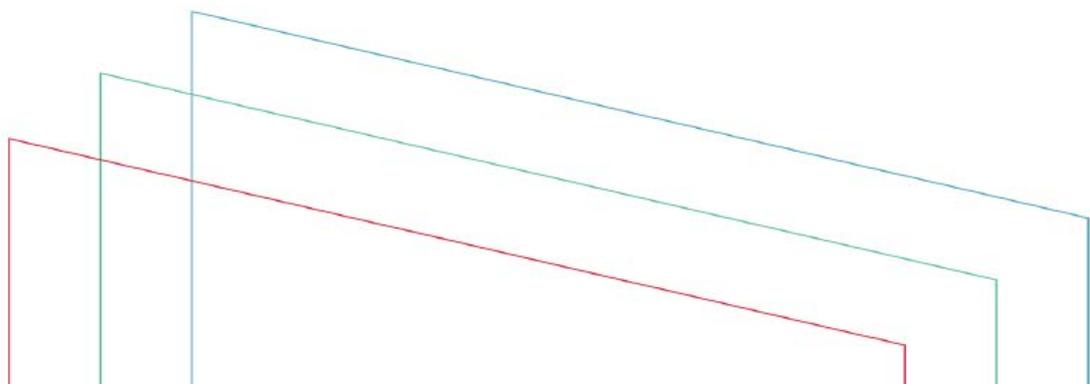
Date of Inquiry: 7th September 2021

SUMMARY

PROOF OF EVIDENCE OF REBEKAH DISKI, MA, MSc

**SENIOR RESEARCHER ON JUST TRANSITION
NEW ECONOMICS FOUNDATION**

New Economics Foundation



1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. This is the Summary Proof of Evidence of Rebekah Diski, MA, MSC. I am Senior Researcher in the Environment and Green Transition team at the New Economics Foundation (NEF). I lead the organisation's work on Just Transition. In my current role I regularly analyse the dynamics of local economies and local labour forces as part of my research on the costs and benefits of potential trajectories towards a low-carbon economy and the implications for local, regional and national industrial strategies. A summary of my *curriculum vitae* is set out at paragraphs 1.1-1.4 of my Proof of Evidence.
- 1.2. I am providing this evidence on behalf of South Lakes Action on Climate Change (SLACC), acting pro bono as an independent expert. My evidence addresses the employment aspects of the Applicant's economic benefits case, addressing the claimed employment figures and other employment benefits relied on in the Applicant's evidence.
- 1.3. The evidence which I have prepared and provide for this public inquiry is true to the best of my knowledge and belief. I confirm that the opinions expressed are my true and professional opinions based on the facts I regard as relevant in connection with the inquiry.

2. THE PROJECTED NUMBER OF JOBS

- 2.1. The Applicant indicates that 518 operational jobs are anticipated to be created in the course of operating the mine, with further indirect employment anticipated to be 'up to' 1,000 jobs and 'up to' 50 apprenticeships. No methodology has been provided for these projected employment numbers, and whilst the Applicant indicates the main operational roles required, it has not provided a justification or explanation of the 'anticipated' numbers. Similarly, during the 2-year construction phase of the mine the Applicant provides a single basic table (CD1.86, Table 7.11) setting out the stated daily average employment (146 workers), however, no justification is given for any of the component daily average figures.

- 2.2. The absence of these details and methodologies is concerning. Decision makers can have no confidence in the figures put forward, nor do they have any reliable way of appraising the scheme's net impact from a public interest perspective.

3. LOCAL SKILLS SHORTAGES

- 3.1. The vast majority of jobs at the mine – some 429 – require previous relevant experience meaning that the Applicant's claim (CD1.86, p.26) that 80% of the operational workforce will be sourced locally is unlikely to be fulfilled. The Applicant's survey (CD1.86, p.26) of local labour supply found under 3% of those local residents expressing an interest in working at the mine have sufficient experience. This also renders doubtful the Applicant's claim that there would not be a significant influx of non-local mine workers.
- 3.2. Further, since the last major deep coal mine in Cumbria, Haig Colliery, closed in 1986, local mining jobs have all but disappeared. In 2018 and 2019 there were 10 people employed in coal mining in Cumbria (Appendix 1), and as of December 2019, only 8 people were employed in deep coal mining in the whole of England (Appendix 2, p.34). In 2001, there were 40 people employed in coal mining in Cumbria (Appendix 3).
- 3.3. The Applicant has provided no analysis on available local skills or of the skills base of those who have already applied for operational jobs at the mine. Given the length of time since there has been significant coal mining in Cumbria it is likely those with relevant skills would need further training and/or be nearing the end of their working lives.
- 3.4. Coal mining is a shrinking industry within the UK, with an ageing population of workers. Given the lack of any clear commitment by the Applicant to train UK-based workers, many of the proposed positions would likely end up being filled by workers

from countries with a larger coal mining industry and a consequently larger pool of skilled workers, such as elsewhere in Europe.

4. PRESSURE ON EXISTING LABOUR MARKET

4.1 The Applicant implies that the proposed employment provided by the development would benefit those who are currently unemployed. However, as the Council's own Economic Development team has pointed out, a large proportion of unemployed people have been out of work for more than six months, suggesting they are not immediately ready for work (Appendix 4). The Applicant gives no indication that it has plans to target this group specifically and offer training or employability programmes as part of their recruitment process.

4.2 Moreover, the Cumbria Local Enterprise Partnership 2021 Skills Report ('LEP Report') (CD9.9) projects the overall available labour force to fall by over 20,000 over the next 15 years. The LEP Report identifies sectors where recruitment is challenging, and skills are in short supply including advanced manufacturing and engineering. Many of these skills are likely to be required for the projected jobs associated with the mine during both the construction and operation periods.

4.3 The Applicant will therefore find it difficult to recruit people with relevant skills locally who are not already employed. Recruitment of already-employed people with these skillsets is therefore likely to have an impact on existing businesses already relying on these valuable skills resulting in what the Council's Economic Development team call a "high level of poaching" from other employers (Appendix 4).

5. IMPACT ON ZERO CARBON AND TOURISM JOBS

5.1. By recruiting from a relatively small pool of people with existing technical, construction and professional services skills, WCM would also be competing with projects much more aligned to Cumbria's planned Net Zero future.

- 5.2. Research by Green House Think Tank and Opal Research and Consulting for Cumbria Action for Sustainability (“the Green Jobs Report”) found that 9,000 jobs could be created in renewable energy, retrofitting buildings, transport and reducing waste (CD 9.10). Half of these transition jobs (over a period of 15 years) would be in West Cumbria, while nearly 2,000 long-term jobs could be created in West Cumbria.
- 5.3. The Green Jobs Report identifies workforce and skills shortages as one of the key obstacles to meeting Cumbria’s climate targets and investment in skills should therefore be concentrated in the future growth sectors needed to support a low-carbon economy.
- 5.4. The Copeland Vision 2040 document highlights new employment opportunities through increased tourism to the Lake District Coast, and the Local Plan (CD 5.8) seeks to enhance the Cumbria and Wainwright Coast walks to attract more tourists. These opportunities are also likely to be undermined by the development of the mine in the middle of where these paths would connect.

6. DEPRIVATION AND UNEMPLOYMENT

- 6.1. Contrary to the Applicant’s SoC which claims the local area ‘suffers from high levels of deprivation and unemployment’ (CD15.1, p.46), the Applicant’s own assessment of the relevant baseline data shows that the local area is broadly in line with national figures, and better than the national figures in a number of respects: its proportion of economically active full and part time employees is higher than the national average, and its deprivation percentage is ‘marginally better’ than regionally and ‘marginally worse’ than the national average.

7. CONCLUSION

- 7.1. The Applicant overstates the economic benefits of the development and does so using unverifiable, unjustified employment figures with no obvious methodology.

- 7.2. There exists a significant local skills gap that is not addressed by the Applicant. Many local workers are already employed and do not presently have the requisite skills and experience for the majority of roles described. This will lead to 'poaching' of appropriately skilled employees from local businesses, and to an influx of non-local employees, which will also squeeze the availability of suitably skilled employees needed for Cumbria's planned transition to zero carbon jobs and green technologies.
- 7.3. The purported benefits of the development are likely to be much less than claimed by the Applicant because there is little evidence to support the magnitude of the claimed benefits and there is an array of negative impacts which have been overlooked.