

Learning the lessons of the past

Proposals for opencast mining at Nant Llesg are nothing new. In 1986 an application by Thomkins Opencast Limited was refused by the local authority's planning sub-committee, despite being recommended for approval.

Back then, Councillors were deeply worried about the effect that open cast mining would have on local businesses and the efforts being made to attract new industry to the area. They were also concerned about the environment and the wellbeing of local people.

A report notes that the last proposal to mine at Nant Llesg was refused because:

"The effect of noise, dust and other disruptive influences on neighbouring land uses would be unacceptable."

"The proposal would be detrimental to the environment which has been improved to make it attractive to residents and prospective industries."

Does this sound familiar?

These objections, made almost 30 years ago, are exactly the same objections that we have today. In fact, as we continue to exist in a troubling economic climate, we have even more reason to be concerned about attracting new businesses, safe guarding local jobs, and ensuring that Rhymney and the Heads of the Valleys area has a prosperous future.

Ecology experts are also concerned about the impact on wildlife, particularly the variety of bird life that is supported on the proposed site for the mine. Pollution and the disruption of water courses is another area of concern for local people who will have to live with the consequences.

Refusing an open cast at Nant Llesg was the right decision then and is the right decision now. We must learn the lessons of the past and hope that today's planning committee shares the same concerns for their constituents that their predecessors had all those years ago.



Getting our voices heard

At a recent presentation by Nant Llesg developer Miller Argent, one Caerphilly Councillor formerly requested that once the application goes in, Caerphilly Council goes out into the community and brings back the community's views as part of the planning process – something the Green Valleys Alliance strongly supports!

Now that the application has been submitted, it is time for everyone who has concerns about these plans to make themselves heard. Everyone who lives or works in the Rhymney area, anyone who runs a business or owns a property in the area. Now is the time to find out the facts and let the decision makers and politicians know what you think.

What you can do

- Make your representation against this to the council before the closing date on Friday 29 November. Visit www.caerphilly.gov.uk/planning or call 01495 235268
- Attend a public exhibition between 4pm -7pm on the following dates:

Tuesday 19 November 2013 at Abertyswg Community Centre
Wednesday 20 November 2013 at Rhymney Community Centre
Tuesday 26 November 2013 at Fochriw Community Centre
Thursday 28 November 2013 at Elim Community Church Hall

- Contact your elected representatives:
Find your Assembly Member www.assemblywales.org/memhome.htm
Find your MP <http://findyourmp.parliament.uk>
- Share your concerns on social media.
Visit www.facebook.com/GreenValleysAlliance and follow us on Twitter @valleysalliance

The planning application is in: Now is the time for action

An application has been made to create a new open cast mine at Nant Llesg on the edge of Rhymney that will run for the next 17 years, destroying the landscape and putting existing jobs at risk. People have until the 29 November 2013 to make their voices heard.

Everyone must ask themselves a question: do you want to live next to the rolling fields and countryside that you see today, or an ugly black scar blighting the landscape?

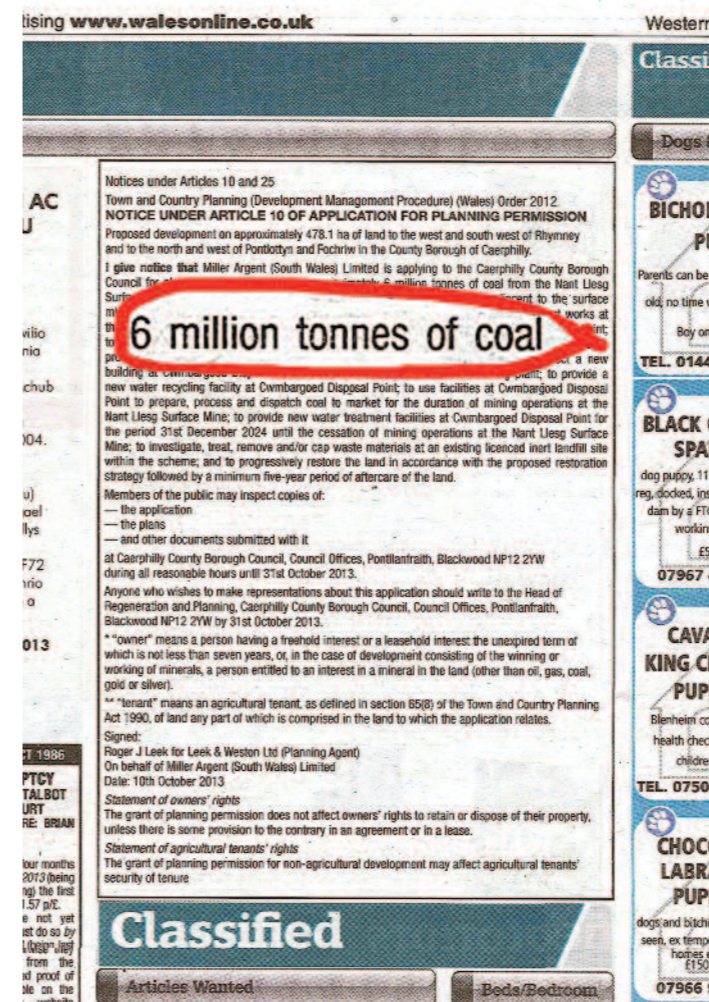
The Green Valleys Alliance vehemently opposes this proposal and in these pages we explain why, and what you need to do if you share our views.

We are a group of like-minded businesses and organisations that came together because we share the same concern – that the damage inflicted on the area by 17 years of opencast mining on the edge of Rhymney is going to lead to the closure of existing businesses and a deterioration in the quality of life for local people. We have received significant support from local people and numerous Welsh politicians, as well as those from further afield who have already lived through the impact of open cast mining.

The more we looked into the issues and spoke to people in the community, it became clear that it was about much more than local jobs. There is a very real threat that the proposed open cast mine will lead to what one leading economist called a "lost generation" and, for the next 17 years, the area will be socially, psychologically and physically deprived.

In these pages you will hear from experts who believe that the development of a massive open cast mine at Nant Llesg will not only lead to the loss of existing jobs, but also discourage new investors, depress house prices, increase poverty, crime and lead to health and environmental issues that the local authority's budget will never address.

These are real concerns that are shared by thousands of local people who are fearful for the future of their children and grandchildren who remain in the area. They are also concerns that cannot be addressed by the promise of a few community facilities and the eventual remediation of the land.



Classified ad pages, Western Mail, 10.10.13

Caerphilly County Borough Council has a decision to make that will change your life, and impact an entire generation. This would be one of the largest open mining projects in Europe and you must choose whether you think it is worth the pain and suffering of years of dust, noise and pollution.





A question of jobs

The creation of local jobs has continuously been placed at the head of the list of “benefits” of Miller Argent’s mining proposals for Nant Llesg. The hope is that in times of economic hardship, and for an area of high unemployment and often low wages, the promise of new jobs can be seen as particularly attractive.

However, many of the proposed jobs will require special skills and will not go to local people, while opportunities for women in particular are likely to be limited.

Furthermore, the risk to existing jobs cannot be overlooked. When a large scale mining operation gets underway just metres away from facilities that manufacture cosmetics, medical goods and supplies, this risk of job losses becomes very real. In the case of Nant Llesg, that is exactly what would happen.

A team of experts from Cardiff University have estimated that there are around 400 jobs in the area supported by the cosmetics, medical goods and supplies sector, and a further 220 supported indirectly by the purchasing of supplies and the wage spending of employees. They disagreed with Miller Argent’s claim that their own “Economic Impact Assessment” found no evidence that their mining operation would have any negative impact on local businesses.

Their study looked at the balance between the estimates of new jobs created and the risk to current and future jobs elsewhere in the community. The report, which is available to download in full on our website, came to a number of conclusions. Amongst them were...

“While the Nant Llesg investment would create employment, there is uncertainty on the levels of employment that would be supported going forward.”

“The effects of reductions in demand for local goods and services caused by the loss of employment opportunities would have serious repercussions in the context of the existing state of the local economy.”

“the presence of significant open cast mining could affect future inward investment prospects into an area that has been shown to be very needy in socio-economic terms”

Turning back the clock?

One question that was considered by the Cardiff University study was whether the approval of mining proposals would set a precedent for subsequent applications in the region. As it can be demonstrated that significant coal reserves are still present right across the Valleys, the likelihood is that many other applications would follow and this could have a marked impact on the “image” of the region – both as a tourism destination and a region for inward investment.



The Cardiff researchers concluded that “the presence of extensive open casting is unlikely to assist in the marketing of the Head of the Valleys area, and attempts to showcase the natural assets of the wider area.” A study commissioned by the Wales Tourist Board a number of years ago asked people what they thought was the prominent colour that represented Wales and the answer was “grey”. When Visit Wales repeated the survey a decade later, the answer to the same question was “green”.



Destination marketing expert Roger Pride, the former tourism boss who commissioned this research, said that the question of “image” needs careful consideration in decisions about new open cast applications:

“Wales has done a lot in recent years to try and manage the transition from our industrial image of the past to that of a modern economy and

this has applied in particular to the investment made in the Heads of the Valleys area. I would not say that there should be a blanket ban on mining but for me it is all a question of scale and location.

“If open cast mines are proposed in a tourism destination or if they start to become a ubiquitous part of the landscape then that would clearly be wrong. If the sites are strategically positioned and discreet then it could be OK. However, if local businesses are expressing concern over the proposals then these concerns need to be taken very seriously.”

What future for coal?



The future for the coal industry is bleak. Coal prices are falling and are likely to continue to do so as the likes of the US and China flood the global market. At the same time we are taking strides towards a greener-economy that is looking to renewables to supply our future power requirements.

The result - huge job losses in the UK coal industry.

In Wales, nearly 300 jobs were at lost at Aberpergwm last December, and the Unity mine near Neath (now Wales’s largest drift mine) has filed for administration as it can no longer provide enough work for its 220 staff.

Outside Wales, the collapse of Scottish Coal led to the loss of around 600 jobs, as well as anxious creditors and communities left wondering whether the promised remediation of the abandoned mines on their doorsteps will actually happen.

Experts on energy in the UK rarely emerge in favour of coal as a long-term solution. Issues over the “carbon capture and storage” technology that is required to make coal-fired

power stations greener; health and safety implications of extraction and rising opposition from communities across the UK are all cited as important factors.

The Welsh Government is sensibly putting a strong focus on cleaner, renewable technology as the way forward and coal-fired power station owners have already been forced to invest in new technology to reduce sulphur emissions. This has included replacing a percentage of local coal with low-sulphur coal from overseas and biomass in order to meet government targets.

Miller Argent’s contract with the owners of Aberthaw B Power Station near Barry (Aberthaw A having been decommissioned in 1995) provides an outlet for the coal retrieved from its opencast mine at Ffos-y-Fran and

makes it the likely source for any coal from Nant Llesg. In fact, the developer suggested at a recent public meeting that approval of their plans would also “safeguard jobs” at Aberthaw.

The same claims have been made for another potential customer in Tata Steel but, while Tata conceded that suppliers such as Miller Argent are regarded as important partners, they were quick to point out that “3,000 jobs do not hang in the balance on this one”.

If this current trend continues, coal prices could fall below the price that Miller Argent can afford to mine. What will that mean for Nant Llesg? The land will be scarred, the current jobs gone, and any promised remediation of land will be left in doubt.