Consultation process confirmed for the proposed Haggs mine water treatment scheme on the River Nent.

This is an update on the next stage of work to develop proposals for a mine water treatment scheme to clean up polluted mine water from the Haggs Adit, Nentsberry.

It provides details of the work completed over Summer 2016, how we now plan to involve stakeholders including the public, and feedback on the four key points identified in the Coal Authority and Environment Agency’s Joint Statement issued in April 2016 following the Parish Council meeting held at the Nent Hall Hotel on 27 April 2016.

Work completed over Summer 2016
Since our last update in April 2016, the project team has been working on how we can improve our communication and engagement with the public. This has involved reviewing the decision making process and how we involve residents, the public and other stakeholders.

To make sure the new approach follows best practice, we have recruited engagement specialists Wilson Sherriff, to help us to design and facilitate the engagement process.

The work we have been doing with Wilson Sherriff has taken longer than we originally anticipated but we are now at a point where we can begin the engagement process again in earnest.

Involvement plans
Our aim is to provide clear information about the decisions we need to take, how and when we aim to take them. We will also make clear how residents and others can have their say.

We want to make sure that members of the public, residents and other stakeholders have the opportunity to feed in their concerns and aspirations about what is proposed, and we will report on how their views have affected our decisions.

The table below gives an overview of the decision-making process that the Coal Authority and Environment Agency will follow, how the public can get involved at each point and indicative timeframes for when the stage is likely to be reached.
### Decision Point
How you can get involved

| Agree the extended search area and develop criteria for evaluating potential sites | Update yourself on the changes made to the search area since April 2016  
Consider the potential sites and suggest other sites to consider.  
Consider the criteria for selecting sites and suggest what else needs to be considered in selecting a site.  
Identify any additional information or data needed | First engagement event on 1 Nov at Nenthall Hotel |
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| Review ‘long list’ of potential sites and agree shortlisted sites | Comment on potential sites identified.
Comment on how they have been evaluated.
Comment on which sites should be ‘shortlisted’. | Second engagement event, Feb /March 2017 |
| Discuss the shortlisted sites | Comment on the pros and cons of shortlisted sites.
Suggest other issues that need to be considered. | Third engagement event  May/June 2017 |
| Identify the preferred site | Discuss layout, shape and operational issues. | Fourth engagement event Sept/Oct 2017 |
| Finalise the preferred site | Review construction and operational activities and make suggestions about minimising impact of construction and operational activities. | Fifth engagement event Oct/Nov 2017 |

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**Feedback on key points raised to date**

In April 2016, the Coal Authority and Environment Agency project team undertook to do the following:

1. Report back on the recently commissioned peer review of the proposed odour control measures once it has been completed.

2. Assess the suitability of the alternative sites including those which were suggested by you at the meeting.

3. Carry out further technical work on the proposed size of the ponds.

4. Prepare additional information to explain how this project fits into the wider proposals for cleaning up metal mine water pollution within the River Tyne Catchment.

The following points report on the progress made to date.

**Point 1: Odour**

The peer review confirmed that the proposed odour control techniques would work effectively if designed and operated correctly. It produced a number of technical recommendations most of which focused on further work to be done to optimise the design for the Haggs mine water treatment scheme. An initial trial of odour control was carried out at the Force Crag mine water treatment scheme in September and a report will be available via the gov.uk website when completed.
The results from these, and potentially other trials, will help us to find the best way of controlling odour and minimise the need for chemicals. The trials have been designed to take into account the differences between the water quality and site setting at Force Crag and any potential Haggs site.

The treatment to clean up the polluted water creates some odour. However this can be managed by the way the site is constructed and by adding certain chemicals to the treated water. This is a safe process and proven technique for odour control.

We are confident that the trials will enable us to put together an odour management plan which will mean no odour beyond the site boundary.

**Point 2: Alternative sites**
To ensure we have included all the sites suggested by the community, we have expanded the search area from 1km to 2.5km from the Haggs Adit and will include sites that require the mine water to be pumped to them.

As detailed above, there will be an opportunity for anyone with an interest to suggest other sites and we will include them in the evaluation process.

**Point 3: Proposed size of ponds**
We want to make the ponds as small as is possible to do the job of cleaning up the polluted mine water.

We have carried out further flow monitoring of the Haggs mine water over the summer and flows have been a little lower than previously. However, we are continuing to monitor through this winter when flows are likely to be higher. We will use all relevant data when deciding how large the treatment ponds need to be and will provide updates by the second engagement event (Feb/Mar 2017) and as we develop the design.

While we may not be able to reduce the overall size needed to be effective, we do have the opportunity to change the pond arrangement, shape, and general ‘look’ of ponds and what goes around them to help minimise any visual impact. This potential to modify the layout and location of the scheme will be a key part of the future consultation activity.

**Point 4: Additional information on how this fits into wider proposals**
Metal mines played a major part in our history. Now abandoned mines pollute our rivers, harming fish and insects as well as tourism and other industries. These mines contribute up to half the metals like cadmium, lead, zinc and copper, found in our rivers, streams and lakes. In England up to 1,500km of rivers are polluted.

Today it would be illegal to leave pollution on this scale when mines close. Operators have to comply with all current legislation which means they can’t allow their mine water to pollute rivers, streams, lakes or groundwater. And when they come to close the mine, they will be liable for the costs of cleaning up any pollution that occurs once the mine is abandoned.

However, most mines were abandoned many decades ago before the current laws came into place. Until 31 December 1999, mine operators could abandon a mine without notifying anyone or taking responsibility for permitting water from the mine to enter into rivers, streams, lakes or groundwater. The operators could be found guilty of causing pollution but due to complexities of
history, underground connections and mine ownership it was difficult to prove that the act of abandoning the mine caused the pollution. Because of this there has only been one successful prosecution for causing pollution from an abandoned mine in Britain. This was for a case in Scotland in 1981.

That is why the government set up the ‘Water and Abandoned Metal Mines’ programme providing funding for the Environment Agency and the Coal Authority to clean up polluted metal mines.

The first scheme in this programme was developed at Force Crag in the Lake District National Park and has been working since 2014. Across England we think that about 100 schemes are needed.

Our aims are:-

- Better, cleaner rivers for current and future generations
- More wildlife for people to enjoy
- More tourism and opportunities for industry which rely on clean rivers
- Writing the next chapter in the mining story

The polluted water from historic mines is harming wildlife in the River Nent and impacts water quality all the way down to the mouth of the Tyne. Around half of the metal pollution entering the Tyne comes from the Nent.

That is why we are giving priority to schemes in the area, as the metal pollution from these mines is amongst the worst in the country.

The Environment Agency has already published the following datasets on mining wastes and pollution from abandoned metal mines in England either on https://data.gov.uk or gov.uk and is planning to publish an outline summary of its 2015-2021 WAMM programme on its webpages in the next few weeks.

Water bodies impacted by pollution from abandoned metal mines
List of water bodies with significant failures of environmental quality standards for metals (cadmium, lead, nickel, copper, zinc and/or iron) that have been attributed to abandoned metal mines in England. Each water body has been allocated a score based on the magnitude of the problem and the impacts on ecology and groundwater. The hyperlink opens a page on data.gov.uk where you can open or download a spreadsheet by clicking on “Link” under Data Resources. The spreadsheet contains three pages of data plus a page of explanatory notes.

Discharges to rivers from abandoned metal mines
Information about average flows and water quality for known mine water discharges from abandoned metal mines in England. The hyperlink opens a page on data.gov.uk where you can open or download a spreadsheet by clicking on “Link” under Data Resources. The spreadsheet contains one page of data plus a page of explanatory notes.

Inventory of Closed Mining Waste Facilities
This lists 97 abandoned metal mine waste facilities in England causing “serious environmental harm” as they pollute at least 500 metres of rivers. Of these, one is also listed due to impacts on human health (Wheal Maid, Cornwall) and one due to instability (BarneyCraig Mine, River West Allen, Northumberland). The hyperlink opens a page on .gov.uk where you can open or download the pdf report (35 pages).

Next steps
We are making a fresh start with this project proposal and want to inform and consult stakeholders including local residents throughout the process.

We are opening up communication with an initial meeting focused on the Haggs scheme on 1 November, and will follow this with a number of consultation sessions as our thinking progresses. Side by side with this we are looking at another possible scheme focused on the Caplecleugh and Rampgill adits at Nenthead. We also continue to monitor other discharges in the local area. We aim to finalise the details of the preferred site in Autumn 2017.

For further information, please visit https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/the-coal-authority or you can contact us via email nenthaggs@coal.gov.uk