Proposed mine water treatment schemes for discharges in Nenthead and Nentsberry.

Feedback report on the public participation events held on 31 October and 1 November 2016.

The Coal Authority (CA) and Environment Agency (EA) held two public participation events to further the consultation process on mine water treatment schemes required to treat the mine water discharges in Nenthead and Nentsberry. They were facilitated by Wilson Sherriff, an independent firm of stakeholder engagement and facilitation specialists.

These events were designed to update the public on the proposed consultation process and to enable people to get involved in shaping the development of proposed schemes. The events were widely advertised using the Gov.uk website, letters to local residents, posters and notices in public spaces, local newspaper advertising and editorial and social media.

Feedback at the events was collected through a variety of methods including evaluation questionnaires, comments made to the team during conversations in the afternoon drop in sessions, and with comments written on flip charts by the facilitators at the evening sessions.

Afternoon and evening events were held in two venues as follows:

At Nenthead Village Hall, 31 October 2016

In total 21 people attended the afternoon open house session and 16 people attended the evening session. Nine people attended both sessions.

Eighteen feedback forms were received in total - 2 people who had attended both sessions, submitted a single feedback form.
At Nent Hall Hotel, 1 November 2016

In total 17 people attended the afternoon open house session and 11 people attended the evening session.

Four feedback forms were received in total - 3 people who had attended both sessions, submitted a single feedback form.

**Topic of the events**

“We wanted to talk to the community about the need for mine water treatment schemes in the area and the scope of the decisions to be made. We wanted the community's views on how we could work with the public to identify the site selection criteria which would reflect the environmental, social and economic values to be considered in generating and evaluating mine water treatment site options.”

This topic was chosen as it forms the first step of the decision making process and the feedback from the events will shape the remainder of the public participation programme.

Through display boards, maps and the attendance of experts from each organisation, information was available and discussions were held on:

- the need for mine water treatment
- a new range of site options and how these would be evaluated
- what was important to residents and businesses
- how people could be involved in the process of identifying appropriate solutions

The CA and EA team were keen to let people know that these meetings represented a new start to working with the community to find an acceptable way of treating polluted mine water, from concept through to operation. This involves the clear presentation of information and a genuine opportunity for all the community to have their say.

**Setting the scene**

The afternoon drop in sessions were planned as an open discussion session for individuals to access and discuss any of the information available and a number of one to one discussions took place with the team members.

The project team opened the evening workshop events by giving an overview of why the mine water treatment discharges need to be treated, the indicative programme for development and construction, and how the public could get involved in the decision making process.
The evening workshops were then split into 3 key sessions:

- general discussion: about the need for a mine water treatment scheme and the treatment technology
- site evaluation criteria: the process used to identify and evaluate potential sites
- consultation process: how would people prefer to get involved?

A full record of each of these consultation events can be found at: https://www.gov.uk/topic/coal/water-management

**Summary of the themes discussed**

Numerous viewpoints were expressed but the following points were most frequently raised:

- that there should be no detrimental effect on the local population e.g. on health, on finances, on safety

- impact on the community; impact on tourism; impact on businesses; air pollution.

- proximity to houses, businesses; visual impact – for example this is an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty best enjoyed on foot or bicycle; odour from the treatment process; the mine water treatment ponds have a large ‘footprint’ for the amount of water treated

- the worry is that "our [the public] input" is still just an exercise and the original site will go ahead despite our objections

**What’s happening now?**

Having listened to all of the comments during the consultation the project team are doing the following:

- revising the site evaluation criteria and scoring method for the long list. This will be published via the gov.uk website before the end of 2016
- producing a new “long list” of sites to evaluate and bring for discussion in early 2017 (probably in March).
- resolving questions raised on any technical issues by having discussions with those who raised them
Several summary reports will also be produced, including:

- a non-technical summary on the evaluation of the different treatment options
- a position statement on the potential of the scheme to increase the midges
- a summary of the catchment characterisation studies detailing the significance of each identified discharge to the water quality of the River Nent
- a summary of the environmental and economic benefits of cleaning up the River Nent and River South Tyne
- a report back on the recently commissioned peer review of the proposed odour control measures once it has been completed
- update on further technical work on the proposed size of the ponds
- a report on the “initial trial of odour control” at Force Crag in September

These will be uploaded onto our website and made available at the next open meetings.

In addition, we will:

- ensure that as many businesses as possible are contacted for consultation including notifying the Alston Moor Business Association
- extend the reach of consultation to include residents of Alston
- try to keep the core EA and CA project team representatives the same so that the community know who they are talking to
- have larger and easier to read maps
- publish a summary of these events on the Gov.uk web site

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