Consultation on the proposed mine water treatment schemes in Nentsberry

Summary of the consultation responses received in response to the proposed Haggs Site, September 2017

Introduction

This report provides a summary of the individual consultation responses received for the engagement event held on 21 and 22 September.

The opportunity to provide comments ran from 21 September to 6 October 2017. It started with a two-day ‘drop in’ style event, held on Thursday 21 September and Friday 22 September 2017 at Nenthead Village Hall. The events were staffed by personnel from both the Coal Authority and the Environment Agency, with comments and attendance recorded by Wilson Sherriff. Wilson Sherriff are the independent facilitation and engagement specialists engaged by the Coal Authority to support the engagement activities for the proposed mine water treatment schemes in Nenthead and Nentsberry.

This event focused solely on the proposed Haggs scheme, with proposals for the Caplecleugh scheme to be discussed separately.

Feedback forms were available to complete during the event or return via post or email. The feedback form was also made available on-line. Six responses were received to the consultation. Of these, five were submitted during the public drop-in sessions and one was submitted via email.

The public were also encouraged to provide additional observations, suggestions and to share their views. These comments were captured on post-it notes, either by members of the public or by members of the project team. The notes were left on display on flip charts.

54 people attended the drop in session over the two days.

Consultation Responses

This summary of responses includes the information from feedback forms received at the public drop in sessions or submitted electronically as well as any points that were captured on post its.

Question 1 - site selection

- The most suitable of options available
- Well thought out
- Plans seem to be OK. No objections
• Seems a sensible location, given that not many properties are nearby, it sits above
the flood plain, and due to the topography of the land, it should be possible to shield
it from being too visible.

Question 2 – Construction phase

• No comment
• Staged installation makes sense. Ensure road surface is reinstated correctly
• Some worry about traffic management, but not too much
• As per other comments, consideration needs to be given to any rights of way (Isaac’s
tea trail) in the vicinity. If remedial / repair works can be done to public rights of way
whilst plant and resource on site, that would be a direct benefit to the community at
very little overall cost to the scheme.

Question 3: which event did you attend?

Thursday: 4
Friday: 1

Question 4: How did you find out about the event?

All of those commenting said that they found out about the event by letter, with one also
citing ‘general knowledge of the project.

Question 5: How useful did you find the display materials?

Ratings out of 10 were as follows -
10 – 2
8 – 3

Question 6: Do you have any other comments?

• A689 – Galligill Junction is in very poor state of repair with pot holes and lying water.
  When main pipeline is being laid will the opportunity be taken to repair the road at
  the junction?
• No sign on gate – or not big enough
• Well presented

Question7: Postcode

Those who responded recorded the following home postcodes:

• CA9 3LQ
• CA9 3LZ
• CA9 3AG
• CA9 3LZ

Online response
An online response was received which did not follow the format of the feedback form. This is reproduced here.

_Feedback on Nent Haggs event of 22nd September_

_Firstly, I must state that I have no axe to grind. I do not live in the village, nor do I hold property there. I am broadly supportive of your aims, and indeed the methods by which you opt to satisfy them, but I do also have an objective view of the possible consequences._

_I’m afraid that this whole saga leaves a very unpleasant taste, and it seems to me that the people of Nenthead have been manipulated from start to finish in a cynical attempt to push through essentially untested technology in this landscape, with no benefit to the local population, only a series of potentially negative consequences, which the team summarily dismiss._

_Instead of public meetings, the ‘drop-in’ scenario has been used instead, as a cynical (and successful) attempt to divide and conquer._

_The shortlist of three sites struck me as incredibly manipulative: two appallingly-sited plants within metres of local dwellings and very close to Nenthead village, and a third, slightly less appalling site (although the owner of the Lovelady Hotel would disagree, I’m sure), the object of the exercise being that the populace will heave such a massive sigh of relief that the third has been chosen that they will back down lamb-like._

_Other potential sites, I see, have been dismissed (perhaps more remote from housing, needing more pumping, etc) for reasons of cost, but it is interesting to see how little any human cost is valued compared with the screaming voice of lucre._

_All concerns have been patronisingly dismissed with a wave of the hand, staggeringly without full evidence. It seems the little people have no voice in this whitewash exercise, only the mirage of a voice:_

1. _Hydrogen Sulphide: Beyond the awful smells, this is a dangerous, flammable, corrosive and pernicious substance, and I do not see any firm evidence that it will not be a problem to the local population and flora/fauna, only the vaguest, ‘Trust us, everything will be fine.’ Hydrogen sulphide is nefarious beyond its lingering odour, and you provide no guarantee as to residual H2S parts per million. None of your experts actually wishes to commit to how much H2S will remain following peroxide treatment (and there are no guarantees as to side-effects of that treatment either!). Perhaps they do not know. Perhaps they do know, but do not want us to know, because this is such a wonderful chance for a large scale field experiment with a couple of thousand guinea pigs. Well, Force Crag was the best opportunity for an experiment._

_I see nothing in the plan to assess both short and long-term ramifications of the H2S menace. I would like to see full health analyses of individuals before and after implementation of the plant, together with long-term monitoring for invidious personal effects of living within a potential poison cloud and possible genetic abnormality further_
down the line. I would also like to see contingency funds set up to compensate people for any health problems incurred as a direct consequence of the H2S residue. This would be in your interests as well as the interests of Nenthead residents, as it would head off the potential for Erin Brockovich-style litigation in the future, should events not transpire as innocently as you suggest.

2. Midge population: Again this concern was dismissed. ‘Don’t worry, it won’t be any worse.’ I could almost feel the pat on my head. Well, residents are right to be concerned about this, as all evidence points to the introduction of new ponds doing the exact opposite. Midges are an accepted nuisance in this part of the world in the summer months, but if this turns from ‘nuisance’ to ‘unbearable’ as a consequence of your intervention, why should locals suffer? What is your contingency plan: unlimited gratis Jungle Formula or do you have something else up your sleeve? So far, I see no proof of any consideration being given to this possibility. And where midges are mere nuisance to people, they can be vectors of disease to animals. There should be a fund to compensate farmers for negative consequences to stock as a result of any midge population explosion.

3. Financial impact: there is a strong likelihood of negative financial consequences should items 1) and 2) not play out as you have proposed. I see again that effects on tourism and house prices are both downplayed.

If holidaymakers no longer stop in the village or rent the cottages in Nenthead because of the smell/midges, it is villagers who will lose their livelihoods. Why should this not be considered? It is not unreasonable. There should be a guarantee against this consequence.

If there is a 50% drop in the value of assets such as houses, this is not NIMBYism, this is making it impossible for a local person to escape the situation that YOU have created, unable to move their family away from the source of the problem because the value of their home has dropped, and this entirely out of their control. I believe, again, that there should be a contingency fund to counter this. All residents should have their homes valued before implementation, and should they wish to move following completion of the plant, this valuation would be guaranteed, either by purchase or by topping up any decrease in the lower price that would have to be accepted as a result of the plant. This would be very easy to implement, and if you are to be believed (that there will be absolutely NO impact on house prices or livelihoods), then it would be at no cost to you whatsoever. Why would you NOT wish to enact this, in good faith?

This in an area of low and precarious employment. Why was it not possible, given the long lead time, to offer jobs connected to the plant to local people, and not simply cleaning or security? It should have been possible to train local people to be the management and maintenance team for the plant. I can only imagine that cost is the issue, that it is more expedient to save on expenditure than to offer the merest crumb to the people who will
actually have to live long-term with the consequences of the plant. It all comes back to money, doesn’t it? And I ask myself, ‘Is this going to be 2027’s Grenfell?’

The bottom line is: would YOU be happy to have this installation in YOUR back garden? Would you send your infant to a local school in the midst of the fallout from this plant? Strangely, not a single member of the spin team even gave the slightest impression that they would be agreeable.

I do not expect to see any of the things I have suggested happen, because it is my impression that this whole process and its outcome has been predetermined. This public consultation is a charade. If it is not, if all is going to be wonderful and sweet-smelling in the gardens of Nenthead, then it should not be a problem for you to commit to the contingencies I have outlined, because if the outcomes are all as you publicly state them, there should be no barrier to your providing any guarantees, as you would never have to pay out any of these penalties, never have to suffer any costs. I should then humbly withdraw all my objections. The only reason you would choose not to implement any contingency and indemnify the local population must surely be that there is something to hide, or you are not as sure of the outcome as your platitudes declare; all is not as you would have people believe. It is impossible to imagine otherwise.

In conclusion, I do not think that many people are totally opposed to the principle of the water treatment plants, and within that sphere, the Vertical Flow Ponds is a decent (if still in its embryonic phase) environmental solution. However, it is clear to me that the potential consequences have not been fully recognised on a site so close to human habitation, and further, that no contingency has been set up for compensation to locals in the event of a worst case scenario outcome.

It all reeks: Cheapest Option; Best Spin; Install the Site; Walk Away. Any problems thereafter: ‘Oh, sorry! We weren’t expecting that. Never mind.’

General Comments (From post-its)

- Isaacs tea trail – could you look at repairing the path and providing a proper access gate?
- If you’re going to build it (and I question if best use of taxpayers’ money) you’ve now chosen the best place.
- Please don’t close road completely and don’t divert us via Alston.
- Odour abatement – has been vague. Needs more details. What is the process? Design detail, equipment, method, and operation. Where has it been proven? Demonstration of effectiveness
- A fairly obvious thing to say but please, please, please, liaise with CCC regarding planned road closures for works as there are likely to be works taking place on the B6294 in the next 12 months!
- Definite feeling that expense and convenience are the primary drivers, rather than effects on local people who are simply collateral.
- How will you get a pipe across a river?
• Algal mat – what is it? How are you dealing with it?
• Put the discharge water into existing cundy next to wetlands rather than make a new ditch / bridge
• What are the benefits to the community? Why can’t you employ local people and businesses?
• I understand that there are no plans for compensation for local people to guard against decreases in property values. THIS IS WRONG. I am moving to this area and the presence of the ponds / odours immediately makes houses fall in value in my eyes, so local people WILL suffer in this respect.
• I’m surprised it’s on a lowland site. Still think it should be on an upland site.
• Caplecleugh – potential to use the site of the old tailings dam at no 23 as the location for a pumping station. Use Gudham Gill as pipe route. The pumping station could have a grassed route. Benefit: repairing the pollution leak.
• Staged installation makes sense.
• Design compensation scheme as contingency if odour and midge problems are worse than predicted. It is the village that must live with the fall out long term.
• For Caplecleugh: do not bring the pipework through the village i.e. not through the cobbles. Would meet strong objection. Council took 8 weeks instead of 3 to re-lay cobbles.
• Well thought out.
• Ensure road surface is reinstalled correctly.
• If take Tea Trail route for pipelines, there’s a shaft adjacent to river just upstream of Lovelady Shield (left bank)
• This is a good balance visually and environmentally.
• A good compromise.
• Clarification is needed as to how the pipeline is going to span the bridge at Nenthal. Under the river (i.e. not visible) is preferable, never mind the expense!
• Great idea from Andy about ensuring information boards are sited at the scheme, with a contact email and number for further info or problems
• Traffic – B6294 – make sure traffic isn’t blocked and retains visibility and is free flowing (accident black spot at Lovelady Shield)
• ‘we have very intelligent, professional people’. Why can’t there be a local working group to help devise a solution? Can’t this be thought about for future MWTS?
• Unconvinced that sulphide residue will be odourless. Need written guarantee with explicit penalty if odours still arise!
• Next information event: Details about actual operations.