

# **1. STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 Banks Mining attaches great importance on building and maintaining a constructive dialogue and relationship with the local communities that host their projects from the early stages of a project's development, right through to its conclusion. At Highthorn they have conducted an extensive range of consultation over a two year period using a variety of methods to inform, discuss and understand local people's interests, views and attitudes regarding the area and the Highthorn proposals.
- 1.2 The Banks Group's development with care approach is at the heart of the business and is a central part of the company's values. It enables members of the project team to understand the community's perceptions of a site in its local context, as well as any views that they have relating to the proposed development. The community is asked to participate in the design process and is given an opportunity to influence the design of the proposed development.
- 1.3 The development with care approach fits in with the Government's policies and expressions of best practice for developers. Banks Mining prides itself on exceeding the statutory requirements in this field and seeks to continually improve and update the methods of engagement to make sure local communities are informed and involved throughout all stages of developments.
- 1.4 Appendix 1 contains a number of documents relevant to this Statement of Community Involvement (SCI):
- Newsletter announcing Banks interest in Highthorn – July 2013
  - Newsletter, workshop invitation leaflet and exhibition leaflet distribution plan – July 2013, December 2014 and September 2015
  - Example of presentation given to parish councils – July 2013
  - Highthorn update letter – October 2013
  - Highthorn update letter – July 2014
  - Scoping Report update letter – December 2014
  - Workshop invitation newsletter – December 2014
  - Workshop 1-4 agendas and notes - January 2015 – June 2015
  - Enhancing your Landscape leaflet – January 2015
  - Example of school visit presentation – March 2015
  - Example of site visit feedback form – July 2015
  - Copy of news releases - July 2013 – August 2015
  - Highthorn website screenshot

- Exhibition Invitation newsletter – September 2015
- Exhibition panels – September 2015
- Exhibition photographs – September 2015
- Example of exhibition feedback form – September 2015

## HIGHTHORN PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

- 1.5 An important element of Banks Mining’s engagement process involves giving communities the opportunity to influence the design of the surface mines and the benefits that can come from the developments by identifying the social, economic and environmental improvements that could be delivered from Banks’ investment in their area.
- 1.6 Banks Mining employs a specialist development relations co-ordinator within the project team whose task it is to identify and get in touch with a wide range of local people, develop a dialogue with those people and ensure their opinions are taken into account. This information is then fed back to the project team. Since the project was launched, representatives of Banks Mining have met with nearly 1,000 people, who live around or are interested in the Highthorn surface mine.

<b>COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN NUMBERS</b>	
<b>Spoken to</b>	<b>Just under 1,000 people</b>
<b>Delivered</b>	<b>13,500 leaflets</b>
<b>Posted</b>	<b>Just over 1900 letters</b>
<b>Released</b>	<b>22 newspaper articles</b>
<b>Attended</b>	<b>10 Parish council meetings</b>
<b>Supported</b>	<b>at least 15 local initiatives</b>
<b>Held</b>	<b>Four community workshops</b>
<b>Hosted</b>	<b>13 site visits</b>
<b>Presented to</b>	<b>11 schools/youth groups</b>
<b>Hosted</b>	<b>stall at one local event</b>

Figure 1 – Community Engagement

- 1.7 Banks Mining has used a range of measures to ensure that a diverse and representative number of people in the community are contacted, including, but not limited to:
- One-to-one meetings
  - Email, website and social media

- News Releases in local print and broadcast media
- Letters
- Newsletters
- Presentations to local groups, schools and parish councils
- Attendance at local events such as fêtes and sporting events
- Community workshops and
- Site visits to operational surface mines and restored sites

1.8 Once the planning application has been submitted, discussions will continue with local people throughout the planning determination period, and if successful throughout the development's operational period. At Banks Mining, there is no deadline or completion date for good communication and engagement.

1.9 This statement summarises the dialogue between Banks and the local community; it looks at the priorities of each of those people and groups who expressed a view and demonstrates how these issues have been addressed and where possible have been included within the Highthorn surface mine proposal.

### **WHO HAVE BANKS MINING SPOKEN TO AND WHAT WERE THEIR PRIORITIES?**

#### **PROJECT ANNOUNCED IN JULY 2013**

1.10 The initial proposals for Highthorn were publicly announced over two years ago on 16<sup>th</sup> July 2013. The dialogue was commenced at an early stage in the project's development process, as a result of discussions held with the local community during the Ferneybeds surface mine design workshops requesting to be informed as soon as Banks Mining develops an interest in a new surface mine proposal. By starting the dialogue at such an early stage, it provided an opportunity to consult at all stages of the project and to work with the local community to shape the project and its benefits to ensure that all views of local people were considered.

1.11 This process involved the distribution of a leaflet and questionnaire (see Newsletter announcing Banks interest in Highthorn – July 2013) to approximately 4500 homes, which is an estimated 10,000 individuals, inviting local people to share their views on Banks Mining's initial proposals (figure 2 shows map of initial proposals). Due to the early stage of the surface mine's development, the area of interest covered a larger area than the proposals now being submitted; allowing the project team to assess the areas considered most sensitive by the local communities and the benefits that local people wanted to see delivered if the development proceeded.

1.12 Of the 10,000 potential recipients, only 113 formal questionnaire responses were received from the local community expressing their initial opinions and indicating whether they wished to be kept up to date with the proposals.

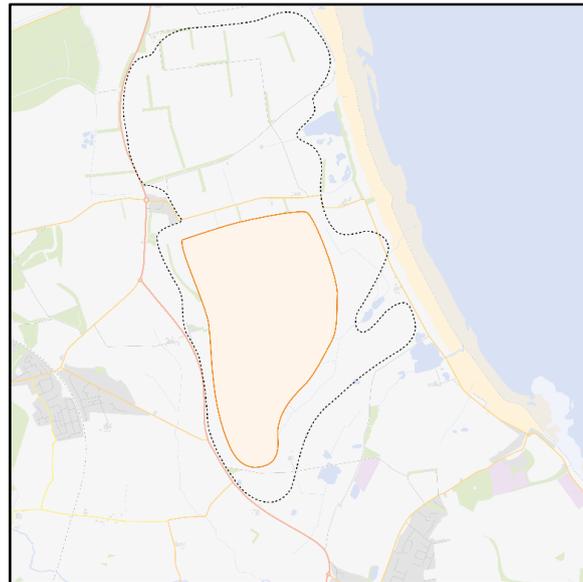


Figure 2 – Map of initial proposals

1.13 The leaflet asked individuals if they wished to take part in the community workshops. Feedback from the Ferneybeds planning process indicated the community found the workshops useful, informative and locals had appreciated the changes their involvement in the design process resulted in. Of those who replied, 30 people indicated that they would like to take part in the workshops with the remaining 83 asking to be kept informed of progress. The leaflet also asked what new facilities local people would most like to see in the area and how Banks could support and help people into work or training.

1.14 Based on the responses received, the feeling towards the Highthorn proposal has been interpreted below:

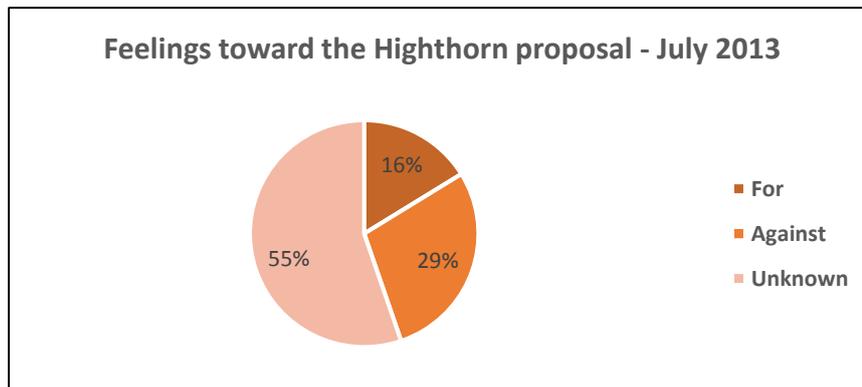


Figure 3 – Chart showing feelings towards the Highthorn proposal July 2013

Some comments received include:

*"I rate all opencast mining companies the same as those who build wind farms – detest them"*

*"Low opinion at present. We have wind farms, sand extraction and have had opencast for decades. Enough. We even had more than our fair share during foot and mouth (burial and pyres). Enough."*

*"You seem to be a caring company with the environment and population in mind as well as profit making."*

*"Having lived in an 'opencast' area for 68 years and observed the various companies I think the restoration work carried out by Banks is 1st class. In fact some areas are better now than prior to the opencast work."*

1.15 59 of the questionnaire responses made suggestions of what they would like to see within their area as analysed below:

<b><u>SUGGESTED IMPROVEMENT</u></b>	<b><u>PERCENTAGE</u></b>
<b>Improved access including disabled access</b>	8%
<b>Improved and new footpaths</b>	17%
<b>Improved and new cycle ways</b>	17%
<b>Improved and new wildlife habitats/nature reserves</b>	22%
<b>Better facilities</b>	10%
<b>Play area</b>	17%

Figure 4 – Table showing suggested improvements July 2013

1.16 36 respondents felt that Highthorn would support and provide jobs for the area. There was clear evidence that local people were keen to see the project deliver apprenticeships and support for individuals who wish to seek employment in other sectors.

## PRIORITIES IDENTIFIED

- Good quality jobs and apprenticeships
- Improved access
- New and improved footpaths, bridleways and cycle paths
- New and improved wildlife habitats

## CORRESPONDENCE

- 1.17 In order to ensure that local people were informed on the progress of the Highthorn proposals, Banks Mining corresponded directly with individuals using letters, email, telephone conversations and home visits.
- 1.18 Update letters were distributed, to those who had asked to be kept up to date, informing of amendments to the proposals, submission of the scoping report and workshop related documentation i.e. agenda and notes.
- 1.19 Following the initial feedback and conclusion of the early site investigation works, an update was issued in October 2013 to local households which informed them that the area of interest had been reduced by 298ha following their feedback, and highlighted that a buffer zone had been introduced around the site with the intention of maximising distances from the site to local households, communities and sensitive areas such as nature reserves. Figure 5 shows the updated area of interest which accompanied the letter.
- 1.20 Some local people preferred corresponding through email, which allows for a continuous dialogue.

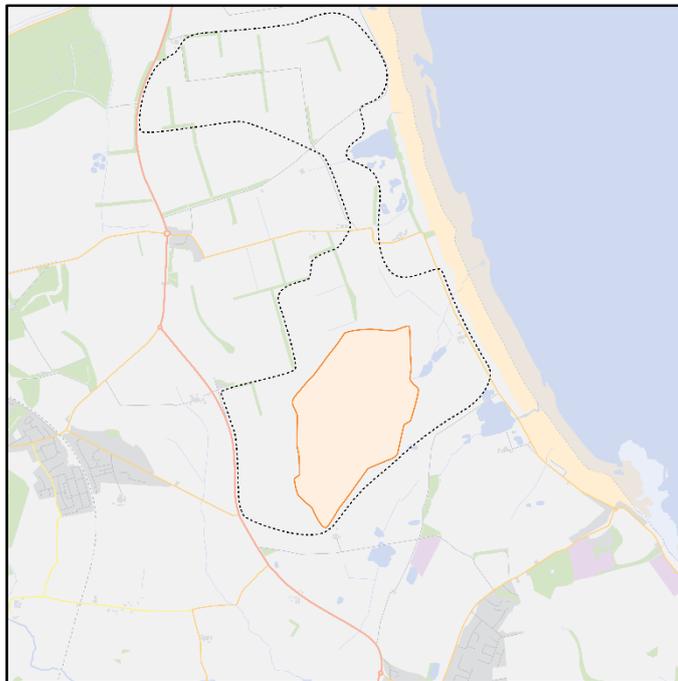


Figure 5 – Updated map of proposals October 2013

- 1.21 Similarly, some people preferred contacting Banks Mining by telephone in order to ask questions and learn more about the proposals.
- 1.22 Banks Mining proactively visited properties in close proximity to the site boundary, in order to inform them of the proposals and the submission of the scoping report. The Banks Mining team will be revisiting all those properties on submission of the planning application, to inform the closest residents of their proposals. Additionally, some residents requested to meet with members of the Banks Mining team to better understand the proposals, to which a date was set and individual meetings were held at locations and times to suit the resident.
- 1.23 Primarily, those who corresponded with Banks Mining were seeking additional understanding, or clarification on a particular point, on the proposals or they were requesting details on meetings or events to discuss the proposals.
- 1.24 Several local residents raised concerns about the size of the site and also the proximity to the houses at Druridge, to Widdrington Village and to the beach. There were also concerns raised about the crossing on the C116 at Druridge. In response to this, Banks Mining reduced the size of the site by 518 ha, which no longer required a crossing on the C116 and also moved away from Druridge, Widdrington Village and the beach.

#### **CORRESPONDENCE PRIORITIES**

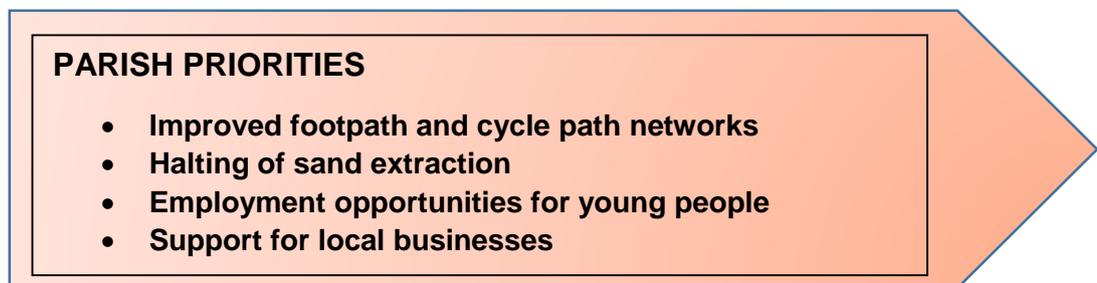
- **Deeper understanding of the proposals**
- **Details on meetings/events**
- **Size of the site**
- **Proximity to Druridge, Widdrington Village and the beach**
- **Crossing the C116 road**

#### **PARISH COUNCILS**

- 1.25 Presentations were given to numerous parish councils located nearby to the Highthorn proposal. The presentation aimed to inform them of the initial proposals and provide an opportunity for discussions on the potential benefits. The parish councils presented to included:
- Widdrington
  - Ellington and Linton
  - Cresswell
  - Widdrington Station and Stobswood
  - Hauxley
  - Lynemouth
  - Amble Town Council

1.26 Further to the direct discussions with the local parish councils, a review of the formal plans and proposals published by a number of the local parishes included the following feedback and suggestions:

- Widdrington Station & Stobswood Local Plan 2011 outlined a number of fundamental priorities for the parish, which included extending the network of footpaths and cycle paths in the area, for local people of all ages and ability including the needs of disabled people.
- In a recent Cresswell parish newsletter, congestion and car parking during peak periods was raised as a concern along with the recently submitted Renewal of Minerals Permission for the continuation of sand extraction at Hemscoth Hill.
- Other priorities that have been discussed with the remaining parishes include the need to support local businesses, providing better facilities for local people, improvements to the access network to the coast and employment opportunities for local people.



**PARISH PRIORITIES**

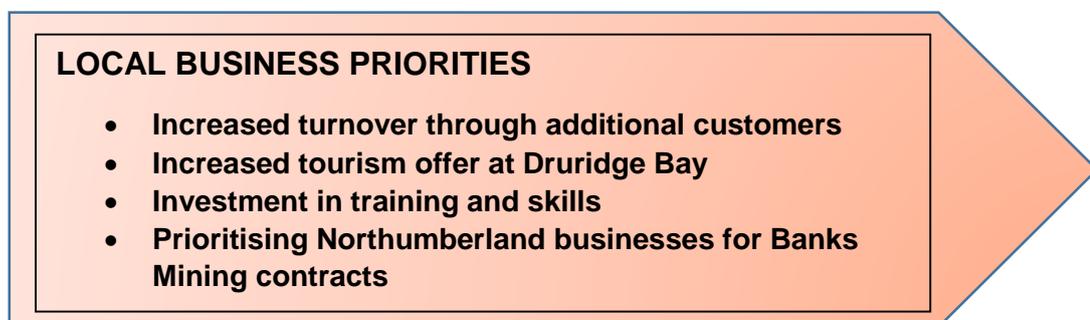
- **Improved footpath and cycle path networks**
- **Halting of sand extraction**
- **Employment opportunities for young people**
- **Support for local businesses**

## LOCAL BUSINESSES

1.27 An important part of the Banks Mining community engagement strategy is to hold and maintain a dialogue with all members of the community, and local businesses are an important element of a community. Therefore efforts have been made to meet with local businesses to discuss the Highthorn proposals and to ascertain any aspirations they have that may be achievable through, or in part, by the proposed Highthorn surface mine. Meetings have been held with:

- The Drift Café, who were concerned about the environmental impacts of a surface mine. The owners are also firmly opposed to the sand extraction at Hemscoth Hill; and have written to the planning authority to raise their objections.
- The Country Barn Café, who are keen to see more people visit the café and shop.
- Woodhorn Museum, who would like to increase visitor numbers at the museum.
- Ellington Caravan Park, who are concerned about the impact it might have on their business.
- Druridge Bay Country Park, which is keen to expand the capacity of the park in terms of facilities i.e. toilets/showers and also looking into the possibility of camping facilities within the site, in order to improve the tourism potential of the local area

- 1.28 Banks Mining currently invests £35m in the north east economy every year and as such, plays a key role in the continuation and creation of employment, both directly and indirectly through this supply chain. Banks Mining team members have met with suppliers and businesses that may have the opportunity to become suppliers, in order to understand their businesses, to assist them in joining Banks' procurement list and also to understand their priorities.
- 1.29 Feedback from local businesses have resulted in the following observations and feedback regarding benefits and restoration suggestions:
- Local businesses are keen to see additional foot fall, in order to increase customer numbers and improve the sustainability of their business.
  - The tourism offer should be improved to encourage more people to visit the area and their business.
  - Existing and new suppliers are keen to see further local investment in order to new gain contracts, continue employing staff and where possible see growth.
  - Local businesses and suppliers are keen to see funding invested in providing training and skills in both their own areas and other sectors more generally within the north east region.
  - Businesses who have not been contracted by Banks Mining, but could in the future, are keen to learn of future contract opportunities for which they could tender. These organisations would like to see Banks Mining prioritise awarding contracts to north east and Northumberland businesses to ensure benefits remain local.



## SCOPING REPORT CONSULTATION

- 1.30 Following the submission of the Highthorn scoping report to Northumberland County Council in December 2014, a letter was sent to all local people, businesses and organisations that wanted to be kept up to date, informing them that the scoping report was available to read online at [www.banksgroup.co.uk/highthorn/project-details/scoping-report/](http://www.banksgroup.co.uk/highthorn/project-details/scoping-report/); and also inform them of the extended consultation period for submissions regarding the scoping report.
- 1.31 In addition to this, the development relations coordinator spent a day visiting properties closest to the site location in order to provide them with a CD copy of the scoping report to aid their review of the report. Where requested paper copies were distributed.

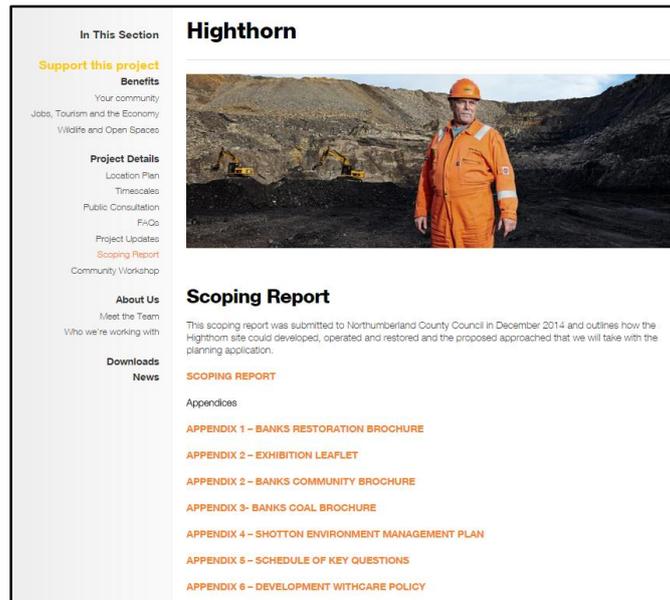


Figure 6 – Scoping report webpage screenshot

1.32 In response to the scoping report, Banks Mining received sixteen comments from statutory consultees and interested organisations, as well as two comments from the local community. The comments from the members of the community were primarily in relation to noise, dust and light pollution; visual impact from the dunes; traffic movements; and restoration. All of these topics were covered in detail during the community workshops, which you will find more detail from pages 11-18.

**SCOPING REPORT PRIORITIES**

- **Environmental impacts**
- **Visual impact from dunes**
- **Traffic movements**
- **Restoration**

## COMMUNITY EVENTS

1.33 Banks Mining was invited to host a stall at Widdrington Station Summer Fair on a Saturday in May 2014. This event was a great opportunity to get a broader understanding of the views and priorities of a wider range of people in the local community.

A large percentage of those who attended were families with children, who, given their family and work commitments, are often not available to take part in traditional community engagement. By attending a local event at a time that suited a different group of the community, different suggestions and views on Highthorn were able to be gathered.

Suggestions provided focussed primarily on activities and facilities for young people and children. Additionally, most people spoken to were really keen to see new jobs and training opportunities in the local area.

1.34 In order to show their commitment to the local community, Banks Mining sponsored the popular Druridge Bay 10km run, for the second year running, and entered a team of runners to raise money for a North East charity, Integrating Children.

Throughout the event many of the Banks Mining runners received positive comments from spectators and other runners about how surprised and pleased they were to see Banks Mining taking such an active part in the local community.

1.35 ATAC is one of the social hubs in Widdrington Station used by many local residents with numerous events being held such as a Bacon Butty morning, which is held every Wednesday. This is an example of how local events have provided an informative yet informal forum for engaging with the local residents over the proposals, answering questions, listening to feedback and understanding priorities.

1.36 Banks Mining has met with CELL (Cresswell, Ellington, Linton & Lynemouth) Big local, which is a Steering Group made up of local people from across the villages who will deliver a series of improvements to the local area through lottery funding.

These meetings have aided Banks Mining in gaining an understanding of the local priorities and some examples include:

- a) Providing reliable and suitable transport options
- b) Increase in the quality of employment in the area
- c) Ensuring the green and street environment is appreciated, enjoyed and cared for
- d) Providing young people with a positive and engaging future
- e) Reducing inequalities in the community
- f) Strengthening the community



**COMMUNITY EVENT PRIORITIES**

- **Jobs and training opportunities**
- **Activities and facilities for young people**
- **Ensuring the green environment is appreciated**

## **COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS**

1.37 Following the success of the community design workshops held during Banks Mining's Ferneybeds surface mine scheme and following the initial responses from the community questionnaire, the Highborn project team were keen to conduct a similar exercise.

1.38 An invite to attend the community workshops was posted to the local community and advertised through press release and the Banks Group website in December 2014. A detailed copy of this can be found at the back of the Statement of Community Involvement.

1.39 Approximately 4500 leaflets were sent to every household, business, parish council and local authority representative in the local area inviting them to attend a series of local meetings.

1.40 The invitation stated:

*We want to find out what environmental, economic and social community benefits might be delivered in association with the Highthorn development if it proceeds. The workshops will be chaired by Mary Coyle, an independent facilitator, to enable open and productive discussion. We would like to invite you to attend a series of workshops, so if you wish to take part, please register your interest by contacting Jeannie Kilty.*

1.41 It was made clear that the aim of these workshops was to create a forum to meet, discuss and debate Banks' proposals and would give the community a real opportunity to influence and shape the project and subsequent restoration of the site as well as the benefits which would be delivered alongside the proposal.

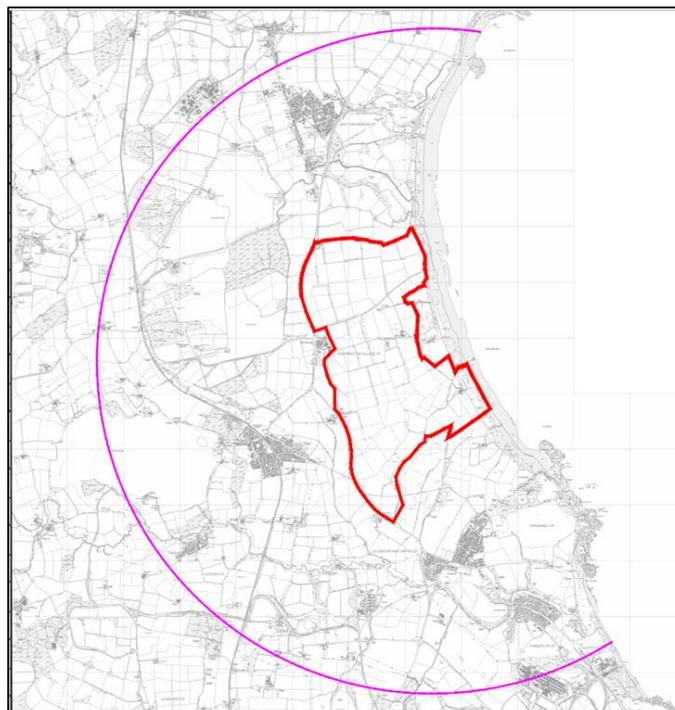


Figure 6 – Leaflet distribution area

1.42 To ensure that participants felt able to express their points of view, Mary Coyle MBE, who facilitated the Ferneybeds community design panels, was appointed as an independent facilitator. Mary has spent most of her career in the voluntary sector, including a crime prevention charity and a leadership development organisation that enables leaders from all sectors to become active citizens in civil society. Using her facilitation skills, she has developed a portfolio of non-executive positions and other trustee and board positions in various organisations, largely due to her advanced communication and enablement skills, which greatly assisted the running of the workshops.

## COMMUNITY WORKSHOP 1 - 19<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2015

- 1.43 The first community workshop was held on Monday 19th January 2015 at Widdrington Station Community Centre and 109 members of the public attended.
- 1.44 Attendees were asked to rate their views (on a scale of 1 -10, where 1 is completely disagree and 10 is completely agree) on the following statement: *'I believe involving local people at an early stage, and throughout the development of the Highthorn Surface Coal Mine will result in a positive outcome for everyone.'*
- 1.45 There were varied responses to this statement, but the majority agreed that involving local people can achieve positive outcomes for everyone with marks in the 6-10 category. There were however, some exceptions to this statement.
- 1.46 A group discussion was then held asking a series of key questions:
- a) What do you most want to achieve from the workshops?
  - b) What do you want to discuss in future workshops?
  - c) What standards do you expect from Banks Mining and from each other and what are your expectations for the workshops?
  - d) What has been your previous experience of surface mining activity?
- 1.47 The detailed responses to these questions can be found at the back of the Statement of Community Involvement.; however the key points raised were:

<b>TOPICS RAISED BY AUDIENCE</b>		
Honesty from Banks	Need for coal	Size of the site
Jobs and training opportunities	Impact of surface mining on the health of local people and the tourism industry	Environmental and traffic impacts of the proposals

## OUR RESPONSE

- a) Amended proposals by:
  - Reducing the size of the site by 460 hectares
  - Increased distance from Widdrington Village and local priorities
  - No longer crosses the C116
- b) Organised additional workshops, which focussed on:
  - Site details; the need for coal; and the planning process
  - Environmental and health impacts; and the impacts of additional transport
  - Ecology; and landscape & visual impacts
  - The social, economic and environmental benefits local people would like to see delivered.
- c) Started a Frequently Asked Questions page on the website to provide detailed responses to questions raised.

### COMMUNITY WORKSHOP 2 – 9TH FEBRUARY 2015

- 1.48 The second community workshop was held on Monday 9th February 2015 at Widdrington Station Community Centre and 81 members of the public attended.
- 1.49 A main focus of the workshop was to provide up to date details on the site design. The presentation explained why the Highthorn location was selected; the development and progress of the area of interest since the launch of the project; and presented the most up to date plans including the reduction in site size (as per Figure 7. The presentation outlined indicative phasing plans demonstrating how the site could work over the lifetime of the project.

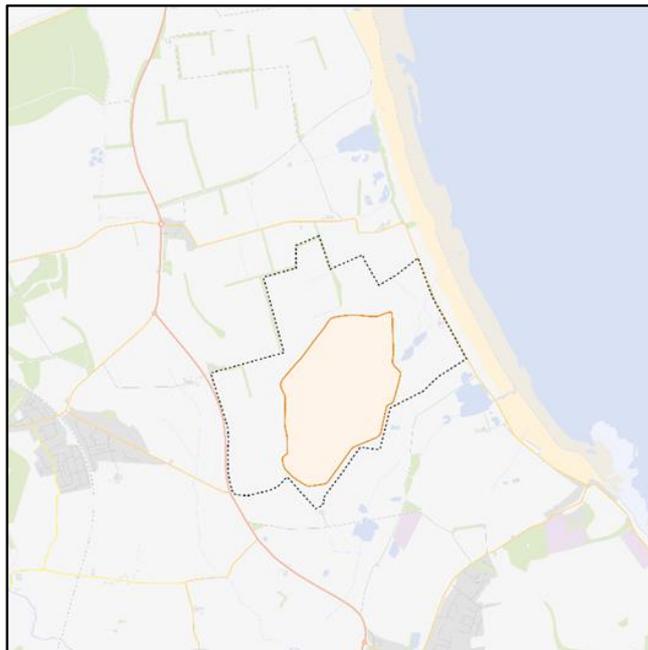


Figure 7 – Updated site proposals February 2015

- 1.50 Feedback was received from attendees during the presentation with the general feeling of the audience being that they were pleased the site had reduced in size and also that their questions were answered comprehensively by the presenter.

<b>SITE DETAILS - TOPICS RAISED BY AUDIENCE</b>		
Possible extensions	24hr working	Progressive restoration
Traffic movements	Blasting	Depth of the surface mine

- 1.51 Another presentation looked at the need for coal in the UK and whether coal is still necessary for our energy needs.

- 1.52 The presentation discussed the importance of coal within the current energy mix for the UK, highlighting coal still provides over 30% of our energy needs, the use of coal and the importance of indigenous coal for the economy and energy security.

<b>NEED FOR COAL - TOPICS RAISED BY AUDIENCE</b>		
Coals role within the electricity generation market	Type of restoration Banks have completed	Long term future of coal
How long coal fired power stations will continue?	Impact of coal price on the commercial viability of the site	Banks' apprenticeship scheme

- 1.53 Following the requests for more information on the planning process, a presentation was given that looked at the planning system, the progress of the Highborn proposal, planning application preparation, and the planning submission and determination process.

<b>PLANNING PROCESS - TOPICS RAISED BY AUDIENCE</b>		
Additional bodies to consult on the scoping report	Banks' approach of consultation	Timescale of the planning application submission

- 1.54 Comprehensive notes of this workshop can be found at the back of the Statement of Community Involvement.

### **COMMUNITY WORKSHOP 3 – 8<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 2015**

- 1.55 The third community workshop as held on Wednesday 8th April 2015 at Lynemouth Miners Welfare Institute and 70 members of the public attended. The venue and day of the meeting was varied in an effort to accommodate the large number of people who wished to attend the workshops.

- 1.56 The focus of this workshop was environmental management, health issues and transport. The presentation on environmental management ran through the significant number of surveys undertaken, the environmental controls on an operational site and the monitoring and compliance of an operational site.

1.57 During the first workshop several local people raised concerns about the health impacts of living next to a surface mine and in response to this a presentation focussed on the fact that “it is most unlikely that open cast sites would have any long-term effects on the health of local communities”. The presentation also looked at all the management controls used to manage sites in a safe, responsible and efficient manner. Following the presentations questions were raised with regard to:

<b>ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGAEMENT/HEALTH TOPICS RAISED BY AUDIENCE</b>		
Light pollution and impact on dark skies	Recording of particulate matter	Standard of monitoring
Health implications of surface mining on children	Noise levels, if 24r working	Noise impact on wildlife
Impact of dust at Druridge and Cresswell	Impact on tourism	Restoration of land

1.58 The final part of the workshop looked at possible routes for the coal to be transported to, potential heavy goods vehicle (HGV) numbers and also the excellent safety record of Banks HGVs.

<b>TRAFFIC MOVEMENTS - TOPICS RAISED BY AUDIENCE</b>		
Monitoring of HGVs	Transport route	Risks to cyclists, cattle and livestock

**OUR RESPONSE**

- a) Banks Mining agreed to conduct additional air quality monitoring at Druridge and Cresswell prior to site commencement.
- b) Banks Mining will undertake a tourism report to look at the impact of Highthorn on the tourism industry.
- c) The Committee on the Medical Effects of Air Pollutants (COMEAP) report stated “it is most unlikely that open cast sites would have any long-term effects on the health of local communities.”

1.59 Comprehensive notes of this workshop can be found at the back of this Statement of Community Involvement.

**COMMUNITY WORKSHOP 4 – 3<sup>RD</sup> JUNE 2015**

1.60 The fourth community workshop was held on Wednesday 3rd June 2015 at Lynemouth Miners Welfare Institute and 50 members of the public attended.

1.61 This workshop focussed on ecology, landscape impact and benefits which could be delivered at Highthorn.

1.62 The ecology consultant highlighted the extensive amount of surveys conducted in the preparation of the planning application and the main findings from these surveys.

<b>ECOLOGY - TOPICS RAISED BY AUDIENCE</b>		
Details on surveying techniques	Guarantee of improved ecological value after site completed	Length of rehabilitation for wildlife

1.63 Banks' Landscape Architect discussed the landscape visual impact assessment that had been undertaken, highlighting potential visuals of the site in operation.

<b>LANDSCAPE &amp; VISUAL IMPACT - TOPICS RAISED BY AUDIENCE</b>		
Impact on footpath from Houndalee to beach	Height of overburden mounds	Request for additional visual assessments

1.64 The final presentation looked at previous benefits delivered by Banks Mining, in order to encourage local people to provide ideas of what benefits they may wish to see delivered if Highborn were successful.

<b>BENEFITS SUGGESTIONS</b>		
Improvements to the C110 coast road	Creating a heritage centre	Skilled job creation
Low key natural improvements	Training and apprenticeship opportunities	

**OUR RESPONSE**

- a) Additional landscape visualisations were agreed.
- b) A comprehensive benefits and restoration package developed meeting local priorities and needs.

1.65 Comprehensive notes of this workshop can be found at the back of this Statement of Community Involvement.

**COMMUNITY WORKSHOP SUMMARY**

1.66 As shown in figure 8 the numbers of attendees at the workshops reduced on an event by event basis, with 109 attending the first and less than half of that number attending the fourth workshop.

1.67 Based on the figures below and feedback from a number of attendees, the conclusion was that Banks had met their commitment to working with, and limiting the impact for, the local communities.

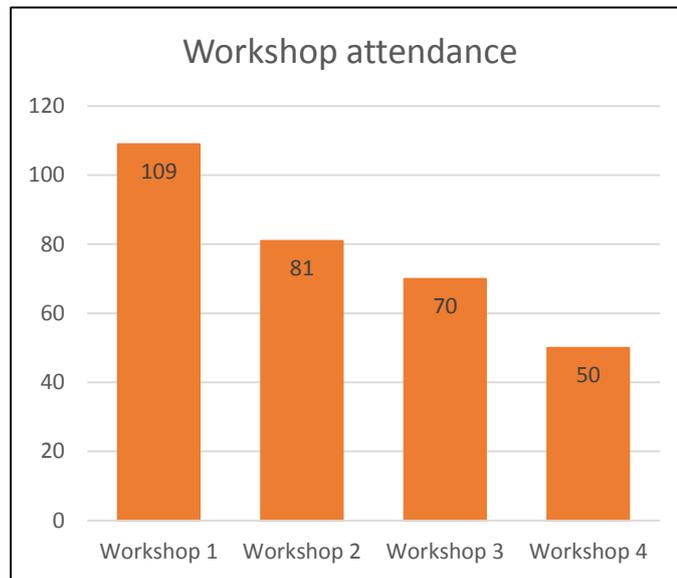


Figure 8 – Chart showing attendance at community workshops

1.68 Throughout the four workshops, attendees highlighted their priorities and also provided suggestions of improvements they would like Banks Mining to deliver.

A topic that was raised at all workshops was the diverse wildlife in the area and how local people would like to see that wildlife protected, but also how they would like to see the creation of new habitats in order to expand on the existing wildlife.

Many attendees were keen to see the creation of jobs for the local area, given the local levels of unemployment. Additionally, some attendees were eager to see valuable career opportunities for local young people, and so many were particularly interested in the creation of apprenticeships.

**WORKSHOP PRIORITIES**

- **Protection and improvement of the wildlife at Druridge Bay**
- **Skilled jobs and apprenticeships**
- **Maintaining high environmental standards**
- **Protecting the beach and dunes**

## SITE VISITS

1.69 At the conclusion of the fourth community workshop, attendees were invited to sign up for site visits to one of Banks Mining’s operational surface mines, Brenkley Lane. Brenkley Lane was selected as it is the closest operational surface mine Banks Mining operates, which will be similar in size to the Highthorn surface mine. Anyone who had made contact previously regarding Highthorn, attended one of our events or had expressed an interest were invited to the site visits. The purpose of the visits

were to give local people the opportunity to experience living and working nearby to an operational mine. The site visits were held on a weekday to provide people with a realistic view of a standard day on one of our surface mines.

1.70 Three site visits were held on consecutive days with a total of 10 attendees. The visit included the viewing of operations on Brenkley Lane surface mine with the site engineer, experiencing being close to the edge of a surface mine at a local shop and cafe, Banks Mining’s progressive restoration and two fully restored sites with the landscape manager.

1.71 Although somewhat disappointed with the number of those who signed up for the site visits, Banks Mining feel that this may be a further indication that local people’s concerns were being addressed sufficiently at the community workshops, and so they did not feel a site visit would add any value to their understanding of the Highthorn proposals. There remains an open invitation for further site visits to occur in the future should locals wish to learn more about surface mining and Banks Mining’s high operating standards.

1.72 Attendees were asked to leave their feedback regarding their expectations prior to the visit and their actual experience. A few of the comments can be found below:

*“I did not have any expectations before the visit other than to see a noisy dusty site. What a pleasure to be wrong.”*

*“The housekeeping on site seemed to me to be very good and the extraction of material was done in a very regimented and same manner.”*

*“It [the restoration] looked so natural and great care was taken”*

1.73 Those who attended the site visits were pleased with the minimal impact the site had on surrounding areas and also the high quality of restoration, particularly progressive restoration.

1.74 Residents were keen to see that progressive restoration was applied to the Highthorn proposal so that the landscape could be improved upon throughout the operation of the site.

**SITE VISIT PRIORITIES**

- **Maintaining high environmental standards**
- **Restoring the site to the standard of other Banks Mining restoration**
- **Incorporation of progressive restoration into Highthorn proposals**

## **CONSERVATION BODIES**

1.75 Meetings and workshops have been organised with conservation bodies to discuss the wildlife currently on and close to the proposed site and also opportunities to increase the diversity of wildlife in the local area.

- 1.76 A series of events were held, which brought together a number of representatives from groups and organisations that have a mandate and interest in the wildlife and ecology of Druridge Bay. These comprised the following attendees:
- a) Northumberland Wildlife Trust, who acted as chair for the events
  - b) Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
  - c) Northumberland County Council
  - d) National Trust
  - e) Natural England
  - f) Northumberland and Tyneside Bird Club
  - g) Northumbria University – Dr Mike Jeffries, who has been undertaking long term studies of the Warkworth Lane ponds

1.77 Please see Chapter 11 of the Planning Statement for more information.

## ONE TO ONE MEETINGS

1.78 Meetings have been held with several officers of Northumberland County Council to understand their views on the Highthorn proposal and also to appreciate their ambition for Northumberland. The intention is that by gaining an appreciation of the greater vision for the area, where appropriate, these ambitions can be developed with the support of the Highthorn proposal.

1.79 According to the Northumberland Tourism Destination Management Plan, tourism is the second most important employment sector in Northumberland, directly employing over 13,000 people vital to the economic wellbeing of the county. Following conversations with several council officers and members, Banks Mining was encouraged to look at the ‘Our Vision, Our Mission, Our Values, Our Priorities’ document (see figure 9) which outlines one of the County Council’s key priorities as improving the visitor offer and extending the tourism season to attract more visitors.

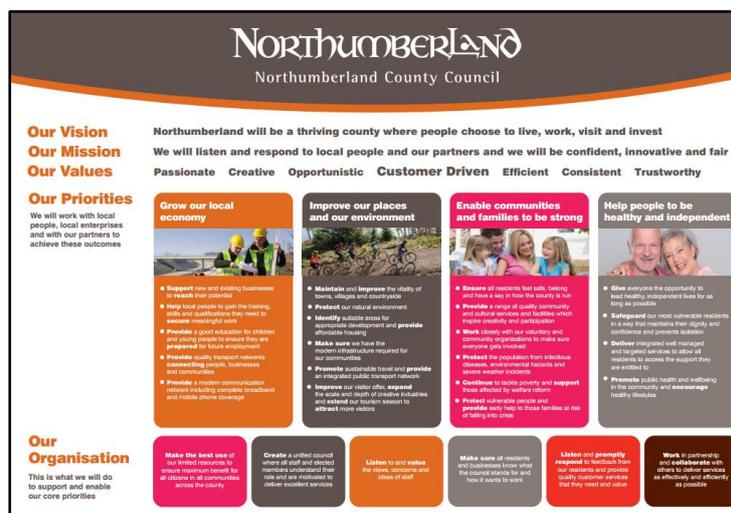


Figure 9 – Northumberland County Council “Our Vision, Our Mission, Our Values, Our Priorities” document

1.80 In terms of tourism, Banks Mining has met with representatives of Northumberland Tourism to discuss potential opportunities to improve the tourism offer in Northumberland.

Priorities for development and promotion that have been raised, in line with Northumberland Tourism's Destination Management Plan 2015-2020, include:

- Heritage
- Cycling and walking
- Nature based tourism
- Dark skies

1.81 Other priorities mentioned in the County Council's 'Our Vision, Our Mission, Our Values' document are growing the local economy by helping local people *"to gain the training, skills and qualifications they need to secure meaningful work"* and helping people to be healthy and independent by promoting public health and wellbeing and encouraging healthy lifestyles.

1.82 Banks Mining has continued their partnership with Northumberland College in order to further the personal development of Banks Mining apprentices, but also to help promote and achieve the College's aim to add value to the social, economic and physical well-being of the community by attracting, training and educating students successfully. Meetings have taken place to understand the limitations of accessing education and training in Northumberland, particularly in rural areas and near Highthorn. From these meetings, Banks Mining has learned that transport has been a particular barrier preventing people accessing training and education.

1.83 Regular presentations, meetings and attendance at careers fairs with Tomorrow's People, Hadston House has been invaluable for both Banks Mining and the young people that use the service. Tomorrow's People help disadvantaged adults and young people to get and keep a job. Banks Mining representatives have attended careers fairs, spoken to the young people about career opportunities in mining and have discussed the barriers that the young people face. Similar to conversations with the college, transport was raised by the charity as an issue for people in the local area. Also, availability of apprenticeships and opportunities with local employers is difficult. Therefore, the priority is seen to be helping young people into training and/or education.

1.84 Working in partnership with schools to give young people an opportunity to fully understand employment opportunities and an understanding of the skills employers are looking for is an essential part of our community strategy.

1.85 Banks Mining has hosted several school and youth group visits to their operational surface mine in Cramlington, Shotton, in order to demonstrate to the young people how Banks Mining operates including some of the mitigation methods used such as dust and noise suppression. Presentations were also given to the young people about mining operations and career opportunities within the surface mining industry. The schools and youth groups were keen to find out about employment and training opportunities.

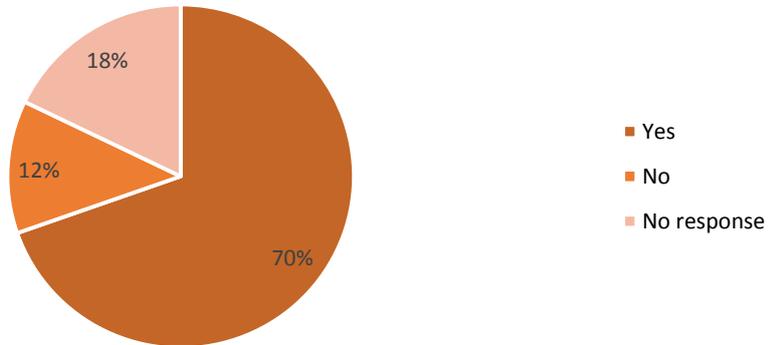
### **'ONE TO ONE' PRIORITIES**

- **Nature based tourism**
- **Cycling**
- **Heritage and dark skies**
- **Jobs, training and apprenticeships**
- **Promoting healthy lifestyles**

## **HIGHTHORN EXHIBITION – 16<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2015**

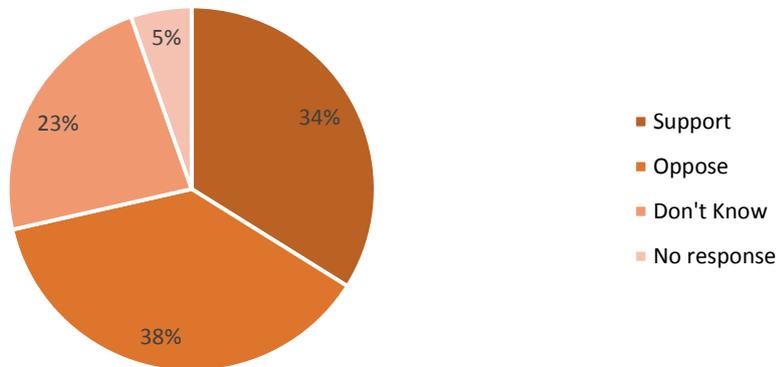
- 1.86 An information leaflet was produced to provide details of the proposal and to invite local people to attend the exhibition. The leaflet was distributed to approximately 4500 properties near the application site (please refer to the Leaflet Distribution Plan for details). The leaflet also provided residents with details of how to pass on their comments to the project team if they were unable to attend the exhibition. A copy of the leaflet can be found at the end of this document.
- 1.87 The exhibition was held at Widdrington Community Centre on Wednesday 16th September from 3pm-8pm, in order to accommodate those who were unable to attend during the day. Photographs of the exhibition can be found at the end of this document.
- 1.88 There were 36 panels of information in total, which covered a background to Banks Mining; Highthorn site details, site restoration, restoration first and Discover Druridge; environmental management of surface mines; ecology assessments undertaken; and a collection of photomontages. The entire collection of photomontages provided in the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment were provided in the room for information. The Highthorn project team was on hand to answer questions relating to the proposed development. A copy of the exhibition panels can be found at the end of this document.
- 1.89 140 people attended the exhibition and 56 of those completed feedback forms, an example of which can be found at the end of this document.
- 1.90 Attendees were asked whether they had any concerns about the proposals and of the 56 who responded, 25% (14) raised transportation of the coal as a concern. Other concerns raised for that particular question include environmental impacts and impacts on local wildlife.
- 1.91 Attendees were also asked what they liked about the proposals and of the 56 who responded, 29% (16) mentioned that they liked the Highthorn restoration proposals. Other positive comments included the creation of jobs, Banks Mining's approach to involving the community and the potential improvements to wildlife.
- 1.92 The feedback form also asked attendees whether they agreed that Banks Mining had listened and spoken to the community over the last two years. The responses were as follows:

Do you agree that Banks Mining have spoken and listened to the community over the last two years?



1.93 Attendees were also asked whether they supported the proposals at this stage. The responses were as follows:

Would you support the application for the Highthorn surface mine?



#### EXHIBITION PRIORITIES

- Environmental management
- Transportation of coal
- Restoration proposals
- Impacts on wildlife
- Jobs, training and apprenticeships

## **HIGHTHORN WEBSITE**

- 1.94 A Highthorn website was created to coincide with the announcement of the proposals in July 2013, to provide an information source for local people. The website can be found at [www.banksgroup.co.uk/highthorn](http://www.banksgroup.co.uk/highthorn) and includes information about:
- a) Site details
  - b) Project timeline
  - c) Community workshops, including all documents from workshops
  - d) Social, economic and environmental benefits
  - e) Frequently Asked Questions, which are regularly updated with questions that local people have asked
  - f) A copy of the scoping report
  - g) A copy of the planning application and all drawings can also be found on the website, along with the details of the development relations coordinator, in order that questions can be easily asked and answered.

## **NEWS RELEASES**

- 1.95 A series of news releases have been issued to provide further information on the Highthorn proposals, including details of community engagement events, amendments to the proposals and the social, economic and environmental benefits of the scheme to the local community and can be found at the back of this Statement of Community Involvement.
- 1.96 Press releases are an effective technique to communicate with a larger audience in Northumberland and the wider north east. Banks Mining encourages people from all walks of life to give their views and aspirations for Northumberland; and so, by releasing press articles, it casts the net of interested parties further.

## **HOW HAVE BANKS MINING LISTENED?**

- 1.97 Banks Mining wants to provide benefits that local people, communities and businesses need and desire for their area. Following on from the extensive and varied consultation over the last two years, Banks Mining has been informed of key priorities and benefits that the local communities, businesses and people want delivered alongside the Highthorn surface mine.
- 1.98 A summary of these priorities and benefits are:
- Local Investment
  - Careers for local people both in surface mining and other fields
  - Nature & the environment
  - Access

- Protection of Druridge Bay and its nature
- Tourism

1.99 Through the development of the Highthorn surface mine, Banks Mining is committed to providing a range of benefits and enhancements for local people, communities and businesses. These initiatives, which will be delivered throughout the lifetime of the Highthorn project, including before the site has started, are discussed below:

### **LOCAL INVESTMENT PRIORITY - CONNECT 2 BANKS MINING**

1.100 Ensuring local businesses have the best possibility of being awarded contracts is an issue Banks Mining is passionate about addressing. As such, Banks Mining will be introducing a Connect 2 Banks Mining charter that will set out how Banks Mining will support the local economy from mining activities at Highthorn and will be introduced in advance the determination of the planning application.

1.101 Banks Mining estimate that over the life of the Highthorn site, spend to manage the site will be at least £48m and Banks Mining, through the Connect 2 Banks Mining initiative, want to ensure that as much of that money stays local as possible.

1.102 For more information on the Connect 2 Banks Mining Charter, please see chapter 3.

### **CAREERS PRIORITY - LEARNING, WORKING, EARNING (SKILLS FUND)**

1.103 Providing training and employment opportunities was a key issue that has been raised by many different people, organisations and businesses across Northumberland. For this reason, Banks Mining will provide at least 50 new jobs and careers if Highthorn is successful. This is in addition to the continuation of at least 50 roles which will transfer from our existing sites in order to manage the Highthorn site. We estimate this will bring a financial benefit of £13.2m to the local economy through wages and employment.

1.104 In response to the training and employment needs of the local area, Banks Mining will also introduce a Skills Fund, which will total £225,000 over the lifetime of the site and the first contribution into this fund will be available from the first year of operation.

1.105 This fund will give local unemployed people access to grants of up to £5,000 to help them overcome barriers they face in taking up an offer of work linked to training.

1.106 For more information on the Skills Fund please see section chapter 3.

### **HIGHTHORN SURFACE MINE FUND**

1.107 It is proposed that a community benefits fund is established for the site that works on the basis of a financial contribution of 15p per tonne of coal extracted, which would be worth £450,000 over the lifetime of the site, with half of the fund, £225,000, used for the Skills Fund already mentioned, and the other half, £225,000, used to support worthwhile projects in the communities around the site. This is a 50% increase per tonne on previous commitments made to the local community in Northumberland.

1.108 The purpose of the fund is to ensure that those communities that are closest to the Banks Group's proposals benefit from the company's presence in their area. A sub-committee of the site liaison group would be formed and administer the fund, in order to support local groups, who are invaluable to the community.

1.109 For more information on the Highthorn Surface Mine Fund please see section chapter 3.

### **ACCESS PRIORITY - NEW AND IMPROVED CYCLE/FOOTPATHS**

1.110 Creation and improvements to footpaths, bridleways and cycle ways was an issue raised by most individuals and organisations that we spoke to as something that they wish to see enhanced. Druridge Bay has the potential to offer significant access opportunities for enjoyment for both local people and visitors alike.

1.111 In response to this desire, Banks Mining will create a network of greenways up and down Druridge Bay allowing people to access and enjoy areas and sites which are currently cut off from one another and inaccessible for people with disabilities.

1.112 Banks Mining will apply its 'restoration first' principle, by delivering greenways throughout the lifetime of the site. This network of greenways will result in up to an additional 7.9km of footpaths, bridleway, and cycle ways in and around the Highthorn site.

1.113 For more information about the new and improved greenways, please see chapter 8.

### **NATURE PRIORITY - NEW WETLAND AND WILDLIFE HABITATS**

1.114 Protecting and increasing the diverse range of wildlife, particularly bird life has been a prominent theme throughout the conversations with local people and organisations.

1.115 Druridge Bay is already home to a number of nature reserves and is a well-known location for bird watching enthusiasts. However, the existing nature reserves are remote and cut off from each other, making it difficult for wildlife to move between the reserves.

1.116 In response to this identified need over 100 hectares of new wetlands and wet grassland habitats will be created in and around Druridge Bay.

1.117 For more information about the new wetlands and wildlife habitats, please see chapter 8.

### **TOURISM PRIORITY - NATURE, HERITAGE, PLAY & GEOLOGY TRAILS**

1.118 The maintenance and improvement of the tourism offer in the local area has been a key issue flagged by local people, conservation bodies and businesses.

1.119 In order to contribute to the tourism industry in Northumberland and Druridge Bay, Banks Mining has committed to creating a series of trails in and around Druridge Bay to link together all the unique attractions in the area, ranging from the historical World War II pill boxes to the outstanding wildlife that have habitats on the coastal route.

- 1.120 Five routes will be created giving local people and tourists an opportunity to enjoy, whilst learning about the local area. The trails will be created from year 1 to 7 of the site and will include a nature, heritage, play, geology and dark skies trails.
- 1.121 For more information about the trails, please see chapter 4.

### **PROTECTION OF DRURIDGE BAY PRIORITY - SAND EXTRACTION CESSATION**

- 1.122 The potential for further sand extraction on Druridge Bay is an issue which has repeatedly been raised with us over the last two years by local people, visitors, conservation groups and organisations alike.
- 1.123 In response to these concerns, Banks Mining has negotiated the cessation of the long-standing mineral planning permission which allows for the removal of up to 62,000 tonnes of sand from the beach and dunes at Druridge Bay every year once the site is operational.
- 1.124 For more information about the cessation of the sand extraction, please see chapter 3.

### **TOURISM & NATURE PRIORITY – “DISCOVER DRURIDGE”**

- 1.125 “Discover Druridge” is a long term partnership plan that could deliver a positive, lasting legacy for Druridge Bay and the wider area. Banks Mining has heard from many local people, organisations and businesses that tourism is crucial to the local economy and local people. Banks Mining wants to help deliver, through the Highthorn surface mine, a tourism offer that will sustain the Druridge Bay area for years to come.
- 1.126 Banks Mining believes Highthorn can be the catalyst to bring about the Discover Druridge visitor attraction by addressing the severe lack of investment in the area. Druridge Bay has many assets and points of interest, but this lack of investment has left many of these assets geographically remote from each other, at risk of falling into decline or ruin and unknown to many but the immediate local communities.
- 1.127 As such, Discover Druridge is designed to provide a collection of improvements, such as new habitats, attractions and recreational facilities, all aimed at helping people discover what Druridge Bay has to offer. No longer will people come to Druridge Bay for a stop off just to visit the beach and then continue onwards up to Warkworth, Bamburgh, Dunstanburgh or Alnwick. Discover Druridge is designed to attract people to the area and keep them at Druridge Bay exploring the trails and tracks, playing in the parks and beach, exploring nature and the Northumberland coast and spending their money in Druridge Bay.
- 1.128 For more information about Discover Druridge, please see chapter 4.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

- 1.129 Banks Mining is proud of its reputation of being a company that works hard to establish meaningful and fruitful relationships with local communities. In this instance, Banks Mining has spoken with many local residents, businesses and organisations before submitting the Highthorn planning application, in order to ensure local voices are heard and recognised, both in the final design of the

planning application submitted and in terms of the benefits which are proposed as part of the Highthorn site.

- 1.130 Banks Mining is committed to continuing the dialogue with local people throughout the determination period for the Highthorn planning application and if successful throughout the lifetime of the site.
- 1.131 Banks Mining has listened to local people's views, priorities and suggestions, and has applied what they have been told to the proposals ensuring the enhancements proposed to Druridge Bay and the wider area are what local people want.
- 1.132 Banks Mining firmly believes that Highthorn will provide a catalyst for progressive change and will deliver a positive legacy for the Druridge Bay area: the benefits of which, Banks Mining believes, will be felt widespread for many years to come.