

Approved - 5 November 2014

BANKS MINING COMMENT RE BEACH PROTEST

Mark Dowdall, environment and community director at The Banks Group, says: "Since first announcing our Highthorn plans last year, we have made a great deal of accurate information available about what we might be looking to do in this area, and have been meeting regularly with people across the local community to talk about it.

"While we fully respect the right of everyone to express their views about any of our proposals, and indeed encourage them to do so through our public engagement work, it's very important to point out that we have not yet finalised a detailed scheme design or site boundary, nor confirmed that any scheme will be going ahead.

"We can also reconfirm that, if the scheme goes ahead, operations would take place several hundred yards away from the bay itself, rather than on the beach, as incorrectly suggested by the visitors' photograph.

"As a North East business that is also one of Northumberland's largest private sector employers, and having worked in the county for more than 30 years, we know this area extremely well and also value the natural beauty of the Northumberland coast extremely highly. Our reputation for working in a safe and environmentally responsible way in our own community is paramount to us, and we are proud of our environmental track record both within the county and elsewhere.

"With its proximity to the popular beach and wildlife attractions at Druridge Bay, we understand that the Highthorn proposal is in a unique and sensitive location, and wholeheartedly agree with the importance of protecting it. To this end, we are working with Northumberland Wildlife Trust and Northumberland Tourism on the project, to help ensure that opportunities to enhance the local environment and habitats and to provide better facilities for visitors and tourists are optimised.

"While many companies, including ourselves, are working to increase the amount of power we produce via renewable means, the fact remains that coal is and will continue to be crucial in meeting the UK's energy needs for the foreseeable future.

"Around 40% of the energy that we all use in the UK is produced through coal, and it makes far greater sense from an economic, environmental, employment and energy security point of view to utilise appropriate domestic supplies rather than relying on imports from potentially-unstable overseas markets that could be many thousands of miles away. In addition to this, the UK coal industry works to some of the most stringent planning and environmental legislation in the world

"If it is eventually progressed and approved, Highthorn would enable us to sustain significant numbers of local jobs, and could offer real and lasting opportunities for the surrounding area for which it would otherwise be impossible to find the necessary funding.

"We will continue to meet with local people, businesses and community groups to explain our initial ideas and explore how their involvement in the design of the project might help us to work together to deliver many tangible environmental, economic and social benefits for the area."

For further information on the Highthorn project, please visit www.banksgroup.co.uk/highthorn or contact the project team on 0844 209 1515 (local rate call from a BT landline).

- ends -

For further information, please contact Julian Christopher at Footprint Public Relations on 07891 005034

Notes to editors

Banks Mining

Banks Mining is part of the Banks Group. Banks Mining develops and operates surface mines throughout England and Scotland. We have experience of mining and restoring over 100 surface mines. As a company we are committed to mining coal in a safe, responsible and efficient way, helping to ensure that the country has sufficient fuel to meet its growing energy needs.

The Banks Group was founded in 1976 in County Durham and now employs around 420 people. Banks' development with care approach ensures sites are developed in close consultation with the community as well as carrying out extensive environmental assessments. More information can be found at www.banksgroup.co.uk

Approved - 7 January 2015

COMMENT FOR MORPETH HERALD RE HIGHTHORN PETITION STORY

Mark Dowdall, environment and community director at The Banks Group, says: "We fully respect the right of everyone to express their views about any of our proposals, and have been encouraging this around the Highthorn project through a comprehensive programme of local discussions and meetings that has been ongoing for almost two years.

"As a major local employer that has worked in Northumberland for more than 30 years, we know the area and the local communities well. We acknowledge that the Highthorn proposal is in a unique and sensitive location inland from the beach and dunes which will be protected and, if planning permission is to be granted, we are committed to operating the site to the highest environmental standards and to protecting local sensitive wildlife habitats.

"We are in discussion with Northumberland Wildlife Trust and Northumberland Tourism to explore opportunities to enhance the local environment and habitats, and to provide better facilities for visitors and tourists, and can reconfirm that operations would take place several hundred yards away from the bay itself if any scheme goes ahead.

"As well as helping to sustain jobs for a significant number of people from our existing Shotton and Brenkley Lane surface mines, Highthorn would also bring considerable new investment into the local economy through wages and the local supply chain, provide local people with new skills development, training and apprenticeship opportunities, and enable us to continue to provide substantial funding in support of new and improved community facilities.

"This project is based in a long-standing coalfield community, and there are many local people who support the project and indeed many who are working in the mining industry and other associated businesses.

"While many companies, including ourselves, are working to increase the amount of power we produce via renewable means, the fact is that around 40% of the energy that we all use in the UK is currently produced through coal yet only 20% of our annual coal consumption is currently produced in the UK. It makes far greater sense from an economic, environmental, employment and energy security point of view to utilise appropriate domestic supplies rather than relying on imports from potentially-unstable overseas markets.

“We will continue to meet with local people, local businesses and with local community groups to explain our initial proposals and explore how their involvement in the design of the project might help us to work together to deliver many tangible environmental, economic and social benefits for the area.”

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Approved - 19 February 2015

BANKS GROUP COMMENT RE DRURIDGE SONG

Mark Dowdall, environment and community director at The Banks Group, says: "We have been conducting a comprehensive programme of discussions and meetings with local people to ensure that the opinions of all interested parties are heard and that accurate information is provided about the aims and objectives of the Highthorn scheme.

"Our experience on the ground is that there is also significant local support for this project based on recognition of the economic, employment, environmental, social and supply chain benefits it could bring to the area.

"As a major local employer that has worked in Northumberland for more than 30 years, we know this area extremely well. With its proximity to the popular beach and wildlife attractions at Druridge Bay, we understand that the Highthorn proposal is in a unique and sensitive location - in fact, we wholeheartedly agree that Druridge Bay should be protected and enhanced.

"To this end, we are in discussions with Northumberland Wildlife Trust, Northumberland Tourism and a wide cross-section of conservation groups alongside the local community on the Highthorn project, to help ensure that opportunities to enhance the local environment and habitats and to provide better facilities for visitors and tourists are optimised.

"We can also reconfirm that, if the scheme goes ahead, operations would take place several hundred yards away from the bay itself, and that the time between the proposed start of operations in 2016 to the completion of restoration would be between eight and ten years.

"If it is eventually progressed and approved, Highthorn would enable us to sustain a significant number of local jobs, and could offer real and lasting opportunities for the surrounding area for which it would otherwise be impossible to find the necessary funding."

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Approved - 20 March 2015

BANKS GROUP COMMENT RE RAY LAIDLER COMMENTS

Mark Dowdall, environment and community director at The Banks Group, says: "While we are working towards increasing the amount of renewable energy that is generated in the UK, the fact remains that around 35-40% of the electricity that we all use to power our homes, businesses, schools and hospitals is produced through coal, and over 70% of the coal that we need currently comes from overseas.

"Coal is and will remain a central part of the UK's energy mix for the foreseeable future as we move towards a low carbon economy, and it makes far greater sense from an economic, environmental, employment and energy security point of view to mine our own indigenous coal reserves rather than relying on imports of coal and gas from potentially-unstable overseas markets.

"We have been conducting a comprehensive programme of discussions and meetings over the last two years to ensure all local opinions are heard and that accurate information is provided about the aims and objectives of the Highthorn scheme.

"Further community workshops are already planned to help ensure we involve local people in developing the best possible project design that delivers lasting, tangible local benefits, and our experience is that there is also significant local support for the Highthorn project based on the recognition of the economic, employment, environmental, social and supply chain benefits it could bring to the area.

"As a major local employer that has worked in Northumberland for more than 30 years, we know this area extremely well, and with its proximity to the popular beach and wildlife attractions at Druridge Bay, we understand that the Highthorn proposal is in a unique and sensitive location.

"We wholeheartedly agree that Druridge Bay should be protected and enhanced, and can reconfirm that any operations at Highthorn would take place several hundred yards away from the bay itself.

"Highthorn would enable us to sustain quality employment for a significant number of local people, and would offer real and lasting opportunities for the surrounding area for which it would otherwise be impossible to find the necessary funding.

"Discussions are continuing with Northumberland Wildlife Trust, Northumberland Tourism and a wide cross-section of conservation groups alongside the local community on the Highthorn project, to help ensure that opportunities to enhance the local environment and habitats and to provide improved facilities for visitors and tourists are optimised.

"The mining industry also retains an important place in the regional economy. We currently employ more than 200 people at our Shotton and Brenkley Lane surface mines near Cramlington, and our local operations contribute around £35m to the regional economy every year through wages, investments, business rates and the local supply chain."

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Approved - 15 April 2015

BANKS GROUP COMMENT RE HIGHTHORN WILDLIFE COMMENTS

Mark Dowdall, environment and community director at The Banks Group, says: "As a major local employer that has worked in Northumberland for more than 30 years, we know this longstanding coal field area extremely well, and with its proximity to the popular beach and wildlife attractions at Druridge Bay, we understand that the Highthorn proposal is in a unique and sensitive location.

"The protection and enhancement of Druridge Bay and the surrounding communities is at the heart of our proposals, and we can reconfirm that any operations at Highthorn would take place several hundred yards away from the bay itself.

"The landscaping and restoration of our surface mines is just as central to their planning and operation as any other part of their development, and provides a great opportunity to deliver environmental, ecological, habitat, tourism and recreational benefits.

"Restoration design and work differs according to the needs of each individual site, but can include tree and hedge planting, reinstatement and improvement of agricultural fields, creation and enhancement of ecological habitats, new wetlands and enhanced footpath and bridleway networks, and is part of a long-term aftercare plan that we design and deliver for each operational site.

"The improvements we make can cover both our sites' operational areas and also provide an opportunity to make ecological enhancements to surrounding locations, as may indeed be the case with the Highthorn scheme, and as part of Banks' "restoration first" approach, we are considering what ecological enhancements might be made on surrounding areas whilst the operational whilst the site is still being mined, rather than waiting until the end of operations.

"We have, for example, planted well over one million new trees as part of the landscaping work we've carried out at and adjacent to our operational and restored surface mine sites so far, and as well as creating the unique Northumberlandia landform as part of our operations

at Shotton, we have also recently recreated a 200 year-old parkland landscape on the site of our former Delhi surface mine.

"The landscaping of our Moss Carr site to the south-east of Leeds won the Landscape category at the 2013 Leeds Architectural Awards, while our Oakenshaw Wildlife Reserve in County Durham won Durham County Council's Environment Award and the Millennium Marque for environmental excellence and sustainable development from the Tidy Britain Group.

"Discussions are continuing with a wide cross-section of conservation groups alongside the local community on the Highthorn project, to help ensure that we protect existing valuable habitats and explore opportunities to enhance the local environment and habitats and to provide improved facilities for visitors and tourists are optimised.

"We have been conducting a comprehensive programme of discussions and meetings over the last two years to ensure all local opinions are heard and that accurate information is provided about the aims and objectives of the Highthorn scheme, and our experience is that there is significant local support for the project based on recognition of the economic, employment, environmental, social and supply chain benefits it could bring to the area.

"While we are working towards increasing the amount of renewable energy that is generated in the UK, the fact remains that around 35-40% of the electricity that we all use to power our homes, businesses, schools and hospitals is produced through coal, and over 70% of the coal that we need currently comes from overseas.

"Coal is and will remain a central part of the UK's energy mix for the foreseeable future, and it makes far greater sense from an economic, environmental, employment and energy security point of view to mine our own indigenous coal reserves rather than relying on imports of coal and gas from potentially-unstable overseas markets."

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Approved - 15 April 2015

BANKS GROUP COMMENT RE HIGHTHORN TRANSPORT ROUTE

Mark Dowdall, environment and community director at The Banks Group, says: "Banks is extremely proud of its transport fleet's operational and performance record in Northumberland, and we are committed to continuing to adhere to industry-leading road safety standards.

"The proposed transport routes and procedures for the Highthorn scheme are still being carefully worked out taking into account local feedback to ensure we avoid minor roads, and utilises major A roads that are specifically designed to handle freight traffic. Any improvements to the A1068 that are required to ensure we have the safest possible transport infrastructure in place will be developed and implemented in conjunction with The Highways Agency and Northumberland County Council.

"The 150 loaded lorry movements per day we discussed at the recent workshop is an absolute maximum figure, with the likelihood being that the average daily number will be significantly lower.

"The proposed length of the working day at Highthorn has also yet to be confirmed, so it is currently impossible for anyone to say what the average number of vehicle movements per hour might be, but we confidently expect this figure to equate to a low increase in the total number of all vehicle movements on the A1068.

"Cyclists have used the routes past our former Delhi, and current Shotton and Brenkley Lane sites for many years, and our drivers are very mindful of the need to ensure their safety, and that of all other road users and pedestrians.

"As part of the development of the Highthorn plan, we are also currently in discussions with recreational access experts to explore how it could support improvements being made to local cycling routes.

"While taking them into account in the planning of the Highthorn scheme, the HGV road safety standards being used for the Crossrail project are specifically designed for an inner city environment that is unlike anywhere in Northumberland. The standards we set for all our transport operations relate precisely to their individual locations, and as well as adhering closely to them ourselves, we also insist any sub-contractors working with us on these sites do precisely the same.

"We were pleased with the numbers of people who attended our latest community workshop, and will continue to work hard to involve local people in developing the best possible project design that delivers lasting, tangible local benefits.

"The Highthorn project would bring a wide range of economic, environmental, social and supply chain benefits to the area, and would enable us to sustain quality employment for a significant number of local people in an area in which we've worked for more than three decades.

"While we are working towards increasing the amount of renewable energy that is generated in the UK, the fact remains that around 35-40% of the electricity that we all use to power our homes, businesses, schools and hospitals is produced through coal, and over 70% of the coal that we need currently comes from overseas.

"Coal is and will remain a central part of the UK's energy mix for the foreseeable future, and it makes far greater sense from an economic, environmental, employment and energy security point of view to mine our own indigenous coal reserves rather than relying on imports of coal and gas from potentially-unstable overseas markets."

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Approved - 4 May 2015

BANKS GROUP COMMENT RE SAVE DRURIDGE WALK

Mark Dowdall, environment and community director at The Banks Group, says: "It's important to once again reiterate that any operations at Highthorn would take place several hundred yards away from Druridge Bay itself, and that the protection and enhancement of the bay and the surrounding communities is at the heart of our proposals.

"Having worked in Northumberland for more than 30 years, we know this longstanding coal field area extremely well, and with its proximity to the popular beach and wildlife attractions at Druridge Bay, we understand that the Highthorn proposal is in a unique and sensitive location.

"To this end, discussions are continuing on the Highthorn project with a wide cross-section of conservation groups and across the local community to help ensure that we maximise the opportunities offered by it to protect existing valuable habitats, enhance the local environment and provide improved facilities for visitors and tourists.

"We have been conducting a comprehensive programme of discussions and meetings over the last two years to ensure all local opinions are heard and that accurate information is provided about the aims and objectives of the Highthorn scheme. Our experience remains that there is significant local support for the project based on recognition of the economic, employment, environmental, social and supply chain benefits it could bring to the area.

"While we are working towards increasing the amount of renewable energy that is generated in the UK, the fact remains that around 35-40% of the electricity that we all use to power our homes, businesses, schools and hospitals is produced through coal, and over 70% of the coal that we need currently comes from overseas.

"Coal is and will remain a central part of the UK's energy mix for the foreseeable future, and it makes far greater sense from an economic, environmental, employment and energy security point of view to mine our own indigenous coal reserves rather than relying on imports of coal and gas from potentially-unstable overseas markets."

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Approved - 29 May 2015

BANKS GROUP COMMENT RE PHOTOGRAPHY COMPETITION

Mark Dowdall, environment and community director at The Banks Group, says: "Having worked in Northumberland for more than 30 years, we know and wholeheartedly agree that Druridge Bay is a very special place, and protecting and enhancing the area and the surrounding communities is at the centre of our Highthorn proposals.

"Any mining operations at Highthorn would take place several hundred yards away from the bay itself, and it's concerning to see the brief for this competition, with its focus on beach and coast-based activities, looking to create a completely false impression relating to the project's location that is both inaccurate and misleading.

"We are continuing discussions with a wide cross-section of conservation groups and with the local community on the Highthorn project to help ensure that we protect existing valuable habitats, explore ways to enhance the local environment, and optimise opportunities to improve facilities for local people, visitors and tourists.

"Suggestions that the land on which the Highthorn scheme would sit would be "lost" if the project goes ahead are also completely false. The landscaping and restoration of our surface mines is as central to their planning and operation as any other part of their development, and provides a great opportunity to deliver environmental, ecological, habitat, tourism and recreational benefits both whilst the mine is operating and once operations have been completed.

"We have been conducting a comprehensive programme of discussions and meetings over the last two years to ensure all local opinions are heard and that accurate information is provided about the location, details, aims and objectives of the Highthorn scheme. Our experience continues to be that there is significant local support for the project based on recognition of the local environmental, social, economic, employment and supply chain benefits it could bring.

"We are working towards increasing the amount of renewable energy that is generated in the UK. However, the fact remains that around 30% of the electricity that we all used during 2014 to power our homes, businesses, schools and hospitals was produced through coal, and over 85% of this coal came from overseas.

"Coal is and will remain a central part of the UK's energy mix for the foreseeable future, and it makes far greater sense from an economic, environmental, employment and energy security point of view to mine our own indigenous coal reserves rather than relying on imports of coal and gas from potentially-unstable overseas markets."

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Approved - 15 June 2015

**BANKS GROUP COMMENT RE
SAVE DRURIDGE DONATION QUERY**

Mark Dowdall, environment and community director at The Banks Group, says: "The protection and enhancement of Druridge Bay and the surrounding communities remains at the heart of our proposals, and we can reconfirm that any operations at Highthorn would take place several hundred yards away from the bay itself.

"It would be wholly inaccurate to draw comparisons between our scheme and the nuclear power plant that was once proposed for Druridge Bay, which would have been infinitely more intrusive and impactful on the area.

"The nuclear plant would also have had a far more permanent place in the local landscape, whereas we have committed to the time between the start of operations and the completion of a full restoration of the Highthorn site to being no more than eight to ten years.

"The landscaping and restoration of our surface mines is just as central to their planning and operation as any other part of their development, and provides a great opportunity to deliver environmental, ecological, habitat, tourism and recreational benefits.

"Appropriate restoration is always central to the long-term aftercare plan that we design and deliver for each operational site, and as part of our "restoration first" approach, we consider what ecological enhancements might be made on surrounding areas whilst the site is still being mined, rather than waiting until the end of operations.

"Discussions are continuing with a wide cross-section of conservation groups alongside the local community on the Highthorn project, to help ensure that we protect existing valuable habitats, explore opportunities to enhance the local environment and habitats and provide improved facilities for visitors and tourists.

"While we are working towards increasing the amount of renewable energy that is generated in the UK, the fact remains that around 30% of the electricity that we all used during 2014 to

power our homes, businesses, schools and hospitals was produced through coal, and over 85% of this coal came from overseas.

"Coal is and will remain a central part of the UK's energy mix for the foreseeable future, and it makes far greater sense from an economic, environmental, employment and energy security point of view to mine our own indigenous coal reserves rather than relying on imports of coal and gas from potentially-unstable overseas markets."

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Approved - 19 August 2015

BANKS GROUP COMMENT RE HIGHTHORN/BUTTERWELL

Barnaby Pilgrim, project director at The Banks Group, says: "The Highthorn project would bring a wide range of economic, environmental, social and supply chain benefits to the local area, and would enable us to sustain quality employment for a significant number of local people in an area in which we've worked for more than three decades.

"Creating the most appropriate transport infrastructure for the Highthorn scheme is a central part of the planning application that we are currently working on, and we are examining all the options available which would enable us to carry out transport operations with maximum efficiency and the minimum possible impact on local roads.

"We flagged up the use of the rail hub at the Butterwell site as being one such option during one of the series of community workshops we have been running through the year, which we're pleased to say have been attended by well over 300 people, but nothing has yet been finalised and we are continuing to evaluate a number of options.

"We will continue to ensure local people are kept up to date with the progress of our Highthorn proposals, and the planning application that we expect to submit later this year will contain full details of all aspects of the work we'll be looking to undertake.

"The Highthorn site represents one of the best and largest remaining coal resources in England, and would help enable us to sustain our position as a substantial contributor to the local economy and as a long-standing supporter of many of the surrounding communities through the Banks Community Fund.

"While we are working towards increasing the amount of renewable energy that is generated in the UK, the fact remains that around 35-40% of the electricity that we all use to power our homes, businesses, schools and hospitals is produced through coal, and over 70% of the coal that we need currently comes from overseas.

"Coal is and will remain a central part of the UK's energy mix for the foreseeable future, and it makes far greater sense from an economic, environmental, employment and energy

security point of view to mine our own indigenous coal reserves rather than relying on imports of coal and gas from potentially-unstable overseas markets."

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Approved - 2 September 2015

BANKS GROUP COMMENT RE FOTE ALNWICK EVENT

Mark Dowdall, environment and community director at The Banks Group, says: "Our proposals for a new surface mine at Highthorn provide real and lasting opportunities to deliver a wide range of economic, employment, environmental, tourism, community, amenity and conservation benefits to the local area.

"While we are working towards increasing the amount of renewable energy that is generated in the UK, the fact remains that around 30% of the electricity that we all used during 2014 to power our homes, businesses, schools and hospitals was produced through coal, and over 85% of this coal came from overseas.

"Coal is and will remain a central part of the UK's energy mix for the foreseeable future. It makes far greater sense to support local jobs in Northumberland, to deliver environmental and conservation enhancements and to provide a secure supply of energy for the UK by mining our own indigenous coal reserves through carefully-planned and sensitively operated schemes such as Highthorn rather than relying on imports of coal and gas from potentially-unstable overseas markets."

For further information on the Highthorn project, and to register support for it, please visit www.banksgroup.co.uk/highthorn

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