

**Proposed surface mine at Highthorn, Northumberland, NE61 5EE**

**Planning Inspectorate reference APP/P2935/V/16/3158266**

**Submission by David William Golding CBE PhD DSc DCL, 11<sup>th</sup> November 2016,**

**Replacing the “Submission by David William Golding CBE PhD DSc,  
dated 9<sup>th</sup> November 2016”**

**A. Introduction**

I write in the support of the ‘Save Druridge’ group, but am acting in a personal capacity in doing so and what I say does not necessarily reflect the views of that group.

The Highthorn proposal by HJ Banks and Company Ltd needs to be viewed in the light of the Paris Agreement, which, in her speech to the UN General Assembly on 20<sup>th</sup> September, the Prime Minister committed the UK to ratifying by the end of the year. This Agreement commits its signatories to “*working to limit it [climate change] to 1.5 degrees Celsius*” by phasing out the use of fossil fuels. This and related commitments are extraordinarily challenging and permit no latitude whatever for we might call ‘emissions indulgence’. They may be achievable, but only (as the Agreement states) “*if everyone fully supports them and helps bring their ambitious goals to life with real action*”. (UNFCCC website)

Certain recent actions of the UK Government, such as that to permit ‘fracking’ in Yorkshire and its support for the construction of a third runway at Heathrow, have led some to cast doubt on the strength of its support for the Agreement, but the issue under consideration provides it with a new opportunity to demonstrate it *bona fides* in this regard.

**B. Highthorn would distract attention from the need for renewables**

Re. *‘(v) the extent to which the proposed development is consistent with the Departments amended online guidance on renewable and low carbon energy.’*

*“Increasing the amount of energy from renewable and low carbon technologies will help to make sure the UK has a secure energy supply, reduce greenhouse gas emissions to slow down climate change and stimulate investment in new jobs and businesses”,* according to Planning Practice Guidance: Renewable and low carbon energy (001), updated 18.06.2015.

In contrast, acceptance of the Highthorn proposal by Banks Ltd would distract attention from the urgent need to further develop and install low-carbon generating capacity. In contrast, rejection of the proposal would send a clear message, encouraging companies to invest in renewable generation. It would therefore accord with the Fifth Carbon Budget, accepted by the Government on 30<sup>th</sup> June 2016.

Following the Committee on Climate Change’s recommendations, the Fifth Carbon Budget set a target for the UK’s emissions to fall to 57% below 1990 levels between 2028 and 2032. However, as the Committee pointed out in its report in October this year, “*The UK’s target to reduce emissions... is challenging, but can be met... Scenarios generally involve... deep reductions in emissions from power... (p.10)*”. “*Current policy in the UK is not enough to deliver the existing carbon budgets that Parliament has set... The Government should publish a robust plan of measures to meet the legislated UK carbon budgets... (p.12)*”.

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A persistent theme in the ‘Statements of Opposition’ (which I submitted to the Inspectorate as a separate document) to the proposed new surface mine by the scientific experts I consulted is the likely adverse effect of the mine by distracting attention from the urgent need to deploy renewable energy. Thus this from Professor Chris Kilsby, Professor of Hydrology and Climate Change at Newcastle University:

***“I... strongly oppose any new coal mining, as it perpetuates our dangerous fossil fuel burning habit [and] diverts investment away from renewables.”***

Similarly...

- *“Any new developments to burn coal threaten efforts moves to more environmentally friendly renewable sources of energy.”* (Professor Sir Tom Blundell FRS FMedSci., Chair of the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution, 1998-2005; and University of Cambridge);
- *“We need new clean energy sources, not more coal.”* (Professor Hayley Fowler, Professor of Climate Change Impacts and Royal Society Wolfson Research Merit Award Holder, Newcastle University);
- *“A future with carbon-free energy sources will be much more healthy, save many lives and also reduce damaging sea level rise... The sooner we get on with it the better the future will be.”* (Professor Sir John Houghton CBE FRS, Chair of the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution, 1992-1998; Author of “Global warming, the complete briefing”, 5<sup>th</sup> Edition, 2014);
- *“I believe this proposed open cast coal mine is non-progressive, unnecessary and environmentally damaging... We need to look forward, think of future generations and positively support the transition to a low carbon future as individuals and organisations.”* (Professor Phil Taylor, Siemens Professor of Energy Systems and Director of the Institute for Sustainability at Newcastle University; and Director of the EPSRC National Centre for Energy Systems Integration.)

**C. Rejection of Highthorn would encourage the phasing out of thermal coal, whereas its acceptance would “lock us into continuing to burn it”.**

Re. ‘(iv) the extent to which the proposed development is consistent with the Written Ministerial Statement on the Central Government’s commitment to replace coal fired power stations with gas as made by the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change on 18 Nov 2015’:

Rejection of the Highthorn proposal by Banks Ltd would send a clear signal to industry of the Government’s support for a rapid run-down in coal-fired electricity generation, as expressed in the Ministerial Statement on 18<sup>th</sup> November 2015. In contrast, as Professor Sir John Lawton CBE FRS put it, Highthorn “would lock us in to continuing to burn coal for years.”

The Ministerial Statement on 18<sup>th</sup> November 2015 stated that “Our consultation has set out proposals to close [coal-fired power stations] by 2025 – and restrict their use from 2023”. The Highthorn proposal would involve development of a new source of coal, whose extraction would, at best, continue right up to the earlier date.

Furthermore, we repudiate the notion that we are faced with a choice between coal mined in Northumberland and that mined abroad, as HJ Banks asserts – our response being ‘neither of the above’!

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We believe that rejection of the Highthorn proposal may well help to accelerate the run-down in coal firing, in the context of the “*deep reductions in emissions*” resulting from the “*robust plan of measures*” called for by the Committee on Climate Change in October, on account the fact that “*current policy in the UK is not enough to deliver the existing carbon budgets that Parliament has set.*”

Intense antagonism (“*insane*” (*sic*), Professor Chris Kilsby) to the development of new sources of coal also came out in the expressions of expert opinion I gathered:

- “*This development must be opposed if we are to avoid the further impacts of CO2 emissions on our climate.*” (Professor Sir Tom Blundell FRS)
- “*Digging up and burning another 3 million tonnes of coal will not only affect the local environment but contribute to further temperature rises and, more worryingly, to increases in extreme events – floods and droughts.*” (Professor Hayley Fowler)
- “*New sources of fossil fuel burning should not be allowed. This applies with particular force to coal, since it is the most carbon-polluting, by far, of all the commonly available types of fuels.*” (Sir John Houghton FRS)
- “*[This] proposal to dig up and burn 3 million tonnes of coal in Northumberland... is simply insane and unnecessary! I therefore strongly oppose any new coal mining.*” (Professor Chris Kilsby)
- “*An application to mine vast amounts of coal flies in the face of the UK’s commitment in Paris in 2015 to fight climate change. We have to stop burning coal... as rapidly as possible, or face catastrophic climate change. This application would lock us in to continuing to burn coal for years and is dangerously unacceptable.*” (Professor Sir John Lawton CBE FRS, Chair of the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution, 2005-2011.)
- “*The UK government plans to phase out coal fired energy generation by 2025 due to the high CO2 emissions this produces. Coal is one of the most polluting sources of energy and there are many lower carbon alternatives available.*” (Professor Phil Taylor)

**D. Highthorn would send out a most damaging signal internationally.**

Re. ‘(vii) any other matters the Inspector considers relevant’:

I submit that the subject matter of this section of my submission is highly relevant to government policy and request that the Inspector gives it due consideration on that basis.

It is beyond dispute that the Britain has led the world in facing up to the challenge of climate change, with, for example, the first Climate Change Act in 2008. However, this has taken place against the backcloth of burgeoning emissions by newly industrialising countries, such as China and India, and considerable diplomatic efforts have been made to encourage such countries to first curb and then to reduce emissions.

Mr John Ashton CBE, a local resident, independent speaker and writer, and former UK climate envoy, is making his own submission to the Inquiry. It includes a compelling statement on the international implications of the decision facing the Inquiry, which I strongly endorse. The following is an extract from that statement and is used with permission:

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“The UK national interest lies in an effective global response to climate change. The goal of UK climate diplomacy has, accordingly, been to accelerate the move away from fossil energy, and especially from unabated coal, across all the major economies... But the foundation for all effective diplomacy is action at home. If you do not walk your talk, those you seek to influence stop listening... If we were to press ahead with the development of new coal resources at home, especially at an inherently sensitive site like Highthorn, we would be cutting our climate diplomacy off at the knees, and undermining our fundamental national interest in a successful global response to climate change.”

- E. The previous acceptance of the proposed mine at Highthorn was not “consistent with Government policies for meeting the challenge of climate change” and involved a wanton disregard for the input provided by informed scientific opinion in this regard.**

Re. ‘(i) the extent to which the proposed development is consistent with Government policies for meeting the challenge of climate change’:

According to the National Planning Policy Framework (93), *“Planning plays a key role in helping shape places to secure radical reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, minimising vulnerability to the impacts of climate change... This is central to the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development.”* Note that this key role is central to sustainable development (my emphases).

In contrast, the Northumberland Strategic Planning Committee report, 5<sup>th</sup> July 2016, dismissed the submissions made by the author on behalf of six climate and environmental scientists of international renown, and many other submissions, relating to the implications of the proposal for climate change, in a single sentence: *“The burning of the coal that would be extracted from the site would contribute to CO2 emissions. Establishing the extent of this would be based on very generic estimates and assumptions and so little reliance could be placed on any conclusions”.* (7.163)

**If this statement was intended to imply that establishing the extent of CO2 emissions “would be based on very generic estimates, etc.”, it is demonstrably false!**

The extent of CO2 emissions which would result from the combustion of three million tonnes of coal can be calculated easily and with complete confidence, on the basis of the relative atomic and molecular weights of carbon and carbon dioxide (12 and 44, respectively), and the carbon content of the coal (86-88%, according to British Coal, <http://www.ukcoal.com/types-and-uses-of-coal.html>). On this basis, burning 3m tonnes of coal would result in the discharge into the atmosphere of 9.4-9.7m tonnes of CO2.

**However, if, as I suspect, the Committee intended to imply that “little reliance can be placed on any conclusions” about the impacts of burning the coal, and that such conclusions could therefore be discounted, this was not only mistaken but absurd!**

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***It was mistaken:*** the 3<sup>rd</sup> Report (2001) of the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change concluded that it is "*likely*" (a probability of 60%) that global warming is due mainly to CO<sub>2</sub>; its 4<sup>th</sup> Report (2007) stated that this is "*very likely*" (90%); and by 2013, the 5<sup>th</sup> Report was confident enough to put the level at "*extremely likely*" (at least 95%) – beyond any reasonable doubt. Likewise the Manifesto issued by the St James's Palace Nobel Laureate Symposium convened by Prince Charles (26-28<sup>th</sup> May, 2009), involving around 60 leading scientists from various disciplines, among them 20 Nobel Prize winners (our finest scientific minds), stated that "*political leaders cannot possibly ask for a more robust, evidence-based call for action!*"

***It was absurd:*** just because we cannot quantify, with any confidence, the *additional* impacts of burning any given amount of coal, this is no reason to discount the damage that such burning would undoubtedly do. Indeed, the inference is absurd – **on this basis we would never be able to curb our reliance on polluting fuels, since each and every proposed use of such fuels could be waved through for the same reason!** In much the same way, we could not estimate the additional impacts of throwing a can of petrol onto a house fire, once it was well and truly ablaze. Nevertheless, in each case the action would make a bad situation worse ('add fuel to the fire'), and would be inexcusable.

According to Lord Robert May, then President of the Royal Society, the UK's national academy of sciences, "*Never have we faced such a global threat. The longer we procrastinate, the more difficult the task becomes.*" That statement were made in 2006 and here we are in 2016 planning to create a massive new coal mine – *it simply beggars belief!*

The Planning Committee asserted that "*CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from the transport of coal from Highthorn would likely be less than that from places such as Russia, etc.*" (7.163), and this seems reasonable. However, it has *not* been established that the *overall* level of emissions would be less. In particular, the procedures involved in developing the Highthorn site for mining, and in restoring the environment after closure, would both involve emissions. Such considerations probably don't apply to coal extraction from large, well-established coal mines in other countries and there may well be other differences – we simply don't know.

Consequently, comparisons regarding the *total* level of emissions in the two cases would be "*based on very generic estimates and assumptions and so little reliance could be placed on any conclusions*", in NSPC's inimitable phrase.

## **F. The Moral Imperative**

*"I urge governments, development and environmental organisations to work together to find sustainable solutions to avert a catastrophe that will exacerbate human suffering to a magnitude that perhaps the world has not yet seen."* (Desmond Tutu, cited in "Up in Smoke", Andrew Simms, New Economics Foundation, 2004)

*"We know what needs to be done. We cannot wait until it is too late. We cannot wait until what we value most is lost".* (Nobel Laureate Symposium Manifesto, May 2009)

***"People of conscience need to break their ties with corporations financing the injustice of climate change."*** (Archbishop Desmond Tutu, 10<sup>th</sup> April, 2014, The Guardian)

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