

**Enough, for all, forever**

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**Rt Hon James Brokenshire MP**

Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government

Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government  
Fry Building, 2 Marsham Street  
London SW1P 4DF

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**From Newcastle and other Northern Universities,  
with support from environmental scientists of international repute**

**Dear Secretary of State,**

***“It would be shameful were the UK to open this new coal mine at precisely the moment the world at large is recognising the dreadful effect of burning coal on our planet’s climate.”***

Sir David Attenborough OM CH CVO CBE FRS FLS FZS FSA FRSGS

***“The individuals pushing the [Highthorn coal mine] are either profoundly ignorant of the risks of climate change, or so blinded by money as to be a menace to our children and grandchildren.”***

Professor Sir John Lawton FRS,  
former Chair of the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution

I write on behalf of a number of distinguished colleagues in connection with the application to create a new, opencast coal mine at Highthorn, Northumberland – please see the Briefing appended which all of them have endorsed.

It is beyond doubt that greenhouse gas emissions and climate change together constitute the pivotal issue in relation to the decision on Highthorn. In rejecting the application on 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2018, it was only to these factors that the Rt Hon Sajid Javid MP attributed “*very substantial significance*”, and to which he gave “*very considerable weight*”. Similarly, in his ruling on 23<sup>rd</sup> November, 2018, Mr Justice Ousely acknowledged that emissions are the “*principal issue*”. Consequently, we restrict ourselves to this issue.

First, the Inspector who conducted the Public Inquiry and Mr Justice Ousely concluded that, assuming our continuing need for coal until 2025, the choice is between its production here or abroad. However, that it not the most critical issue, which is whether we should source the coal from mines already in operation, or create new ones! It doesn’t seem to have occurred to them that every new mine will, almost inevitably, increase the total amount of CO<sub>2</sub> eventually released into the atmosphere. Of course it will: *‘More coal mines = More carbon emissions’!*

***Cont’d over***

Second, the Inspector explicitly rejected the notion that the occasion should be used to send a 'signal' or 'message' on the need to transition to renewable energy, and the judge likewise seems to have seen no need to do this. The Government, however, should have no such inhibitions! Why did Claire Perry launch the international 'Powering Past Coal Alliance' at COP 23 in Bonn on 16<sup>th</sup> November 2017, if not to 'send a message'? Why did she say, "*The time for coal has passed*", and quote her Canadian counterpart, Catherine McKenna, as saying, "*Coal is not coming back*", if not to 'signal' the need to run down the extraction and use of coal worldwide, and to discourage the creation of new mines?

Having ratified the Paris Agreement and initiated the Coal Alliance, it would send a most damaging signal were the Government to now consent to a new coal mine.

Third, I alert you to the acute embarrassment to which the Government would be exposed were the new mine to begin operation in the very same year as the UK hosts 2020's COP 26 Climate Summit, for which Ms Perry has put in a bid! This is particularly the case on account of the scale of the public demonstrations and civil disobedience with which the opening of the mine would doubtless be marked - opposition to the Highthorn mine has become a regional and national *cause celebre* on account of the mine's proximity to the beauty spot, Druridge Bay, and the veritable 'roller coaster' of events by which the campaign has been characterised.

In a letter to me on 12<sup>th</sup> June (copy enclosed), Claire Perry wrote that, "*I believe... there is more that we could do across HM Government and I am keen to work with my colleagues in other departments to explore ways to ensure policy on coal is as climate coherent as possible*". [My emphasis] You now have an excellent opportunity to ensure 'climate coherence', by the definitive rejection of the Highthorn application, thus confirming the earlier decision by Rt Hon Sajid Javid MP, the then Secretary of State for Housing, etc.

In the briefing appended, my colleagues and I provide what we believe to be compelling reasons why, on balance, the Highthorn application should be rejected. We hope that the Government will adopt a strategic perspective on the UK's obligations and interests, attach to considerations of climate change the weight they deserve - and set aside Mr Justice Ouseley's ruling in consequence.

I would be most grateful to receive a reply.

Yours sincerely,

Dr David Golding CBE

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