

I was a Minerals and Waste Planner for the County Council for 10 years. We monitored landfills and quarries, looked for sites for new recycling centres, got test gas drilling sites restored, and helped essential developments get planning permission. I understand Cumbria and National planning policies, and have immersed myself in the details of this Coal Mine proposal since January 2019.

I retired in 2015 and have watched the climate crisis get worse. I saw my own and other communities in Cumbria flood, and worked with them to oppose new developments that increased flood risk for nearby homes. Steeper cuts in emissions are needed because extraction and use of fossil fuels are not slowing down. I watched the technology for making steel without using coal advancing in Europe, and the battle to modernise and “decarbonise” the steel industry in the UK.

I am now confident that allowing this coal mine would be a big mistake, and that a better future can be built without this mine. This mine might have looked reasonable back in 2012 and 2014 when various people approached the County Council to talk about a new coal mine at Whitehaven, but UK and EU climate policy has caught up with the science, and the USA is not far behind.

The world does not need another coking coal mine. There is plenty of the right quality of coal to make the steel we need while the steel industry modernises and gets ready for a long term low carbon future. Several reports this year show that there are huge opportunities for new jobs in Cumbria but a real shortage of people with the right skill. Young people who train for a career in coal mining are likely to be in a worse position in the future than those who train for jobs in the low carbon economy that is being promoted by all the Cumbrian authorities.

The mine is also, in my opinion, against planning policy, and a Public Inquiry is the best way to examine all the evidence and issues rationally. That is why SLACC worked hard to get a Public Inquiry rather than leave the decision to the County Council.

There is a big question about whether the carbon emissions from the use of the coal in steel making should be weighed in “the planning balance”. SLACC and our legal team have always argued they should, and at 9 million tonnes a year, they are far greater than the 100 thousand tonnes of carbon “savings” that WCM claim. Claimed “benefits” of reducing transportation emissions are a classic distraction tactic.

There are more questions. Will steel companies buy high sulphur West Cumbria coal instead of the US and Australian coal they use now? Will disturbing the Marchon site clean up the environment or cause more problems? Will local people benefit or see the environment get worse and tourism jobs suffer? Will skilled coal miners from elsewhere get the highest paid jobs?