

MARGAM OPENCAST COAL SITE

Members will recall that the issues surrounding the above site were discussed at the January Development Control Committee. The Committee resolved to pursue in conjunction with Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council, methods of site restoration that did not involve additional coaling and to investigate use of the existing restoration fund to explore methods of making the site safe. The Committee made it clear that there was no support for further coaling operations. The Committee also supported the proposal put forward by Neath Port Talbot to attend a joint public meeting.

The purpose of this report is to provide members with an update on the current position regarding the site.

Officers from Bridgend and Neath Port Talbot visited the site on January 20th and observed the installation of pumping equipment. The water level in the void continued to rise during January and the site operators commenced mechanical pumping early in February. The water level is now being maintained at around 43.3m above ordnance datum. The water level is monitored weekly.

Officers met with local members and residents on the 11th February in order to explain the position regarding enforcement action.

The Development & Building Control Manager, Chair and a local member met with officials from Natural Resources Wales (NRW) on the 13th February. NRW explained its position with regards the water in the void and was able to provide some suggestions with regard to a more permanent solution to controlling the water levels. NRW agreed to share the results of the water testing that had been carried out in the adjacent water course and also suggested that geotechnical information regarding the stability of the void wall in the south western corner of the site should be provided. This information has been requested from Celtic although no response has been received to date.

A public meeting was held at the Talbot Institute on the 24th March. The Director of Communities, Development & Building Control Manager along with The Neath Port Talbot Chief Executive Officer, Director of Environment, Head of Planning and Minerals Enforcement Officer from Neath Port Talbot were in attendance. The Chief Executive Officer from Celtic Energy Ltd was also present. The audience comprised local residents, AMs, and members from both Bridgend and Neath Port Talbot. No representative from the land owner (Oak/Beech Regeneration) attended. A number of issues were raised from the floor including, funding, site safety, security and future restoration as well as suggestions for possible after uses. The representative from Celtic indicated that there were no intentions to take forward any coaling proposals at Margam and that an alternative solution will be required. Also, if the current planning application for additional coaling at East Pit in Tairgwaith was approved then the profits from this could go towards the restoration of all four of the Celtic operated sites including Margam. Unfortunately even if the full potential profit from this site could be achieved it would still leave a funding shortfall of around £15 million at today's prices. It was suggested by Celtic that after uses for the site could include renewable energy and recreation uses with would involve the reinstatement of the rights of way and roads through the site and retention of the void to form a new lake. The possibility of residential development of the site was not favourably received by both local planning authorities.

It is now a matter for both authorities to enter discussions with the land owner and operator as to the scope and nature of the after use/restoration scheme, however this is not likely to occur until after the East Pit application has been determined sometime in April.

In the meantime the situation regarding the water levels in the void will continue to be monitored.

Recommendation

That the contents of the report be noted.

**MARK SHEPHARD
CORPORATE DIRECTOR COMMUNITIES**

Background Papers

None.