

STAY-AWAY COUNCILLORS FUEL 'DONE-DEAL' CONCERNS

Campaigners against Scottish Coal's application for what would be the second largest opencast mine in Scotland, extracting two million tonnes of coal from site adjacent to the Midlothian village of Cousland and East Lothian village of Ormiston, Communities Against Airfield Open Cast (CAAOC), are angry at the low turnout of local Councillors at Midlothian Council's Pre-determination Meeting for the Airfield proposal, held at Cousland Village Hall yesterday (Wed 22nd Sept).

Half of the 18 Councillors responsible for determining Scottish Coal's application attended the Hearing, with 9 out of 18 sending apologies. Dougie McKenzie, Chair of CAAOC said, "Not only was this poor attendance extremely disappointing, but it also implies that the pre-determination process is merely paying lip service to community engagement, and adds fuel to the 'done-deal' theory that those Councillors not attending have already made their decision. The Scottish Government introduced the pre-determination hearing to allow the public to put across their views – if half of the decision makers aren't there to listen then it has failed in its purpose to ensure community engagement in the planning process."

"We have already written to the council complaining about the fact that many were only given a week's notice of the date, and with the meeting being scheduled during working hours, it effectively excluded any local business owners or anyone in full time employment from attending."

Those presenting in support of the application at the Pre-Determination Hearing comprised the planning applicant, Scottish Coal. Those presenting in opposition were CAAOC (Communities Against Airfield Open Cast), Tynewater Community Council, East Lothian Council, Ormiston Community Council and 11 members of the public.

Chairman of Ormiston Community Council, James Blane, who also spoke at the Hearing in opposition of the development said, "The Planning Committee will re-convene on 12 October to determine the outcome of Scottish Coal's application. Only then will we discover what's more important, the public's concerns or Scottish Coal's money."

Notes to editors

- Press and media enquiries should be directed to Anne Farquharson, Press Officer on 07816 668980.
- Over 1030 objections to the proposal have been submitted to Midlothian Council Planning Department.
- An independent poll of all residents in Cousland Village conducted by Tynewater Community Council recorded a resounding rejection of 95% to Scottish Coal's application. (90% of the 114 households responded to the survey). Similarly on a 63% return over 91% of Ormiston residents expressed their opposition.
- Communities Against Airfield Open Cast (CAAOC) is a group comprising local residents and business owners opposed to the application. www.airfieldopencast.co.uk
- Airfield Farm is located South East of Dalkeith adjacent to the villages of Cousland (Midlothian) and Ormiston (East Lothian)
- The site has been designated as an area of Great Landscape Value and is prime agricultural land as identified in the Midlothian Local Plan
- Scottish Coal is subsidiary of Scottish Resources Group

- The formal application for the Open Cast Mine at Airfield was submitted to Midlothian Council Planning department on Friday 24th July by Scottish Coal.
- Pre-determination meetings have been introduced as part of the recent Scottish Government planning reforms, with the objective of increasing community engagement in the planning process.

- **PRE-DETERMINATION HEARING ATTENDANCE**

Present

Cllr C Beattie
Cllr L Beattie
Cllr Bennett
Cllr Boyes
Cllr Chalmers
Cllr Imrie
Cllr Muirhead
Cllr Russell
Cllr Statham

Not Present

Cllr Aitchison
Cllr Brown
Cllr Constable
Cllr Milligan
Cllr Moffat
Cllr Montgomery
Cllr Thacker
Cllr Thompson
Cllr Wilson.