**CYNGOR CYMUNED TAWE UCHAF COMMUNITY COUNCIL**

**Minutes of the Special Meetings on 23rd June and Site meeting on 25th June 2020**

**The meeting on 23rd June, 2020 was a remote meeting via Zoom**

**The site meeting was held at Caehopkin on 25th June 2020**

**Present 23rd June –** Councillors Stephen Davies (Chairman) Susan Pyart, Huw Williams, Arlene Jones, Auriol Graham, Selwyn Fyfield,

**Present 25th June** – All above including Councillors Alun Thomas and Gail Hopkins-Williams. John Smith, Ben Pritchard Arup Consulting and Rob Thompson Celtic Energy.

**Apologies for absence** **23rd June, 2020, -** Councillors Alun Thomas and Gail Hopkins-Williams

The Chairman opened the meeting reminding members the Special Meeting will involve a remote discussion and a further site visit later in the week with Arup Consulting on Thursday 25th June, 2020. The Council will discuss and agree comments over the two meetings for submission to the Planning authority.

Following discussion on 23rd June and the site visit with Arup Consulting on 25th June, the Council agreed to submit the following comments to the Planning authority.

**Planning Ref 20/0738/FUL**

**Proposed Complimentary Restoration Earthworks to create 2 looped landform platforms with associated drainage on Land at and surrounding Nant Helen Opencast Coal Site**

Tawe Uchaf Community Council is disappointed that Celtic Energy has presented this application at a time when the Country is in lockdown due to the deadly Coronavirus pandemic. Lockdown has prevented the circulation of consultation letters to properties close to this development. As a result, it has not allowed for proper local consultation with ratepayers. Further, and extremely important, this planning application could be determined by a Planning Committee who will not have visited the site to experience first-hand the impact of the high embankment above the village of Caehopkin. The photographs presented to the Committee have been taken from the other side of the valley. The photographs do not paint an accurate picture. Tawe Uchaf Community Council respectfully asks that planning process must be delayed to allow the Planning Committee to undertake a site visit to experience first-hand the visual impact on the village of Caehopkin.

Tawe Uchaf Community Council has discussed the details and plans in relation to the above application. Tawe Uchaf Community Council wishes to submit the following comments to the Planning Committee.

Tawe Uchaf Community Council is supportive and welcoming of initiatives and developments that will provide skilled employment opportunities in this area. However, the designs and impact on settlements in the Community would need to be satisfied.

 The height of the proposed embankment above the village of Caehopkin will sit approximately 45 metres above the cycle track. The embankment will be constructed on restored opencast mining tips. The restored ground slopes steeply down to the cycle-track. An area of marshy ground sits adjacent to the cycle track. The marshy ground are disused holding lagoons from the opencast mining operations. The marshy area floods in heavy rain. The embankments will be constructed on this marshy area. The base of the embankment is therefore unstable. There will be a risk of slippage.

Any slippage or ground movement on this restored opencast land either under construction, heavy rainfall or heavy trains using the track will cause an immediate and possibly devastating landslip threatening to the village and its residents;

The restored opencast ground sits above old extensive underground working. The old underground workings will further prejudice ground stability

The two attenuation ponds will hold approximately 3500 and 1500 cubic metres of water respectively. This volume of water equates to approximately 3500 and 1500 tonnes of water directly above Caehopkin and Brooklands. The volumes of water held in the two ponds pose an additional threat to the residents of Caehopkin and Brooklands. The previous comments on ground stability need to be considered in this respect.

Climate change exacerbates the above comment. Rainfall totals are increasing, the severity of storms and rainfall volumes poses a further threat to ground stability.

The village of Caehopkin is already prone to flooding. The proposals to open up old watercourses will create the risk of increased flooding. Station Road, Caehopkin becomes a waterway in heavy rain.

There is a total absence of any on-going maintenance plan for the attenuation ponds and the re-opened watercourses. An effective safety maintenance plan for the ponds and watercourses must be developed and implemented

The visual impact of the GCRE project on Caehopkin and Coelbren is unacceptable. Residents have experienced 50 to 60 years of opencast mining on the site and experienced dust and ground vibration. The Council feels strongly that the visual impacts must be minimised to provide future comfort to residents.

Road safety on the A4221 will be a further risk. There will be increased vehicle movements. Some of the traffic will involve heavy slow moving loads. The A4221 has a 60mph speed limit approaching the entrance to the site where traffic will approach and turn into the site and back into the A4221 leaving the site.

In view of the foregoing Tawe Uchaf Community Council respectfully requests a full review of the proposed plans and a redesigned scheme produced to move any track further away from the village, to mitigate the visual impacts, improve safety of the site and the relocation of the risks created by the attenuation ponds.

Finally, Tawe Uchaf Community Council, would insist, respectfully that the Planning Committee must visit this site before making a decision on this application.

The Chairman of the Council, Councillor Stephen Davies has requested to address the Committee.