



Mining projects in the UK and the community



The three major mining projects currently under way in the UK involve rail, coal, and fertilizer. They are all at various stages of the project cycle.

HS2, the controversial high-speed rail project, was originally envisaged to connect London to Manchester and Leeds via Birmingham by 2033. Economics and politics have had a major impact on the final cost – up from an initial £35 billion to over £100 billion, and on the final route – the Birmingham Leeds link has been scrapped. However, work goes on and HS2 has once again begun tunnelling under London after launching its third giant tunnel boring machine (TBM) near Euston station. Following a longstanding tradition of naming TBMs after women, members of the local community have selected the name ‘Lydia’ for the TBM. Lydia Gandaa is a former teacher at the nearby Old Oak Common Primary School and a founding member of the Bubble & Squeak social enterprise in the area. She is an active member of the local community, running after-school and holiday clubs at the Old Oak Community Centre.

The new coal mine in Cumbria is a project near Whitehaven that will produce 2.8 million tons of coking coal a year for steelmaking and create 500 new jobs. It was approved by the UK government in January 2023, despite objections from local, national, and global groups over its climate impact. The mine will emit about 9 million tons of greenhouse gases a year, equivalent to putting 200 000 cars on the road. Most of the coal mined will be exported. The UK Climate Change Committee condemned the decision and said it contradicted the global effort towards net zero. Climate campaigners have been denied the opportunity to institute a legal challenge against the government over its decision to grant planning permission for a new coal mine in Cumbria. The project was initially approved by Cumbria County Council in October 2020. West Cumbria Mining, the firm behind the project, promised to create 500 direct jobs and 1500 in the wider community.

The Woodsmith project is Anglo American’s new polyhalite fertilizer mine that is being developed in the northeast of England near Whitby. Polyhalite is a naturally occurring mineral that contains potassium, sulphur, magnesium, and calcium plus numerous micronutrients, making it an ideal natural fertilizer. The project is currently sinking two mine shafts over a mile deep near Sneaton, south of Whitby and a 37 km long tunnel to a processing area at Wilton on Teesside.

After an investment of £400 million in 2022, Anglo announced that the capital expenditure for this year will be £650 million and approximately £800 million per year for the following three years – a significant investment for the local area.

The project currently employs over 1650 people at its sites in Whitby, Teesside, and Scarborough, with the majority being from the local communities.

The Woodsmith Foundation is an independent charity funded by Anglo American and has recently awarded grants totalling almost £250 000 towards initiatives that will support local communities from Teesside to Scarborough.

Seventy organizations received grants from the Foundation to help them deliver a range of programmes. For example, Scarborough Pride will use their grant to offer meaningful support and activities for the LGBT+ community in the Scarborough Borough. The Loftus Town Council will use their grant to start a gardening club for residents.

So, mining and the community are inseparable. What happens when lithium mining starts in Cornwall will be another story!

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