

Planning application for barite mine to deliver vital resource for the North Sea oil and gas industry lodged

A planning application to develop a world class barite resource at Duntanlich, north of Aberfeldy, was lodged with Perth & Kinross Council on 13th November by oilfield services company, M-I SWACO.

The proposed mine is a replacement for the company's mine at Foss, which has operated since 1985.

The Duntanlich orebody is unique in the UK. It is the only known significant barite deposit that is economic to work and will enable the UK to become self-sufficient in a mineral vitally important to the North Sea oil and gas industry, ensuring security of supply.

The planning application follows extensive community consultation, with events held in Ballinluig, Pitlochry and Aberfeldy and meetings with key stakeholders, to inform the proposals.

Barite is largely used as a weighting agent for drilling fluids in oil and gas exploration and there is no substitute with all the essential properties of this mineral. It is also used as a value-added application in the automobile and medical industries.

The Foss barite deposit has a complex geological structure making it increasingly difficult to mine. In comparison, a mine at Duntanlich, boasting a resource in excess of 7.5 million tonnes of barite which has a simple geological structure, could supply the whole of the UK's requirements for more than 50 years at planned production rates.

The Duntanlich development would provide skilled employment for around 30 people, drawn from the local area, where employment is largely reliant on tourism and forestry. There could also be indirect employment opportunities for local suppliers and contractors.

New proposal integrates results of 3 years of environmental studies

A previous planning application to develop the Duntanlich resource was turned down in 1996. Three years of environmental studies have informed the new proposal and careful design has now ensured that previous concerns, such as visual impact and impact on the road network, have been addressed.

The new proposal ensures that there is no visibility from the highly sensitive Queen's View and no or minimal visibility from the rest of the surrounding area.

The proposed new access route into the site from the A827 close to the A9 Ballinluig junction will remove mine traffic from the settlements in the Tay valley. Production of 120,000 tonnes per annum is proposed.

Ian Hughes, Project Manager for M-I SWACO said:

"We are clearly delighted to be able to be lodging this planning application, which will ensure the UK is self-sufficient in barite. Such a project will not only have a significant positive local economic impact, diversifying the economy of this rural area where employment is reliant on tourism and forestry, but will also have national significance in terms of providing vital continuity of supply for the North Sea oil and gas industry.

"We have learnt a lot from the time of the previous application and have made significant adjustments to our proposals.

"We have engaged extensively with the local community and other key stakeholders to ensure the success of this important project for both the local area as well as nationally."