# Councillors back community opposition to coal mining plans threatening Sirhowy Country Park



Councillors from Caerphilly County Borough have expressed their deep appreciation for the participants of the Twmbarlwm Trek, which took place on 10 May 2025, part of the ongoing Caerphilly Challenge Series. This event showcased not only the region's stunning landscapes but also the community's firm stance against a controversial proposal for open-cast coal mining in Sirhowy Country Park.

The trek brought together individuals of various ages and backgrounds, united in a common purpose: to raise awareness about the plans put forward by Energy Recovery Investments (ERI) to extract a staggering half a million tonnes of coal from the Bedwas Colliery. Attendees were alarmed to discover the full scope of ERI's intentions, which involve operating a coal processing plant on land adjacent to the park, beneath a well-documented coal seam.

Concerns surrounding the proposal are numerous and profound. The extraction process would necessitate the transportation of thousands of lorry loads of coal annually along narrow routes that wind through ancient woodlands and even encroach on the COVID Memorial Woodland established by the Welsh Government. More jarringly, ERI plans to deposit approximately 7.5 million tonnes of contaminated spoil on the nearby Mynydd Y Grug nature reserve, a crucial habitat for rare flora and fauna that has slowly rehabilitated over decades.

Sirhowy Country Park serves as much more than a mere recreational space; it is a vital component of the local community's identity—a tranquil escape where families gather, children discover nature, and local volunteers commemorate lost loved ones by planting trees. As expressed by local officials, compromising this cherished environment for industrial purposes could lead to irreversible damage to both the ecosystem and the psychological wellbeing of residents.

In recent months, the local outcry has been reflected in the form of a petition that has gained nearly 4,000 signatures, overwhelming evidence of the community's discontent with the proposed mining development. Residents and visitors alike fear the potential health risks, environmental degradation, and negative impacts on property values that could arise should the project move forward.

Speaking in the Senedd, local representatives highlighted the broader implications of the reclamation proposals, emphasising that while the removal of coal tips is essential, it should not come at the cost of community wellbeing. Those opposing the project argue that the reclamation plans, while perhaps well-intentioned in theory, could ultimately harm rather than help the local ecology.

The proposed activities do not merely risk disrupting existing park resources but also run contrary to the Welsh Government's commitment to ensuring coal tips are made safe, particularly in light of the historical tragedies associated with mining. Activists argue that repeating the mistakes of the past would be a dangerous precedent, especially given that the region is home to over 900 disused coal tips, many of which are still considered environmental hazards.

In opposition to ERI's claims that profits from coal sales would fund site restoration, campaigners have characterised this as a form of 'greenwashing'. They suggest that such ventures often lead to projects being abandoned when expectations for profit dwindle, leaving ecological damage without remediation. Many within the Coal Action Network advocate for a future focused on restoration without the need for further extraction, urging for balanced approaches that prioritise the health of the environment and community.

As the community continues to mobilise against these proposals, the collective sentiment remains clear: the safeguarding of Sirhowy Valley Country Park is paramount. The participants in the Twmbarlwm Trek and others engaged in the campaign have sent a resolute message to local authorities. Together, they stand firm in their commitment to protect the green spaces that define their community and ensure that future generations can continue to enjoy the ecological treasures and tranquillity found within the park.

Cllrs Janine Reed and Jan Jones have reiterated their commitment to support the community in these efforts, stressing the importance of unity in ensuring a future that respects both the environment and the needs of the community.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraph 1, 5
2. Paragraph 2, 3
3. Paragraph 3, 4, 5
4. Paragraph 4
5. Paragraph 6
6. Paragraph 6

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.southwalesargus.co.uk/news/25170023.councillors-thank-participants-weekend-twmbarlwm-trek/?ref=rss> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.southwalesargus.co.uk/news/24475795.almost-4-000-sign-petition-rewilding-bedwas-coal-tip/> - A petition opposing the coaling of Bedwas coal tips has garnered nearly 4,000 signatures. Residents and tourists from Bedwas, Cwmfelinfach, and surrounding areas have expressed concerns about the plans by Energy Recovery Investments (ERI) to extract coal from the Bedwas coal tips. They fear potential risks to health, wildlife, tourism, and property values. The Welsh Government has prioritized making coal tips safe to prevent risks like instability and contamination, following historical incidents such as the Aberfan disaster in 1966. ERI's proposal aims to return the former coal tips at Mynydd Y Grug in Bedwas to moorland and grassland, with consultation events held in February. However, some residents believe the reclamation will not improve the situation but rather move it onto the smaller tip in Cwmfelinfach. ERI director Steve Williams stated that they will return the land to its original state before the tips were built. Independent councillor for Ynysddu ward, Jan Jones, expressed concerns that allowing the remediation to proceed would set a dangerous precedent. The Sirhowy Valley is a hotspot for tourists, which some people fear could be lost if the plans happen.
3. <https://caerphilly.observer/news/1038724/fears-raised-in-senedd-over-coal-tip-reclamation-projects/> - Members of the Senedd have raised concerns over coal tip reclamation projects, particularly focusing on the plans by Energy Recovery Investments (ERI) for the former coal tips at Mynydd y Grug in Bedwas. Rhianon Passmore, representing the Islwyn constituency, highlighted constituents' worries about 18 to 20 lorries a day traveling down a haul road that passes through the Sirhowy Valley Country Park. She emphasized that while the removal and remediation of coal tips are desired, it should not come at any cost. Sioned Williams, representing South Wales West, pointed out that there are over 900 disused tips in her region, warning that the landscape has been scarred with environmental hazards left behind. Heledd Fychan, representing South Wales Central, called for new legislation to reflect current realities, noting that the Mines and Quarries Act dates back to 1969. The Plaid Cymru MS criticized the UK Government for not contributing to the long-term remediation of disused coal tips, urging them to take responsibility.
4. <https://www.change.org/p/halt-the-proposed-reclamation-plant-and-haul-route-within-the-sirhowy-valley-country-park> - A petition on Change.org is calling for the halt of the proposed reclamation plant and haul route within the Sirhowy Valley Country Park. The petition expresses deep concern over Energy Recovery Investments (ERI) Reclamation Ltd's plan to remove 500,000 tonnes of coal over five years from two coal tips in Bedwas and use sales from the coal to restore the site. The proposed haulage route would pass through the park, affecting areas used for walking, cycling, running, and horse riding. The park also houses a Covid memorial garden, a community farm, and an activity center. The petition urges ERI to reconsider their plans to preserve this vital green space for both residents' well-being and environmental conservation purposes.
5. <https://www.coalaction.org.uk/2024/04/17/bedwas-coal-tips-key-facts-and-impacts/> - Coal Action Network provides key facts and potential impacts of the proposed Bedwas coal tips mine by Energy Recovery Investments (ERI) Ltd. The plan involves mining nearly half a million tonnes of coal from two coal tips in Caerphilly, South Wales. The extraction would result in around 36 heavy goods vehicle (HGV) movements per day, contribute over 1.3 million tonnes of CO2 emissions, and potentially devastate the local ecology that has been slowly recovering over the past 30 years. The project also endangers the Sirhowy Valley Country Park, which borders one of the tips. The proposal includes building a new section of haul road 575 meters long and 6 meters wide, and widening the existing forest track, possibly at the loss of trees bordering the road. The operation is expected to be initially for around seven years, with work on site starting at 6 am and continuing into the night until 10 pm for 6-9 months, with potential extensions.
6. <https://www.coalaction.org.uk/2024/04/18/support-local-campaign-group-resist-bedwas-coal-mine/> - Coal Action Network supports the local campaign group resisting the Bedwas coal mine proposed by Energy Recovery Investments (ERI) Ltd. The company plans to extract nearly half a million tonnes of coal from two coal tips in Bedwas, South Wales, claiming that profits from coal sales will fund the restoration of the sites. However, the campaign group views this as a 'greenwashing' attempt, noting that companies often abandon such projects when profits decline, leaving over 300 coal tips abandoned in South Wales. The group emphasizes the need for remediation without further coal mining and highlights the potential environmental and community impacts of the proposed project.