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The Coal  
Authority

# Be part of our exciting future

**Lisa Pinney MBE**, Chief Executive Officer of the Coal Authority, shares some of the latest innovations and ambitions of the statutory body – from its commercial support to the property market and achievements in sustainability and energy – to explain why it's the organisation of choice for an exciting and dynamic future.

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**Q** What are your main areas of focus as Chief Executive and how do you hope to achieve them?

**A** For me, the heart of any successful business and service to the public is having good people and for those people to be valued and supported. The Coal Authority has a statutory responsibility to provide services on behalf of the government to manage the legacy of coal mining. A highly skilled and diverse, sustainable organisation is one of my main aims so that we are seen as an employer of choice and as an inclusive, diverse employer.

We also need to raise a greater awareness of the organisation and what we do. More people are already aware of our incident number and how to get in touch with us if they have concerns. We deal with a combined total of around 1200 incidents and subsidence claims per year. It's really important that people in coal mining areas or those who have concerns about public safety relating to mine entries and mine gas have the right information, have access to our 24/7 phone line and understand that we are absolutely here to help. To do this, we need to continue to develop our partnerships in the private and public sectors and with members of the public. We pride ourselves on our ability to stop and listen to our customers and to share and utilise that information. We also know we do things more effectively when we work with others.

It's also important to look beyond site-specific issues and problems from our mining heritage and look at the opportunities they present. This means increasing our investment into innovations and partnerships to see what can be done with the assets we already have – from the ochre and other by-products of the mine water treatment process, to the water we manage, as well as our data.

**Q** How will your previous environmental and public safety experience help in your new role as Chief Executive?

**A** I've built a career as a leader of operational bodies and working with communities that face really

difficult issues such as flooding. I've seen first hand the impact of flooding on people's lives and their homes – working on big schemes to help reduce risk and make life better for them. From my environmental incident response experience to working with large teams, I have a strong track record in dealing with Coal Authority related matters. I am looking forward to pulling from my experience in building the right pool of talent – particularly in terms of diversity and inclusion. I'm passionate about getting more women into STEM subjects and will be looking to develop how the Coal Authority can be an employer of choice.

Since joining the Coal Authority earlier this year, my aim is to bring my experience and more forwards to help support the public and also create new opportunities to use our heritage to enhance the environment.

### Q What is the impact of mining on the environment and people?

A We have a responsibility on behalf of the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy to minimise and mitigate the impact of coal mining heritage. We currently manage over £4 billion worth of liability on behalf of the government. As an organisation, we are focused on public safety and subsidence but also keeping the country running by reducing the impact on infrastructure. We work very closely with infrastructure providers to keep road and rail networks and other infrastructure projects working smoothly.

Another important aspect of the Coal Authority is the incredible archive and digital information that we hold on decommissioned mines and how that information benefits the conveyancing and property markets as well as others. For this we have to understand our customers and the markets we work with, to listen to their needs and invest in new ways to support them.

### Q What challenges does the Coal Authority face and how will you overcome these?

A What's really interesting is the complexity of the challenges. We know the property market continues to change and needs our data and information to support it. One of our duties as a public body is to open up and help competition in that market – as well as provide quality products and expertise from people that have an incredible background in subsidence, the environment and coal mining.

We then need to monitor and invest in our asset potential and ensure we don't miss an opportunity. For example, we need to invest in underground heat from our assets and work with others to develop this further - we could have a really exciting district heating

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strategy! I'm a big believer that sometimes the fantastic things get put to one side with the day-to-day and that's one of our challenges. As a small body with a big remit we need to focus on doing our core role well but also develop our opportunities, as they could be really powerful for the UK going forwards.

### Q What is the Coal Authority's strategy for the future?

A Again, to deliver our core statutory role around public safety. We must never lose sight of this. Anything that threatens the safety of someone's home and family is hugely upsetting and emotional so we always need to consider and develop what we do and how we do it. For example, when a 'non-coal' concern is raised by the public, a private business or a local authority, we're not always the body that can help but we have to think about how we signpost people – being respectful around that really matters.

Our partnerships and customer relationships are also incredibly important strategically – at all levels.

Finally our innovation focus: how we make the most of the assets and estates that we manage from the mining legacy – particularly by-products from our mine water treatment schemes. For example, we're one of the largest managers of water in the UK and treat over 120 billion litres of water every year. How do we use that packet of skills, information and products from our core role and develop exciting and sustainable solutions? This is a key part of our strategy and business plan for the next five years.

### Q What practical steps is the Coal Authority taking to become more sustainable?

A It's really important when you're a body like us in the environmental field to hold ourselves up to real

standards – some of this is thanks to using our assets more creatively and our renewable energy projects. Other steps have come from products that were previously classed as 'waste' – ochre for example, that used to go to landfill. We have developed this ochre into a pigment for the fine arts market and it can also be used to remediate contaminated land. This is a real win-win for the environment, sustainability and is also good for the bottom line; it helps us do more overall.

Our sustainable and renewables approach really helped us to win the Edie award in sustainability and recycling in 2018. It's a continued part of our commitment to the environment: how we ensure we look for ways to be better, smarter and more sustainable and to share information with others so we can all benefit.

### Q What campaigns and partnerships does the Coal Authority support?

A We always have plenty of campaigns and partnerships going on. To pick out a few:

- Our Groundsure partnership for integrated coal mining and environmental search reports - a real advantage to help combine multiple information streams quickly for customers.
- A number of partnership projects in the environment with Defra and other bodies, specifically around metal mines. One recent project in the Tyne area to reduce the impact of metal mining should have a £30 million benefit over the next thirty years.
- Another really exciting partnership is our innovation centre at the National Coal Mining Museum – a really powerful connection that will help communicate and link our mining heritage with what is being done to benefit our country in the future.

### Q How has the Coal Authority introduced new ways of working in order to further improve efficiencies and essentially continue to grow and transform?

A We have been on a journey since the Coal Authority was created in 1994. It was very linked to the

regulation of coal industry and over time it's evolved to a wider role in public safety and subsidence after decommissioning, minimising environmental aspects of our mining legacy and now into commercial work. We work hard to engage with communities and continue to develop our work and reach around community engagement and further embed our customer service ethos.

We've just finished working on one of the biggest subsidence projects we've ever undertaken. There were over thirty houses affected by subsidence, eighteen of which required demolition. The ground remediation works are now complete and we have been granted conditional planning permission for the site to be redeveloped. Working in partnership with the community has been a key factor in the remediation of this project. Our ability to listen helps us to provide the very best service to the public that we can. Being an organisation that can work well with people when things are hard is essential.

### Q How will the Coal Authority be looking to mitigate risks as you continue to deliver your latest strategy and business plan?

A We must never forget what we are here to do – our core existence is around safety and to enhance the environment – protecting people against hidden risks.

We need to ensure we retain and develop the quality of our people who are all passionate about what they do in the everyday – allowing them to go out, solve problems and be creative.

Our partnership work, understanding problems collectively and looking for opportunities, is also fundamental to minimising risk. We must continue to listen to what the markets and customers need and how nimble we need to be – how our data supports the conveyancing market and others in the future and how we can help. We need to be in the spaces where we can add value without losing sight of our high quality services and products and to keep people safe.

**Lisa Pinney MBE**  
is the Chief Executive Officer of the Coal Authority.

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