



A green industrial strategy

for West Cumbria

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West Cumbria needs a green industrial strategy to create good, long-term jobs and a stronger local economy.



Local employers, trade unions and politicians have been working on a proposal for green investment, developing an alternative to the proposed West Cumbria mine.



This project can be driven by local stakeholders, but needs national policy support on skills, procurement, finance and governance to move forward.



Prospect is the leading UK union for engineers, managers, and specialists.

We represent more than 156,000 workers across the public and private sectors, including thousands of members working in energy generation, transmission, distribution, and research roles around the UK.

West Cumbrian economy

Sellafield Ltd is a key anchor employer in West Cumbria, accounting in 2021 for 21,650 jobs¹ - equivalent to 28% of local employment. These are good, highly productive jobs. However, this level of employment is in gradual decline, with an estimated 1,500 fewer people working for Sellafield Ltd in West Cumbria in 2021 than was the case five years previously.

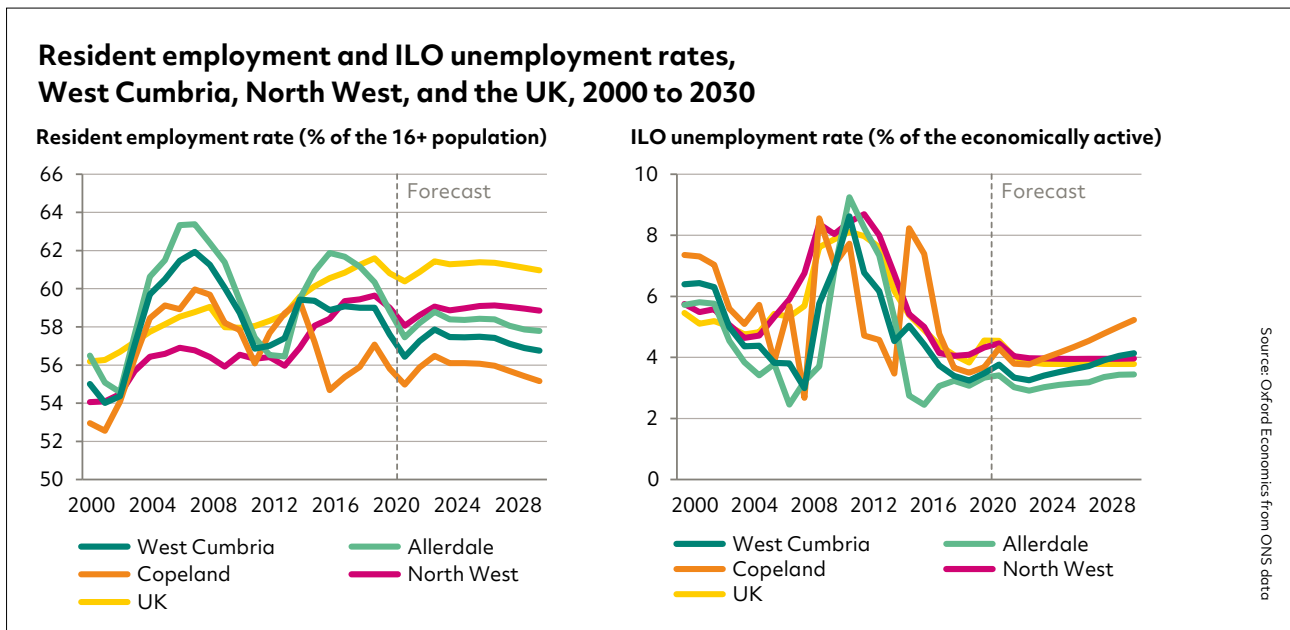
Jobs at Sellafield Ltd provided a mean annual wage of £45,700 in 2021, 35% higher than the UK average of £29,800. Yet, this is atypical of a West Cumbrian economy that has an ageing and generally less well qualified resident population.

Combined with challenges relating to West Cumbria's physical and digital connectivity, the sectoral structure of the West Cumbrian economy is

a major constraint. It is under-represented among larger employers and sectors expected to drive growth, regionally and nationally, and has a weak growth outlook.

A disproportionately high share of neighbourhoods are impacted by deprivation relating to education, skills, training and health.

To use political terminology, West Cumbria needs 'levelling up'. Specifically, it needs more, good, green jobs, both to meet Sellafield Ltd's immediate and longer-term skills needs and to strengthen the economy beyond nuclear. Sellafield Ltd's needs cover a range of scarce and critical skills and those in high demand, and for many of these it is in national competition with the wider energy sector.



1 'The economic contribution of the NDA to the West Cumbria economy' Oxford Economics April 2022

A partnership for progress

Stakeholders across West Cumbria have contributed over the years to initiatives and plans that have not come to fruition. The current focus on the proposed coal mine is a consequence of the failure to deliver good, sustainable jobs despite promises to do so.

Whilst years of inaction cannot be reversed overnight, there is an urgent need to refocus on a green industrial strategy based on tangible projects that can quickly progress towards delivery.

This is the goal of a Prospect proposal developed in discussions over summer 2023 with the leader of Cumberland Council and representatives of Sellafield Ltd, the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority (NDA).

We hope that this can become the basis for a long-term strategic approach that delivers real benefits for workers in West Cumbria. But we cannot afford to ignore the urgent needs for improvement that will change the political and economic narrative.



Just having jobs in general. There's so many people that just want a good, stable job provides the sufficient income to pay the bills."

Amy (36)
Tutor, Workington



Nuclear is a very known and tested science. I don't understand why it's not used more."

Josh (25)
*Vehicle Technician,
Ewanrigg*



Priorities

Some of the initial priorities, building on preparatory work already underway by other stakeholders are:

- **An SMR for West Cumbria** – Great British Nuclear aim to bring two SMR project to Final Investment Decision by 2029. Rolls Royce SMR has proposed Moorside along with Wylfa Newydd and Trawsfynydd and as potential SMR sites and has stated in written Parliamentary evidence that: ‘As former nuclear power station sites, these locations have existing grid connections, meaning that the construction of extensive, new, costly grid infrastructure is not required for new SMRs². The proposal from Solway Community Energy is based on RR SMR technology, is entirely privately financed and ready to begin exploratory work on a non-exclusive basis on the Moorside site.
- **West Coast Renewables Park** – A hub for manufacturing and processing materials for the local green economy. The 130-acre brownfield site that formerly hosted Albright and Wilson’s Marchon chemical plant is ideally suited for such a development. The recently announced solar farm at Dean Moor at Branthwaite demonstrates potential demand for a local supply chain. Investment in the Port of Workington could create a viable case to site a gigafactory in West Cumbria. This facility should link up with local colleges to widen access to skills training.
- **Project Colette** – A proposed 1.2GW community owned wind farm³ which also includes possibilities for green hydrogen and steel production. Although Project Colette may take longer to deliver, the West Coast Renewables Park could kickstart enabling and supply chain activities.

2 <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/109546/pdf>

3 <https://greenfinancecommunityhub.co.uk/project-collette/>



The more we invest in it for the future, not just how environmentally friendly it is, but also for I guess the economy. It’s a good thing.”

Lewis (28)

*Hospital Activity Lead,
Workington*



Now is the time for renewal and the existing partners look forward to working with other stakeholders to realise a better future for West Cumbria.

There are some key challenges though a wider engagement programme can resolve them. The core requirements are ones of political leadership and governance.

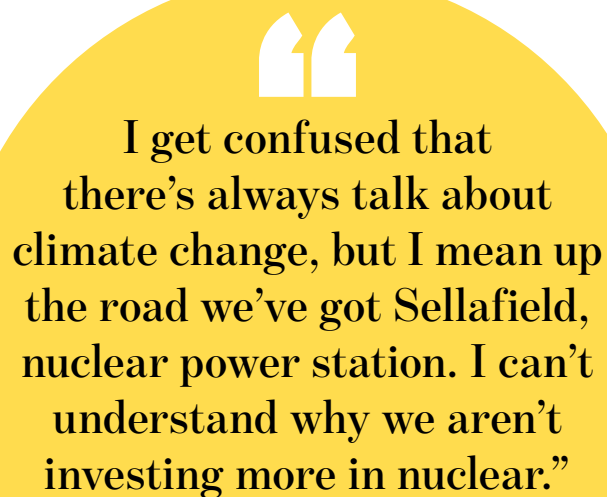
Procurement

US experience following the introduction of the Inflation Reduction Act clearly demonstrates the benefits of an industrial strategy that uses incentives and conditionality to create domestic jobs.⁴ It has created more than 170,000 clean energy jobs in its first year and \$110bn investment in clean energy manufacturing, often in under-served communities.

Independent research commissioned by Prospect⁵ demonstrates that a stronger commitment to social value in procurement can create thousands of good quality jobs in areas of greatest need and strengthen UK security by boosting domestic supply chains. Yet Sellafield Ltd is under no obligations in this regard. Neither is there any mechanism for either Sellafield Ltd or supply companies to access work opportunities from overseas.

WE NEED

Public procurement regulations to be amended to provide for a social value approach to letting contracts.



I get confused that there's always talk about climate change, but I mean up the road we've got Sellafield, nuclear power station. I can't understand why we aren't investing more in nuclear."

John (60)

Shop Assistant, Dalton



4 <https://climatepower.us/wp-content/uploads/sites/23/2023/07/Clean-Energy-Boom-Anniversary-Report-1.pdf>

5 'Design, build and maintain: Effective defence procurement' <https://library.prospect.org.uk/download/2023/00477>

Governance

West Cumbria's Industrial Solutions Hub (ISH) has potential to develop into a low carbon and renewables centre and to support the creation of a renewables park. There are successful examples of industrial diversification strategies in other nuclear and isolated communities:

The North Highland and Moray Space Cluster Strategy, funded by Dounreay Site Restoration Ltd (DSRL) and Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) estimates that a Northern Space Cluster could create 740 jobs in the Highlands and Islands and boost the regional economy by £56m per year by the end of this decade. It is the first vertical satellite launch site to secure planning permission in the UK and could become Europe's first continental orbital spaceport.

Morlais is a Menter Môn tidal energy project covering a 35km² area of seabed off the coast of Anglesey. It aims to benefit local communities, the economy and help tackle climate change by using renewable energy to generate clean low carbon electricity. The first stage of the project focused on community and stakeholder engagement and securing consent from Welsh Government and Natural Resources Wales. This was achieved over a period of just two years, allowing for phased implementation of tidal energy devices.

Investment in the Advanced Manufacturing Research Centre in South Yorkshire has transformed a former coal mining area into a centre of manufacturing excellence applied across a range of sectors. It provides a hub for high quality, industry-ready employment and training. West Cumbria, by contrast, has dispersed training facilities and, with the exception of the National Nuclear Laboratory, there is no recognised centre of excellence in innovation.

However, the ISH itself is at a relatively early stage of development and may require further leadership and financial investment.

WE NEED

Government, learning from examples elsewhere, to commission independent expert analysis of the potential of the ISH and to develop a business case for investment that will deliver sustainable economic improvements.

Employment

Sellafield Ltd is already facing significant challenges in recruiting for a range of roles. These include specialist roles, for example in radiation protection, cyber security and AI, as well as operational roles. At present this demand does not seamlessly match local availability of skills, either because of national competition or, in the case of operational roles, perceived lack of access routes for the local population including NEETS in the 19-30 age group.

Sellafield Ltd, like other companies in the NDA Group, is subject to government controls over pay. Other nuclear employers, especially those operating in the private sector, are not subject to the same restraints and therefore can simply outbid Sellafield Ltd for the skills they require. This has led to increased reliance on agency supply workers, at higher cost but budgeted separately, working alongside an increasingly demoralised core workforce.

There is a potential home-grown solution to increasing employment of local people who are currently NEET. This can be characterised as 'target, improve and backfill'. In other words, large employers, including Sellafield Ltd, target existing workers with potential for development, invest in them, and backfill the roles they vacate. This may require a programme of 'community' or pre-apprenticeships, for example for the NEET cohort.

WE NEED

A revised approach to workforce investment at Sellafield, including as part of the current government review of NDA pay arrangements but also taking account of the need for a wider skills strategy to deliver the UK's nuclear ambition.

Redirection of a portion of unused funding from the apprenticeship levy to provide appropriate access to local employment.

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