MORE THAN 700 new jobs – many of them expected to be local – will be created in a new 55-square-kilometre open-cut mine at Morangup that could start in 2017.

A Chinese-backed joint venture company intends as early as next February to seek State environmental approval to mine 220 million tonnes of bauxite stretching 20km from near Wundowie to 1.5km from the Avon River and the main rail link to Perth.

Bauxite Alumina Joint Ventures say the mine would create 120 new jobs, plus at least five times more support jobs for contractors, suppliers and other services and operate for at least 25 years.

“We’d like the majority of our workforce to be local people,” BAJV General Manager Bill Moss said.

“The earliest start-up could be in three years’ time with all approvals in place.”

The news has shocked Morangup residents, who say they first knew about planned mining “on their doorstep” when they read about it in last month’s Herald.

“We’re horrified that the Shire told us nothing about it,” Morangup Progress Association President Dave Mustchin said.

The nearest small Morangup subdivisions are less than a kilometre west of the bauxite deposit, which half encircles the closely-knit rural community (see map Page 12).

Local residents have formed a new action group to raise concerns about proposed mining and say “all of our communities will need to unite to preserve our clean country air, our beautiful night skies, our way of life and our property values.”

Their concerns include threats to local ground and rain water supplies; dust clouds and increased traffic; the impact on local farms, businesses and tourism; protecting unique local flora and fauna; and the “very real possibility” that properties will lose value next to “intense mining activities”.

The Toodyay Shire Council released an economic development plan last month which described the proposed mine as a “major transformative investment” that would help create more local jobs and attract more young families to service the needs of the Shire’s ageing population.

The mining joint venture is a 70-30 partnership between a subsidiary of Chinese state-owned coal mining, power, chemicals, aluminium and machinery manufacturing giant Yankuang Group and Australian mining company Bauxite Resources Ltd (BRL).

BRL wholly owns another major Darling Range bauxite resource called ‘Fortuna’ on 658ha of privately owned land 10km north of Wundowie.

The Morangup deposit – called ‘Felicitas’ – is all on private land, 80 percent of which is cleared and the rest bush.

The bauxite deposit starts about a metre below the surface and is three to five metres thick.

Where it crosses Toodyay Road near Fernie Road, BAJV say it may build an underground conveyor belt to transport crushed ore under the road to the rail link 14km away.

The Shire this month denied “rumours” it had “approved the project or made secret arrangements with the company”.

Shire President David Dow said the Council had no power to approve or refuse mining – it was “entirely a matter for the State Government” to decide.

“All mining of bauxite would require State Government mining approval, not a local government extractive industry licence,” he said.

Cr Dow said he would ask BAJV to provide the Shire with more details about its plans before seeking a public meeting with Morangup residents.

“If handled correctly, the mine could have positive economic and social outcomes for Toodyay,” Cr Dow said.

However, it could also have possible negative ramifications for nearby Morangup residents.”

A BAJV spokesperson said the company had offered to meet Morangup Progress Association representatives after they first raised concerns “a few weeks ago”.

The association had requested more time to form a committee and gather information and community feedback before meeting BAJV, possibly next month.
Map source: BAJV Resources - Morangup bauxite deposits marked in blue

Figure 2: Felicitas Resource drill hole location map