

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of the Scrutiny Sub-Committee for Looking After the Environment held at the County Hall, Durham on **Tuesday 31 January 2006** at **10.00 a.m.**

COUNCILLOR CARROLL in the Chair

Members

Councillors Armstrong, Carr, Chapman, Freeman, Gray, Henderson, Holroyd, Knox, Lethbridge, Ord, Porter, Pye, Stelling, Stradling, Tennant and Young.

Co-opted: Mr D Easton and Mr D.M Jones

Other Members:

Councillors Meir, O'Donnell and Williams

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Douthwaite.

A1 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

A2 County Durham Minerals and Waste Development Framework – Minerals Issues and Options Report

The Sub Committee considered a report of the Acting Director of Environment and also received a presentation from Jason McKewon, Planning Officer of the Planning Policy Team on the County Durham Minerals and Waste Development Framework (for copy see file).

It was explained that the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 made important changes to the planning system to replace Local Plans with Local Development Framework. The County Council is required to prepare a Minerals and Waste Development Framework (MWDF) to replace the Minerals and Waste Local Plans. The MWDF will comprise of six waste and minerals Development Plan Documents (DPD). This will provide the basis for determining all future minerals and waste planning applications in County Durham.

Consultation on the Minerals Issues and Options Report was carried out in November and December of last year. Questions were posed in the report about the policy that should be taken in relation to mineral supply and extraction issues. The report also set out industry suggestions for extensions to existing sites or proposals for new sites.

The County Council is required to make provision for 75.8 million tonnes of crushed rock and 6.1 million tonnes of sand and gravel over the period 2001-2016. Landbanks also need to be maintained equivalent to at least 7 years

supply of sand and gravel and 20 years of crushed rock. The minerals industry have proposed the following sites or extensions:

- A new rock quarry in Weardale
- Extensions to quarries at Heights Quarry, Hulands Quarry, Bishop Middleham Quarry, Crime Rigg Quarry, Witch Hill Quarry and Aycliffe Quarry.

The Sub Committee were asked what weight should be given to employment retention at existing sites and the provision of new jobs in rural areas.

Sand and Gravel - In relation to sand and gravel it was explained that the current provision is insufficient to maintain a 7 year landbank. The current plan has identified 5 areas of search but no applications have come forward. It may be necessary to have a site specific approach. Suggestions have been made by the industry for two new sand and gravel quarries at Low Harperley and at Hummerbeck.

Industrial Minerals - High grade dolomite is worked at Thrislington Quarry. The operator has requested that two existing allocations be reallocated. Extensions to Thrislington in conjunction with existing sites together with other proposals may have a cumulative impact.

Brick Clay - County Durham contains two of the regions five brickworks at Todhills and Eldon. Consideration is needed on how to meet their needs together with the needs of brickworks outside of County Durham.

Building Stone – Extensions have been proposed at Windy Hill Quarry and Stainton Quarry both in Teesdale. Objections have been received to the extension at Stainton.

Opencast Coal – There is currently a presumption against proposals for opencast coal unless they are environmentally acceptable, or can be made so by planning conditions or that they provide local or community benefit which outweighs the adverse impacts of the proposal. UK Coal has submitted five sites for consideration, one of which has been withdrawn. Objections have been received to the sites at White Lea and Randolph. The Marley Hill site has been withdrawn.

It was explained that once representations have been considered the sites would be assessed before undertaking consultation on the options. Further briefings and discussions will be held with local Members and portfolio holders once the sites are appraised.

Jason McKewon explained that the sub regional apportionment only applies to the extraction of aggregates and crushed rock. The issue of need does not apply when considering opencast coal proposals.

During the discussion of energy issues it was explained that the County Council could only take into account the existing national policies.

Councillor Young made reference to the UK's present energy supply problems and the need for these to be taken into account in determining policies. The

need for a mixed energy policy and investment in a basket of technologies including clean coal technology was highlighted.

Councillor Stelling raised the issue of renewable energy and the continuing increase in wind turbines. Joan Portey, Business Manager Planning Policy, explained that there was separate guidance on renewable energy. Whilst many proposals were coming forward it was unlikely to contribute as much as gas or coal. The County is meeting its regional guidance target. The Regional Spatial Strategy states where wind farms should not be installed but does not give advice on specific sites.

Councillor Tennant suggested that the extraction of minerals was important in supporting employment and for the local economy and should be supported by the County Council. Jason explained that most of the opencast coal sites that were easier to work have been previously worked and that some of the remaining sites lay in areas of high landscape value.

In response to questions about the protection of the environment it was explained that policies are prepared to protect national, regional and local areas of landscape value. In addition there are policies for the restoration and aftercare of mineral sites. The County Council is seeking to improve standards of reclamation which will enable public access to the sites. It was acknowledged that in post war era, standards of reclamation had not been very high.

Councillor Henderson was concerned that once the minerals DPD's had been agreed it would be binding on the Authority and would preclude the Planning Committee from objecting to specific sites. In addition there was a concern that further opencast and mineral working would affect the image of the County and make it difficult to attract new business. Joan Portrey advised that there was little evidence available in relation to the latter issue, though this would be further investigated.

Jason explained that the sites in the options report had been identified by the industry. These will be considered on the basis of need and environmental acceptability and following an appraisal included in the final preferred options report. It was also explained that the approach taken with sand and gravel is not working, as none of the previously identified sites had been taken up by industry. It may therefore be necessary to replace this with a site specific approach. The sites that have been identified by industry will need very careful consideration.

Responding to questions on regional apportionment and the use of recycled aggregates, Jason explained that the Regional Working Party decided the apportionment and that Durham had argued for the lowest possible apportionment. The use of recycled aggregates had been taken into account in deciding the regional apportionment.

With the consent of the Chairman, Mr Major, a representative of the Regional Flood Defence Committee advised that dredged aggregates were damaging marine habitats and wondered whether it would be possible to increase the production of sand and gravel to offset any reduction in that taken from the seabed. It was explained that the County Council could only take account the

apportionment for County Durham and it was unlikely that extraction would be increased to compensate for any reduction in marine dredging.

The Sub Committee was advised that all comments made today would be considered.

The Sub Committee agreed to receive the report.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.