northumberland minerals local plan

ADOPTED
March 2000

NORTHUMBERLAND
COUNTY COUNCIL

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CHAPTER 1:

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

1.1 This plan presents the County Council's policies and proposals that will guide minerals development in the County to the year 2006.

1.2 The plan covers the entire range of mineral extraction in the County outside the National Park. Northumberland has extensive deposits of economically valuable minerals. It currently produces around 2.2 million tonnes of opencast coal, 0.8 million tonnes of deep-mined coal and 2.7 million tonnes of crushed rock and sand and gravel every year. Sandstone, peat and clay are extracted and oil and gas and vein minerals are also potentially exploitable.

1.3 A consultation draft of this plan was published in January 1995. Comments on the plan's contents were invited from parish and district councils, government bodies, industry, interest groups and the general public. All comments made during the consultation period were taken fully into account when preparing the revised plan for deposit. A public inquiry was opened in November 1997. In March 1999 the County Council published Proposed Modifications in the light of the Inspector's Report and invited comments. The plan was adopted without further modification in March 2000.

PURPOSE OF THE PLAN

1.4 Minerals are important natural resources which make an essential contribution to the nation's prosperity and quality of life. Their extraction contributes to the local economy through direct employment and as raw materials for industry and construction. Mineral working can, however, cause major disturbance to the environment and people's living conditions.

1.5 The purposes of the Minerals Local Plan are therefore to ensure the most sustainable use of Northumberland's resources, to reconcile mineral working with other competing interests as far as possible, and to strike the right balance between the need to produce minerals and the need to protect the environment and people's quality of life.

1.6 More specifically, this plan aims:

- to protect local communities and the County's resources such as good quality agricultural land and features of landscape, wildlife and heritage importance from undue disturbance or damage as a result of the working and transport of minerals.
- to identify how much aggregate and other minerals will need to be supplied from Northumberland to make an appropriate contribution to the local, regional and national need for minerals, and to identify the preferred locations for mineral extraction.
- to safeguard important mineral resources and encourage the use of secondary and recycled materials wherever possible.
- to provide a detailed policy framework for assessing and controlling mineral working and to ensure that land used for mineral working is properly reclaimed to a beneficial after-use.

THE POLICY CONTEXT OF THE PLAN

1.7 The Northumberland Minerals Local Plan is a statutory local plan and part of the development plan for Northumberland. It has been prepared in accordance with the provisions of the Town and Country Planning Act, 1990, as amended by the Planning and Compensation Act, 1991.

1.8 In preparing the Minerals Local Plan the County Council has had regard to the established framework of policy and advice on minerals matters at the national, regional and local level. Government policy and advice on the planning aspects of mineral extraction is set out in a number of documents including 'This Common Inheritance' (1990) which sets out a broad environmental strategy for the country and the "UK Strategy for Sustainable Development" (1994). More detailed government advice is provided by Planning Policy Guidance Notes (PPGs) and more specifically by Minerals Policy Guidance Notes (MPGs). These form an important basis for the local plan.

1.9 Regional planning guidance for the northern region is set out in RPG7, published in 1993, and covers the counties of Cleveland, Durham and Northumberland. A draft revision of Regional Planning Guidance for the North East was published in May 1999. Information and advice on aggregates minerals is contained in reports produced annually by the Northern Region Working Party on Aggregates.

1.10 At the County level, strategic policies are set out in the County Structure Plan, which was adopted in 1996 and this plan has been produced in the light of its contents. More detailed planning policies are contained in the district-wide local plans.

1.11 This plan has been prepared in conjunction with a Minerals Local Plan for the Northumberland National Park which was adopted in January 2000.

MONITORING AND REVIEW

1.12 It will be important to monitor changes in circumstances which have a bearing on the future scale and pattern of mineral working. These will include:

- changing national and regional policies and European Community directives;
- changes in supply and demand, both nationally and locally, including the use of secondary and waste materials;
- the availability of new information regarding the importance, location and scale of workable reserves;
- changes in working techniques, restoration opportunities, transportation developments and the overall economics of mineral workings.
- changes in public and political attitudes, in particular regarding environmental issues.

1.13 When it becomes apparent that the overall context has changed substantially, it will become necessary to review the policies and proposals in the plan to see whether changes are needed. In any case, it is anticipated that the local plan would be reviewed at least every five years.

FORMAT OF THE PLAN

1.14 The plan consists of a Written Statement and a Proposals Map. Larger scale inset maps have been produced to show particular areas in greater detail. The Written Statement contains the policies which will be used in considering and determining all mineral planning applications outside the National Park. Each policy is accompanied by a justification explaining why the policy is necessary and what it is intended to achieve. An Environmental Appraisal of the Plan has been undertaken, to assess the environmental implications of the policies and proposals.

CHAPTER 2:

A STRATEGY FOR MINERALS DEVELOPMENT

INTRODUCTION

2.1 Minerals are an important element in the economy of Northumberland but their extraction can have a significant environmental impact. Government planning policies for minerals aim to ensure that there is an adequate supply of minerals, with due regard for the protection of the environment. Section 54A of the Town and Country Planning Act, 1990, emphasises the primacy of the development plan in the assessment of planning applications. It states that "determination shall be made in accordance with the plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise."

POLICY CONTEXT

2.2 The Regional Planning Guidance for the Northern Region (RPG7) states that "Minerals Planning Authorities will need to recognise that in providing for a supply of minerals, a balance must be struck between the economic and environmental requirements of the community. The Government is committed to the principle of sustainable development, which should ensure that special environments are not adversely affected by mineral exploitation. In particular, the value of the countryside and coast in terms of nature conservation, landscape, agriculture, recreation and tourism, and the quality of life for local residents should be taken into account".

2.3 The 'UK Strategy for Sustainable Development' (January 1994) said that while very large quantities of mineral resources exist and it may be very unlikely that there will be a problem of physical exhaustion of resources, it is becoming increasingly difficult to find sites that can be worked without damaging the environment to an extent that people find acceptable.

2.4 The Government has defined the objectives of sustainable development for minerals planning in the Minerals Planning Guidance Note 1 General Considerations and the Development Plan System (MPG1) June 1996 as:

i) to conserve minerals as far as possible, whilst ensuring an adequate supply to meet needs;

ii) to ensure that the environmental impacts caused by mineral operations and the transport of minerals are kept, as far as possible, to an acceptable minimum;

iii) to minimise production of waste and to encourage efficient use of materials, including appropriate use of high quality materials, and recycling of wastes;

iv) to encourage sensitive working, restoration and aftercare practices so as to preserve or enhance, the overall quality of the environment;

v) to protect areas of designated landscape or nature conservation value from development, other than in exceptional circumstances and where it has been demonstrated that development is in the public interest; and

vi) to prevent the unnecessary sterilisation of mineral resources".

2.5 A strategy for the plan that meets Government policy and is also sustainable must therefore seek to ensure an appropriate supply of minerals to meet the legitimate needs of society whilst recognising the need to protect the environment, conserve resources, minimise waste and ensure good environmental working practices.

SUPPLY OF MINERALS

2.6 The community has an essential requirement for minerals for construction, industrial and energy requirements. The Government recognises that minerals are important natural resources and that their exploitation makes a significant contribution to the nation's prosperity and quality of life. Minerals can only be worked where they occur naturally and the materials produced must be of a suitable quality for the intended purpose.

2.7 Northumberland contains a wide variety of mineral resources, some of national importance and others which are of significance at a regional and local level. The County of Northumberland is one of the largest producers of opencast coal in England and Wales. It is a net exporter of crushed rock and sand and gravel for aggregate use and it produces quality building stone for use in prestigious building projects around the country. Peat is produced and sold throughout the country, and clay is extracted and used locally for the manufacture of bricks.

2.8 Government policy requires that each mineral planning authority area should make a contribution to meeting local, regional and national demand which reflects the nature and extent of minerals in its area and other relevant planning considerations. The County Council recognises this obligation but seeks to ensure that this will only be done if a proposal for mineral extraction is environmentally acceptable. POLICY S1

POLICY S1

LAND WILL BE MADE AVAILABLE FOR MINERAL WORKING THROUGH THE PLANNING PROCESS TO PROVIDE AN APPROPRIATE CONTRIBUTION TO LOCAL, REGIONAL AND NATIONAL NEEDS. THE COUNTY COUNCIL:

- WILL ENCOURAGE GREATER EFFICIENCY IN THE SUPPLY AND USE OF PRIMARY MINERAL RESOURCES;
- WILL NOT GRANT PLANNING PERMISSION WHERE THERE WOULD BE AN UNDULY ADVERSE IMPACT ON LOCAL COMMUNITIES OR THE ENVIRONMENT.

PROTECTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT

2.9 Whilst recognising that the provision of minerals is essential to meet society's needs, it is also recognised that mineral working almost invariably causes disturbance or damage to other resources. In Northumberland valuable mineral resources underlie extensive areas of the County. The geological conditions which gave rise to valuable mineral deposits also produced some of Northumberland's finest scenery such as the Great Whin Sill, the Cheviot and the Carboniferous rocks which underlie parts of the National Park and North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Minerals underlie some of the County's most productive agricultural land and historic environments with concentrations of archaeological sites. Examples are the sand and gravel areas in the Tyne Valley and in the Milfield/Powburn areas. Mineral extraction may also destroy features of conservation, wildlife or heritage significance.

2.10 Mineral workings can last for many years and may have a significant impact on the living conditions of people living nearby. It is important, therefore, that sites are carefully chosen, designed and operated, bearing in mind the need to protect the best of the County's natural resources and heritage and the need to protect local communities from the traffic, noise, dust and other problems which are often associated with mineral working. The adequacy of measures which are put forward by operators to mitigate adverse visual and environmental impacts will be taken into account and rigorously assessed. POLICIES S1-S2

POLICY S2

ALL PROPOSALS FOR MINERAL DEVELOPMENT WILL BE ASSESSED AGAINST ALL RELEVANT POLICIES IN THIS PLAN INCLUDING THE ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION, SITE MANAGEMENT AND RESTORATION POLICIES.

POLICY S3

PLANNING PERMISSION SHOULD NOT BE GRANTED FOR DEVELOPMENT WHICH WOULD STERILISE IMPORTANT ECONOMICALLY WORKABLE MINERAL DEPOSITS UNLESS:

- THERE IS AN OVERRIDING NEED FOR THE DEVELOPMENT AND PRIOR EXTRACTION OF THE MINERAL CANNOT REASONABLY BE UNDERTAKEN; OR
- EXTRACTION OF THE MINERAL IS UNLIKELY TO BE PRACTICABLE OR ENVIRONMENTALLY ACCEPTABLE.

POLICY S4

THE EXTRACTION OF PROVEN MINERAL DEPOSITS IN ADVANCE OF OTHER PLANNED DEVELOPMENT WILL BE PERMITTED PROVIDED THAT:

- PRIOR EXTRACTION WOULD NOT UNDULY PREJUDICE THE TIMING AND VIABILITY OF THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT;
- A SIGNIFICANT PART OF THE EXTRACTION SITE WOULD BE STERILISED BY DEVELOPMENT;
- THERE WOULD NOT BE A SIGNIFICANT ADVERSE EFFECT ON LOCAL COMMUNITIES OR THE ENVIRONMENT.

POLICY S5

THE USE OF MINERAL WASTES, POWER STATION ASH AND CONSTRUCTION WASTES AS SUBSTITUTES FOR PRIMARY AGGREGATES WILL BE ENCOURAGED PROVIDED THAT THERE WOULD NOT BE A SIGNIFICANT ADVERSE EFFECT ON LOCAL COMMUNITIES OR THE ENVIRONMENT.

CONSERVATION OF RESOURCES

2.11 As mineral resources are finite their unavoidable and irretrievable loss should be limited. It is, therefore, important to safeguard those deposits which are of economic importance against sterilisation by other types of development in order to ensure their potential availability to meet future needs. The sterilisation of important deposits reduces the extent of workable reserves and limits the range of options for future extraction, possibly leading to increased pressure on sensitive areas. The County Council will make appropriate representations to District Councils when they determine such applications. POLICY S3

2.12 Where there is an overriding need for development to take place on land containing a workable mineral deposit, the mineral should, wherever possible, be extracted in advance of the development unless this would give rise to unacceptable impact. This is most likely to apply to opencast coal if operations can be completed relatively quickly and extraction and restoration is completed within a reasonable timescale. The timescale of the proposed mineral operation will be a factor to be taken into account. POLICY S4

2.13 In relation to aggregates minerals, Minerals Planning Guidance Note 6, guidelines for Aggregates Provision in England, April 1994 advises that in order to pursue a sustainable approach to aggregates supply, it is necessary to use all construction aggregate materials efficiently. This involves avoiding the use of higher quality materials where lower grade materials would suffice. This principle is echoed in MPG1, which applies to all minerals, as one of the objectives for sustainable development in minerals planning "to encourage efficient use of materials including the appropriate use of high quality materials." In order to conserve high grade resources, minerals should be used for purposes to which they are best suited. High grade minerals should not be used for more general purposes when lower grade alternatives are readily available, so that proper use can be made of their specific qualities and they remain available for future use.

2.14 The minerals extracted in Northumberland are not exceptionally high grade minerals nor are they nationally scarce. Nevertheless, a number of minerals extracted in the County are sold for specialist uses. The sand and gravel deposits of the Milfield basin and Breamish Valley are used for a variety of uses including high strength concrete, surface dressing, brick manufacture and specialist pre-cast concrete products. Northumberland sandstone is often used for prestige building projects. Some opencast coal is used for blending with the generally higher sulphur coal produced by deep or drift mining methods. It is important, therefore, and in line with the sustainability criteria outlined in MPG1, that such minerals are not used for general purposes when lower grade materials are available.

RE-USE OF RESOURCES

2.15 It is in the national interest that products manufactured from aggregate minerals should be recycled wherever possible and that secondary materials such as mineral wastes, construction wastes and industrial by-products, for example power station ash, should be used as a substitute for land won minerals where this is feasible and environmentally acceptable. This will have the effect of reducing the area used for mineral extraction, conserving high quality minerals which might otherwise be used for low grade purposes, removing unsightly waste tips and reducing the amount of waste requiring disposal by other means.

2.16 Whilst the use of secondary and recycled materials should be encouraged, proposals for re-use will be assessed against environmental protection criteria. In Northumberland, mineral waste is used to assist the reclamation of mineral workings, particularly hard rock and sandstone quarries. In addition, the reworking and processing of waste materials may cause environmental problems such as dust, noise and traffic problems. There will, therefore, be a need to ensure that such damaging effects are minimised and balanced against the benefits of a greater use of secondary materials. POLICY S5

GOOD WORKING PRACTICES

2.17 The importance of sensitive working practices during mineral operations are now widely recognised by the industry as well as by national and local government. Planning conditions attached to permissions have long been used to control working methods and restoration practice. In addition, Government advice now encourages mineral planning authorities to satisfy themselves that the operators' proposals for managing the site in accordance with such planning conditions are acceptable, practical and realistic before approving minerals applications.

2.18 Mineral extraction operations can provide an opportunity to enhance the environment through reclamation or working proposals. Examples include increased woodland and hedgerow planting, the creation and management of water and nature conservation areas, improvement in land quality, the provision of recreation facilities, the diversion of existing heavy lorry traffic away from residential areas and other community benefits. Where such benefits are proposed they will be taken into account in assessing applications. POLICY S6

POLICY S6

IN CONSIDERING PROPOSALS FOR MINERAL WORKING, THE COUNTY COUNCIL WILL AIM TO PROTECT THE QUALITY OF LIFE FOR LOCAL COMMUNITIES BY ENSURING THE HIGHEST STANDARD OF OPERATIONAL PRACTICE AND WILL ALSO TAKE INTO ACCOUNT ANY PROPOSED LONG TERM IMPROVEMENTS IN THE ENVIRONMENT RESULTING FROM THE WORKING AND RESTORATION PROPOSALS.

CHAPTER 3:

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

INTRODUCTION

3.1 This chapter sets out the policies against which all applications for minerals development in the County will be assessed. The purpose of these policies is to assess whether proposals would be acceptable in environmental terms.

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

3.2 All planning applications for minerals extraction should contain a detailed description of the development site and proposals, supported by an analysis of the likely environmental effects of working the site. Where significant effects are anticipated, The Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment)(England and Wales) Regulations 1999 require that an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) should be undertaken. Advice from the Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions is set out in Circular 02/99 'Environmental Impact Assessment'.

3.3 An EIA is a technique for drawing together, in a systematic way, analysis and assessment of a project's environmental effects. This enables the identification and evaluation of likely effects before a decision on the proposal is made. There are no set criteria for determining the need for a formal EIA, although most major mineral developments are likely to require one. Factors such as the nature, size and duration of the operation and the sensitivity of the location will help determine the need for a formal EIA.

3.4 Pre-application discussions with the County Council are therefore advised to establish if an environmental impact statement is needed and to scope the issues to be addressed. In considering a planning application, the proposal will be initially assessed against the planning and environmental criteria set out in this chapter. Chapter 10 sets out a Code of Practice for site management and operation and the information which should be provided to support each planning application, even if no formal environmental impact statement is necessary. POLICY EP1

POLICY EP1

AN ANALYSIS OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS WILL BE REQUIRED WITH ALL PROPOSALS FOR MINERAL WORKING AND, WHERE NECESSARY, AN ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT WILL BE REQUIRED, AS PRESCRIBED BY THE TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING (ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT)(ENGLAND AND WALES) REGULATIONS 1999.

PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENTAL CRITERIA

3.5 The County Structure Plan sets out criteria against which proposals for mineral working will be assessed. These are listed in Structure Plan policy M2. This requires that major developments, including most mineral workings, will only be permitted where the benefits clearly outweigh any potential environmental damage. The following sections develop and add to the environmental criteria listed in Structure Plan policy M2.

Landscape

3.6 Some of the most attractive areas in the County have been afforded national designation and statutory protection. These include the National Park and two Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) which together cover about 30% of the land area of the County. Policies for minerals development within the Park are included in a separate document: 'Northumberland National Park Minerals Local Plan' which has been prepared in conjunction with this Plan.

3.7 AONBs are designated under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 as areas of outstanding landscape quality and the conservation of their natural beauty is in the national as well as local interest. In Northumberland, the North Pennines and the North Northumberland Coast are designated as AONBs.

3.8 Government policy, as set out in MPG6, advises that major developments should not take place in AONBs save in exceptional circumstances and it requires the "most rigorous examination" of proposed mineral workings or extensions to existing workings in AONBs. The visual and environmental effects of proposed mineral workings will be a major consideration and only proven national interests and lack of alternative sites are likely to justify an exception.

3.9 There are no existing mineral workings in the North Northumberland Coast AONB. In the Northumberland part of the North Pennines AONB there are two active mineral workings; Dodd End sandstone quarry and Thorngreen limestone quarry.

3.10 The stretch of coastline between the Scottish border and Cresswell has been defined as a Heritage Coast by the Countryside Commission. No minerals are currently worked within the Heritage Coast area. POLICY EP2

3.11 There are many areas of Northumberland within the uplands and upland fringe which are not nationally designated, but which, nevertheless, comprise landscape units of a particularly high quality and as such are considered to be of county-wide importance. Such areas are identified in the County Structure Plan as Areas of High Landscape Value (AHLV) and have been defined in detail in district-wide local plans.

3,12 The fringes of the Northumberland National Park are defined as Areas of High Landscape Value and special consideration will be given to protecting the setting of the National Park from insensitively located mineral development which could harm the natural beauty or character of the Park.

3.13 Parts of the AHLV in Castle Morpeth and Tynedale districts are also defined as Green Belt. PPG2 explains that the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open, but that mineral extraction need not be incompatible with Green Belt designation provided that high environmental standards are maintained and that the site is well restored. It is also recognised that Green Belts have a positive role to play in providing access to the open countryside for the urban population and in retaining attractive landscapes near to where people live.

POLICY EP2

PROPOSALS FOR MINERAL WORKING IN THE NORTH NORTHUMBERLAND COAST AND NORTH PENNINES AREAS OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY WILL ONLY BE PERMITTED IF, FOLLOWING THE MOST RIGOROUS EXAMINATION, THEY ARE DEMONSTRATED TO BE IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST.

THE ASSESSMENT SHOULD INCLUDE:

- THE NATIONAL NEED FOR THE MINERAL TOGETHER WITH THE AVAILABILITY AND COST OF ALTERNATIVE SUPPLIES AND ANY LESS DAMAGING SITES; AND
- THE EFFECTS OF THE PROPOSALS ON THE ENVIRONMENT AND THE LANDSCAPE, THE LOCAL ECONOMY, THE NATURAL BEAUTY, WILDLIFE, CULTURAL HERITAGE AND THE QUIET ENJOYMENT OF THE AREA.
- IN THE CASE OF EXTENSIONS TO EXISTING MINERAL WORKINGS, ANY ENHANCEMENT TO THE LOCAL LANDSCAPE THAT WOULD RESULT FROM THE PROPOSALS.

3.14 The County Council considers that the designation of land as Green Belt is a material factor in the consideration of mineral applications. It would not wish to see mineral workings which would harm the open and rural character of the Green Belt for a significant period whilst the site is being worked or result in the loss of attractive landscapes or areas for informal recreation close to settlements.

3.15 The area in the south of the County forming the watershed between the River Tyne and River Derwent is designated as Green Belt and an AHLV in the Tynedale District Wide Local Plan. This area of attractive countryside in close proximity to the Tyneside conurbation has been under pressure for mineral extraction, particularly opencast coal working. Two proposals for coal extraction at Whittonstall and Woodhead were refused by the Secretary of State for Energy in 1978 and 1984 following public inquiries. In 1995 a proposal for opencast coal extraction at Leadgate near Prudhoe was also refused on appeal. The high landscape quality of the area and the importance of retaining such attractive landscapes near to where people live was recognised in these decisions.

POLICY EP3

THE ASSESSMENT OF PROPOSALS FOR MINERAL WORKINGS WILL TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THEIR POTENTIAL IMPACT ON THE LANDSCAPE, BOTH DURING AND AFTER WORKING. THIS WILL INCLUDE:

- THE QUALITY, CHARACTER, LOCAL DISTINCTIVENESS AND VALUE OF THE LANDSCAPE;
- THE VISUAL PROMINENCE OF WORKINGS IN THE LANDSCAPE;
- THE POTENTIAL LOSS OR GAIN OF PARTICULAR LANDSCAPE FEATURES INCLUDING THE REMOVAL OF PAST DERELICTION AND THE OPPORTUNITY TO IMPROVE THE LANDSCAPE;
- THE NEED FOR SPECIAL PROTECTION TO BE AFFORDED TO THE SETTING OF THE NATIONAL PARK AND TO AVOID ANY DEVELOPMENT WHICH WOULD HAVE A SIGNIFICANT ADVERSE EFFECT ON THE NATURAL BEAUTY, WILDLIFE AND CULTURAL HERITAGE OF THE PARK;
- THE EFFECT ON THE ACHIEVEMENT OF GREEN BELT OBJECTIVES INCLUDING:
  - THE RETENTION OF ATTRACTIVE LANDSCAPES NEAR TO WHERE PEOPLE LIVE;
  - THE PROVISION OF OPPORTUNITIES FOR OUTDOOR RECREATION CLOSE TO URBAN AREAS;
- THE MAINTENANCE OF OPEN COUNTRYSIDE AND VIABLE COUNTRYSIDE USES BETWEEN THE SETTLEMENTS IN SOUTH-EAST NORTHUMBERLAND.

3.16 The significance of a mineral operation in landscape terms depends on a number of factors including the character and quality of the landscape directly affected, the value of the landscape in local terms, the presence of landscape features such as woodland, the visibility of the workings from surrounding areas, the duration of the workings, the potential to screen the site and the likelihood of restoring the site to a high standard. Much of the Northumberland landscape is designated as of high quality (Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Areas of High Landscape Value). AONBs are national designations and are therefore afforded the highest level of protection. However, even countryside which carries no special designation may well be valued by those who live and work there and by visitors. It is Government policy, emphasised in PPG7, that the countryside should be safeguarded for its own sake and that non-renewable and natural resources should be afforded protection. In south-east Northumberland where most of the population of the County live, County Council policy seeks to upgrade the environment, protect areas of unspoilt open countryside and ensure that areas that have been previously worked for minerals are satisfactorily reclaimed. Policy S2 of the Northumberland Structure Plan seeks to maintain open land between the settlements of south-east Northumberland.

3.17 It is possible for mineral development to provide the opportunity to create interesting landforms and features such as water areas, hedgerows and woodlands. Wherever mineral working is permitted, conditions will be imposed and planning obligations negotiated, to secure such improvements. POLICY EP3

Nature Conservation

3.18 Mineral working can often conflict with the aims of conserving important natural elements of the environment. The nature conservation interest of the County is exemplified by the number of areas which are recognised as being of international importance. The Holburn Lake and Moss and the coastal edge and tidal areas around Lindisfarne are designated as wetlands of international importance under the Ramsar convention, whilst Lindisfarne, Holburn Lake and

Moss, the Farne Islands and Coquet Island are designated as Special Protection Areas. Candidate Special Areas of Conservation have been identified at Berwickshire and North Northumberland coast, part of the Border Mires, Kielder-Butterburn, Newham Fen, North Northumberland Dunes, North Pennine Dale Meadows, and the Tyne and Allen river gravels. The Northumberland coast is identified as a proposed Special Protection Area and proposed Ramsar site. Further sites of international importance may be recognised during the Plan period.

3.19 Special Protection Areas (SPAs), under the EC Conservation of Wild Birds Directive 1979, give protection to habitats used by species of birds listed in Annex I of the Directive, and by regularly occurring migratory species. Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), under the EC Directive on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora, give protection to natural habitats and habitats of species listed in Annexes I and II of the Directive. Some of these species and habitats are at particular risk and are identified as priority species and habitats. Protection is afforded to SPAs and SACs by the Conservation (Natural Habitats &c) Regulations 1994.

3.20 The plan area also contains numerous nationally important areas of nature conservation and geological interest, including over 80 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Internationally important sites and those of national importance will receive the highest level of protection and this protection will apply to any further nature conservation sites which may be identified during the life of the plan.

3.21 The network of habitats also comprises regionally and locally important nature conservation sites. These include Sites of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCIs), Regionally Important Geological and Geomorphological Sites (RIGS), Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) and areas of ancient semi-natural woodland. Countryside features, which because of their linear or continuous structure or their function as stepping stones from one habitat to another, are particularly important to ensure the maintenance of the current range and diversity of our flora, fauna, geological and landform features and the survival of important species. Examples include rivers, river banks, hedgerows, ponds and small woods. The integrity of the moorland environment, in particular isolated tracts of moorland, is also an important feature of the County. All these areas must be protected wherever possible. The various nature conservation designations are shown in Table 1 below.

3.22 Certain plants and animal species and their habitats are protected by law under Part 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. Some other animals are protected by their own legislation, for example the Protection of Badgers Act 1992. The presence of a protected species is a material consideration when considering a development proposal.

POLICY EP4

PROPOSALS FOR MINERAL WORKINGS WILL NOT BE PERMITTED WHERE THEY WOULD ADVERSELY AFFECT, EITHER DIRECTLY OR INDIRECTLY, SITES OF INTERNATIONAL NATURE CONSERVATION IMPORTANCE UNLESS THERE ARE IMPERATIVE REASONS OF OVERRIDING PUBLIC INTEREST AND THERE IS NO ALTERNATIVE SOURCE OF SUPPLY. WHERE THE SITE HOSTS A PRIORITY HABITAT OR SPECIES, PLANNING PERMISSION WILL ONLY BE GRANTED WHERE THE EXTRACTION IS NECESSARY FOR REASONS OF HUMAN HEALTH OR PUBLIC SAFETY OR FOR BENEFICIAL CONSEQUENCES OF PRIMARY IMPORTANCE FOR NATURE CONSERVATION. WHERE EXTRACTION DOES PROCEED, IT WILL BE SUBJECT TO CONDITIONS OR, WHERE APPROPRIATE, PLANNING OBLIGATIONS WILL BE SOUGHT TO SECURE COMPENSATORY MEASURES NECESSARY TO MAINTAIN THE OVERALL COHERENCE OF NATURA 2000.

POLICY EP5

MINERAL WORKINGS WHICH WOULD ADVERSELY AFFECT, DIRECTLY OR INDIRECTLY, THE NATURE CONSERVATION VALUE OF SITES OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST WILL NOT BE PERMITTED UNLESS, FOLLOWING THE MOST RIGOROUS EXAMINATION, IT CAN BE DEMONSTRATED THAT THE NEED FOR THE MINERAL OR OTHER RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS OUTWEIGH THE VALUE OF THE SITE AND NO ALTERNATIVE IS AVAILABLE. ACCOUNT WILL ALSO BE TAKEN OF ANY DETRIMENTAL EFFECT ON THE INTRINSIC NATURE CONSERVATION VALUE OF THE NATIONAL NETWORK OF SUCH SITES. WHERE THE SITE IS ALSO A NATIONAL NATURE RESERVE OR IS IDENTIFIED UNDER THE NATURE CONSERVATION REVIEW OR GEOLOGICAL CONSERVATION REVIEW ADDITIONAL REGARD WILL BE PAID TO THE PARTICULAR IMPORTANCE OF THE SITE.

POLICY EP6

MINERAL WORKINGS WHICH ADVERSELY AFFECT THE INTEGRITY OF SITES OF REGIONAL OR LOCAL IMPORTANCE FOR NATURE CONSERVATION OR PROTECTED SPECIES AND THEIR HABITATS WILL NOT BE PERMITTED UNLESS FOLLOWING CAREFUL CONSIDERATION OF THE PROPOSALS, IT CAN BE DEMONSTRATED THAT THERE ARE MATERIAL PLANNING BENEFITS OR THE NEED FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OUTWEIGHS THE NATURE CONSERVATION VALUE OF THE SITE.

POLICY EP7

WHERE THE COUNTY COUNCIL DECIDES TO GRANT PERMISSION FOR MINERAL WORKING WHICH IS LIKELY TO AFFECT ANY SITE OF NATURE CONSERVATION IMPORTANCE, CONDITIONS WILL BE IMPOSED REQUIRING THE DEVELOPER TO INCLUDE MEASURES TO CONSERVE THE NATURE CONSERVATION VALUE OF THE SITE OR, WHERE DAMAGE IS UNAVOIDABLE, TO PROVIDE REPLACEMENT HABITAT AND FEATURES.

POLICY EP8

THERE IS A PRESUMPTION IN FAVOUR OF THE PRESERVATION OF HADRIAN'S WALL. MINERAL WORKINGS WILL NOT BE PERMITTED WHERE THEY WOULD ADVERSELY AFFECT HADRIAN'S WALL WORLD HERITAGE SITE, AND ITS SETTING, AS DEFINED ON THE PROPOSALS MAP.

POLICY EP9

THERE WILL BE A PRESUMPTION IN FAVOUR OF THE PRESERVATION OF SCHEDULED ANCIENT MONUMENTS AND NATIONALLY IMPORTANT ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES. MINERAL WORKINGS WHICH WOULD ADVERSELY AFFECT THESE SITES OR THEIR SETTINGS WILL NOT BE PERMITTED.

3.23 A site designated for its nature conservation value can be affected by mineral extraction beyond its boundary. This may result from alteration to the water table or drainage patterns, or disturbance from site operations, machinery, blasting or traffic. Therefore, in assessing development proposals account shall be taken of these indirect effects.

3.24 Where planning permission for mineral development is granted under the terms of Policy EP7 planning conditions will be imposed and, where appropriate, planning obligations may be sought to secure appropriate operation, restoration and after-care of sites to limit any damage to nature conservation interests to an acceptable level. Mineral working also affords opportunities for the creation of new habitats, although new areas are not an equivalent substitute for existing habitats. The County Council will liase closely with English Nature and appropriate nature conservation organisations. POLICIES EP4-7

Table 1: Nature Conservation Designations

IMPORTANCE	SITE DESIGNATION & EXPLANATION	UK STATUTORY DESIGNATION
SITES OF INTERNATIONAL IMPORTANCE	Ramsar Sites listed under the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance	SSSI
	Special Protection Areas (SPAs) to be classified under the EC Directive on the Conservation of Wild Birds	SSSI; SPA
	Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) to be designated under the EC Directive on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora (the Habitats Directive)	SSSI; SAC
	Natura 2000 a coherent community-wide network of SACs and SPAs	
SITES OF NATIONAL IMPORTANCE	National Nature Reserves (NNRs) declared under section 19 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 or section 35 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981	SSSI
	Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) notified under section 28 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981	SSSI
SITES OF REGIONAL/LOCAL IMPORTANCE	Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) designated by local authorities under section 21 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949	LNR
	Regionally Important Geological/ Geomorphological Sites: Non statutory site of regional importance recognised by English Nature and Local Authorities.	RIGS
	Non-statutory Nature Reserves established and managed by a variety of public and private bodies eg county wildlife trusts, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds	-
	Sites of Nature Conservation Importance Sites of Nature Conservation Importance or equivalent. These are usually adopted by local authorities for planning purposes. The name and status of this type of site varies considerably	SNCI

Cultural Heritage

3.25 Northumberland contains a rich heritage of features of architectural, historic or archaeological interest, including Conservation Areas, Listed Buildings, Historic Parks and Gardens, Scheduled Ancient Monuments, Battlefield Sites, other archaeological sites and historic landscapes. Over 15,000 archaeological sites and historic features are known, of which 11,000 are so far registered on the County Sites and Monuments Record. Over 800 of these are Scheduled Ancient Monuments and this figure is likely to increase following a survey being carried out by English Heritage. The Hadrian's Wall Military Zone is a World Heritage Site as designated by UNESCO. UNESCO requires buffer zones to be defined around World Heritage Sites to cushion them from unsuitable development. This has been done for the Hadrian's Wall World Heritage Site. The management plan for Hadrian's Wall (July 1996), prepared by English Heritage in consultation with other bodies, defines the World Heritage Site and its setting. It is essential that sites and buildings of importance should be protected from mineral working which would irreparably damage or destroy them or their settings.

3.26 Features of national and international importance will therefore receive the highest level of protection. Sites and buildings of local and regional archaeological and historic importance must also be protected wherever possible. Where such areas are affected by proposals for mineral working, a judgement will be made concerning the relative importance of the historical feature and the need for the mineral. This will take into account the availability of alternatives and the degree to which a mineral operation can be designed to minimise damage to such areas. POLICIES EP8-11

3.27 Where a proposal for mineral working would affect an area containing sites of known or potential archaeological importance, the operator will be required to provide information in the form of an archaeological assessment. If this assessment indicates that important archaeological remains may exist, a field evaluation may be necessary. The general presumption will be in favour of in situ preservation of archaeological remains but, where this is not possible, the emphasis will be on making adequate provision for sites to be appropriately recorded and published.

3.28 In order to minimise future conflict and unnecessary expense, it is important that mineral operators discuss their preliminary plans with the mineral planning authority at an early stage, to establish the likely archaeological sensitivity of their proposed area. POLICY EP12

POLICY EP10

PROPOSALS WHICH WOULD ADVERSELY AFFECT REGIONALLY OR LOCALLY IMPORTANT ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES WILL ONLY BE PERMITTED WHERE THERE ARE MATERIAL PLANNING BENEFITS OR THE NEED FOR THE MINERAL OUTWEIGHS THE IMPORTANCE OF RETAINING THE SITE UNALTERED AND NO ALTERNATIVE SOURCE IS AVAILABLE.

POLICY EP11

THERE WILL BE A PRESUMPTION IN FAVOUR OF THE PRESERVATION OF LISTED BUILDINGS. PROPOSALS FOR MINERAL EXTRACTION WHICH WOULD RESULT IN DEMOLITION OF, DAMAGE TO, OR WILL DETRACT FROM LISTED BUILDINGS OR THEIR SETTINGS WILL NOT BE PERMITTED UNLESS IT CAN BE DEMONSTRATED THAT THERE ARE MATERIAL PLANNING BENEFITS OR THE NEED FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OUTWEIGHS THE IMPORTANCE OF RETAINING THE BUILDING IN ITS UNALTERED FORM AND NO ALTERNATIVE SOURCE IS AVAILABLE.

POLICY EP12

WHERE PROPOSALS FOR MINERAL WORKING AFFECT SITES OF KNOWN OR POTENTIAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL IMPORTANCE, OR WHERE THE RELATIVE IMPORTANCE AND/OR EXTENT OF SUCH A SITE IS UNCLEAR, THE DEVELOPER WILL BE REQUIRED TO PROVIDE FURTHER INFORMATION IN THE FORM OF AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT AND WHERE APPROPRIATE AN EVALUATION. WHERE THE COUNTY COUNCIL DECIDES TO GRANT PERMISSION FOR MINERAL DEVELOPMENT WHICH WILL AFFECT SITES KNOWN TO CONTAIN ARCHAEOLOGICAL REMAINS, AND PRESERVATION IN SITU IS NOT APPROPRIATE, SUCH PERMISSION WILL BE SUBJECT TO A CONDITION AND, WHERE APPROPRIATE, A PLANNING OBLIGATION MAY BE SOUGHT TO ENSURE THE DEVELOPMENT MAKES PROVISION FOR THE EXCAVATION AND RECORDING OF THE REMAINS AND PUBLICATION OF THE FINDINGS.

POLICY EP13

THE ASSESSMENT OF PROPOSALS FOR MINERAL WORKING WILL TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THEIR IMPACT ON AGRICULTURE INCLUDING THE EFFECT ON LAND QUALITY AND FARM STRUCTURE AND THE PROSPECTS FOR RECLAMATION TO AT LEAST EQUIVALENT QUALITY OF LAND. PROPOSALS WHICH AFFECT THE BEST AND MOST VERSATILE AGRICULTURAL LAND (GRADE 1, 2 AND 3A) WILL NOT BE PERMITTED UNLESS IT CAN BE DEMONSTRATED THAT THE LAND CAN BE RECLAIMED WITHOUT LOSS OF QUALITY OR, IF THIS IS NOT POSSIBLE, THERE ARE MATERIAL PLANNING BENEFITS OR AN OVERRIDING NEED FOR THE MINERAL WHICH CANNOT BE MET FROM AN ALTERNATIVE LESS DAMAGING SITE OR SOURCE OF SUPPLY.

Agriculture

3.29 Agriculture is the dominant land use in Northumberland, accounting for over 80% of the total land area of the County. Nevertheless, high quality agricultural land is scarce; the provisional Agricultural Land Classification has identified 3.2% of the County's land area is classed as Grade 2. More recent detailed local studies have identified a small pocket of Grade 1 agricultural land in the County. National policy, as set out in PPG7, is that the "best and most versatile" agricultural land (grades 1, 2 and 3a) is a national resources for the future and considerable weight should be attached to its protection. The "best and most versatile" land should not be degraded in the longer term as a result of mineral extraction..

3.30 Much of the best agricultural land in the County is underlain by high quality sand and gravel reserves. The potential exists to restore mineral workings back to agriculture, but past experience has shown that the restoration of grade 3b land to its original quality is normally more successful than the restoration of higher quality land. Where sites are low lying, the land may be lost to agriculture altogether if they are worked wet and restored to water areas. It is important to resist mineral working on high quality agricultural land, therefore, whilst land of lower quality is available. If there is a proven national need for the mineral this may be sufficient to override the need to safeguard the agricultural land. Additionally, as restoration techniques continue to improve, if an operator can demonstrate to the satisfaction of the County Council and FRCA that grade 1, 2 or 3a land could be restored to its original condition so that the long term potential of the land as a national agricultural resource is preserved, then working may be acceptable. An agricultural after-use is most commonly proposed for the best and most versatile land. Although forestry or some other forms of amenity after-use may also be acceptable, the methods used in reclamation should enable the land to retain its longer term potential as a high quality agricultural resource for the future.

3.31 Despite the importance of preserving the best agricultural land there has been a change in emphasis in agricultural policy in recent years, from maximising food production to diversifying the rural economy. Mineral extraction on land of lower quality therefore poses fewer constraints. In certain locations there are opportunities for poorer quality land to be improved or its nature conservation value to be reinstated or enhanced by restoration following mineral workings.

3.32 The County Council will also take into account the impact of the loss of agricultural land on the viability of a farm unit. This is particularly important in upland areas where better quality land in the valley bottoms is farmed in conjunction with large areas of hill grazing. There is a significant relationship between extensive stock rearing on the uplands and fattening on the better quality land in the lowland areas. POLICY EP13

Local Economy

3.33 Minerals are an important national resource and their exploitation makes a contribution to the economic growth of the country. The impact of mineral working on the local economy, however, may be felt in a number of different ways. The minerals industry is an important source of employment in the County. Approximately 900 people are employed directly in the industry with additional jobs in related employment. The significance of these jobs can be high, particularly in the more remote rural areas of Northumberland with few alternative job opportunities. The creation or maintenance of jobs will therefore be a factor to be taken into account in assessing mineral proposals. Operators will be encouraged to recruit local people wherever practicable.

3.34 It is also necessary to take into account the impact of mineral working on other areas of the economy. This is particularly relevant to opencast coal where sites have been proposed close to major roads or in close proximity to modern industrial areas or business parks. As part of their economic development activities, the County and District Councils aim to promote a strong and attractive image for Northumberland as a business location and tourist destination. The effect of mineral workings on the general environment of the County may be seen as a possible deterrent to further inward investment in the County. Existing industries in the County, particularly pharmaceutical companies, have expressed their serious concerns about opencast coal workings close to their factories which depend on a dust-free, clean air environment. POLICY EP14

POLICY EP14

THE ASSESSMENT OF PROPOSALS FOR MINERAL WORKING WILL TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THEIR IMPACT ON THE LOCAL ECONOMY, INCLUDING JOBS CREATED OR MAINTAINED, AND THE EFFECT ON OTHER LOCAL BUSINESSES AND INWARD INVESTMENT.

Tourism and Recreation

3.35 Tourism also makes an important and increasing contribution to the County's economy. The Structure Plan recognises that it is Northumberland's natural and historic assets which are the main attractions to tourists and day visitors. Mineral deposits are known to exist close to some of Northumberland's major tourist attractions and it is important not to detract from these assets.

3.36 The countryside is used for informal recreation activities, such as walking, picnicking, cycling and visiting features of historic interest, as well as more active pursuits such as climbing and pony trekking. Mineral workings have the potential to detract from the enjoyment of such activities through visual intrusion, traffic generation, disturbance from noise, dust or blasting and their effect on footpaths and other rights of way although, in certain circumstances, there may be long term benefits from the creation of new habitats or recreational resources. POLICY EP15

POLICY EP15

THE ASSESSMENT OF PROPOSALS FOR MINERAL WORKING WILL TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THEIR IMPACT ON TOURISM AND RECREATION.

POLICY EP16

WHERE PROPOSALS FOR MINERALS WORKINGS ARE PERMITTED, EXISTING RIGHTS OF WAY MUST BE SAFEGUARDED WHEREVER PRACTICABLE OTHERWISE A SUITABLE ALTERNATIVE ROUTE MUST BE PROVIDED EITHER BY TEMPOARY DIVERSION OR DEDICATION BY THE DEVELOPER.

Rights1 of Way

Where existing rights of way cannot be retained, a suitable alternative route will be required either by temporary diversion or dedication by the developer. POLICY EP16

Transport

3.38 A major concern with many mineral operations is the transport of material by road. As well as the wider effects of atmospheric pollution, the use of heavy goods vehicles for the transport of minerals causes serious disruption and danger to affected communities and damage to the road network. Other means of transport such as rail, ship, conveyor or pipeline can be less damaging but are not always practicable, may involve considerable investment in infrastructure and do not offer the flexibility of road transport.

3.39 Rail is currently used to transport coal from two disposal points in the County (Butterwell and Widdrington). At present, the largest opencast coal sites in the County are linked to these disposal points by private haul road. This practice is successful in keeping heavy coal lorries off the public highways. Other opencast coal sites and all other mineral workings transport minerals by road. Harden, Cragmill and Divethill quarries send material by road to Berwick and Blyth harbours for transport to south-east England and Europe by ship. Coal is also shipped from Blyth to south-east England and Europe. Facilities exist at Hexham to load minerals onto the rail network.

POLICY EP17

PROPOSALS TO USE ALTERNATIVE MEANS OF TRANSPORT TO ROAD, SUCH AS RAIL, SHIP, CONVEYOR OR PRIVATE HAUL ROAD, WILL BE REGARDED AS A POSITIVE FACTOR IN DETERMINING APPLICATIONS FOR MINERAL WORKING PROVIDED THAT THIS WILL RESULT IN AN OVERALL ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFIT.

POLICY EP18

THE ASSESSMENT OF PROPOSALS FOR MINERAL WORKING WILL TAKE INTO ACCOUNT TRANSPORT CONSIDERATIONS INCLUDING THE SUITABILITY OF THE ROAD OR RAIL NETWORK TO ACCOMMODATE TRAFFIC; THE ROUTEING OF TRAFFIC TO AVOID SETTLEMENTS; AND THE EFFECT ON HIGHWAY SAFETY, HIGHWAY MAINTENANCE AND THE ENVIRONMENT.

3.40 County Council policies seek to ensure that heavy freight traffic will be handled by rail wherever possible. To this end the County Council will support applications by industry for grant aid to provide private sidings under Sections 136-9 of the Transport Act, 1993. Proposals for mineral developments should explore the feasibility of transporting minerals by means other than the public road networks, such as ship, rail, conveyor, pipeline or private haul road. Where they are practicable such proposals will be regarded as a positive factor in the assessment of applications and suitable conditions will be imposed. However, it should be borne in mind that the construction of new rail loading facilities can bring problems of visual intrusion, both of the facilities themselves and stockpiles of minerals. Therefore a judgement will have to be made as to whether there would be an overall environmental benefit. POLICY EP17

3.41 Where new proposals involve movement of material by road, the suitability of the local road network will be assessed. In order to reduce the environmental impact of heavy traffic, proposals for new mineral workings should not transport material along minor roads which would cause unacceptable disturbance to local communities and the environment. The County Council will seek to secure agreements with mineral operators, in line with current guidance, to ensure the use of approved lorry routes and will require operators to carry out highway strengthening and improvements before granting planning permission, where these are considered to be necessary as a result of the mineral proposals. POLICY EP18

Local Communities

3.42 The working of minerals inevitably gives rise to some disturbance. Where mineral workings exist local communities can be affected by visual intrusion, loss of mature landscapes, noise, dust, vibration and other features which contribute to the amenity and quality of life of the area. The transport of minerals by road can also cause disturbance many miles from the site. If these effects would have direct impacts on local communities and could not be ameliorated to an acceptable degree through planning conditions then the minerals operation should not be permitted.

3.43 Careful planning can ensure that adverse effects are minimised. These matters are examined in detail in Chapter 10, which sets out how the County Council expects the operation and restoration of mineral sites to be carried out in the form of a Code of Practice. POLICY EP19

Cumulative Impact

3.44 The impact of a concentration of workings close to a community can be particularly damaging to the general quality of life of that community and to the environment of the area including its landscape character and wildlife interest. Even when mineral extraction has ceased and reclamation taken place, it takes many years for restored landscapes to mature, particularly in the more exposed and coastal parts of Northumberland where the rate of tree growth is slow.

3.45 Unacceptable cumulative impact can result from either a succession of workings one after another (new sites or extensions to sites) or from two or more sites operating or being restored in the same locality. In addition, proposals for mineral working can result in various environmental impacts which may be individually acceptable, but which, collectively, are judged to create unacceptable environmental damage. POLICY EP20

Water Resources

3.46 The Environment Agency is concerned with the possible impact of mineral working on water resources, flood defence, conservation interests and the potential problem of surface and ground water pollution. In particular, mineral extraction may reduce ground water levels in the area surrounding a site and for a significant distance away. This may, for example, have a detrimental effect on archaeological remains or nature conservation interests. Run off from sites can be laden with mud and silt and, if allowed to drain into the river systems, would cause pollution. In addition, the reclamation of sites within a floodplain could raise ground levels, thus increasing flood risk elsewhere.

3.47 Mineral workings can, however, incorporate alleviation measures in appropriate circumstances, such as the use of settlement lagoons to allow silt and mud to settle out of used water, or the design of workings to improve, rather than impede, flood defences. POLICY EP21

POLICY EP19

THE ASSESSMENT OF PROPOSALS FOR MINERAL WORKING WILL TAKE INTO ACCOUNT POTENTIAL DISTURBANCE TO LOCAL COMMUNITIES AS A RESULT OF SITE WORKING, ASSOCIATED PLANT AND VEHICLE MOVEMENTS.

POLICY EP20

THE ASSESSMENT OF PROPOSALS FOR MINERAL WORKING WILL TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THE CUMULATIVE IMPACT ON LOCAL COMMUNITIES AND THE ENVIRONMENT, IN PARTICULAR:

- THE COMBINED IMPACT ON THE ENVIRONMENT OF A NUMBER OF SEPARATE EFFECTS DUE TO TRAFFIC, NOISE, DUST OR VISUAL INTRUSION FROM A SINGLE WORKING SITE;
- THE CUMULATIVE DIRECT EFFECTS FROM TWO OR MORE WORKING SITES;
- THE COMBINED EFFECT ON THE LANDSCAPE ARISING FROM THE RESTORATION OF A NUMBER OF SITES OVER TIME
- THE CUMULATIVE IMPACT ON THE QUALITY OF LIFE FROM AN UNBROKEN SEQUENCE OF WORKING AND RESTORATION.

POLICY EP21

THE ASSESSMENT OF PROPOSALS FOR MINERAL WORKING WILL TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THEIR EFFECT ON EXISTING GROUND WATER LEVELS, WATER ABSTRACTION, FLOOD RISK, GROUND AND SURFACE WATER QUALITY, AND THE ADEQUACY OF MEASURES WHICH ARE PUT FORWARD TO MITIGATE ANY ADVERSE EFFECTS. PLANNING PERMISSION WILL ONLY BE GRANTED IF THE DEVELOPMENT PRESENTS NO UNACCEPTABLE RISK TO WATER RESOURCES OR OF FLOODING.

POLICY EP22

PERMISSION WILL ONLY BE GRANTED WHERE THE OPERATOR'S PROPOSALS FOR THE MANAGEMENT, WORKING, RESTORATION AND AFTER-CARE OF THE SITE ARE ACCEPTABLE. OPERATORS MAY THEREFORE WISH TO DRAW ATTENTION TO THEIR PAST ENVIRONMENTAL PERFORMANCE.

POLICY EP23

WHERE APPROPRIATE AND NECESSARY TO THE GRANT OF PLANNING PERMISSION, THE COUNTY COUNCIL WILL SEEK TO NEGOTIATE WITH MINERAL OPERATORS, COMMUNITY OR ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS WHICH ARE BOTH FAIRLY AND REASONABLY RELATED TO THE PROPOSALS AND COMMENSURATE WITH THE LIKELY IMPACT AND SCALE OF THE DEVELOPMENT.

Operators' Proposals

3.48 The way in which a minerals site is managed is crucial in environmental terms. Even if a site is acceptable in principle it can be made unacceptable by poor operating standards. Each operational and restored site is a company's shop window allowing the County Council to assess whether future proposals are likely to be worked and restored to an acceptable standard.

3.49 The Government White Paper, 'This Common Inheritance' states that "operators must take account of best environmental practice and aim to be good neighbours". More recently, MPG3 and MPG6 indicate that in considering proposals for minerals development, authorities will wish to satisfy themselves that the operators' proposals for managing the site in accordance with planning conditions, and the restoration of the site and after-care, are acceptable. POLICY EP22

Community and Environmental Benefits

3.50 Even after the inclusion of mitigation measures and the appropriate use of planning conditions, disbenefits are frequently experienced by the local community from minerals developments. The County Council may therefore seek to negotiate community or environmental benefits in respect of such applications, for example to offset the loss of, or impact on, any amenity or environmental resource present on the site prior to development. Benefits will be sought only where they are necessary to the grant of planning permission, where they have a direct relationship to the development and are required to meet needs arising from the development itself. Benefits may be sought either in the form of a payment or by the direct provision of facilities and will be secured through an agreement under section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 between the developer and the Minerals Planning Authority. The extent of the benefits sought will be fairly and reasonably related in scale and kind to the proposed development and discussions with operators on community benefits will take place in parallel with discussions on the technical planning aspects of applications.

3.51 Members of the local community may identify the effects of a proposed development on their community through the consultation process and, where relevant, these effects will be considered as part of the technical assessment of the proposals. Any negotiations on planning obligations will include the identification of any related community or environmental benefits to remedy or compensate for the disbenefits of the scheme. POLICY EP23

CHAPTER 4:

COAL

INTRODUCTION

4.1 Coal is an energy mineral used principally in the production of electricity. The production of coal at a national level has been falling for most of this century as alternative fuels have come into use. The ready availability of oil after the Second World War and more recently substantial reserves of natural gas have helped to reduce the demand for coal. In 1998/99 national coal output was 38.6 million tonnes, compared with 197 million tonnes in 1960 and 200 million tonnes in 1947.

4.2 Whereas the production of deep-mined coal has declined, the output of opencast coal has generally increased. Relatively low labour costs and levels of investment and economies of scale mean that the opencasting of coal is commercially very attractive. From the beginning it has been seen as an important source of low-cost energy, the exploitation of which could be increased to meet specific needs, such as during war time or in response to the oil crisis in the 1970s. Production levels have therefore fluctuated over the years. In the early 1980s the Government moved away from the setting of a national production target for opencast coal towards a policy that overall output should be determined by the market. Subsequently, national output increased from 15 million tonnes in the mid-1980s to 19 million tonnes in 1992/93. In 1998/99 output declined to 14.9 million tonnes.

4.3 The markets for coal have also altered during the second half of this century. Over 80% of all coal used in Britain today is sold to power stations to generate electricity, compared to the situation in the 1960s when only 26% was sold for power generation.

4.4 Following the privatisation of the electricity industry in 1991, power generators have been able to secure orders from the cheapest sources of fuel available. Currently this means using a greater proportion of natural gas and imported coal, resulting in a reduction in demand for home-produced coal. In 1992 British Coal announced its intention to close 31 of the then remaining 50 deep coal mines in Great Britain. In 1994 there were only 16 deep mines remaining open. Since the privatisation of British Coal in early 1995, some of the mothballed pits have come back into production. In 1998/99 there were 17 former British Coal collieries operating in United Kingdom as well as a number of smaller mines.

GEOLOGY

4.5 Coal was formed from the organic remains of forests and swamps which covered much of northern England around 300 million years ago during the period known as the Carboniferous. Coal occurs in horizontal beds, known as seams, separated by other sedimentary rocks, typically sandstone and shale with, in some places, limestone. Coal seams can vary in thickness from several metres to fine partings only a few millimetres thick. In Northumberland coal seams are found principally in two groups of rock, the Coal Measures and the Carboniferous Limestone. The distribution of these coal-bearing rocks is shown in Map 1.

4.6 The main coalfield of Northumberland forms part of the larger Northumberland and Durham coalfield. The coal-bearing rocks all lie within the Coal Measures. In Northumberland these rocks occupy a roughly triangular area in the south-east of the County between Amble, Prudhoe and the coast. Small isolated areas of Coal Measures are also present on the southern side of the Tyne Valley at Midgeholme, Plenmeller and Stublick. Numerous good quality seams occur in these rocks and have provided large tonnages of steam-raising and house coal with significant quantities of coking coals particularly in the south of the County. Coal has been worked both underground by deep mining and near surface from opencast operations.

4.7 The rocks of the Carboniferous Limestone groups and Scremerston Coal Group occupy a much larger area of the County than the Coal Measures. Whereas coal seams occur at intervals throughout these rocks they are less numerous and generally much thinner than the seams in the Coal Measures. A few seams have been of considerable economic value, notably the Shilbottle and Little Limestone coals, though most seams have proved to be of no economic value or occur in workable quantities in small areas only. Previous prospecting results indicate that substantial reserves of coal do exist in the area south of Berwick, but the coal is of a poor quality.

4.8 Coal can be worked by deep mining (via vertical shafts or horizontal or inclined adits or 'drifts') and opencast mining, the choice being determined by geology, depth of seams and economic viability. Coal is extracted by all three methods in Northumberland.

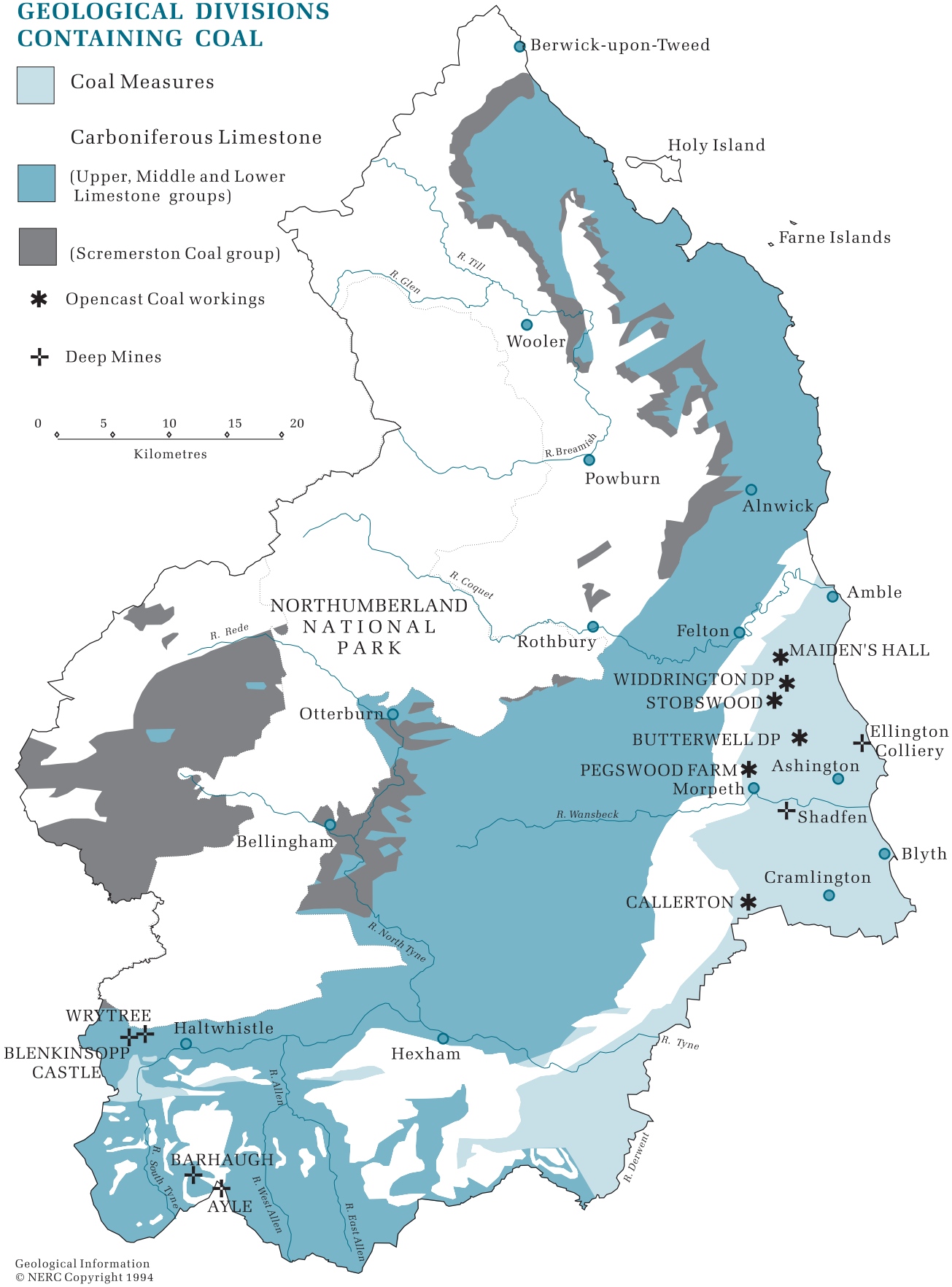
4.9 Coal is currently being worked from both the Coal Measures (by deep mining and opencast) and from the Carboniferous Limestone (by drift mining). Potentially workable reserves of coal exist in the Coal Measures and locally within parts of the Carboniferous Limestone outcrop.

Method of working - opencast sites

4.10 Large opencast coal sites can be several hundred hectares in extent and modern technology allows extraction to reach depths in excess of 200 metres. The Stobswood site near Ulgham covers 650 hectares, has 28 seams and will reach a maximum excavation depth of 190 metres. On the other hand small sites of just a few hectares can still be economic.

4.11 Extraction involves massive earth-moving operations in order to recover relatively small quantities of coal. Soils and overburden are stripped by motorscrapers or excavators and stored close to the site perimeter in large mounds. These serve as visual and noise screens, although the overburden mound itself may be the most conspicuous feature of the extraction process. Successive layers of material are then removed, creating a series of working benches at coal horizons. Harder rock layers may require blasting to loosen them prior to removal. Once extracted, coal is normally taken to a disposal point for grading before transport to its final destination.

4.12 Where possible, extraction is phased so that only part of the site is opened up at any one time. When the last phase has been worked the remaining void is filled with overburden stored on the site and the soils replaced. Although often referred to as a temporary activity, the larger sites in Northumberland have taken 10-15 years to complete and many more years for the reclaimed land to mature.



Method of working - deep mines

4.13 Deep mines such as Ellington operate by sinking a vertical shaft and creating lateral roadways. Coal seams have been worked by the long wall and board and pillar methods. Drift mines consist of horizontal or inclined tunnels driven into a hillside where coal outcrops. Only the access or portal can be seen at the surface leading to a series of underground roadways laid out in a grid iron system. These roadways are just wide enough to allow passage of the tubs of coal brought out of the mine on rails. The coal is worked by the board and pillar method and waste stone is backfilled into the cavities left by the removal of coal. As little waste as possible is taken out of the mine.

EXISTING SITES

4.14 Coal is currently produced from Ellington Colliery, one drift mine and four opencast sites. Details of the opencast sites are set out in Table 1.

Table 4.1 Opencast Coal Sites in Northumberland as at December 2000

Site	Site Area	Total (ha) Tonnage (000s)	Estimated Estimated Remaining (000s)	Coaling Tonnage	Coaling Started End	Restoration due to End	Status	Operator
Stobswood	650	13,702	5,000	1990	2005	2007	In Production	RJB Mining
Maiden's Hall	464	3,500	1,200	1996	2002	2004	In Production	RJB Mining
Pegswood Moor Farm	84	1,500	780	1977	2003	2005	In Production	H J Banks
Callerton	62	120	50	1999	2001	2002	In Production	Ward Bros

Coal Output and Current Markets

4.15 Between 1 April 1998 and 31 March 1999, 3.2 million tonnes of coal were produced from Northumberland: Ellington produced 800,000 tonnes; drift mines produced 100,000 tonnes and opencast sites produced 2.3 million tonnes. The largest markets for this coal have been Blyth Power Station and the Alcan Power Station at Lynemouth. During 1998/99 Blyth Power Station consumed 1.8 million tonnes of coal and Alcan Power Station consumed 1.2 million tonnes of coal. Coal has been imported into the County by rail to help supply these markets. Blyth Power Station is now scheduled to close in January 2001.

4.16 Other markets for Northumberland coal include ICI Wilton and Blue Circle Cement at Dunbar. Coal continues to be shipped to power stations on the River Thames and Avonmouth.

POLICY CONTEXT

National Policy

4.18 National Guidance on opencast coal extraction is set out in Mineral Planning Guidance Note 3 'Coal Mining and Colliery Spoil Disposal' published in April 1999. It states that Mineral Planning Authorities should endeavour to observe this guidance in formulating development plans.

4.19 The Guidance indicates that the Government's central energy policy objective is to ensure secure, diverse and sustainable supplies of energy at competitive prices. It states that "it is not for the planning system to seek to set limits on or targets for any particular source or

level of energy supply; nor to predetermine the appropriate levels of coal to be produced by underground or opencast mining. It is for individual operators to determine the level of output they wish to aim for in the light of market conditions, and for Mineral Planning Authorities to determine the acceptability of individual projects in accordance with the principles of the land use planning system".

4.20 The Guidance also recognises that, although some sites are capable of being well restored, opencast coal mining can be extremely damaging to the environment and amenities of a locality whilst it is taking place, and the restored landscape can take many years to mature. The proposals for restoration and the extent to which the proposal provides local or community benefits must be weighed against the severity of the harm likely to be caused during the duration of the development and the time it would take for the landscape to regenerate following restoration.

4.21 The Guidance stresses that the development plan-led system will provide the framework for assessing applications and ensuring that development and growth are sustainable. In applying the principles of sustainable development to coal extraction the Government believes there should normally be a presumption against development unless the proposal would meet the following tests:

(i) Is the proposal environmentally acceptable or can it be made so by planning conditions or obligations?

(ii) If not, does it provide local or community benefits which clearly outweigh the likely impacts to justify the grant of planning permission?

and additional tests in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Green Belts and other protected areas.

Local Policy

4.22 From 1977 it was the practice of the County Council to seek agreement with the former British Coal Opencast on a long term programme for opencast coal workings in Northumberland. The programmes were the subject of wide consultation and were reviewed at approximately two to three year intervals. The last review was approved in 1992 and covered both deep mining and opencasting and the public and private sectors of the industry. It set out the County Council's preliminary views on a number of proposals put forward by British Coal Opencast and licensed operators based on information available at that date.

A STRATEGY FOR NORTHUMBERLAND

4.23 There is no shortage of potential sites for opencast coaling in Northumberland. This is illustrated in Map 1 which shows that coal-bearing rocks underlie around 60% of the land area of the County. It is not suggested that these are all economically viable but it does give a context to the potential scale of environmental impact should opencast coal working proceed unchecked throughout Northumberland. The plan-led approach to opencast workings is required to provide guidance to both the mining industry and to communities and other businesses.

4.24 Whilst the overall level of opencasting is not to be fixed at a national level this Plan examines the scale of working within Northumberland in the light of environmental criteria and strategies and policies as set out in the County Structure Plan.

4.25 In making provision for development the Structure Plan seeks to ensure that the impact on the environment and communities is minimised as far as practicable. To conserve the natural and built environment a tiered policy approach is adopted to give protection. Landscape, heritage conservation, nature conservation and recreation policies seek to develop this strategy. In the coalfield area environmental enhancement is seen as a vital element to the regeneration of the area. The retention of open space between settlements and safeguarding the best features of local landscape are priorities. It is recognised that in the past opencast mining has damaged the appearance of the local landscape, most notably in the Druridge Bay area, and measures are required to enhance its appearance.

4.26 Coal plays an important role in sustaining the economic wellbeing of Northumberland. The underground and opencast mines provide employment and create wealth within local areas. Opencasting has an additional role in helping to supply coal at a price, which on its own or blended with deep-mined coal, is an economic fuel for generating power. The main market in Northumberland for Northumberland-produced coal is the Alcan power station at Lynemouth. This is a major local employer which in turn helps to sustain employment at Alcan Smelter and Blyth Docks. In addition, there has been interest in new coal-fired power generation in Northumberland. For the local coal industry to continue to be economic through economies of scale of production other power and industrial markets need to be supplied by the industry.

4.27 This plan sees the first priority as ensuring that the locally-based industrial and domestic markets are supplied over the long term. The plan seeks to ensure continuity of supply to the power generators in Northumberland and the efficient and economic working of deposits. It is essential for the local economy that neither the deep-mined nor opencast sources of coal are exploited for the short term gain of the coal industry but that the wider economic perspective is taken into account.

4.28 To achieve this economic strategy and to minimise environmental impact the preferred scenario is the continuation of Ellington deep mine together with a limited number of large opencast sites. Experience has also shown that the environmental impact of opencasting can be contained by a maximum of two or three major sites operating at any one time, preferably linked by private haul road to rail-connected disposal points. These major sources of supply will be supplemented by drift mines and other small opencast sites but these are not seen as main sources of supply in the future. Individual smaller opencast operations have been found to have a disproportionate impact on the environment relative to their size; most lead to unplanned piecemeal working in Northumberland due to the extensive areas of shallow seams; are more likely to be disruptive to local communities, businesses and recreational areas; lead to more heavy traffic on local roads; and are seldom worked and restored to their originally envisaged timescales.

POLICY C1

WHERE A PROPOSAL FOR OPENCAST COAL EXTRACTION RAISES SIGNIFICANT PLANNING OBJECTIONS, WHICH ARE NOT OUTWEIGHED BY OTHER BENEFITS, THE COUNTY COUNCIL WILL TAKE INTO ACCOUNT ANY EVIDENCE THAT THE APPLICANT CAN PRODUCE THAT THE INTENDED MARKET CANNOT BE SUPPLIED FROM LESS DAMAGING ALTERNATIVE SITES OR SOURCES OF SUPPLY.

OPENCAST COAL

Future provision

4.29 There is no national guidance on the appropriate level of coal provision. MPG3 has made it clear that it is not for the planning system to pre-determine levels of coal to be produced by underground or opencast mining. However, MPG 3 also advises that the greater the planning objections to a particular site, the more material will be the possibility of supplying the market from less damaging alternative sites or sources of supply. POLICY C1

4.30 MPG3 advises that minerals local plans should indicate those areas where coal extraction is likely to be acceptable in principle, as well as those areas where working is unlikely to be acceptable. It indicates that the extent to which it will be possible to identify particular areas will depend on local circumstances and the level of knowledge about the resources. It advises that MPAs may wish to indicate:

- broad areas of search; or
- the extent of the shallow coalfield area and the constraints within that area; or
- a combination of the two.

4.31 There are a number of difficulties in adopting any of these approaches in Northumberland. The shallow coalfield covers an extensive area in Northumberland. Whilst the shallow coalfield can be defined, as shown on Map 1, the viability of the coal deposits in the Carboniferous Limestones and Scremerston groups has never been comprehensively assessed. To simply define the extent of the shallow coalfield is therefore not thought to be helpful. The identification of constraint areas within the coalfield may be effective in protecting special areas designated for their landscape, ecological or historical significance but would be less effective in protecting local communities and businesses and would not take into account the cumulative effect of workings and environmental initiatives following deep mine closures. Similarly, to identify broad areas of search would provide considerable uncertainty to all parties on what might be an acceptable area within which opencast coal working might be acceptable.

4.32 The consultation draft therefore examined those areas where potentially workable opencast resources are known to exist, summarised the main planning issues and put them forward for comment by all interested parties. The consultation exercise indicated that there is general support for the strategy of the plan in relation to coal extraction, and views have been expressed concerning the areas identified.

4.33 In this plan, it is proposed to identify a small number of preferred areas for opencast coal extraction. In identifying these areas account has been taken of the following:

a) views expressed during the consultation and deposit stages;

b) discussions with the coal industry about their forward programmes, as advocated by MPG3;

c) projected production rates from existing mines and sites already permitted;

d) current and anticipated future markets for coal; and

e) conformity with plan policies, environmental acceptability and the principles of sustainable development.

POLICY C2

PROVIDED THERE ARE NO SIGNIFICANT ADVERSE EFFECTS ON THE ENVIRONMENT OR LOCAL COMMUNITIES, PLANNING PERMISSION WILL BE GRANTED FOR THE EXTRACTION OF COAL BY OPENCAST METHODS FROM:

- LAND WITHIN THE STEADSBURN AREA, AS DEFINED ON THE PROPOSALS MAP;
- LAND ASSOCIATED WITH THE A1 TO SOUTH EAST NORTHUMBERLAND LINK ROAD AT WHITEFIELD, DEPENDING ON THE PROSPECT OF THE ROAD BEING CONSTRUCTED.

4.34 There are currently four operational sites in Northumberland; Stobswood producing 963,000 tonnes per annum until 2005, Maiden's Hall producing 600,000 tonnes per annum until 2002, Pegswood Moor Farm which will produce 250,000 tonnes per annum until 2003 and Callerton producing 90,000 tonnes per annum.

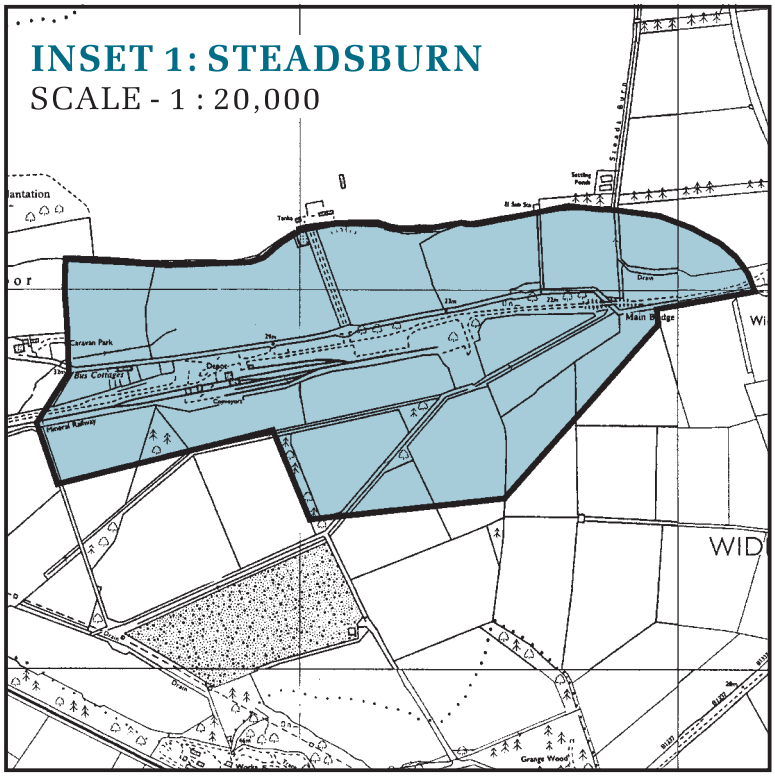
4.35 In accordance with the overall strategy set out above, it is not considered appropriate to indicate a total presumption against further coal workings elsewhere. It is envisaged that the main provision for coal during the plan period could be provided by Ellington Colliery, Blenkinsopp/Wrytree drift mines, the existing opencast sites together with a limited number of new areas for opencast coal extraction as identified below. Because of the difficulties in predicting coal supplies and markets in the longer term, it is not considered appropriate to identify preferred areas for the whole period covered by this plan. When the plan is reviewed, a reassessment of markets and opencast output can be carried out. POLICY C2

Steadsburn

4.36 Steadsburn is located to the west of Widdrington village to the south of Maiden's Hall. It straddles the C115 road and incorporates the Widdrington Disposal Point. The site was the subject of a planning application submitted in 1993 which was subsequently withdrawn by British Coal without having been determined.

4.37 The area is thought to contain around 700,000 tonnes of coal plus associated fireclay which could be extracted over a three year period. There would be clear long term environmental benefits in the working of this site due to the removal of Widdrington Disposal Point and reclamation of the area. The site could only be worked once Maiden's Hall has finished coaling as the Disposal Point will be used to transport coal from the site.

Preferred Area



4.38 The issues which any planning application for coal extraction in this area would need to address include:

a) Visual Impact

Opencast workings could be visually prominent in this open landscape. Appropriate measures should be employed to screen any workings particularly from Widdrington village and the A1068 coastal route.

b) Proximity to Housing

Widdrington village and other isolated properties are in close proximity to this area. Appropriate measures should be taken to reduce any adverse impacts to an acceptable level.

c) Transport

The County Council would need to be satisfied that acceptable alternative coal transport arrangements could be made following the removal of the Disposal Point.

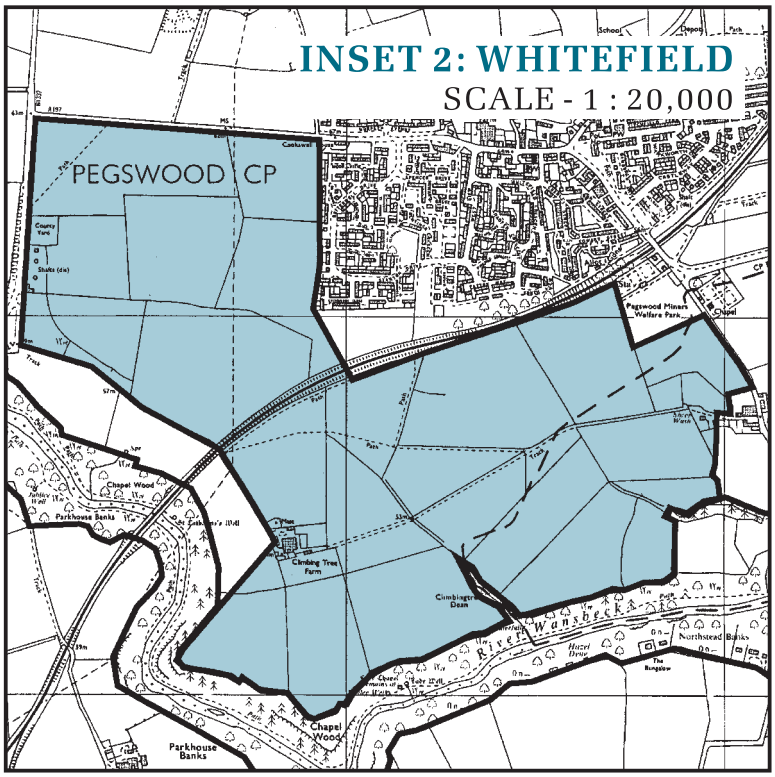
Land associated with the A1 to South East Northumberland Link Road at Pegswood Moor and Whitefield

4.39 The County Council's Local Transport Plan 2001-2006 identifies the Morpeth Northern Bypass Stage 1 in the five year programme. This is part of a scheme to provide a link road between the A1 and south east Northumberland. However, the second and third stages are not included in this plan.

4.40 The following issues would need to be considered in assessing any planning application in this area.

a) The Prospect of the Road Being Constructed

In assessing the prospect of the full A1 to south east Northumberland link road being constructed consideration will be given to the approach set out in the White Paper "A New Deal for Transport: Better for Everyone" published in July 1998 which requires the evaluation of alternative schemes before major new road schemes are accepted.



b) Viability of Proposed Road Development

Prior extraction of coal from the area should not prejudice the timing and viability of the proposed road development and developers should be aware of the need to co-ordinate with other operators and the road construction. The land should be compacted to an agreed standard and the work monitored by an independent consultant to enable road construction to proceed

c) Environmental Acceptability

Although the principle of coal extraction from this area is agreed, the sensitive nature of the location close to the residential areas of Morpeth and Pegswood means that any scheme for opencast extraction needs to be very carefully designed to minimise the overall impact on these settlements. Similarly, the impact on the nature conservation, landscape and agricultural value of the area will need to be fully assessed.

d) Transport

Proposals for the transport of coal should minimise the impacts on Pegswood, Morpeth, Hebron and Longhirst.

CONSTRAINT AREAS

4.41 In order to provide further guidance to coal operators and certainty to local communities opencast coal constraint areas have been defined. These areas are defined on the Proposals Map and described below.

North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

4.42 The North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty contains areas of workable opencast coal at Stublick, the area between Halton Lea Gate and Plenmeller Common and potentially in the Little Limestone Coals further south. The North Pennines consist of wild open moorlands with deeply incised wooded valleys. Its national landscape importance has been recognised by its designation as an AONB and recent initiatives mean that it is also growing in importance for outdoor recreation and tourism. The County Council sees no justification for further opencast coal workings within the AONB. POLICY C3

POLICY C3

UNLESS THERE ARE EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES WHERE IT CAN BE DEMONSTRATED THAT THE SPECIAL LANDSCAPE, HERITAGE AND NATURE CONSERVATION INTERESTS OF THE AREA WOULD NOT BE ADVERSELY AFFECTED, PLANNING PERMISSION WILL NOT BE GRANTED FOR OPENCAST COAL SITES IN THE FOLLOWING AREAS:

- NORTH PENNINES AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY;
- TYNE/DERWENT WATERSHED;
- NORTHUMBERLAND COAST BETWEEN AMBLE AND LYNEMOUTH;

AS DEFINED ON THE PROPOSALS MAP.

POLICY C4

PLANNING PERMISSION WILL NOT BE GRANTED FOR OPENCAST COAL SITES IN SOUTH EAST NORTHUMBERLAND AS DEFINED ON THE PROPOSALS MAP UNLESS:

- A SIGNIFICANT PART OF THE SITE IS DERELICT, DEGRADED OR CONTAMINATED AND THE PROPOSAL PROVIDES FOR ITS COMPREHENSIVE RECLAMATION; OR
- THE OPENCAST OPERATIONS ARE NECESSARY TO AVOID THE STERILISATION OF PROVEN COAL RESOURCES (SEE POLICY S4); OR
- THE LOCAL LANDSCAPE VALUE OF THE SITE IS SIGNIFICANTLY ADVERSELY AFFECTED BY EXISTING VISUALLY INTRUSIVE DEVELOPMENT.

Tyne/Derwent Watershed

4.43 The area in the south of the County forming the watershed between the Rivers Tyne and Derwent, together with an area to the north of the Tyne, contain substantial reserves of opencast coal, some of which are high quality medium volatile coking coals. It is designated as Green Belt and an Area of High Landscape Value in the Draft Tynedale District Wide Local Plan. It is an area within which proposals for opencast working have been strongly resisted over the years and the decisions have been supported on appeal (Whittonstall in 1978, Woodhead in 1984; and Leadgate in 1995). POLICY C3

Northumberland Coast

4.44 The Northumberland coastal strip between Amble and Lynemouth has been subject to opencast workings since the 1940s. The most recent site, East Chevington, has now completed coaling and is undergoing after-care. Substantial reserves of coal still remain, particularly at Highthorn and Hemscott Hill between Widdrington and Ellington and at Windmill Hill, east of Ellington. Both the County and District Councils are working to upgrade the environment of Druridge Bay and its environs as reflected in the Northumberland Coast Management Plan, the Management Strategy for Druridge Bay and the establishment of a coast project to develop an integrated approach to the management of the coastal landscape. This change in emphasis from a landscape dominated by opencast workings to one being improved and conserved has been reflected in the recent extension of heritage coast designation to Druridge Bay between Amble and Cresswell. The area is also particularly important for nature conservation, containing the Cresswell Ponds SSSI and Northumberland Coast SSSI. It is particularly important for migrating birds and is a candidate Ramsar site and Special Protection Area. POLICY C3

South East Northumberland

4.45 The south-east Northumberland constraint area has been defined on the Proposals Map. The boundary of the area is based on the definition of south east Northumberland in the County Structure Plan and includes the districts of Wansbeck, Blyth Valley and part of Castle Morpeth to the east of the A1.

4.46 This area contains the main settlements and employment centres in the County. The Structure Plan recognises that this part of the County has suffered in the past from the effects of opencast and deep mining. The emphasis now is to regenerate and enhance south east Northumberland by focusing new employment and housing development on the settlements and safeguarding those features and landscapes which have a particular value.

4.47 The landscape of south east Northumberland is less spectacular than the grandeur of the scenery in the west and north of the County. Nevertheless, Government policy in PPG7 emphasises that the countryside should be safeguarded for its own sake. Countryside which may carry no special designation is often valued by those who live and work there. The importance of these open areas close to communities and employment centres has been recognised in past appeal decisions, in particular Fenwicks Close Farm, Pegwhistle Burn and West Hartford. POLICY C4

Other Areas

4.48 Elsewhere, that is in the areas not defined as preferred areas or constraint areas, applications for opencast coal extraction will only be permitted where various criteria are met (Policy C5 and other relevant policies in the plan).

4.49 The acceptability of opencast coal extraction proposals will depend on their environmental acceptability and whether there are any positive benefits associated with the scheme. One such consideration will be the employment and economic implications of the proposal. MPG3 advises that economic benefits such as the contribution to, or maintenance of local, regional or national employment can be taken into account. This is relevant in the Northumberland context as coal and coal-related jobs are an important part of the local economy.

4.50 The County Council has regarded the continuity of job opportunities in opencast mining and related activity as a positive factor in considering proposals. However, in recent years direct employment on opencast sites has fallen as increased mechanisation, larger plant and new shift patterns have been introduced. Butterwell opencast site employed over 600 people during the 1980s, yet Stobswood, which was permitted as its replacement, currently employs around 350. As well as direct employment on opencast sites in the County, opencast workings may help to maintain or create indirect employment opportunities in the sectors which supply the opencast industry, handle and transport the coal, or consume the coal. MPG3 also advises that where there is material evidence that coal extraction would have an adverse effect on efforts to attract or retain investment in an areas this is a material consideration that should be taken into account in deciding planning applications.

4.51 Opencast coal extraction provides the opportunity to reclaim areas of derelict or degraded land where the subsequent restoration is an improvement to the local environment. There are now relatively few such areas left in the County due principally to the County Council's reclamation programme but also to former opencast coal working. However, where there are opportunities to improve degraded environments by opencast coal working, the area of degraded land should be significant both in terms of the area it covers and the unsightliness and/or danger it represents. Some areas of former mineral workings have re-vegetated naturally and can no longer be regarded as degraded land.

4.52 The sterilisation of coal reserves by other forms of development should be avoided where coal extraction can be carried out within a reasonable timescale and in an environmentally acceptable way. Whilst recognising that coal reserves will not be confined to the proposed development site, the County Council wishes to avoid the situation whereby a small development proposal precipitates a much larger opencast site with consequent environmental implications and delays in the original planned timescale of the development.

4.53 Planning applications for opencast coal workings will be assessed against other relevant policies in the plan as well as those relating specifically to opencast coal in this chapter. POLICY C5

POLICY C5

OUTSIDE THE AREAS COVERED BY POLICIES C2, C3 AND C4, PROPOSALS FOR OPENCAST COAL EXTRACTION WILL ONLY BE PERMITTED WHERE THE PROPOSAL CAN BE CARRIED OUT IN AN ENVIRONMENTALLY ACCEPTABLE WAY, CONSISTENT WITH THE PRINCIPLES OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, AND WHERE THE OVERALL BENEFITS TO THE LOCAL COMMUNITY OUTWEIGH THE DISTURBANCE OCCASIONED DURING DEVELOPMENT. SUCH BENEFITS MIGHT INCLUDE:

- THE PROPOSAL HAS AN OVERALL BENEFICIAL EFFECT ON THE LOCAL ECONOMY;
- THE ENVIRONMENT OF THE AREA WILL BENEFIT FROM OPENCAST COAL WORKING AND SUBSEQUENT RECLAMATION BECAUSE THE LAND OR A SIGNIFICANT PART OF IT IS DERELICT OR DEGRADED;
- THE OPENCAST OPERATIONS ARE NECESSARY TO AVOID STERILISATION OF PROVEN COAL RESERVES (SEE POLICY S4).

POLICY C6

PROPOSALS FOR OPENCAST COAL EXTRACTION THAT INHIBIT THE COMPREHENSIVE WORKING OF THE COAL DEPOSITS OF AN AREA IN AN EFFICIENT AND ENVIRONMENTALLY SATISFACTORY MANNER WILL NOT BE PERMITTED.

POLICY C7

WHERE AN OPENCAST COAL SITE IS ACCEPTABLE, THE ASSOCIATED EXTRACTION OF FIRECLAY WILL BE ENCOURAGED PROVIDED THIS DOES NOT SIGNIFICANTLY AFFECT THE LIFE OF THE OPERATION, THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT OR TRAFFIC GENERATED BY THE SITE AND RESULT IN UNACCEPTABLE ON-SITE STORAGE OF CLAY.

POLICY C8

THE COUNTY COUNCIL SUPPORTS THE CONTINUING OPERATION OF ELLINGTON COLLIERY AND WILL, THROUGH CONDITIONS OR PLANNING OBLIGATIONS ON NEW PLANNING PERMISSIONS AND/ OR DISCUSSIONS WITH OPERATORS SEEK TO IMPROVE THE ENVIRONMENT AROUND THE COAL MINE AT ELLINGTON AND THE COAL STOCKING AND HANDLING FACILITIES AT LYNEMOUTH.

Comprehensive working

4.54 It is important that opencast coal resources are worked efficiently and comprehensively. Not to do so could result in small unworked areas of coal which would be wasted or result in pressure to rework previously- worked areas. Piecemeal working of an area, i.e. a number of small unrelated schemes also means that local communities can be faced with unpredictable and prolonged activity and hinder the satisfactory reclamation of affected areas. POLICY C6

Other Minerals

4.55 Where two or more minerals are found together in the same site, it can be beneficial in economic and environmental terms for the minerals to be worked at the same time. There is a close geological association between coal and brick-making clays and the coal measures in parts of south east Northumberland are overlain by sands and gravels. Where these minerals are workable and viable their extraction as part of an opencast scheme can prevent unnecessary sterilisation of valuable mineral reserves and avoid the need to open new workings for these minerals elsewhere. Where opencast coal extraction is acceptable in principle, therefore, the viability of concurrent extraction of other minerals should be fully explored. POLICY C7

DEEP-MINED COAL

Ellington Colliery

4.56 Ellington Colliery supplies mainly the Alcan Power Station. It began life before planning controls were introduced. The coal stocking and coal handling facilities at Lynemouth, however, are subject to normal planning controls. Permission was granted in 1986 for further development of these facilities subject to the carrying out of agreed landscaping and screening works. As environmental standards continue to increase, further improvements need to be made to the environment in this general area. POLICY C8

Drift Mines

4.57 There is one operational drift mine in the County at Blenkinsopp/ Wrytree and a number of non-operational mines.

Drift Mines in the Alston Area

4.58 Ayle and Barhaugh are small drift mines, quite different in character from other coal operations in the County. They are located high in the North Pennines together with two similar operations in Cumbria (Blagill and Clarghyll). The area has a history of considerable mining activity, mainly the vein minerals lead, zinc and silver. It is now designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and is being actively promoted for tourism.

4.59 The drift mines are not currently operating but have until recently produced a specialist semi-anthracite coal, extracted from the thicker of the two coal seams associated with the Little Limestone series. The seam, which is about 18 inches thick, was metamorphosed by the heat and pressure associated with the formation of the whin sill. Much of the volatile matter in the coal was driven out resulting in a hard smokeless coal with a high carbon and low volatile content.

4.60 The two mines have collectively produced around 7,000 tonnes of coal a year, most of which was sold directly to coal merchants in Haydon Bridge, Appleby and County Durham, for the domestic market. They also represented a small but important local source of employment (18 jobs) in an area of limited employment opportunities. These jobs, the miners' disposable income and the contribution to coal merchants' businesses and local suppliers of materials were significant in the local economy. In addition, the environmental impact of the workings was small. The relatively low level of production generated little coal traffic (approximately 20-30 lorries per week) and the underground nature of the workings meant that environmental disturbance was minimised.

Blenkinsopp Castle and Wrytree Drift

4.61 Although once operated as two separate drift mines, Blenkinsopp Castle and Wrytree drift are now run as a single enterprise, with accesses on to the C302 and A69.

4.62 In 2000 the mine employed 95 persons and produced around 150,000 tonnes. The mine works the Little Limestone seam but here it has not been subject to the same heat and pressure as the seam in the Alston area. The seam is thicker but not of special quality. There are estimated reserves of 5 million tonnes of coal. Coal is transported by lorry, a maximum of 70 lorries per day respectively from each site. However, the possibility of transporting coal by rail is being investigated. In 1996 both sites received renewals of permission for continued working of coal and retention of surface installations and buildings. These permissions will expire at the end of 2019 and require the sites to be restored in accordance with an agreed scheme, unless further permissions are obtained.

Shadfen Park

4.63 Permission was granted for Shadfen Park drift mine, to the east of Morpeth, in 1976. It continued operating by virtue of a series of permissions until 1991 when the mine ceased production. The current permission runs until 2001 and requires the site to be restored to woodland and agricultural land.

POLICY C9

PROPOSALS FOR NEW MINES OR EXTENSIONS TO EXISTING MINES WILL BE PERMITTED WHERE THERE IS NO SIGNIFICANT ADVERSE EFFECT ON LAND OR PROPERTY DUE TO SUBSIDENCE, LOCAL COMMUNITIES OR THE ENVIRONMENT.

POLICY C10

PROPOSALS FOR THE SURFACE DISPOSAL OF COLLIERY WASTE WILL ONLY BE PERMITTED WHERE UNDERGROUND DISPOSAL IS NOT FEASIBLE AND THERE WOULD NOT BE A SIGNIFICANT ADVERSE EFFECT ON LOCAL COMMUNITIES AND THE ENVIRONMENT. WHERE PERMISSION IS GRANTED, CONDITIONS WILL BE IMPOSED TO ENSURE THAT OPERATIONS ARE REGULATED TO MINIMISE DISTURBANCE TO THE ENVIRONMENT AND LOCAL AMENITY AND THE LAND IS SATISFACTORILY RECLAIMED FOR AN APPROVED AFTER-USE.

Future Provision

4.64 The operation of existing drift mines in the County can bring important social and economic benefits, particularly to the more remote rural parts of the County. Nevertheless the highest environmental standards will continue to be expected especially in the North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. POLICY C9

4.65 It is considered that it would be more beneficial from an environmental and economic point of view to meet any need for additional capacity at existing mines rather than at new sites. Planning applications for new mines or extensions to existing mines will be assessed against Policy C9 and other relevant policies in the plan.

Colliery Spoil Disposal

4.66 Colliery spoil is made up of waste shale and clays removed from the coal during processing. Waste rock is also produced from cutting new underground roadways and other development work. The mechanisation of coal extraction has increased the quantity of spoil produced from deep mines.

4.67 The colliery spoil from most of the drift mines in the County is backfilled underground. This practice reduces the environmental impact of mining as the spoil does not need to be transported and tipped. Wherever possible, therefore, this should be the preferred method of disposing of colliery spoil. POLICY C10

4.68 Colliery spoil from Ellington Colliery has been disposed of by means of tipping onto the foreshore at Lynemouth for many years. However, in 1990 the Government announced its intention to bring to an end the dumping of colliery spoil as a means of disposal onto beaches and into the sea on environmental grounds.

4.69 Various alternatives for disposing of the spoil were examined and British Coal identified their preferred option of a combined coal/mine discard operation at Windmill Hill between Ellington, Lynemouth and Cresswell. This proposal generated considerable opposition in these communities and in the 1992 'Coal Industry in Northumberland Policy statement the County Council indicated that, on the basis of information then available, it was opposed to opencast working at Windmill Hill.

4.70 However, before a planning application for Windmill Hill could be submitted, British Coal, in February 1994, closed Ellington Colliery. During this time when there was no tipping on the foreshore, considerable problems of coastal erosion were experienced close to Alcan power station. Emergency defence works were carried out providing protection for the power station itself but it has become clear that if disposal on the foreshore were to cease, the coal stocking grounds and other ancillary facilities for the Alcan Power Station would be threatened by sea inundation.

4.71 Following the reopening of Ellington Colliery a scheme has been agreed whereby the colliery spoil is to be used for coastal defence. This is a constructive use and involves the compaction of material to ensure that it does not simply wash away into the sea. The continuation of this practice by RJB Mining is currently being considered by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food who control the coastal disposal of colliery spoil through its licensing procedure.

CHAPTER 5:

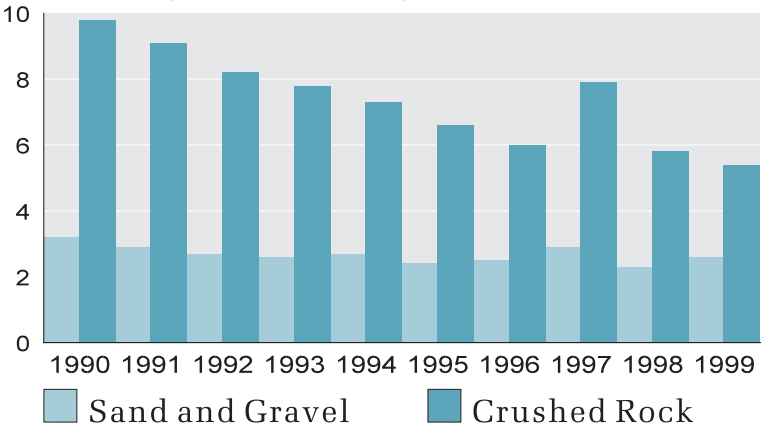
AGGREGATE MINERALS

INTRODUCTION

5.1 Aggregates are materials used in the construction industry. Roads, houses, schools and commercial and industrial buildings all depend on the supply of aggregates for concreting, filling and surfacing purposes. The principal aggregate minerals in Northumberland are hard rock (igneous rock and limestone) and sand and gravel. Secondary materials such as construction and mineral waste and power station ash are also produced in the County.

5.2 Northumberland produced 1.8 million tonnes of crushed rock and 0.9 million tonnes of sand and gravel during 1997. Most of this was consumed within the County or in Tyne and Wear. 56% of the crushed rock produced in Northumberland was consumed within the County with 44% exported to other areas, primarily Tyne and Wear. 44% of sand and gravel produced was consumed within Northumberland with the remaining 56% exported also primarily to Tyne and Wear.

Sales of Primary Aggregates in the Northern Region 1990-1999 (Million Tonnes)



SAND AND GRAVEL

5.3 The land-won sand and gravel resources extracted in Northumberland occur either as superficial 'drift' deposits covering the solid geology of the County or as beach sand and are shown on Map 2. The potential sources of sand and gravel are confined to five main areas of the County.

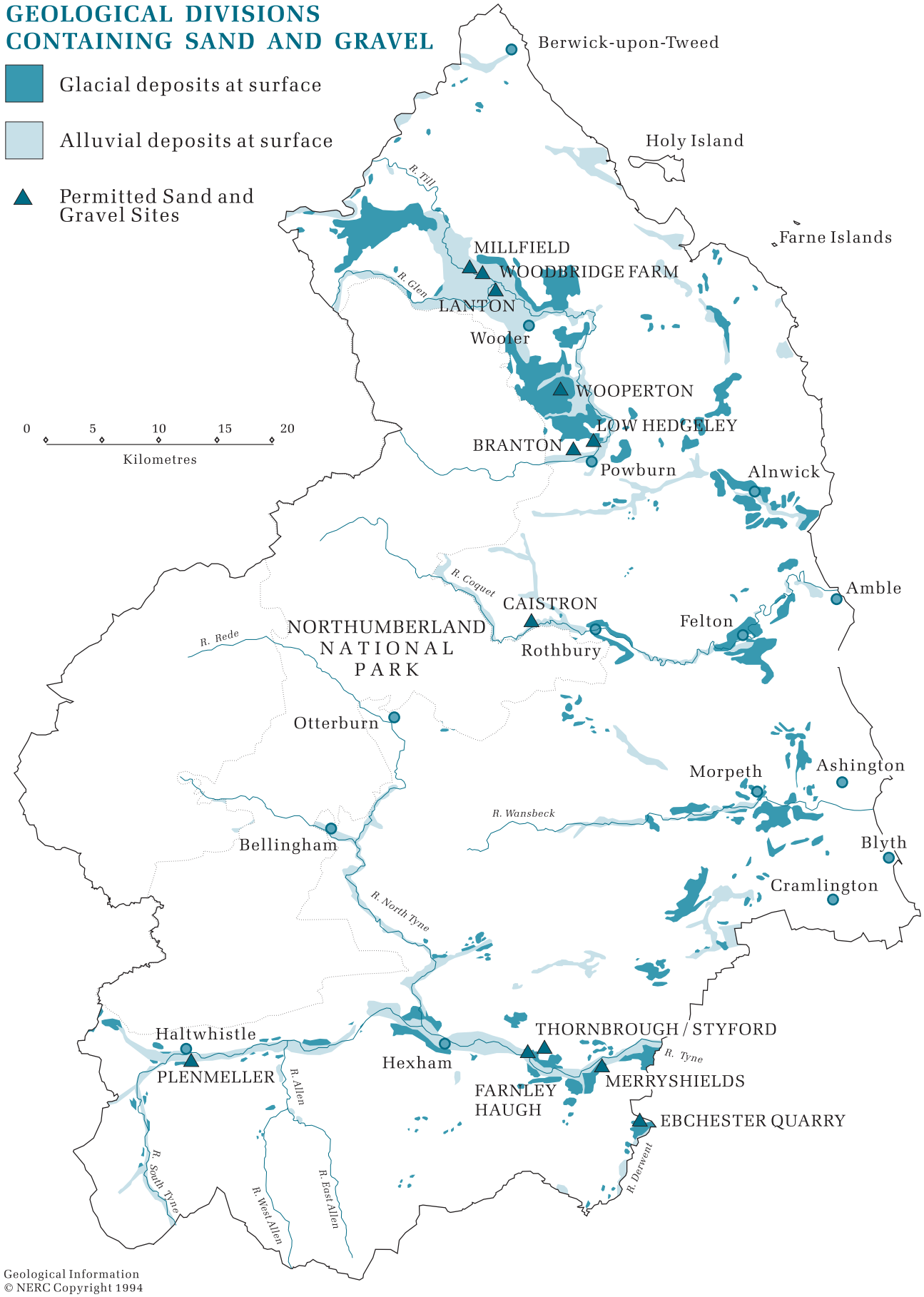
- The glacial deposits and river terrace or delta deposits lying between Powburn and Coldstream in the north of the County (Milfield-Breamish area);
- The glacial sand and gravel deposits in the Alnwick-Morpeth-Ashington areas;
- River terrace and alluvial deposits in Coquetdale;
- River terrace, alluvial and glacial deposits in the Tyne and Derwent river valleys;
- Beach deposits, formerly extracted at Druridge Bay.

Milfield-Breamish Area

5.4 North of Powburn, large areas of low lying land are mapped as glacial sand and gravel, river terrace deposits or alluvium, all associated with the presence of a glacial lake which formed towards the end of the last Ice Age. During this period the high ground of the Cheviot Hills was exposed to weathering so that the source of most of the deposited sediments was the durable igneous rock types of the Cheviots. The river terrace deposits of sand and gravel in the area between Wooler and Milfield are, together with the Powburn area, amongst the highest quality reserves in the County. Sand and gravel is currently being extracted or will be extracted at the following sites.

Map 2

SAND & GRAVEL



Milfield

5.5 Sand and gravel has been extracted from the former Milfield Aerodrome since the 1960s. Extraction was completed in 1999 and the site has been progressively restored to agriculture and it is anticipated that the final phase will be fully restored by summer 2001.

Woodbridge Farm

5.6 Woodbridge Farm is being worked as an extension to Milfield Quarry. The site is expected to produce about 650,000 tonnes over three to four years, during which time the derelict buildings on the site will be demolished. The waste materials will be crushed on site and sold for low grade aggregate use. The site will be restored in phases to agriculture with woodland shelterbelts.

Lanton

5.7 It s proposed to work Lanton as a replacement site for Milfield/ Woodbridge Farm. The operators brought forward this site in advance of reaching agreement with the landowner at Woodbridge Farm because permitted reserves at Milfield were nearing exhaustion. Extensive pre-application discussions resulted in an application acceptable in planning terms subject to a section 106 agreement governing the sequence of workings in the area. Extraction will not start at Lanton until Woodbridge Farm has ceased working and will continue until 2010. Estimated reserves are in the region of 1.8 million tonnes. Advance tree and hedgerow planting has taken place along the A697 and south of the site and the site will be restored to agriculture with deciduous woodland and a small pond.

Branton

5.8 This site was permitted on appeal in 1993 as a replacement for Brandon Farm which has undergone restoration and is now in after-care. Approximately 1.3 million tonnes of sand and gravel will be extracted over 11 years between 1994 and 2004. Branton is expected to cease production in 2004 and will be progressively restored to two lakes for recreation and nature conservation purposes.

Low Hedgeley

5.9 An extension to the Low Hedgeley site on 33 hectares of land was approved in 1998 for extraction until 2012. This site is also used for processing sand and gravel extracted at Roddam Quarry which is within the National Park.

Wooperton

5.10 Planning permission for sand and gravel extraction at Wooperton was granted in October 1996 and work commenced on site in March 1997. The site contains approximately 2 million tonnes of sand and gravel to be extracted over a 26 year period at a rate of approximately 85,000 tonnes per annum.

Alnwick-Morpeth-Ashington Area

5.11 The majority of this area is mapped as glacial till (boulder clay) but it contains a number of outcrops of glacial sand and gravel deposited as the ice sheets retreated at the end of the Ice Age. Whereas some of these outcrops are probably isolated patches it is likely that some represent outcrops of more extensive beds or lenses of sand and gravel within the glacial till. The main outcrops are around Alnwick, Felton, south from Ulgham and between Morpeth and Ashington in the Wansbeck Valley. There are no current sand and gravel workings in this area.

Coquetdale

5.12 To the west of Rothbury, drift deposits, consisting of alluvium and poorly developed terraces are confined to the valley floor. The river flows from the west over relatively durable bedrock and materials in the river deposits tend to be fairly clean and well graded and are similar in nature to those in the Wooler area. East of Rothbury the drift deposits are mainly glacial till and developments of river terrace or alluvial deposits are restricted to a few river haughs. Permission exists for sand and gravel extraction at Caistron, west of Rothbury.

Caistron

5.13 Sand and gravel extraction has continued intermittently by virtue of a series of planning permissions since 1956, the most recent granted in 1992. The permission allows for a continuation of output of approximately 65,000 tonnes per annum until 2016. Restoration of former workings has created a series of lakes and established a nature reserve particularly important for birds. In 1999 operations at this site ceased.

Tyne and Derwent River Valleys

5.14 This area consists mainly of the valleys of the Rivers Tyne, South Tyne and North Tyne but includes the area around Ebchester in the Derwent Valley. Potential deposits comprise of glacial sand and gravel, river terrace deposits and alluvium. Deposits of glacial sand and gravel are present on both banks of the Tyne Valley and around Ebchester. Alluvial sand and gravel exists in the river floodplain between the County boundary in the east and Haltwhistle in the west. Sand and gravel is currently being extracted at the following sites.

Merryshields

5.15 Permission was granted by an Interim Development Order permission (see Glossary) in 1948 for sand and gravel extraction at Merryshields. A further IDO permission, adjacent to the River Tyne (Bywell Bridge), and has been operational since 1996. Permission also exists at Merryshields to tip inert waste to allow for improved progressive agricultural restoration. There is no processing plant on site and extracted material is taken to Crawcrook in Tyne and Wear for processing.

Farnley Haugh

5.16 Sand and gravel has been extracted at Farnley Haugh intermittently since 1965, the most recent permission having been granted in 1984. Extracted material is taken to Crawcrook in Tyne and Wear for processing. The site will be restored to a lake for nature conservation and agricultural land. The current permission runs until 2004.

Thornbrough/Styford

5.17 Extraction began at Styford in 1963 and was carried out until the early 1980s when permission was given on appeal for the adjacent site of Thornbrough in 1982. The reserves at Styford have been worked out and the site is now fully restored. There are a number of permissions for the tipping of inert waste at Thornbrough and the site is being progressively restored to agriculture. The current extraction is permitted until 2004.

Ebchester Quarry

5.18 The former quarries of Broadoak and Hollings Hill are now operated as one quarry for sand and gravel extraction. Broadoak had been in

operation since the 1950s and has permission until 2002, whilst Hollings Hill was granted planning permission in 1994 and has permission to extract until 2012. Extraction at Broadoak has now ceased and the processing plant has now been removed. The permission allows for the continuation of inert waste tipping followed by reclamation of the site to agriculture and woodland.

Plenmeller

5.19 An application was submitted to extract 880,000 tonnes of sand and gravel over a five to six year period in 1995. Restoration is to agricultural land, woodland and a fishing lake. An application has been submitted to extend the time period for extraction.

Coastal Areas

5.20 In addition to the drift sand and gravel deposits in Northumberland, planning permission exists for the extraction of beach and dune sand deposits at Hemscott Hill, Druridge Bay. There is also limited extraction, under permitted development rights, in association with the dredging of harbours. Planning permission no longer exists for the former beach working at Blakemoor Burn.

Hemscott Hill

5.21 Permission for sand extraction at Hemscott Hill was granted on appeal by the Minister of Housing and Local Government in 1960, although there is no current extraction taking place other than the clearance of the Hemscott Burn. A scheme of planning conditions has been submitted under the Review process (see Chapter 12) and discussions are continuing with the landowner.

HARD ROCK

5.22 Production of hard rock, for roadstone and crushed rock aggregate, comes from two principal sources in Northumberland, the Whin Sill and the Great Limestone. Sandstone is quarried at a number of localities in the County but is used almost exclusively for building stone. Sandstone is therefore considered separately in chapter 6.

5.23 Whinstone is a long-established quarryman's term for the hard grey quartz dolerite of the Whin Sill. The Whin Sill comprises a series of more or less horizontal sheet-like bodies of quartz dolerite, a hard grey igneous rock intruded into the surrounding rocks in a molten state at the end of the Carboniferous period, about 295 million years ago. The hard resistant nature of the rock of the Whin Sill gives rise to some of the County's most distinctive scenery. It forms the north-facing scarp along which the Roman Wall was built. It also forms the Kyloe Hills in the north of the County and provides the dramatic sites for Lindisfarne, Dunstanburgh and Bamburgh Castles.

Map 3

HARD ROCK

5.24 The quartz dolerite at the Whin Sill provides a high quality rock suitable for road surfacing purposes. However, it does not possess all the qualities required to be classified as a high specification aggregate (HSA), i.e. an aggregate suitable for use in heavily trafficked roads where high levels of skidding resistance and aggregate durability are required with a "polished stone value" (PSV) equal to or greater than 58. The whinstone extracted in Northumberland has a PSV in the range 55-58, and can be used in all but the most demanding road surfacing situations.

5.25 The Whin Sill is currently worked at Keepershield, Barrasford, Divethill, Howick, Longhoughton and Cragmill quarries.

5.26 Limestone currently exploited in Northumberland occurs in the Carboniferous Middle and Upper Limestone groups. These rock sequences consist mainly of sandstone, shale and limestone, with thin coal seams locally, repeated many times in regular cycles. The thickness of individual rock types varies considerably and thus the thickness of each cycle varies. Two limestone formations are currently worked in the County. The Great Limestone, at the base of the Upper Limestone Group, is a generally thickly-bedded medium to dark grey rock. It is worked at Mootlaw Quarry and intermittently at Thorngreen Quarry. The Oxford Limestone, within the Middle Limestone Group, is a well-bedded medium grey limestone. At Barrasford, where it is worked along with the Whin Sill, it is partially metamorphosed to a grey crystalline limestone or marble with local concentrations of calc-silicate minerals. The rock was metamorphosed (altered by heat) by the intrusion of the Whin Sill.

Keepershield

5.27 This whinstone quarry was granted an IDO permission in 1948. A consolidating permission was granted in 1991 which imposed modern conditions of working over the whole of the quarry. This permission includes an extension within which is The Scroggs SSSI. A scheme of working agreed between the operators, English Nature and the County Council involved the translocation of vegetation from the SSSI to a restored part of the site. Permission for extraction of whinstone runs until 2042 when the site will be restored to agriculture, nature conservation and woodland. At current extraction rates there are sufficient permitted reserves to last 36 years.

Barrasford

5.28 The quarry has been in production for over a century and the first permission, an IDO, was granted in 1948. In 1988 a permission was granted involving an extension and a legal agreement to forego the right to work part of the IDO permission area. There is a processing plant and coating plant on the site. A major extension to the site was approved in 1998 subject to the construction of a new haul road to the A68, which was opened in 1999. The permission permits extraction until 2040.

Divethill

5.29 Divethill Quarry has been operational since 1934 and its first planning permission was granted in 1948. An extension to the whinstone quarry was granted permission in 1991 and this runs until 2010. The quarry has a processing plant and a coating plant. Final restoration of the site will return the quarry to agriculture and woodland.

Cragmill

5.30 Permission for extraction of whinstone was granted in 1948 and runs until 2042. Permitted reserves, however, will be exhausted towards the end of the plan period. Permissions were granted in 1989 and 1992 to create mounds to screen the processing and coating plants.

Howick

5.31 The first planning permission for the extraction of whinstone dates from 1948 and an extension was granted in 1978. At the same time a legal agreement secured the protection of an area of woodland to the south of the site. The current planning permission was granted in 1997 and runs until 2008. There is a processing plant and a coating plant within the quarry.

Swinburne

5.32 Swinburne Quarry has been operational for over 50 years and was first brought under planning control with IDO permissions in 1947 and 1948. Planning permission exists to extract whinstone from an extension area originally granted permission in 1973 which ran until 1999. A scheme of conditions for the IDO permission has been agreed, and this permission runs until 2042. There is a processing plant and coating plant. There are approximately 20 years permitted reserves remaining. Operations at Swinburne have been temporarily suspended.

Belford

5.33 There has been a quarry producing whinstone on this site since the turn of the century, although the first planning permission was granted in 1947. The quarry has continued by virtue of a series of permissions, the most recent one being granted in 1995. Due to the recession in the construction industry and the loss of a major ballast contract to British Rail, operations at Belford have been temporarily suspended. An application has recently been approved to renew permission for extraction within the existing permitted area until 2015 and for a revised method of working and final restoration over the remainder of the site.

Mootlaw

5.34 The original planning permission for Mootlaw was granted in 1950 but the quarry did not open until 1967. An extension to the site was granted in 1984 and a further extension to the site and a new haul road were approved in 1997. This permission permits extraction until 2014. There is a processing plant on site.

Thorngreen

5.35 Permission was granted in 1981 and revised in 1998 to reopen this limestone quarry, and the permission runs until 2006. Extraction is intermittent, depending on the operator's current contracts.

Longhoughton

5.36 Permission was granted in 1998 to rework this whinstone quarry, and extraction is permitted until 2008. Extraction is on an intermittent basis depending upon sales.

Dormant Sites

5.37 There are four dormant hard rock quarries with valid planning permissions in Northumberland. Three of these (Snableazes, Greensfield and Ewesley) are IDO permissions. Ewesley has subsequently been fully restored. A scheme of working and restoration would need to be submitted and approved by the County Council before extraction could resume at the remaining sites. The fourth, Kyloe Quarry, is not an IDO permission.

Aggregates used in Forestry

5.38 The Forestry Commission manages a significant area of forest in Northumberland and is largely self-sufficient in winning aggregates for building and maintaining forest roads on its own land. Extraction is small scale involving some 75,000 tonnes annually of soft sandstone and Dolerite from numerous small quarries in Kielder and Rothbury Forest Districts. Reserves are generally suitable only for local use and, through their use in forestry, make a significant contribution to the local economy.

SECONDARY AGGREGATES

5.39 The quantities of secondary aggregates used for construction purposes are difficult to assess. However, there is an assumption in current government guidance that approximately 10% of aggregates used are from secondary sources.

5.40 The main source of secondary aggregates in Northumberland is power station ash from Alcan power station and, until it ceased generation in 2000, from Blyth power station. In 1997, about 134,000 tonnes of ash suitable for aggregate purposes was produced by the two power stations. 90% of this was sold for use as an aggregate. These account for 6% of total aggregate sales in the County. The amount of ash actually produced is very variable but there is potential to increase the use of power station ash for aggregate purposes.

5.41 A further potential source of secondary aggregate is colliery spoil. Spoil from Ellington Colliery is being used for coastal defence purposes around Alcan Power Station coal stocking ground. This is defined as a constructive use.

5.42 In County road schemes approximately 10% of bituminous material is recycled and used in road construction. Building demolition materials are reused and demolition materials from Milfield airfield were recycled as part of the Milfield Quarry operation. However, the total quantities of recycled demolition materials are not known.

5.43 Overall, it is likely that less than 10% of aggregates used has come from secondary sources and the scope for a significant increase may be limited due to the uncertain future of the major spoil-producing industries. Policies concerning recycling facilities are included in the Waste Local Plan

AGGREGATES DEMAND AND SUPPLY

5.44 Government guidance on the provision of aggregate minerals is set out in Minerals Planning Guidance Note 6 (MPG6) published in 1994. These guidelines stress the importance of an adequate and steady supply of aggregates to meet the needs of the construction industry, balanced against environmental concerns. In addition, in reflecting the Government's commitment to sustainable development the guidance proposes:

- to conserve minerals as far as possible;
- to minimise production of waste;
- to increase efficient use of materials including recycling of waste; and
- to protect environmentally sensitive areas.

The Government also calls for a gradual change from the present supply approach, which relies mainly on the traditional land-won sources, to

one which incorporates an increasing use of alternative sources of materials such as secondary aggregates, recycled materials, and coastal superquarries.

5.45 MPG6 sets out a broad framework of aggregates demand in England covering the period from 1992 to 2006. These forecasts are in turn broken down to determine the share which each region is expected to contribute. They draw on information provided by long term projections of demand and advice provided by the Regional Aggregates Working Parties (RAWPs). RAWPs were established in the 1970s to co-ordinate the provision of aggregate minerals and include representatives of the mineral planning authorities, the minerals industry and the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions. Northumberland is represented on and chairs the Northern Region Aggregates Working Party which also covers Tyne and Wear, Tees Valley and Durham.

5.46 MPG6 indicates that the approximate total demand for construction aggregates in England between 1992 and 2006 will be between 4,200 and 4,500 million tonnes. Mineral Planning Authorities are expected to make provision for some 3,100 million tonnes of primary aggregates (73% of total demand). The rest is expected to be met from other sources - marine-dredged sand and gravel (7%), imports from outside England and Wales (4%), imports from Wales (4%) and secondary and recycled material (12%).

5.47 At the regional level, demand for aggregates within the region is expected to be 275 million tonnes, and other regions are likely to make demands on the Northern Region for an additional 35 million tonnes of primary aggregate. MPG6 envisages that the total supply of 310 million tonnes of aggregates will be made up as shown on Table 5.1.

Table 5.1

Aggregates supply in the Northern Region, 1992 - 2006		
	1992-2006	Supply (mt) % of Total
Landwon provision	245	79
Marine-dredged sand and gravel	15	5
Imports from other regions.	15	5
Secondary and Recycled	35	11
Total	310	100

Source: Minerals Planning Guidance Note 6. 1994

POLICY A1

PROVISION WILL BE MADE IN ACCORDANCE WITH NATIONAL GUIDANCE AND THE ADVICE OF THE NORTHERN REGION WORKING PARTY ON AGGREGATES TO ENABLE THE SUPPLY OF AT LEAST 15.5 MILLION TONNES OF SAND AND GRAVEL AND 41 MILLION TONNES OF CRUSHED ROCK IN THE PERIOD 1992-2006 UNLESS EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES PREVAIL.

5.48 The planning authorities in the Northern Region are therefore required to make provision for 245 million tonnes of aggregate material from land-won sources over the period 1992-2006. This will be made up of 50 million tonnes of sand and gravel and 195 million tonnes of crushed rock. These figures have been broken down and apportioned on a sub-regional basis. Northumberland is required to make provision for at least 15.5 million tonnes of sand and gravel and 41 million tonnes of crushed rock over the period 1992-2006.

Landbanks

5.49 In addition to the requirement to ensure an adequate supply of aggregate minerals, Mineral Planning Authorities are required to maintain a landbank of reserves. A landbank is a stock of planning permissions for the winning and working of minerals. The period of the landbank reflects the lead times which may be involved in obtaining planning permission and bringing a site into production. A landbank of permissions can help to secure continuity of supply by enabling industry to respond speedily to fluctuations in demand. MPG6 advises that Mineral Planning Authorities should aim to maintain a landbank for an appropriate local area, sufficient for at least 7 years extraction in the case of sand and gravel. It also advises that a longer period may be appropriate for crushed rock. The County Council takes the view that for crushed rock 15 years is appropriate. This represents more than twice the period advised for the sand and gravel landbank and is sufficient to ensure flexibility in the face of the longer lead times associated with the development of hard rock quarries.

5.50 For both crushed rock and sand and gravel the approach in this minerals local plan is to avoid landbanks being established which are excessive which could obstruct initiatives to increase the use of secondary and recycled aggregates.

5.51 The County's existing stock of permitted reserves is sufficient to meet the requirement for sand and gravel and crushed rock during the plan period (up to 2006). However, to ensure an adequate landbank at the end of the plan period it will be necessary, before then, to grant additional permissions to enable the provision of sand and gravel to be maintained until 2013 and crushed rock until 2021.

POLICY A2

THE COUNTY COUNCIL WILL AIM TO MAINTAIN A LANDBANK OF PERMITTED RESERVES SUFFICIENT FOR AT LEAST SEVEN YEARS EXTRACTION OF SAND AND GRAVEL AND AT LEAST FIFTEEN YEARS EXTRACTION OF CRUSHED ROCK AGGREGATE THROUGHOUT THE PLAN PERIOD, UNLESS EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES PREVAIL.

Table 5.2

Reserves required in Northumberland (million tonnes)

	Sand & Gravel	Crushed Rock
MPG6 Requirement 1992-2006	15.5	41.0
Produced (1992-1996)	4.3	12.3
Required Provision 1997 - 2006	11.2	28.7
beyond 2006	7.2*	41.0**
Total	18.4	69.7
Permitted Reserves (1.1.97)	15.1	59.3
Additional reserves required	3.3	10.4

* 7 year landbank for sand and gravel at end of plan period.

** 15 year landbank for crushed rock at end of plan period.

5.52 Table 5.2 shows that there is a need to grant further permissions for 3.3 million tonnes of sand and gravel and 10.4 million tonnes of crushed rock within the plan period.

5.53 These figures are not inflexible. Local considerations, environmental acceptability of sites and benefits which may accrue from applications should also be taken into account. The County Council recognises that the total permitted reserves figures may conceal an uneven distribution of reserves, some of which are unlikely to be worked within the plan period.

POLICY A3

PLANNING PERMISSION WILL NOT BE GRANTED FOR THE EXTRACTION OF AGGREGATE MINERALS IF:

- THERE ARE MATERIAL PLANNING OBJECTIONS WHICH ARE NOT OUTWEIGHED BY SIGNIFICANT BENEFITS TO THE ENVIRONMENT OR THE LOCAL COMMUNITY; AND
- THE EXISTING LANDBANK OF PERMITTED RESERVES IS ADEQUATE, UNLESS THERE IS A NEED FOR THE PARTICULAR NATURE AND QUALITY OF THE AGGREGATE WHICH CANNOT REASONABLY BE MET FROM OTHER AVAILABLE SOURCES.

5.54 Nevertheless, it is important to avoid over-provision of aggregates by granting permission for more sites than are actually required. This would be contrary to the principles of sustainable development and might cause unnecessary environmental damage and waste of resources. At the same time, however, the County Council recognises the need to maintain the landbank figures. Should the landbank of permitted reserves of aggregate minerals fall below the levels set in Policy A2, this will be an important consideration to be balanced against any harmful effects to the environment and the community, when determining minerals planning applications. Whilst it is not general for a developer to have to provide evidence of a need, the need for the mineral will be taken into account if put forward in support of an application or where an Environmental Statement is required. Any significant benefits to the environment or the local community will also be taken into account.

5.55 The scale and location of future working is determined not only by consideration of future demand for aggregates but also by the distribution of viable deposits and the environmental acceptability of potential future sites. MPG6 advises that the Mineral Planning Authority should be satisfied that sites put forward in the development plan contain economically workable deposits of mineral and that they are likely to become available to the minerals industry within the plan period. In addition, sites should be acceptable in environmental terms.

5.56 The Milfield-Breamish Area is especially important for Neolithic and early medieval archaeology and any proposals for aggregates extraction in this area will in particular require the early consultation and prior assessment/evaluation of sensitive sites.

5.57 To maintain the appropriate level of permitted reserves the County Council will depend on the industry to bring forward applications in the right place at the right time. Even if the level of permitted reserves falls below the recommended level, planning permission will not be granted for the extraction of aggregates from unacceptable sites.

5.58 All planning applications for the extraction of aggregate minerals will be assessed against other relevant policies elsewhere in this plan as well as those relating specifically to aggregates in this chapter.

5.59 In considering which areas to include in the plan as preferred areas, regard has been paid to the advice in MPG6 that it may be generally preferable, as a means of minimising environmental disturbance, to adopt a policy of allowing extensions to existing mineral workings rather than allowing mineral workings at new greenfield sites. Extensions would only be acceptable, however, if the existing quarry is suitably located and the extension would cause no significant adverse effect on local communities or the environment. Where there are environmental problems with existing quarries, an extension may provide the opportunity to bring about overall improvements. The opening of a new quarry may be acceptable as a replacement for an existing site which has environmental problems.

5.60 In defining the preferred areas in the plan account has been taken of the advice in MPG6 (para. 60) that MPAs should make reasonable efforts to satisfy themselves that the land is:

(i) underlain by economically workable deposits; and

(ii) likely to become available to the minerals industry within the plan period.

5.61 The resources contained within the preferred areas are expected to be more than adequate to meet the County's production requirement as outlined in MPG6 and maintain a landbank both during and at the end of the plan period. The consideration of planning applications will take into account the overall supply position in the County and planning permissions will only be granted where this is consistent with the principles of sustainable development. Should these preferred areas represent an over provision of aggregate minerals in the light of revised government guidance (MPG6) and emerging revised regional planning guidance, all the identified preferred areas will be re-examined as part of the plan's first review. POLICY A4-A7

POLICY A4

PLANNING PERMISSION FOR THE EXTRACTION OF SAND AND GRAVEL WILL BE GRANTED WITHIN THE FOLLOWING AREAS:

- MARLEY KNOWE
- FARNLEY HAUGH EXTENSION
- MERRYSHIELDS EXTENSION
- HOUGHTON STROTHER
- PLENMELLER EXTENSION

AS DEFINED ON THE PROPOSALS MAP PROVIDED THAT THERE ARE NO SIGNIFICANT ADVERSE EFFECTS ON LOCAL COMMUNITIES.

SAND AND GRAVEL PROVISION

Marley Knowe

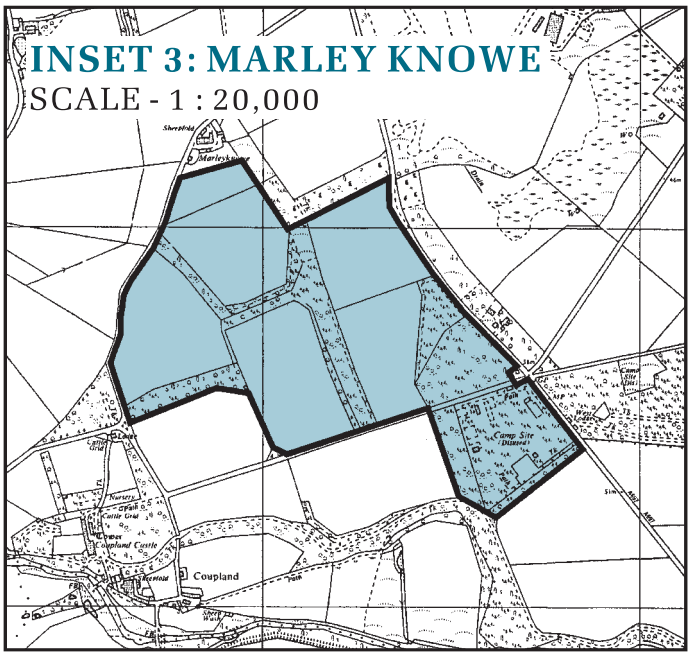
5.62 Marley Knowe is located to the west of the A697, about 2.5 km south of Milfield. The site was the subject of a planning application in 1984 but was refused on landscape and agricultural grounds together with no overriding need for the mineral at that time.

5.63 The issues which any planning application in this area would need to address include:

a) Archaeology

The Milfield Basin contains nationally important archaeological remains, primarily of prehistoric and early medieval date. These remains comprise an archaeological landscape of very great importance. Individual elements of this landscape can be extensive and widely dispersed and current thinking suggests natural topographic features may have formed an important component of it. This area is known to contain archaeological remains; furthermore, it is considered to be an area of very high potential with high probability of further, as yet undiscovered, remains surviving. Given the extensive nature of archaeological remains known to exist in the Milfield Basin, the applicant will be required to provide in advance a full assessment and extensive evaluation of the preferred area, using all appropriate techniques and working to specifications approved by the County Archaeologist. The result of this work will inform the planning decision. Coupland Castle to the south west of the site is a Grade 1 listed building, the setting of which should be protected.

Preferred Area



b) Agriculture

The agricultural land classification is predominantly sub-group 3a, with the rest sub-group 3b and woodland. This represents some of the best and most versatile agricultural land in the County. The capacity for this to be reclaimed to an agricultural after-use would largely depend on the depth of working, and the potential for providing effective gravity drainage suited to a low level restoration. Any future planning application should be accompanied by detailed proposals sufficient to demonstrate that the land would be reclaimed to an agricultural after-use, without loss of quality.

c) Landscape character and visual impact

Within the preferred area there are substantial wooded areas which provide screening from the north and east. New planting has also been carried out on the southern boundary. The wooded area should be retained in order to screen views into the site and allow the landscape to return to maturity following working. The plantation to the south of Coupland Road offers potential as a screened site for a processing plant.

d) Residential amenity

There are three properties immediately adjacent to the site and the settlements of Milfield, Coupland and Sandy Houses could also be affected by workings. Any planning application should include measures to reduce the impact of mineral working to an acceptable degree.

e) Cumulative impact

Planning permissions exist for the extraction of sand and gravel on land to the east of the A697 in this area. The County Council will fully assess the cumulative impact of working, including the transport considerations.

Farnley Haugh extension

5.64 The site operators have identified a possible extension area for the existing workings. This is a triangular piece of land to the south-east of the existing workings between the railway line and the river and contains approximately 400,000 tonnes of sand and gravel. The land has been left fallow for a number of years.

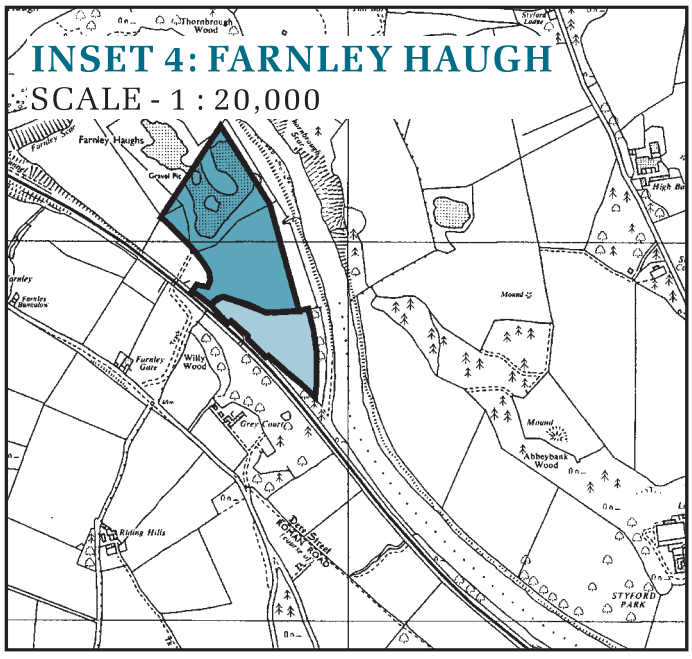
5.65 The issues which any planning application in the area would need to address include:

a) Archaeology

There are no recorded archaeological sites in the proposed extension area. However, a Bronze Hoard has been discovered to the west of the existing site, indicating the potential archaeological interest. A desk top archaeological assessment would therefore be required.

Existing Site

Preferred Area



b) Nature Conservation

The River Tyne and its banks between Corbridge and Stocksfield are designated as an SNCI due to their floral interest and importance for wintering wildfowl. Any scheme should contain proposals to ensure protection and where possible, enhancement of features of value.

c) Landscape Character and Visual Impact

The site is included within an Area of High Landscape Value identified in the deposit draft Tynedale District Wide Local Plan. It is also within the approved Green Belt. Any planning application should include a landscape appraisal including an assessment of the impact of the workings on the achievement of green belt objectives, the visual impact of the workings and measures to mitigate such impacts.

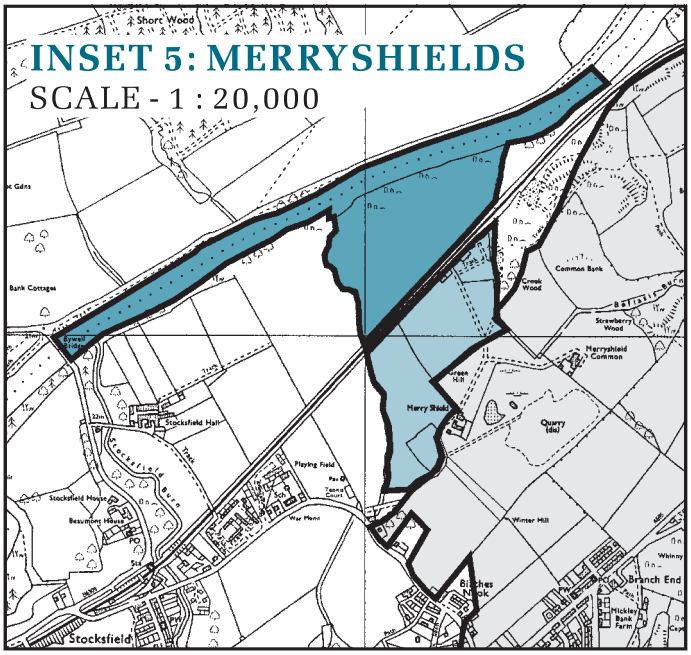
Merryshields extension

5.66 This area of land is located between the existing Merryshields site and the dormant IDO consent at Bywell Bridge and is estimated to contain approximately 0.5 million tonnes of sand and gravel. The site operators have indicated that mineral extraction could be carried out as a phased extension to Merryshields Quarry.

Preferred Area

Existing Site

Opencast Coal Constraint Area



5.67 The issues which any application in this area would need to address include:

a) Agriculture

This area contains areas of best and most versatile agricultural land (subgrade 3a and possibly grade 2). The site is relatively elevated in relation to the River Tyne, and the potential for agricultural restoration would depend on the depth of excavation. Any planning application should be accompanied by detailed proposals sufficient to demonstrate that the land, or part of it, would be reclaimed to an agricultural after-use without loss of quality.

b) Archaeology

There are no recorded archaeological sites in the area concerned but there are sites in the vicinity. A desk-top archaeological assessment would therefore be required in the first instance.

c) Impact on residential areas

The site is overlooked by houses in Stocksfield. Therefore, any scheme should include measures to reduce the impact of mineral working to an acceptable degree.

Houghton Strother

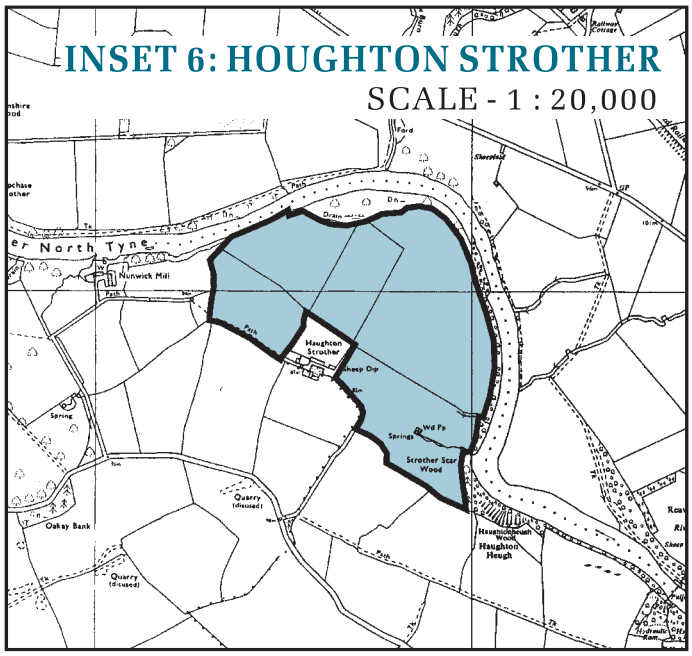
5.68 This area is located in the valley of the River North Tyne between Chollerford and Wark. It is an area of haugh land currently used as rough grazing. It is estimated to contain around 1.5 million tonnes of sand and gravel.

5.69 A new site is proposed as a replacement for Thornbrough Quarry which will be worked out in approximately 4 years' time. The operators have indicated that they no longer wish to pursue an extension to the existing quarry at Thornbrough.

5.70 The issues which any planning application in this area would need to address include:

a) Visual impact

The area is included in the Area of High Landscape Value in the Tynedale District Wide Local Plan. Any planning application should include a landscape appraisal including an assessment of the visual impact of workings and measures to mitigate such impacts.



b) Transport/Site access

The acceptability of the scheme would be dependent on acceptable site access and transport proposals. Two existing quarries in the area, Keepershield and Barrasford, currently generate large numbers of heavy lorry traffic. Current proposals at Barrasford quarry, if approved, will reduce the amount of traffic going through the villages of Barrasford, Chollerton and Wall. Any proposed scheme should therefore address this issue, in particular, lorry routeing and lorry numbers. Any application should incorporate a traffic survey and analysis.

c) Historic buildings

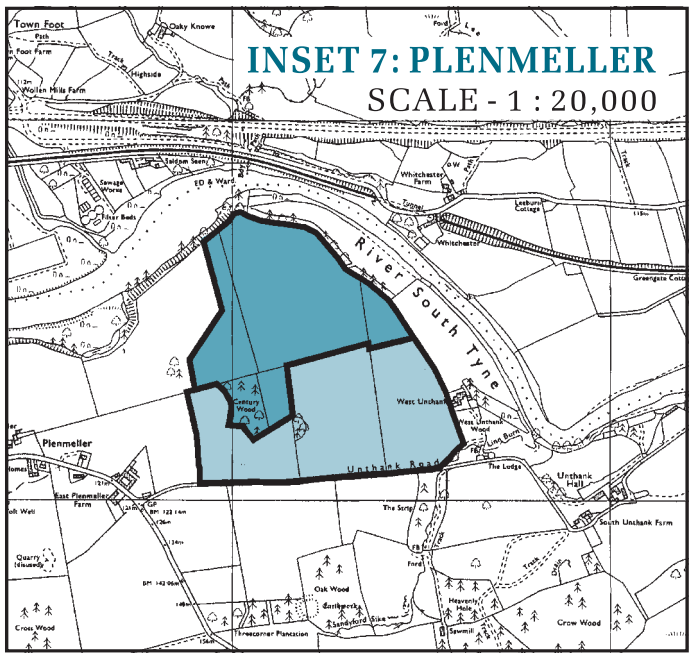
The site lies adjacent to Nunwick Hall, which is a Grade II* Listed Building, and Nunwick Park, which is a Grade II Listed Park. In addition, Chipchase Castle, a Grade I Listed Building, lies about 2 miles to the north-west. Any proposed scheme should not detract from the settings of these buildings or Nunwick Park and the landscape appraisal should address these issues and the impact on the tranquillity of this area.

d) Water Resources

The site is adjacent to the River North Tyne. Any planning application would need to demonstrate that sand and gravel workings would present no unacceptable risk to water resources, flooding or fishing.

e) Agricultural Land

The site may contain small blocks of best and most versatile agricultural land. A detailed survey should be carried out and if high quality land is to be disturbed any planning application should be accompanied by detailed proposals to demonstrate that an equivalent block of land would be reclaimed without loss of quality.



f) Nature Conservation

Any planning application should include an assessment of the nature conservation value of the grassland, proposals to conserve those features of value and proposals to enhance the nature conservation value of the site on restoration.

Plenmeller extension

5.71 The existing Plenmeller site is located to the south of the River South Tyne approximately 1.25 km south east of Haltwhistle. The preferred area lies to the south of the existing site and is wholly in agricultural use. The area is estimated to contain approximately 1.5 million tonnes of sand and gravel.

5.72 The issues which any application in this area would need to address include:

a) Agriculture

An Agricultural Land Classification Survey shows that this area is predominantly classified as being grade 3b. However a small area (2.9 ha) is classified as grade 3a. Due to the potential value of valley bottom agricultural land in the hills and uplands, any future application should be accompanied by detailed proposals to demonstrate that, following mineral working, the land would be reclaimed to agricultural (or other acceptable land-based after uses) without loss of quality.

b) Visual Impact

The area is included in the Area of High Landscape Value in the deposit draft Tynedale District Wide Local Plan. Any planning application should include a landscape appraisal including an assessment of the visual impact of workings and measures to mitigate such impacts.

c) Impact on Residential Areas

The proposed extension would bring mineral extraction closer to West Unthank Farm and properties in Plenmeller Village. The proposed boundaries of the site should therefore reflect the need to protect the amenity of residents and proposals should include measures to reduce the impact of mineral working to an acceptable level.

d) Archaeology

There are no known archaeological sites in the preferred area, however, the potential for new sites to be found in this area is high. An archaeological assessment and, if necessary, an evaluation would therefore be required.

e) Nature Conservation

Any planning application should include an assessment of the nature conservation value of the area, proposals to conserve features of value and proposals to enhance the nature conservation value of the site on restoration.

f) Water Resources

The site is adjacent to the River South Tyne. Any planning application would need to demonstrate that sand and gravel workings would present no unacceptable risk to water resources, flooding or fishing.

POLICY A5

PLANNING PERMISSION FOR THE EXTRACTION OF SAND AND GRAVEL OUTSIDE THE AREAS LISTED IN POLICY A4 WILL NOT BE GRANTED UNLESS IT CAN BE CLEARLY DEMONSTRATED THAT THE PROPOSED WORKINGS WOULD BE SIGNIFICANTLY MORE ACCEPTABLE OVERALL THAN A SITE IDENTIFIED IN THE PLAN.

POLICY A6

PLANNING PERMISSION FOR THE EXTRACTION OF CRUSHED ROCK WILL BE GRANTED WITHIN THE FOLLOWING AREAS:

- SWINBURNE EXTENSION
- DIVETHILL EXTENSION
- CRAGMILL EXTENSION

AS DEFINED ON THE PROPOSALS MAP, PROVIDED THAT THERE ARE NO SIGNIFICANT ADVERSE EFFECTS ON LOCAL COMMUNITIES.

Preferred Area

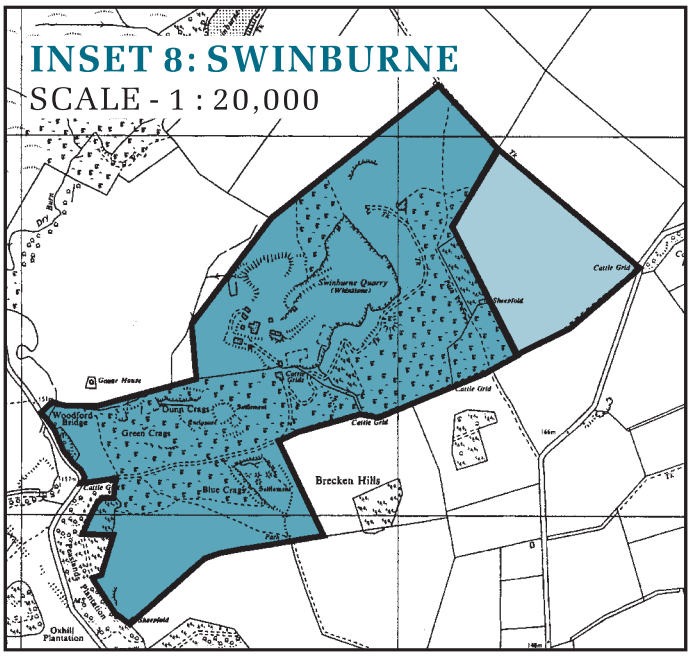
Existing Site

CRUSHED ROCK PROVISION

Swinburne extension

5.73 Swinburne Quarry has recently ceased production due to the loss of its contract with Railtrack plc to supply material for use as ballast. The operators do not intend the closure of the quarry to be permanent, rather it is mothballed for the time being. They have identified an area within which they propose to apply for permission to extend the quarry.

5.74 Any future proposals to extend the quarry would provide the opportunity to retain the existing woodland (within the permitted area) and carry out screening and landscaping measures to reduce the visual impact of the entire quarry. The operators have also indicated their willingness to discuss relocation of the plant to a better-screened location.



5.75 The suggested area lies to the east of the existing quarry and is estimated to contain 10 million tonnes of reserves.

5.76 The issues which any application would need to address include:

a) Visual impact

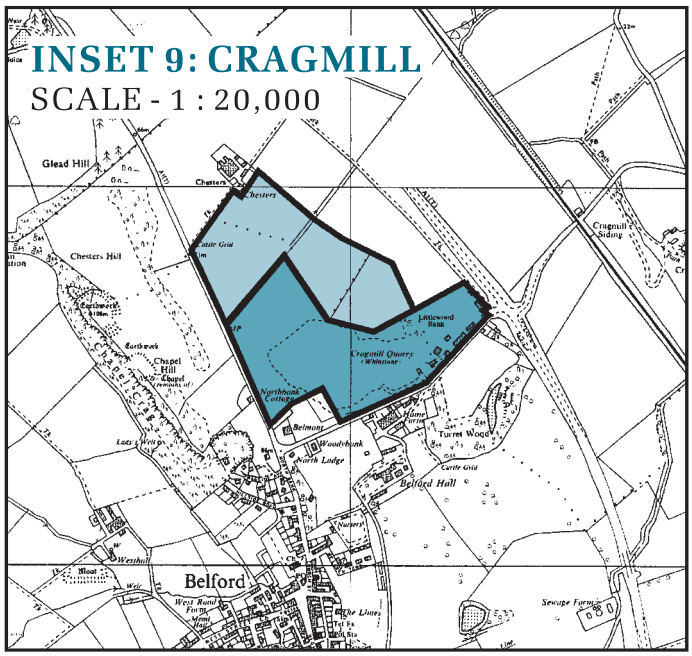
Appropriate screening and landscaping measures for the whole quarry, proposals to relocate the plan and the retention of the existing woodland within the existing permitted area

b) Impact on residential properties

The proposed extension would bring mineral extraction closer to Colwell Fell Farm. Proposals should include measures to reduce the impact of mineral working to an acceptable degree.

Existing Site

Preferred Area



Cragmill extension

5.77 Permitted reserves within Cragmill Quarry will become exhausted towards the end of the plan period. An area of land containing up to 6 million tonnes of reserves has been identified as a potential extension area. The area identified would mean that working would move further away from the village of Belford.

5.78 The quarry currently operates under a planning permission granted in 1948. The conditions controlling operations are inadequate by today's standards. There are no conditions governing the frequency, times and level of blasting and this has been a cause of concern for the residents of Belford. Similarly, there are no adequate conditions requiring restoration of the quarry. However, the Environment Act, 1995, now enables the County Council to review old mineral permissions and agree new sets of planning conditions to control operations.

5.79 The issues which any planning application in this area should address include:

a) Transport

Whinstone is currently transported by road along the A1, and a small amount (3% of total output) is transported to south-east England by ship from Berwick Harbour. Proposals for an extension should examine the potential for rail transport of the mineral to reduce the numbers of lorries on the public road network.

b) Visual impact

A detailed visual appraisal would be required to assess the impact of the proposals, in particular from the A1, the C58 north of Belford and the North Northumberland Coast AONB.

c) Impact on residential properties

The proposed extension would bring mineral extraction closer to Middleton Lodge and The Chesters. Proposals should include measures to reduce the impact of mineral working to an acceptable level.

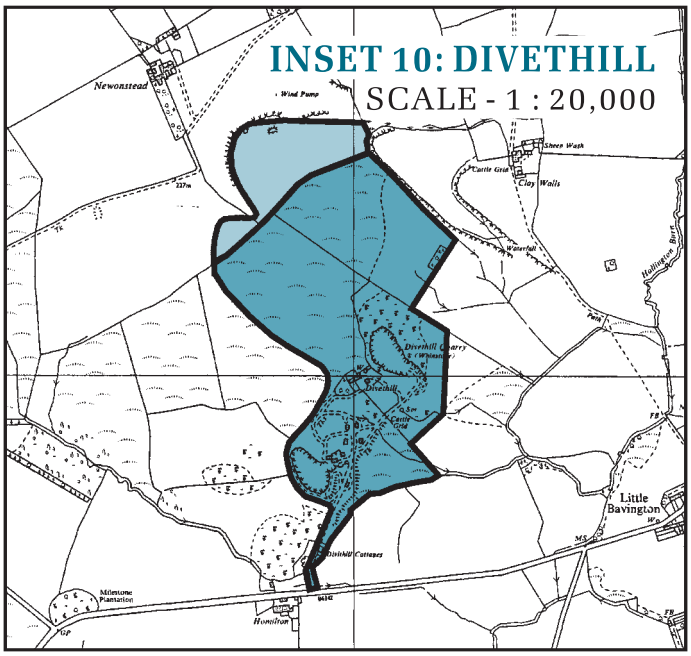
d) Nature Conservation

There is an SNCI adjacent to the preferred area. Any scheme should ensure the protection of features of value.

Divethill extension

5.80 Planning permission was granted in 1991 for an extension to the quarry and working within this extension area has recently commenced. The quarry contains sufficient permitted reserves for the next 9-12 years production. Permitted reserves of the site would therefore be exhausted towards the end of the plan period.

5.81 The consultation draft plan identified an area of land for a further extension which would have brought workings much closer to the village of Great Bavington. In the light of the concerns expressed by the residents of Great Bavington, it is now proposed that a much smaller area be included as a preferred area. The area is estimated to contain approximately 1.5 million tonnes which would be sufficient for between 4 and 6 years production.



Preferred Area

Existing Site

5.82 The issues which any planning application in this area should address include:

a) Landscape character and visual impact

A detailed visual appraisal would be required to assess the impact of the proposals, in particular from Little Bavington, the B6342 and from high ground to the south and east. The preservation of the Crags to the north and west is particularly important. The operators have indicated that they would wish to work the proposed extension at an early stage in order to limit the visual intrusion of the quarry workings. This would need to be carefully examined in the visual appraisal.

b) Impact on residential amenity

Proposals should include measures to minimise the impact of mineral working on the villages of Great Bavington and Little Bavington to an acceptable degree.

c) Nature Conservation

A proposed scheme will affect an SNCI. It should therefore contain proposals to ensure the protection of the features of value.

POLICY A7

PLANNING PERMISSION FOR THE EXTRACTION OF CRUSHED ROCK OUTSIDE THE AREAS LISTED IN POLICY A6 WILL NOT BE GRANTED UNLESS IT CAN BE CLEARLY DEMONSTRATED THAT THE PROPOSED WORKINGS WOULD BE SIGNIFICANTLY MORE ACCEPTABLE OVERALL THAN A SITE IDENTIFIED IN THE PLAN.

BORROW PITS

5.83 Borrow pits are temporary aggregate mineral workings serving major building or civil engineering projects such as road schemes. They are used solely to supply minerals, usually low grade aggregates, for these projects and are sometimes used for the disposal of surplus materials from the site.

5.84 The advantages of borrow pits over established quarries include the ability to meet peaks in demand, lower costs and a reduction in heavy lorry movements. They may also help conserve resources of high quality aggregates by permitting the use of locally occurring materials of lower quality.

POLICY A8

PROPOSALS FOR BORROW PITS WILL ONLY BE PERMITTED IF THE MINERAL CANNOT PRACTICABLY BE SUPPLIED FROM EXISTING QUARRIES OR AVAILABLE WASTE MATERIALS, THERE WOULD NOT BE A SIGNIFICANT ADVERSE EFFECT ON LOCAL COMMUNITIES OR THE ENVIRONMENT, AND THE SITE WOULD BE OPERATED AND RECLAIMED IN A SATISFACTORY MANNER.

5.85 The disadvantages of borrow pits include the development of greenfield sites in areas where mineral working may not normally be acceptable. It may also be difficult to secure the satisfactory control of operations and reclamation of sites.

5.86 Proposals for borrow pits will be examined in the same way as proposals for other mineral working and will only be permitted where the benefits associated with the development outweigh any adverse environmental impacts. For proposals to be acceptable it will be important to demonstrate that the demand cannot reasonably be supplied from existing quarries or available waste materials, that the development would not cause significant adverse impacts to local communities or the environment and that the site will be operated in a satisfactory manner and properly reclaimed. Appropriate sites should be identified at an early stage prior to the commencement of road improvement works, rather than at a late stage, when there is little opportunity to consider alternatives. POLICY A8

WHARVES

5.87 Government policy anticipates that, subject to tests of environmental acceptability, an increasing level of aggregates supply nationally will come from coastal superquarries. The extent of this contribution is difficult to quantify and is unlikely to contribute greatly to demand for at least 10 years owing to the long lead-times in establishing superquarries. At present only one exists at Glensanda in west Scotland. MPG6 indicates that superquarry material is not anticipated to be imported into the Northern Region in the period 1992-2006. On this basis it is not considered necessary to safeguard in this plan land for wharf and port development to handle the importation of large quantities of superquarry material.

CHAPTER 6:

SANDSTONE

INTRODUCTION

6.1 Sandstones are present throughout the Carboniferous series of rocks exposed in Northumberland, as shown on Map 4, and are worked primarily for building stone. Small amounts are also sold for aggregate use.

6.2 Sandstone has been quarried in the County for use as a building material for thousands of years and gives areas within the County their local character, reflecting the local geology. Northumberland produces particularly high quality building stones, which have been used for prestige buildings both in the County and nationwide.

6.3 The use of stone as a building material has declined considerably during this century due to the increase in cost of labour and the availability of cheap alternatives. However, there is a continuing demand for natural stone for renovations, extensions and new buildings in sensitive areas. The planning and conservation policies of local authorities contribute to some extent to this demand.

METHOD OF WORKING

6.4 The working of sandstone quarries is long term but intermittent, responding to demand for specific projects. Soils are stripped from the working area and stored for use in restoration. Overburden is removed and stored separately. Explosives are usually used to lightly fracture the stone and assist in lifting the large blocks required. The excavated stone is either cut and dressed at the quarry or transferred to another site for preparation.

6.5 Waste stone, which can be up to 50% of extracted stone, is stored for use in final restoration. The stockpiling of waste stone can cause visual problems particularly in quarries with few or no planning conditions controlling operations. The provisions for the Review of Old Mineral Permissions in the Environment Act 1995 will assist in dealing with these problems.

EXISTING WORKINGS

6.6 There are currently nine active sandstone quarries in Northumberland outside the National Park. They are all relatively small scale operations, each employing typically 2-3 people and producing less than 5,000 tonnes per year.

Blaxter

6.7 Blaxter Quarry is located to the west of the A696, five miles south east of Otterburn. The quarry has been in operation for over 100 years, and was granted permission for an extension in 1949. Extraction ceased in 1979 but the site was used to cut and dress stone from nearby quarries until 1984. At present the site is owned by Northumbria Stone. A permission was granted in 1998 to extract stone until 2042. Stone is split and cut on site, but taken to Gateshead for dressing. A great deal of waste stone has been tipped randomly over the hillside in the past causing visual problems. This situation will improve in time as the spoil is re-vegetating, due to hydra-seeding and heather interplanting, and the surrounding coniferous trees are breaking up the visual impact.

Map 4

SANDSTONE

Cragg

6.8 Cragg Quarry is situated on a north facing hillside about one mile south of West Woodburn. It ceased production in the 1920s, but in 1992 permission was granted to reopen the quarry. A extension to this permission was granted in 1998 to extract until 2005. Extraction from the site is intermittent depending on demand. It is anticipated that the quarry could produce around 3,000 tonnes per year.

High Nick

6.9 High Nick Quarry, which is situated approximately 2 miles north east of East Woodburn, began working in the last century but was abandoned in the 1930s. The quarry was reopened in 1978 and an extension permitted in 1990 to run until 2010. It is operated by Natural Stone Products Ltd. There are an estimated 20 years of permitted reserves remaining. The sandstone extracted from High Nick is of consistent quality and colour and is used as ashlar (high grade masonry and architectural stone). It is taken off site for cutting and dressing. Restoration is being carried out progressively and involves the grading and re-vegetation of waste stone with moorland species.

Darney

6.10 Darney Quarry is located less than a mile to the west of High Nick. Extraction began in the 1920s and was subsequently given permission in 1949 (until 2042). The quarry was abandoned in the mid 1980s, but in recent years small amounts of stone have been removed from the site by the operators, currently Natural Stone Products Ltd.

Black Pasture

6.11 Black Pasture Quarry, situated on the north side of the B6318 military road, just to the east of Chollerford, probably dates back to Roman times. It has recently reopened following the granting of a 10 year planning permission in 1989. The stone is cut and dressed at the operator's (Scottish Natural Stones) processing works at Lanarkshire before the finished product is transported nationwide and abroad for use in prestige building and restoration projects.

Bearl

6.12 Bearl Quarry on the B6309 near Stocksfield dates back to the 19th century. It reopened in 1981 following the grant of a 15 year permission only to close again in 1985. In 1996 the operators, Northumbria Stone, were granted permission to extract until 2027.

Ladycross

6.13 Ladycross Quarry lies in the middle of Slaley Forest, six miles south of Hexham. Stone has been quarried from this site for at least 300 years and was used in the construction and repair of Durham Cathedral, Morpeth Castle and Hexham Abbey. A series of planning permissions has been granted since 1964 and the most recent runs until 2006. No explosives are used on the site; it is one of the few remaining quarries in England where stone is won by hand, using hammer and wedge, by the site operators, Ladycross Stone Co. Some parts of the quarry have been restored.

Dodd End

6.14 Dodd End Quarry near Allenheads was reopened in 1989 by a local operator, Allenheads Natural Stone, after being last worked in the 19th century. The quarry produces about 1,500 tonnes of stone per year which is cut and dressed in Allenheads. The stone is used by a local building contractor. The current planning permission runs until 2009.

Doddington

6.15 Doddington Quarry is close to the village of Doddington, 3 miles north of Wooler. Planning permission was granted in 1950, although the site dates back to the 19th century. The permission runs till 2042. The quarry is worked intermittently by Natural Stone Quarries in response to specific building projects. The stone is cut and dressed off site. There is a large quantity of quarry spoil from past workings tipped over the hillside which is now beginning to weather and re-vegetate.

FUTURE WORKINGS

6.16 Potential environmental problems associated with sandstone extraction include the production of large quantities of waste stone; the transport of stone by large articulated lorries; disturbance to residents due to the use of explosives and the long term nature of these quarries. In addition the reopening of old quarries often conflicts with nature conservation interests. On the other hand the quarries provide a specialist product and can provide a limited amount of employment in rural areas.

6.17 Together with the two quarries in the National Park, there are eleven sandstone quarries in total in the County. These are mostly worked intermittently, responding to demands for specific projects. Discussions with landowners and mineral operators have indicated that there is likely to be interest in reopening a number of old quarries in the County and extending existing quarries.

6.18 There is no specific national mineral planning guidance to provide the context for the future planning of sandstone quarries and it is not possible to establish accurately the current stock of permitted reserves or future demand for sandstone. Each application should therefore be assessed individually according to the specific need for the proposed product and tests of environmental acceptability. Planning applications will be assessed against Policy SA1 and other relevant policies in this plan.

POLICY SA1

PROPOSALS FOR SANDSTONE QUARRIES, INCLUDING THE REOPENING OF OLD QUARRIES AND EXTENSIONS TO EXISTING QUARRIES, WILL ONLY BE PERMITTED IF THERE IS A NEED FOR THE MATERIAL WHICH CANNOT BE MET FROM EXISTING SITES AND THERE WOULD NOT BE A SIGNIFICANT ADVERSE EFFECT ON LOCAL COMMUNITIES OR THE ENVIRONMENT.

6.19 The operators of Bearl and Ladycross quarries have indicated areas of possible future extensions to these quarries. However, due to the sporadic nature of sandstone extraction, it is uncertain when the extensions will be needed. In principle, the areas appear to be acceptable in planning terms but at this stage detailed site assessments have not been carried out. POLICY SA1

MINERAL WASTE

6.20 The production of building stone often produces a high proportion of waste stone. Some of this waste stone is used for restoration purposes. However, in line with national policies, the County Council wishes to encourage the use of this waste for productive purposes where this can be done in an environmentally acceptable way. In addition to waste stone currently being produced there is a legacy of waste stone produced in the past which has been tipped on adjoining areas, for example at Darney, Doddington and Blaxter quarries. Whilst the re-use of this material is desirable if it prevents the extraction of aggregate material from new greenfield sites, its removal may cause environmental problems which may outweigh such advantages. At Darney and Doddington quarries large amounts of waste stone are beginning to weather and re-vegetate naturally and are located in areas of upland which are highly visible. POLICY SA2

POLICY SA2

THE RE-USE OF SANDSTONE WASTE WILL BE ENCOURAGED PROVIDED THAT THERE WOULD NOT BE A SIGNIFICANT ADVERSE EFFECT ON LOCAL COMMUNITIES, THE ENVIRONMENT OR THE FINAL RESTORATION

CHAPTER 7:

PEAT

INTRODUCTION

7.1 Peat is formed from the accumulated remains of plants in wet conditions. These waterlogged conditions inhibit the normal processes of decay and decomposition. As plants die the weight of their remains gradually compresses the lower layers. This accumulation of compressed, partially-rotted material is known as peat.

7.2 There are two fundamental types of peatland in Britain: fens and bogs. Fens occur in waterlogged situations where they receive nutrients in water from the surrounding catchments as well as from rainfall. Bogs occur in areas where they are largely dependent on precipitation for supply of water.

7.3 There are two main types of bog peatland in Britain, both of which can be found in Northumberland. Raised bogs are characteristic of an almost or completely flat underlying topography and so are mainly found on low plains or broad valley floors. Raised bogs are more commonly exploited commercially due to their thickness, sterility and often accessibility. In England, raised bogs in their natural state originally covered almost 37,500 ha. at over 200 sites. The majority of these, however, have been altered by human activities, particularly through agricultural drainage. Of the original 207 raised bogs in England only 15 retain areas in a natural or near-natural condition, comprising an area of 493 hectares. A further 33 bogs retain areas of drained or moribund primary bog.

7.4 The second type of bog peatland is blanket bog which occur in areas which are sufficiently cool and constantly wet to allow the accumulation of peat on all but the more steeply sloping ground. Blanket bog peat are thinner and contain more nutrients than raised bog peat. They are mainly in the uplands of Northern England but also in parts of the South West and extend to about 214,000 ha.

7.5 Most peat bogs in Northumberland are upland blanket bogs, mainly concentrated in the South Kielder/Wark forest areas and the North Pennines. However, areas of blanket bog do contain within them smaller areas of raised mire and thicker areas of blanket bog known as valley or basin mire.

METHODS OF EXTRACTION

7.6 Although peat was traditionally cut by hand, it is now extracted mechanically. Peat is cut during the summer months and harvesting is possible only during dry weather. A number of different methods are employed but the principal ones are:

- rotavation: where peat is rotavated to a depth of about 6 inches and left to dry prior to harvesting;
- Difco harvesting: where a 3 inch wide slot is cut into the peat to a depth of 3 feet. The contents of the slot are drawn up and extruded as a continuous sausage. These sausages are then left to dry prior to harvesting.

Map 5
PEAT

Production and consumption of peat

7.7 In the UK, the extraction and use of peat is almost entirely related to horticulture, either as growing media or as a soil improver. This currently amounts to about 2.55 million cubic metres of peat per year, of which 87% is used as growing media. The two main markets for peat are amateur gardeners and the professional horticultural industry, accounting for 58% and 39% of total usage respectively. About 60% of this peat comes from production within the UK and the remaining from imports, mainly from sites in Ireland.

7.8 There are 17 raised bog sites in England which have planning permissions for peat extraction. These cover 5,793 ha. and are located within 11 mineral planning authority areas. Some of these permissions (1,553 ha.) have been given up in nature conservation agreements. There is no current commercial peat extraction from blanket bogs in England.

EXISTING SITES

7.9 Peat is currently extracted at two sites in Northumberland, Kemping Moss near Lowick and Greymare Farm near Belford. A third site at Bellcrag Flow in the National Park has planning permission but extraction is no longer taking place. Together, they cover an area of 43 hectares.

Kemping Moss

7.10 Planning permission for the extraction of peat on 2 ha of raised bog was granted in 1983. This was substantially enlarged to 25 ha by a 1989 permission which will cease in 2009. The peat is blended and bagged on site and sold for horticultural and garden use throughout the UK. Production figures vary, but the operation is capable of producing a maximum of 85,000 cubic metres per year. The site has estimated reserves of 750,000 cubic metres of peat.

Greymare Farm

7.11 Planning permission for the extraction of peat on 4 ha of land was granted in 1985 and extended to 9 ha in 1992. The permission runs to 2011. The site is part of an area of lowland raised mire, the western part of which (outside the planning permission area) has been designated as the Holborn Lake and Moss SSSI. The 1992 permission made provision for various works to be carried out and hydrological monitoring to take place to ensure that the extraction would not be detrimental to the SSSI. The site is capable of producing a maximum of 20,000 cubic metres of peat per year with the actual level of production dependent on the level of orders from nurseries. The peat is stockpiled, blended and bagged before being transported to markets throughout the country. The estimated reserves in the site are 400,000 cubic metres.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

7.12 Peatlands provide particularly rich distinctive and increasingly rare habitats. Development of a lowland raised mire takes thousands of years and the system depends on its water table being very close to the surface. An undisturbed raised mire supports sphagnum mosses together with other plants which have adapted to the extremely sterile and acidic conditions. Some of our rarest insects thrive in the wet conditions and the mossy hummocks and pools provide vital nesting and feeding grounds for wading birds. The overall mixture of plants and animals makes raised bogs unique and valuable places.

7.13 Due to their ecological importance least damaged mires and peat bogs are designated as SSSIs. There are 20 such SSSIs in Northumberland, 10 of which are outside the National Park.

7.14 Peat bogs are often also valuable archaeologically. During the processes by which peat was formed and accumulated, archaeological material became covered or trapped. These wetland sites are particularly important because of the types of sites represented and the exceptional preservation offered by anaerobic conditions. Organic materials which do not normally survive on dryland sites are often preserved in the wetlands and inorganic materials are better preserved. Their juxtaposition also allows a more complete understanding of the way artefacts were made and used.

7.15 Peat bogs are now recognised as vulnerable habitats. In particular, once a bog has been drained, the ecological and archaeological interest is likely to be damaged or destroyed. An English Nature survey completed in 1978 found that 96% of intact lowland peat mires existing in 1850 had been lost mainly due to drainage, burning and afforestation schemes. In recent times commercial peat extraction has contributed to the damage to peatland.

7.16 The recreation of peat bogs following peat extraction is impossible, the intricate habitats and peat archive cannot be replaced. Although it is possible to rehabilitate the sites to some form of peatland or other wetland habitat, the peatland will be destroyed.

7.17 Against this background there has been increasing concern to protect remaining peatlands of nature conservation importance. In 1990 a number of environmental organisations formed the Peatland Campaign consortium, which has focused attention on the threats to peatlands and the availability of alternatives to peat in horticulture. In 1991 English Nature published a lowland peatland Position Statement which seeks to protect all remaining areas of relatively natural lowland peatland. In 1992 the Department of the Environment established a working group to consider the key issues in the balance between nature conservation and mineral extraction interests affecting peatlands. The working party's report was published in August 1994.

7.18 In July 1995 the DoE published Minerals Planning Guidance Note 13 on peat provision in England. The Guidance Note provides advice to mineral planning authorities and the peat extraction industry on the exercise of planning control over the extraction of peat. It also sets out the Government's policy for peatlands in England:

- to conserve a sufficient range, distribution and number of all peatland habitats;
- to promote the wise use of the wetland resource within the nation's peatland heritage;
- to avoid wherever practicable the destruction of important archaeological remains in peatland;
- to enable the horticultural industry to continue to be supplied with peat;
- to encourage the development and use of suitable alternatives;
- to provide a suitable framework for updating old permissions for peat extraction, especially in respect of rehabilitation of sites.

7.19 The Guidance Note indicates that the Government's intention is that the future extraction of peat in England from any new sites should be restricted to areas which have already been significantly damaged by recent human activity and are of limited or no current nature conservation or archaeological value. Wherever possible, subsequent restoration of such sites should give priority to wetland rehabilitation and to the enhancement of the nature conservation resource. The Guidance indicates also that the demands of the horticultural user markets should be met by a combination of home-produced peat, imported peat and alternative materials.

7.20 The range and availability of alternatives to peat has increased significantly over the last few years. They now account for almost 30% of the total quantity of substrate used by the professional and amateur sectors. The most common material, accounting for 84% of the total alternatives to peat is bark. The greatest use of alternatives is as a soil improver. In contrast, their use as growing media is very limited. It is predicted that the total market demand for peat will be about 2.8 million cubic metres by 2005. The use of alternatives is predicted to increase from 1 million cubic metres in 1993 to about 1.3 million cubic metres by 2005. The County Council will encourage the development and use of peat alternatives.

7.21 While some nature conservation interest can survive traditional hand cutting of peat, mechanical extraction can be very damaging and the ability to recreate lowland raised bog is unproven. The County Council will seek the advice of English Nature on the likely ecological effects. POLICY P1-P2

POLICY P1

PROPOSALS FOR PEAT EXTRACTION WILL ONLY BE PERMITTED WHERE THE SITE HAS ALREADY BEEN IRREPARABLY DAMAGED BY RECENT HUMAN ACTIVITY AND IS OF LIMITED OR NO CONSERVATION INTEREST, AND THERE WOULD BE NO ADVERSE EFFECT ON THE LANDSCAPE, ECOLOGICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL VALUE OF THE SITE AND ITS SURROUNDINGS.

POLICY P2

WHERE PEAT EXTRACTION IS PERMITTED, EXTRACTION WILL BE SUBJECT TO AGREED HYDROLOGICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING SCHEMES AND, WHEREVER POSSIBLE, SUBSEQUENT RESTORATION OF THE SITE SHOULD GIVE PRIORITY TO PEATLAND OR WETLAND REHABILITATION AND TO THE ENHANCEMENT OF THE NATURE CONSERVATION RESOURCE.

CHAPTER 8:
CLAY

INTRODUCTION

8.1 Clay extracted in Northumberland is used in the manufacture of bricks, pipes and tiles. Specialist fireclays have also been used in the manufacture of refractories, but this traditional application is declining in significance compared to use in the manufacture of bricks and pipes. Two types of clay are currently extracted in Northumberland.

Fireclay

8.2 Fireclay occurs within the Coal Measure series as a layer beneath the coal seams. It is currently extracted as an ancillary mineral to opencast coal at Stobswood, Maiden's Hall and Pegswood Moor Farm Opencast Sites. Fireclay is an important ingredient in the manufacture of bricks. Brickshales make up the largest proportion of the required raw feed and are used to make traditional red bricks, whilst fireclays produce the range of colours and styles required for current house bricks. North East fireclays produce the cream buff coloured facing bricks used country wide in the building industry.

8.3 Markets for Northumberland fireclays include Steetley Bricks Ltd at Throckley. An important local market, the Stobswood Brickworks closed in 1999. Northumberland fireclays are also sold further afield to improve local clays of inferior quality. For example clays from Northumberland are currently supplied to Cloughton Manor Brickworks in Lancashire and Armitage Brick in Yorkshire.

Glacial Clay

8.4 Clays of fluvio-glacial origin occur widely in Northumberland. They are drift deposits overlying the solid geology which were laid down following the last Ice Age. Such clays are currently exploited at Swarland Brickworks for use solely in the brickworks.

Swarland Brickworks

8.5 This site was granted an IDO permission in August 1947 and covers an area of 80 hectares. However, only a small proportion of the total area with planning permission is currently being worked, approximately 16 hectares (20%). Clay is excavated once a year, for a period of about two months, during a dry spell. Extraction is by scraper which removes the clay in layers. The clay is stockpiled in two heaps either side of a conveyor system which feeds the production plant. The extraction site and brickworks combined currently provides employment for 30 people. The bricks are sold to local markets within a 30-40 mile radius.

8.6 Until 1994, the IDO permission was the only means of planning control over the working of the site. However, under the legislation governing IDO permissions, modern planning conditions have been approved for this site. These conditions cover such issues as phasing of working, restoration of the site and screening.

FUTURE PROVISION

8.7 Fireclay is being extracted at opencast sites in the County in sufficient quantities to meet available markets. The Stobswood site is not due to cease coaling until 2005 which will allow the supply of fireclays over a lengthy period. When proposals for new opencast coal sites are considered, the opportunity to extract associated fireclay will be fully explored to ensure that resources are not unnecessarily sterilised. Proposals will be considered against Policy C6.

8.8 It is acknowledged, however, that fireclay is an important mineral in its own right, and if the number of opencast sites producing suitable fireclays decline, then it is possible that proposals may come forward to extract fireclay as the principal mineral. Should such proposals come forward they would need to demonstrate a need for the mineral and that it could not be supplied from existing sites. In addition they would be assessed in terms of their environmental acceptability.

8.9 Issues of particular concern would be any proposals for stockpiling of clays and the timescale of site operations. Brick manufacturers require clays with specific physical and chemical properties which can be supplied over a sufficient time period in order to produce consistent products. This may result in stockpiles of clays with different physical and chemical characteristics being used at different rates for a lengthy period. Such operations could affect the environmental acceptability of a fireclay site. Planning applications will be assessed against Policy CY1 and other relevant policies in the plan.

8.10 There is no need to identify further land for clay extraction at Swarland Brickworks as the permitted area contains large reserves of clay. Should proposals for new clay workings elsewhere in the County be received they will be assessed in terms of their environmental acceptability. Planning applications will be assessed against Policy CY1 and other relevant policies in this plan. POLICY CY1

POLICY CY1

PROPOSALS FOR THE EXTRACTION OF CLAY WILL ONLY BE PERMITTED IF THERE IS A NEED FOR THE MATERIAL WHICH CANNOT BE MET FROM EXISTING SITES, THE PROPOSALS FOR THE SITE DURATION AND CLAY STORAGE ARE ACCEPTABLE AND THERE WOULD NOT BE A SIGNIFICANT ADVERSE EFFECT ON LOCAL COMMUNITIES OR THE ENVIRONMENT.

CHAPTER 9:

OIL AND GAS

INTRODUCTION

9.1 Oil and natural gas are used primarily as fuel, with a small amount used as a raw material for the petro-chemical industry and in the manufacture of drugs and plastics.

9.2 Oil and gas have never been exploited in Northumberland, but during the 1980s exploration was carried out to determine the existence of viable reserves. Exploration was concentrated in the districts of Castle Morpeth and Tynedale and in 1986 planning permission was granted for an exploratory drilling rig near Longhorsley. No commercially viable deposits were proved.

9.3 Government policy, as set out in DoE Circular 2/85, is to encourage exploration for and production of the country's own oil and gas reserves provided that this can be achieved in an environmentally acceptable way.

The Licence System

9.4 Oil and gas are the property of the Crown so companies must obtain a licence from the Department of Trade and Industry to exploit oil and gas resources. The licence system comprises three types of licence which reflect the main stages of oil and gas development: exploration, appraisal and production.

9.5 Once exploration has confirmed the presence of oil or gas, a period of appraisal is necessary when further testing is carried out to analyse its characteristics. The exploration and appraisal of oil and gas is not dissimilar from the exploration of other types of mineral and as such proposals for exploratory boreholes will be considered against the policies in Chapter 12.

9.6 Oil and gas wells comprise beam pumps known as "nodding donkeys" which are 3-5 metres in height and are driven by small diesel or electric motors. Once at the surface, oil is generally pumped to a small central collection station and periodically removed from the site by road tanker.

FUTURE PROVISION

9.7 Any proposals for commercial development of oil and gas should be presented as part of a comprehensive scheme, including any adjacent areas, to enable efficient exploitation and consideration of the environmental effects of the whole scheme. Proposals for oil and gas development will be assessed in terms of their environmental acceptability. Planning applications will be assessed against Policy OG1 and other relevant policies in this plan. POLICY OG1

POLICY OG1

PROPOSALS FOR THE EXTRACTION OF OIL OR NATURAL GAS WILL ONLY BE PERMITTED IF THE PROPOSAL IS PART OF A COMPREHENSIVE SCHEME FOR PRODUCTION FROM THE AREA, THERE WOULD NOT BE A SIGNIFICANT ADVERSE EFFECT ON LOCAL COMMUNITIES OR THE ENVIRONMENT, AND THE PROPOSAL WOULD NOT GIVE RISE TO UNACCEPTABLE RISK OR HAZARD.

CHAPTER 10:

SITE MANAGEMENT AND OPERATIONS: CODE OF PRACTICE

INTRODUCTION

10.1 The impact of mineral working can be considerably reduced by good site management and operational practice. The County Council will seek to ensure that mineral sites are worked in the least intrusive way to minimise disturbance and are reclaimed to a beneficial and appropriate after-use. This chapter considers the ways in which problems associated with mineral operations can be reduced. The satisfactory operation and reclamation of mineral sites will be a major consideration when applications are considered. Conditions covering these matters will be attached to planning permissions. Where there are matters which have an important bearing on the development but which lie outside the scope of planning conditions, the County Council will seek to negotiate planning obligations with the applicant and, where appropriate, other interested parties, to restrict or regulate the development or use of land, using the powers contained in Section 106 of the 1990 Town and Country Planning Act.

10.2 In addition to planning legislation, site operations are controlled by a variety of other statutes including the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and Health and Safety Regulations. This chapter, however, concentrates on planning controls which are imposed by conditional planning permissions and planning obligations.

10.3 The minerals industry itself is, together with Mineral Planning Authorities, seeking ways through self-regulation to improve its environmental standards. This is in line with government policy and its "polluter pays" principle. Environmental Codes or Codes of Practice have been prepared by the aggregates industry trade association (QPA) and some mineral companies. In addition, the industry has co-operated with studies such as the Greensite Report, commissioned by the DETR, which recommended that a system of environmental management should be established in each company's organisation. This would include a corporate environmental statement, environmental site appraisals, regular monitoring of performance and periodic environmental audit/review.

10.4 New legislation, government advice and technological advances are likely to mean that the methods of achieving the best possible operational standards will continue to develop and improve. This chapter therefore outlines the principles which the County Council will have regard to and sets them out as a Code of Practice. POLICY SM1

POLICY SM1

TO SECURE THE ACCEPTABLE OPERATION AND RECLAMATION OF MINERAL SITES, THE COUNTY COUNCIL WILL SEEK TO ENSURE THAT THE WORKING OF SITES IS CARRIED OUT IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE PLANNING CONDITIONS AND, WHERE APPROPRIATE AND SUBJECT TO THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF EACH CASE, THE MINERALS LOCAL PLAN CODE OF PRACTICE. WHERE NECESSARY, THE COUNTY COUNCIL WILL SEEK TO CONCLUDE PLANNING OBLIGATIONS TO CONTROL MINERAL OPERATIONS, THEIR RECLAMATION, AFTER-USE AND SUBSEQUENT MANAGEMENT.

CODE OF PRACTICE

Information in Support of Planning Applications

10.5 The implications of mineral working can be wide ranging. Applicants are therefore required to include full details of their proposals so that the implications of the planning application can be identified and thoroughly examined before a decision is taken. The information

required and the level of detail will vary according to the proposal but will normally include details of the existing land use, the nature of the development, proposed method of extraction, processing and transportation, the economic justification for the proposal, the measures for protecting local amenity, the environmental effects of the proposal and the proposals for reclamation, after-care and after-use. Where significant environmental effects are anticipated an environmental assessment will be required (see Chapter 3).

10.6 Applicants are encouraged to discuss their proposals with the County Council prior to the submission of an application. Such pre-application discussions can enable early identification of potential constraints and prevent wasted time and expense by the developer. They should also help speed up the processing of the planning application. Information normally required by the Mineral Planning Authority in support of minerals planning applications is set out in Annex 2 to MPG 2 and Table 10.1.

Table 10.1 Information required in Support of Planning Applications

1. Details of the site, geology and minerals interests including:
   - the current land use and land form;
   - the quality, characteristics and extent of the mineral resource;
   - the quality, characteristics and extent of the soil resources for restoration.

2. Details of working proposals including:
   - a detailed description of the proposed development;
   - the mineral reserve, annual production and life of the operation;
   - details of diversion of services and rights of way;
   - method of working including depth, direction, phasing, infilling; arrangements for soil stripping, storage and restoration;
   - provision for spoil disposal;
   - layout of the site including access and siting and design of buildings and plant;
   - mode of transport, traffic generation and routeing;
   - the extent and impact of any subsidence likely to be caused on the surface.

3. Measures to protect local amenity including:
   - minimisation of pollution and environmental disturbance such as noise, dust, blasting, vibration, smoke and fumes;
   - screening and landscaping.

4. An assessment of the impact of the development on the environment and measures taken to eliminate or minimise these effects, including impact on:
   - the landscape and features of geological and of ecological importance including any trees to be felled;
   - archaeological remains and features of architectural or historic importance and historic landscapes;
   - agricultural interests;
   - public rights of way;
   - water resources;
   - nature conservation including both habitat and species interests.

5. Details of site reclamation and intended after-uses including:
   - an integrated working and restoration scheme;
   - details of any filling materials;
   - after-care proposals;
   - details of after-uses.

6. Economic justification (where required by an Environmental Statement or the developer wishes it to be taken into account to offset other material planning considerations), including:
   - the need for the mineral, proposed markets and end uses;
   - the employment and other economic implications of the proposals;
   - consideration of alternative sites or sources of supply.

Visual impact

10.7 The visual impact of mineral operations can be reduced in a number of ways including the following.

- Careful site location which respects existing topography and features of importance, e.g. ridgelines, woodlands, hedgerows, stone walls, etc. Proposals should include measures to retain, protect and manage such features where appropriate. The Countryside Commission report on opencast coal mining gives good advice on landscape and visual aspects which is applicable to all mineral workings.
- A method and direction of working which takes account of views into the site and is chosen as the least intrusive.
- A phased extraction and progressive restoration scheme which minimises the amount of land being worked at one time.
- Careful siting and layout of plant, buildings, stockpiles and haul roads. Their visual impact can also be reduced by height restrictions, appropriate cladding or colour schemes and regular maintenance.
- Screening measures such as earth mounds which are grassed and kept free from pernicious weeds, fencing and tree planting. Where developments are planned over a long timescale, advance tree planting should be carried out to soften and assist in screening future workings.
- The creation of a site entrance that is clean, tidy, well signposted and sympathetic to the local environment.

Operational Impact

10.8 In order to reduce the impact of mineral workings on the environment and local communities, measures should be adopted to control the hours of working, lorry numbers, lorry routes, noise, blasting, dust, smoke and fumes.

Hours of working

10.9 Whereas operational activity may be acceptable during day-time hours, noise, lights, blasting and heavy traffic would be unacceptable to affected communities during the night and at weekends. Working will therefore normally be limited to between 0700 and 1900 hours Mondays-Fridays and 0700 and 1300 hours on Saturdays with no working on Sundays or Bank Holidays. It is recognised that there may be exceptional cases where longer or shorter hours may be appropriate, for example, due to proximity to housing, shorter working hours may be appropriate, whilst to meet essential supplies of coated roadstone longer hours may be acceptable. In some cases it may be more appropriate to limit particular activities, such as blasting, to particular times. This will depend on individual circumstances. Complaints are often received about the early arrival of heavy lorries at mineral sites. Unfortunately, it is not possible to limit arrival times by a condition on the mineral working. The County Council, however, would urge mineral companies to address this problem where it occurs.

Lorry numbers and routes

10.10 The number of heavy goods vehicles leaving and arriving at a site is often the most environmentally disturbing feature of mineral operations, potentially affecting communities both locally and further afield along the traffic route. The number of lorries therefore needs to be controlled and monitored. Planning permissions will, where appropriate, contain conditions limiting the number of lorries permitted to leave the site daily, weekly or monthly. In addition, agreements will be sought to ensure the use of agreed lorry routes.

Noise

10.11 Sources of noise include blasting; the processing plant; heavy vehicles and equipment, such as draglines; warning sirens and bleepers. Planning applications should identify the noise sources, including plant, and any noise-sensitive properties which may be affected, demonstrate the current background noise level and set out what measures will be taken to keep noise from the operation to acceptable levels. Such measures include:

- the fitting and maintenance of silencers;
- the use of rubber linings on certain sections of plant, e.g. chutes, hoppers;
- the housing and cladding of fixed plant and machinery;
- careful siting of fixed plant in relation to the topography and prevailing wind direction;
- the use of conveyors rather than dump trucks for the movement of minerals within the site;
- the use of electric rather than diesel pumps;
- the maintenance of an acceptable distance between the operation and noise-sensitive land uses. The precise distance which will be acceptable will vary according to individual site characteristics.
- the use of acoustic fencing or baffle mounds;
- the use of working methods such as one way vehicle movements so as to reduce the noise made by reversing vehicles and warning bleepers;
- the use of remote sensors to eliminate the use of reversing bleepers.

10.12 These measures may be included as planning conditions depending on the proximity of noise-sensitive properties and characteristics of the site; the existing ambient noise levels; the predicted noise arising from the proposed development; and the proposed hours of working and duration of particular activities. Planning conditions will normally include maximum noise limits, using advice set out in MPG11 and from the Environmental Health Officer. In appropriate cases operators will be required to monitor and report noise levels.

Blasting

10.13 Blasting takes place in hardrock quarries, sandstone quarries and most opencast sites. Safety aspects of blasting are the responsibility of H.M. Inspectorate of Mines and Quarries who will be consulted on all mineral applications involving blasting. Public concern over blasting arises mainly from ground vibration, air over-pressure and flyrock. Statutory limits on blasting should be sufficient to prevent direct damage to property. However, shaking buildings and rattling windows can give rise to considerable concern. Planning applications should identify properties which may be affected and set out the measures which will be taken to reduce the impact of blasting. In appropriate cases operators should arrange for independent structural surveys at properties in the vicinity of the site before working commences. Other measures include:

- designing blasting schemes;
- setting maxima percentile peak particle velocity levels;
- limiting the times of blasting and warning of these times;
- setting of target percentile maxima for air overpressure;
- appropriate height and alignment of the quarry face;
- using non-explosive methods and avoiding the use of secondary blasting (i.e. reducing large pieces of rock dislodged by the first or primary blast).

10.14 Planning conditions will normally include maxima percentile peak particle velocity and air overpressure levels, taking advice from the Mines and Quarries Inspectorate and Environmental Health Officer.

Dust, Smoke and Fumes

10.15 Dust is generated from the processing plant, stockpiles, haul roads, extraction, and the stripping and replacement of soils and overburden. This is exacerbated during dry and windy weather.

10.16 Planning applications should identify measures which will be taken to reduce dust, smoke and fumes. These may include:

- appropriate siting and design of plant, buildings, stockpiles and haul roads;
- the plant (or specified parts of it) to be enclosed with a dustproof building fitted with dust extraction and filtration equipment which will be well maintained;

- internal haul roads, plant and storage areas to be swept regularly and sprayed by water bowsers during dry weather; or the use of vapour masts or sprinkler systems;
- the seeding of baffle mounds and other storage heaps;
- siting dust-generating operations away from sensitive areas;
- permanent routes to be surfaced with concrete or tarmac and kept free of dust;
- vehicles to be routed through wheel and body washing equipment before leaving the site;
- the use of contained conveyors instead of dump trucks;
- sheeting of loads to prevent dust blown from transported material.

In appropriate cases operators will be required to monitor dust arisings from the site.

10.17 Planning conditions may also include a requirement for assessment monitoring and reporting of ambient dust levels outside the site and to temporarily cease operations during dry and/or windy weather to prevent the transmission of dust to areas outside the site.

Water

10.18 Surface and ground water can be polluted by mineral working in a number of ways and mineral operations may present a flood risk unless appropriate alleviation measures are taken. In addition, mineral workings may affect the drainage of adjoining land. The Environment Agency has extensive powers to protect water resources and its requirements will be taken into account in planning applications and in imposing conditions.

Mud and debris

10.19 Unmetalled internal haul roads can become very muddy and, unless precautions are taken, quarry traffic can spread mud and debris onto the adjoining public highways. Measures such as wheel cleaning facilities, the metalling of quarry access roads for a reasonable length and sheeting of lorries help to prevent this.

Access design

10.20 Access roads to new sites will be expected to be designed to a high standard on the advice from the County Highways Authority or in the case of trunk roads, the Highways Agency. The access may be designed to prevent lorries leaving in a certain direction where this would cause a danger to other road users or where the route is prohibited through a lorry routeing agreement.

Airport Safeguarding Zones

10.22 The extraction of minerals can attract birds, through for example, the removal of topsoil or accumulation of water. This can present a danger to planes using an airport in the vicinity due to “bird strike”. The County Council will consult the Civil Aviation Authority in appropriate cases.

Mine Gas

10.23 Under certain circumstances hazardous mine gases can seep to the surface from abandoned underground coal workings. These emissions have affected opencast, reclamation and construction sites as well as residential, commercial and industrial properties.

10.24 Most mine gas emissions are made up of firedamp (methane) and/or stythe (carbon dioxide and nitrogen). These gases form in abandoned underground mine workings and are potentially hazardous when they escape to the surface. Where mineral workings take place in the shallow coalfield the County Council will require operators to investigate the likelihood of encountering mine gases during any part of the operation or restoration of the site. Where necessary a condition will be attached to the planning permission requiring the appropriate measures for the safe dispersal of stythe or other mine gas.

Public Rights of Way

10.25 Structure Plan policy aims to maintain the network of public and negotiated rights of way in the County. Where a proposed mineral working would result in the temporary or permanent loss of a right of way the operator will be required to provide an alternative and should endeavour to ensure that the alternative is of at least equivalent function, interest and quality.

10.26 The statutory machinery for footpath and bridleway diversions or extinguishment is separate from the minerals planning application and consultations with the County Council should take place in the pre-application stage to prevent delays in implementation later on.

Mineral Wastes

10.27 Mineral wastes currently produced in the County are either backfilled or stored for future restoration works. A small amount of quarry waste is sold as a low grade aggregate. Ellington Colliery disposes of its wastes as a coastal protection measure for the Alcan Power Station coal stocking area.

10.28 Conditions will be attached to planning permissions to ensure the acceptable disposal of mineral waste either stored for subsequent restoration works or sold as secondary aggregate.

Monitoring and Enforcement

10.29 The performance of operators in complying with conditions attached to planning permissions, and general standards of working will be closely monitored. All active minerals sites will be inspected at least twice a year and reports of unauthorised development and breaches of planning conditions will be investigated.

10.30 Where breaches of planning control or other problems arise, resolution will normally be sought by negotiation and agreement in the first instance. In this connection the establishment of local liaison committees can provide an important link between mineral operators and local communities and will be supported. Where necessary, action will be taken to enforce planning conditions and legal agreements using the powers available under planning legislation. In the case of unauthorised mineral development, action will be taken to bring it under planning control.

CHAPTER 11:

RECLAMATION

INTRODUCTION

11.1 The term "reclamation" as defined in MPG7 includes both restoration and after-care. Restoration refers to the operation following mineral extraction resulting in the replacement of sub-soil, topsoil or soil-making material. Aftercare describes the steps necessary to bring the restored land up to the required standard for its proposed after-use. Reclamation also includes events which take place before and during mineral extraction such as the correct stripping and protection of soils.

11.2 Over the last 10-20 years, standards of reclamation have improved in response to pressure from environmental groups, public concern, an effective use of planning controls and changing attitudes in the minerals industry itself. National policy advice on reclamation issues is set out in MPG7, November 1996. It emphasises the importance of good quality reclamation and the need for a high level of commitment by all parties concerned. Any doubts about the achievement of satisfactory reclamation will adversely affect granting of the planning permission.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

11.3 It is essential that mineral extraction and reclamation are properly designed at the planning application stage to ensure that both are technically and economically feasible, and their impact can be fully assessed. There are a number of factors which are common to most reclamation schemes, regardless of which after-use is proposed. These are considered below.

Phasing

11.4 Wherever practical, reclamation should be phased to minimise the area of land taken out of beneficial use at any one time, and to ensure reclamation is achieved as quickly as possible. For small schemes it will normally be appropriate to submit full reclamation details at the planning application stage. For larger schemes, this approach may not always be practical due to the difficulty in precisely quantifying overburden and mineral volumes in advance of extraction. For example, where sand and gravel workings are to be reclaimed to a water area the exact contouring and lake shaping may vary from that predicted. Similarly, for long life schemes, the reclamation proposals may alter in response to changing land use or environmental priorities. In such cases, it will normally be acceptable to submit an overall concept plan at the planning application stage, followed by phased submissions of the detailed scheme as extraction progresses. It is, however, essential that the concept plan is shown to be feasible and details of restoration are submitted in sufficient time for further consultations.

Soils

11.5 For after-uses requiring the growth of vegetation, effective site reclamation will depend on the appropriate identification and management of soil resources prior to and during working as well as in the later stages of restoration and after-care. This is especially the case for topsoil and where an agricultural after-use is proposed. If soils are mishandled, damaged or lost, the standard of reclamation is likely to be prejudiced and difficult to rectify.

11.6 Prior to working, a detailed soil survey will be required to identify soil types, profiles, and depths. Once working commences, topsoils, subsoils and overburden should be stripped, stored and replaced separately. Soils may need to be stripped separately according to their texture with care needed in the case of higher quality soils. These operations should only be carried out in dry weather conditions when the soil is sufficiently dry and friable to prevent compaction and damage.

11.7 Where soils have to be stored the mounds should be designed to minimise damage to soil structure, seeded and kept weed free. Alternatively, soils can be stripped and re-spread in progressive restoration. As soils are only handled once this will result in less damage than if double handling occurs. However, it should be ensured that progressive restoration does not result in the inversion or inappropriate mixing of higher quality soils. Where soils are absent or insufficient, it may be possible to create adequate soil-making materials from fill, silt or overburden. Any soils that are present should be concentrated in areas where they are most needed.

Landscape issues

11.8 It is important to address landscape issues well before a planning application is submitted in order to allow a full landscape assessment to be carried out. This will help to ensure that the quality and character of the reclaimed site will be of a high standard, the site will be assimilated into the surrounding landscape and be compatible with the proposed after-use.

11.9 Reclamation schemes should include a landscape assessment which provides an understanding of the current landscape character of the site and how it relates to the landscape of surrounding areas. It should identify the visibility of the site from all major surrounding viewpoints and identify features or areas within or adjacent to the site that should be conserved, enhanced or reinstated as part of the reclamation scheme. Reclamation proposals should also take into account the timescale of the mineral working. During this time, the landscape fabric of the surrounding areas can change considerably.

11.10 Further specific advice on landscape issues following mineral extraction, including advice on landscape assessments, is contained in the Countryside Commission's advisory booklet on opencast coal mining. The principles outlined in the report are relevant to all mineral extraction.

11.11 Screening and landscaping measures designed to reduce visual impact during the operational stages of the site can also contribute to the final reclamation scheme.

Reclamation with Fill

11.12 Waste disposal can be associated with mineral extraction either because imported waste is the only practical means of restoration or because mineral workings provide valuable void capacity for accommodating waste. In Northumberland, relatively few mineral workings do accommodate imported waste, partly due to the lack of suitable wastes and the large distances between most mineral workings and the principal sources of waste. Four sand and gravel workings (Merryshields, Broadoak, Hollings Hill and Thornbrough) import inert wastes such as builders' rubble and tile waste. Harecrag, a disused hardrock quarry, is used for the disposal of domestic waste.

11.13 Most mineral workings are only suited to receive inert categories of waste due to risks of ground water pollution and proximity to residential or other sensitive areas. Waste disposal will be examined in detail in the forthcoming Waste Local Plan. However, where minerals operations propose waste disposal as a means of reclamation the following factors will be examined:

- the source and availability of waste;
- the type of waste;
- working arrangements;
- the risk of ground water pollution;
- proximity to residential and other sensitive areas;
- traffic implications;
- the risk of gas migration;
- effect on the life of the site;
- reclamation proposals and after-use.

Reclamation without Fill

11.14 Where the ratio of overburden to mineral volume is high, there is likely to be sufficient on-site material to backfill and reclaim the void without imported fill. This situation applies to opencast coal, where the bulking effect of the overburden often compensates for the loss of mineral volume, allowing reclamation to original or higher ground levels.

Low level reclamation

11.15 For workings which do not breach the water table, reclamation may be possible by re-spreading overburden and soils across the graded quarry floor. Such opportunities are most likely to be successful for shallow workings, where the reduction in land levels can be more easily absorbed into the surrounding landscape. This low level restoration, however, can give rise to drainage problems where there is a high ground water table and suitable measures would need to be undertaken to avoid such problems.

11.16 Where the water table is breached, low level reclamation may still be technically feasible providing a permanent pumping scheme is established. Such schemes may be appropriate where areas of high quality agricultural land are proposed to be worked and where fill is not an option. In order to ensure pumping is carried out into perpetuity, appropriate legal measures need to be implemented in accordance with Government advice contained in DoE Circular 25/85.

AFTER-CARE

11.17 The 1981 Minerals Act empowered mineral planning authorities to impose an “After-care Condition” on all mineral planning consents where reclamation is to agriculture, forestry or amenity. The purpose of the after-care requirement is to help ensure that newly-restored land is properly treated during the first few critical years to ensure it is reclaimed to a satisfactory standard.

11.18 An operator may submit an after-care scheme for approval by the County Council, or the planning permission will contain conditions specifying the steps to be taken following restoration. An after-care scheme should cover the management of the land (including planting, cultivation, treatment with fertilisers, irrigation and drainage) for a period of 5 years from compliance with the restoration condition or such other maximum period after compliance with that condition as may be prescribed. In some circumstances it may be appropriate to extend the period of recuperative management of all or part of the site, for example, sites where it is necessary to establish forestry or amenity woodland or a scheme to establish nature conservation after-uses. Some schemes may need to wait for adjoining land to be restored. Where appropriate the County Council will seek a planning obligation to extend the after-care period.

11.19 Regular meetings and inspections will form an essential part of the after-care regime to monitor progress and amend the programme of work as necessary. The developer should produce an annual report addressing the topics identified by Annex 5 to MPG7 on 'The Reclamation of Mineral Workings'. The report should be submitted to all interested parties four weeks prior to the annual after-care site meeting. At the end of the after-care period the County Council will issue a certificate affirming that the land has been reclaimed to a satisfactory standard. POLICY R1

Restoration Bonds

11.20 It is Government policy that properly worded and relevant planning conditions which are complied with and, where necessary, enforced, should be able to secure the restoration, after-care and after-use of mineral sites. Financial guarantees to ensure restoration of mineral sites should therefore not normally be required.

11.21 Most mineral sites are satisfactorily restored. The most likely reasons for unsatisfactory restoration are the lack of modern conditions for reclamation or technical failures. A recent Study for the Department of the Environment by Ove Arup indicated that only 5% of failures result from financial failure. The lack of modern conditions is now being addressed through the review of old mineral permissions under provisions resulting from the Environment Act 1995. Continued improvements in technical practices should address the problems of technical failure.

11.22 MPG7 states the Government's position on financial guarantees for restoration. The Government does not intend to introduce new provisions to enable financial guarantees or bonds to be required under the planning system, covering possibilities of both financial and technical default on restoration. "Applicants should therefore demonstrate with their applications what the likely financial and material budgets for restoration, after-care and after-use will be, and how they propose to make provision for such work during the operational life of the site."

11.23 The guidance note does set out exceptional cases where it will be reasonable for an MPA to seek a financial guarantee to cover restoration (including after-care) costs, through a voluntary agreement/planning obligation at the time a planning permission is given. Examples of such situations may be:

(i) for very long-term new projects where progressive reclamation is not practicable;

POLICY R1

PROPOSALS FOR MINERAL WORKING WILL ONLY BE PERMITTED WHERE PROPER PROVISION HAS BEEN MADE FOR THE RECLAMATION OF THE SITE AS SOON AS PRACTICABLE TO A CONDITION SUITABLE FOR THE IDENTIFIED AFTER-USE. THIS WILL INCLUDE:

- AN ASSESSMENT OF THE EXISTING LANDSCAPE AND A PRACTICABLE SCHEME SHOWING HOW THE RECLAIMED SITE WILL BE ASSIMILATED INTO THE LANDSCAPE;
- DETAILS OF PHASING, FILLING, LAND FORMS, DRAINAGE, POLLUTION PREVENTION MEASURES, MANAGEMENT OF SOILS AND LANDSCAPING;
- ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE EFFECTIVE AFTER-CARE OF SITES;

AND WHERE RELEVANT OR APPROPRIATE:

- PROGRESSIVE RECLAMATION;
- MEASURES TO ENHANCE THE ENVIRONMENT SUCH AS THE RETENTION OR CREATION OF WOODLAND, HEDGEROWS, LANDSCAPE FEATURES, WILDLIFE HABITATS, GEOLOGICAL EXPOSURES AND RIGHTS OF WAY;

POLICY R2

CONDITIONS WILL BE IMPOSED TO ENSURE THAT ALL NEW MINERAL DEVELOPMENT IS RECLAIMED IN ACCORDANCE WITH CURRENT GUIDELINES. THE COUNTY COUNCIL WILL EXPECT APPLICANTS TO DEMONSTRATE HOW THEY PROPOSE TO MAKE FINANCIAL PROVISION FOR THE PROPER RESTORATION OF THE SITE.

(ii) where a novel approach or technique is to be used;

(iii) where there is reliable evidence of the likelihood of either financial or technical failure, but these concerns are not such as to justify refusal of permission.

11.24 Since the publication of MPG7, the government has issued new guidelines on operator's responsibilities with regard mineral extraction and disposal. MPG3, Coal Mining and Colliery Spoil Disposal, March 1999, states "The government therefore considers that having regard to the principle of polluter pays and to the uncertainty that would otherwise arise for local communities, financial guarantees are a legitimate and acceptable means for reassuring the local community of operators' commitment and ability to restore sites properly and timeously."

11.25 The County Council would accept membership of a trade organisation which operates a mutual funding scheme as adequate evidence of proper financial provision for the reclamation of mineral sites. The Quarry Products Association is one such organisation which operates a mutual funding scheme for sand and gravel sites. In such exceptional circumstances as envisaged in paragraph 11.23 above, the County Council may seek financial guarantees to cover restoration (including after-care) costs where the operator is not a member of such a mutual funding scheme. POLICY R2

AFTER-USE

11.26 The term "after-use" is used to mean the ultimate use after mineral working. The type of mineral and method of working will have a great bearing on the options for reclamation and after-use of a site. The depth of the working, its relationship to the water table, the volume of mineral waste, the potential to import other waste, the topography of the site and the character of the surrounding area will all need to be considered.

11.27 After-use options include agriculture, woodland, nature conservation, recreation and, less commonly, built development. It is therefore essential that after-use is determined at the planning application stage because firstly, each after-use will have its own physical requirements which must be assessed before extraction commences and secondly, there must be clear evidence that the proposed after-use will be properly implemented and managed in the long term. Any proposal to vary the after-use should be submitted prior to the commencement of restoration, to ensure the physical characteristics appropriate to each after-use are satisfactorily restored. The timescale of a mineral working site is relevant to the after-use of the site. Proper provision should be made for reclamation to an appropriate after-use. However, for long term sites, in particular hard rock quarries, precise details of the after-use may be difficult to determine as land use requirements and reclamation techniques can change. In these cases a general concept plan may be appropriate, with further details to be submitted at a later stage.

Agricultural After-use

11.28 Most mineral workings are reclaimed at least in part to an agricultural after-use. In general, where high quality agricultural land is taken for mineral extraction, it is particularly important that restoration and after-care preserve the long-term potential of the land as a national agricultural resource. Government policy seeks also to

encourage the diversification of the rural economy where this will not result in the significant loss of high quality agricultural land. Therefore, whilst agriculture remains the most appropriate after-use for many mineral sites, other uses such as forestry or amenity may be considered on land which was originally in agricultural use.

11.29 For all mineral workings being reclaimed to agriculture, and on land being reclaimed to ensure that it retains its longer-term potential as a high quality agricultural resource, MAFF has a statutory role in advising on restoration and after-care conditions. The planning application should be accompanied by a detailed scheme which will demonstrate that the land will be subsequently restored to a standard at least that of its previous agricultural quality.

11.30 Agricultural after-use schemes present important opportunities to redress some of the environmental damage caused by modern agricultural practices. Where possible such schemes should reintroduce features associated with Northumberland's traditional landscape, including hedgerows, stone walls, small copses, ponds and streams. The actual measures need to be compatible with agricultural production and the long term aspirations of the landowners.

Woodland After-use

11.31 Mineral workings which were reclaimed during the 1960s and '70s were influenced by the need to maximise agricultural production and areas of woodland were kept to a minimum. Since then, there has been a shift in emphasis in agricultural policy towards farm diversification and a general awareness of the landscape and environmental value of woodlands. Productive woodlands can combine timber production with recreation, nature conservation and visual amenity. Woodland will not always be an appropriate after-use but generally the County Council wishes to encourage the planting of woodland, in particular broadleaved species, which will improve and enhance the landscape. More specifically woodland planting is encouraged in appropriate locations within the area covered by the LEAF and Greening for Growth projects. These are County Council-led initiatives aiming to improve the landscape of the coalfield area of south- east Northumberland. On some mineral sites the planting of coniferous species as a nurse to the final broadleaved crop may be required.

11.32 Wherever woodland has been lost to mineral working, there will be a requirement to replant at least the equivalent area of woodland as part of the reclamation of the site. Where substantial tree planting is proposed as part of the reclamation scheme, the Forestry Authority has a statutory role in advising on restoration and after-care conditions.

Nature Conservation After-use

11.33 Mineral extraction can present opportunities to create habitat types, such as water areas, reedbeds and areas of lowland wet grassland, which are valuable for nature conservation. Worked out areas of Caistron sand and gravel workings have been designed to attract birds and other wildlife and a nature reserve has been created. Similarly, the reclamation of a number of other former or existing mineral workings include areas for nature conservation, for example opencast coal sites at East Chevington and Linton Lane and sand and gravel sites at Branton and Farnley Haugh.

11.34 There are a number of factors which need to be taken into account when considering the suitability of nature conservation as a after-use.

(1) New habitats should be appropriate to the site and its context.

(2) Opportunities to extend and enhance existing habitats in the area, or known to occur previously.

(3) Establishing links and stepping stones between existing habitats, for example by features such as hedgerows, rough verges and water courses.

(4) Opportunities to diversify the types of habitat in an area.

(5) Opportunities to provide a recreational or educational reserve.

Recreational After-uses

11.35 There are opportunities for recreational after-uses for reclaimed mineral workings provided that the site is suitably located for the proposed use, and the scheme is properly designed and makes suitable provision for the long term management of the site. Government research has shown that recreation and amenity reclamation can bring substantial social and conservation benefits, opening up new land for sporting activities, for informal recreation and greatly increasing the opportunities for public access. Structure Plan policy welcomes the provision of outdoor recreation facilities provided they are not detrimental to the natural features of the County, local communities or the transport network. A study entitled 'The Northern Region Watersports Study' carried out by the Sports Council indicated a specific requirement for additional facilities for watersports in locations which are accessible to urban areas. The requirement for recreational facilities will be determined in District Local Plans and any proposals for recreational after-use should be consistent with Local Plan policies.

11.36 Schemes designed for water recreation should demonstrate that they are able to meet the physical requirements of the proposed activity. Factors such as lake depths, shape and size, bank profiles, creation of islands, prevailing wind direction, treatment of water margins, access and parking should be carefully considered. Similarly, reclamation to

other uses such as a golf course or an informal picnic site needs to establish appropriate contouring, restoration and after-care at the outset.

11.37 Examples in the County of such after-uses include Druridge Bay Country Park which opened in 1989. It is a former opencast coal site which has been reclaimed to a mix of land- and water-based recreation facilities. Similarly, Bedlington Golf Course was reclaimed from the former Acorn Bank opencast coal site which operated during the 1950s and 1960s. Fishing lakes are proposed on parts of the existing Branton sand and gravel site and have been created on the recently restored Milkhope opencast coal site.

Built development after-use

11.38 Reclamation of mineral workings for built development is technically feasible, provided it is compatible with other planning policies in the area. At some sites the mineral has been extracted in advance of built development, for example at Bebside (superstore) and Meadowdale (housing) in accordance with policy S3 in this plan. Proposals should demonstrate that sufficient compaction and ground stability can be achieved to allow building to go ahead.

CHAPTER 12:

OTHER MINERAL DEVELOPMENTS

INTRODUCTION

12.1 This chapter deals with a number of general issues related to mineral developments including mineral exploration, the re-working of mineral waste tips, minerals consultation procedures and the review of planning permissions.

EXPLORATION

12.2 Mineral exploration is necessary to prove the existence and extent of mineral resources. Exploration ensures that a resource is economically viable and helps to determine how it can be worked. Although exploration is a temporary activity, safeguards are still needed to minimise its environmental impact. There are three main methods of mineral exploration, geophysical surveys, trial pits and boreholes.

POLICY MD1

WHERE PLANNING PERMISSION IS REQUIRED, PROPOSALS FOR SEISMIC SURVEYS CONNECTED WITH MINERAL EXPLORATION WILL BE PERMITTED SUBJECT TO SATISFACTORY ENVIRONMENTAL SAFEGUARDS.

Geophysical Surveys

12.3 Seismic surveys are the most common type of geophysical survey, especially in the exploration of coal and oil. They detect differences in the elasticity of rock strata below ground level which provides information about the underlying geological structure. This information includes the thickness of overburden, depth of deposits, and location of faulting and folding. Seismic surveys are usually preliminary surveys, prior to sinking boreholes.

12.4 Seismic surveys are carried out using various methods, such as vibroseis (using vehicles with vibrator pads) and shot hole surveys (using small charges of dynamite in shallow boreholes). Most seismic surveys have little environmental impact, although the installation of geophones can cause some disruption, and noise and vibration can raise concerns when carried out in sensitive areas. Most seismic surveys are permitted development under the GDO, although there are exceptions relating to sensitive areas, buildings, size of explosive charge and duration of operation. In these cases specific planning permission is needed. Operators are in any event encouraged to notify the County Council and local residents at an early stage to inform and allay concerns. POLICY MD1

Shallow boreholes and trial pits

12.5 These are used for the exploration of surface minerals. Shallow boreholes use small rigs and as each borehole takes only a short period to execute, a number of boreholes may be sunk in a day. Trial pits dug out by excavators are mostly used in assessing shallow deposits, in particular sand and gravel. After the information is recorded the pits are backfilled and reinstated.

12.6 Shallow boreholes and trial pits provide information on the depth, extent and quality of shallow deposits, the make up of overburden and hydrological data.

12.7 Due to the short duration of these operations only rarely does the Mineral Planning Authority need to be notified, the main exception being opencast prospecting which involves a more intensive survey and formal notification procedure. Most shallow boreholes and trial pits are also exempt from the need to obtain planning permission. Exceptions relate to close proximity to buildings and operations in environmentally sensitive areas. POLICY MD2

POLICY MD2

WHERE PLANNING PERMISSION IS REQUIRED, TEMPORARY EXPLORATORY DRILLING OR TRIAL PITTING TO IDENTIFY THE EXISTENCE AND EXTENT OF MINERAL RESERVES WILL BE PERMITTED SUBJECT TO SATISFACTORY ENVIRONMENTAL SAFEGUARDS AND THE FULL REINSTATEMENT OF THE LAND AND STRUCTURES.

Deep boreholes

12.8 In Northumberland, deep boreholes are only likely to be used in the exploration of oil and gas. In 1986 planning permission was granted for an exploratory drilling rig near Longhorsley, however, no deposit was proved. A typical exploration site covers half a hectare and rigs can be 40 metres high. A hard base, normally comprising crushed stone, is required for the drilling rig and associated equipment. Drilling may occur 24 hours a day for several months. The environmental implications of deep borehole drilling are therefore much greater than those for the other exploration methods noted above. It is therefore necessary to obtain planning permission before the development can go ahead. The main environmental issues associated with deep boreholes are as follows.

Visual impact

12.9 Deep borehole sites can be visually intrusive although this has to be balanced against the relatively short duration of the activity. There are, however, some areas of such importance in Northumberland in terms of their landscape character, historic, archaeological or conservation value that even a short-lived development would not be acceptable if it had a detrimental impact on such areas. The Secretary of State for the Environment confirmed this in his decision in 1993 to refuse planning permission for an exploratory deep borehole at Stanley Plantation near Corbridge due to the discordant visual impact on the setting of Hadrian's Wall, a World Heritage Site. In addition, floodlighting makes sites more visible at night and may inadvertently light up nearby buildings. Locating sites near to housing should therefore be avoided.

Noise

12.10 Noise is also likely to be a significant environmental concern. The rig is the main source of noise which usually comprises a low frequency hum from the generator and intermittent high frequency sounds from the brake and handling of casing. Noise generated from traffic servicing the site can also cause disturbance. Borehole sites should therefore by located away from noise sensitive areas.

Access

12.11 Although short-lived, traffic generation can be substantial. Heavy lorries will bring hardcore, construction equipment and the rig. This traffic can place severe constraints on site selection in rural areas served only by narrow roads. The potential impact can often be minimised by appropriate management measures such as agreements on lorry routeing.

POLICY MD3

PROPOSALS FOR EXPLORATORY DEEP BOREHOLES WILL NORMALLY BE REQUIRED TO INCLUDE DETAILS OF:

- PRESENT USE OF THE SITE;
- ESTIMATED DURATION OF SITE DEVELOPMENT AND EXPLORATION;
- LAYOUT AND DESIGN OF SITE;
- TRANSPORT ARRANGEMENTS;
- HOURS OF OPERATION;
- ANTICIPATED NOISE LEVELS;
- MEASURES TO MINIMISE POLLUTION AND ENVIRONMENTAL DISTURBANCE;
- AN ASSESSMENT OF ANY ECOLOGICAL, HISTORICAL, ARCHITECTURAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL FEATURES, INCLUDING THEIR SETTINGS, AFFECTED;
- RECLAMATION AND AFTER-USE.

SUCH PROPOSALS WILL ONLY BE PERMITTED IF THERE IS NO SIGNIFICANT ADVERSE EFFECT ON LOCAL COMMUNITIES OR THE ENVIRONMENT AND SUBJECT TO SATISFACTORY ENVIRONMENTAL SAFEGUARDS.

POLICY MD4

PROPOSALS FOR THE REWORKING OF MINERAL WASTES WILL BE PERMITTED EXCEPT WHERE THE LAND HAS BEEN SATISFACTORILY RESTORED OR NATURALLY REGENERATED, OR WHERE WORKINGS WOULD HAVE A SIGNIFICANT ADVERSE EFFECT ON LOCAL COMMUNITIES OR THE ENVIRONMENT.

Water Pollution

12.12 During drilling, fluid termed "drilling mud" is circulated to support the borehole, cool and lubricate the drilling bit and remove rock cuttings from the borehole. Care must be taken to protect both surface and ground water from contamination.

Reclamation

12.13 Reclamation involves the removal of the hardcore foundation and the separate re-spreading of topsoils and subsoils. This should be carried out as quickly as possible after the operation. POLICY MD3

REWORKING OF MINERAL WASTES

12.14 The potential for reusing mineral wastes as a substitute for primary aggregate resources has been outlined earlier in the plan. This section deals with the environmental implications of the removal of material from old tips such as sandstone, coal or vein minerals. This may be for use as an aggregate, or in the case of coal and vein minerals, it may now be economic to recover the mineral which had at one time been discarded.

12.15 Limited reworking may be possible under the provisions of the General Development Order but, where extensive reworking is proposed, specific planning permission is required. In determining proposals of this nature it will be necessary to balance the benefits of re-using waste materials thus limiting the exploitation of primary resources against the potential level of disturbance.

12.16 Reworking of mineral waste tips can have an adverse impact on the environment in terms of visual intrusion, noise, dust and traffic. Reworking can also re-mobilise toxins, particularly sulphide minerals which adversely affect the pH of water and can cause the release of heavy metals into systems. In addition, some old waste tips have naturally regenerated and may support unusual or rare plants and animals. POLICY MD4

MINERALS CONSULTATION PROCEDURES

12.17 Under the provisions of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, the County Council has a duty to establish Minerals Consultation Areas within which the District Councils are required to consult the County Council on applications for development which could have the effect of sterilising mineral deposits. The inclusion of land within a Consultation Area does not imply a presumption for or against mineral working. It does, however, help to ensure that important deposits are not sterilised, that development within these areas takes into account the existence of mineral resources and workings and that the siting of other developments in close proximity to mineral workings is avoided.

12.18 The County Council has notified District Councils of Mineral Consultation Areas relating to existing mineral workings. These will now be revised following the adoption of the Minerals Local Plan and new plans issued for sand and gravel and hardrock. Coal is subject to a separate consultation procedure operated by the Coal Authority. Other minerals (clay and sandstone) are relatively abundant so it is not considered necessary to re-define Consultation Areas at this stage.

12.19 In accordance with the Conservation (Natural Habitats &c.) Regulations 1994 mineral sites which have unimplemented or partially implemented permission which are likely to have a significant effect on an international site must be reviewed by the MPA in consultation with English Nature.

REVIEW OF PLANNING PERMISSIONS

12.20 Mineral workings can last for many years. Such sites are often controlled by planning permissions which are lacking in the standards expected today. This can result in disturbance to communities and the environment in the vicinity of such sites. The Government recognised this and decided that there was a need for regular reviews of mineral permissions, to ensure that up to date environmental controls were in place at all sites.

12.21 The Town and Country Planning (Minerals) Act 1981 required MPAs to periodically review mineral sites and their permissions, with a view to securing improved environmental standards. Northumberland County Council commenced a review under this provision, but this was subsequently suspended. As this system had not worked as well as anticipated, a reform of the legislation was initiated. The first reform was introduced in the Planning and Compensation Act 1991 to deal with the oldest extant planning permissions known as Interim Development Orders (IDOs), granted between 1943 and 1948. Holders of IDOs had to register them with the MPA and submit a scheme of operating and restoration conditions for the authority's approval. Ten IDOs were registered in Northumberland, 5 active sites and 5 dormant sites. To date, modern planning conditions have been agreed for all of the active sites and one dormant site.

12.22 Many permissions granted after the IDO period also had inadequate conditions in terms of today's standards. The second reform was therefore to provide for the updating of permissions granted in the 1950s, 60s and 70s. This was introduced in the Environment Act 1995. Further information and advice on these requirements is provided in MPG14 "Environment Act 1995". The legislation provides for an initial review of sites where the predominant permission was granted before 22 February 1982. The review is to take place in two successive phases, each over a period of 3 years. The first phase of the review deals with active sites where the predominant permission was granted after 30 June 1948 and before 1 April 1969 and all sites wholly or partly within National Parks, AONBs and SSSIs. The second phase will deal with active sites where the predominant permission was granted after 31 March 1969 and before 22 February 1982. No development can lawfully commence at dormant sites until a new scheme of conditions has been submitted and approved.

12.23 In January 1996 Northumberland County Council produced a list of the sites to be included within this initial review, identifying, where appropriate, dates for the submission of schemes of conditions. The County has 9 Phase I sites (including 1 in the National Park), 3 active Phase II sites and 29 dormant Phase II sites (including 2 partly in the National Park). Periodic reviews of all mineral permissions, including IDO permissions, are to take place every 15 years from the date of the latest mineral permission relating to the site or from the date of a previous review. MPAs are required to set review dates for all mineral sites. If schemes of conditions are not submitted by the specified date, all permissions relating to the site cease to have effect.

12.24 When sites are reviewed, any condition which could be imposed on a new planning permission can be imposed on the permission of the site under review. Conditions which deal with the amenity and environmental aspects of working will not attract compensation.

POLICY MD5

MINERAL WORKINGS IN THE COUNTY WILL BE REVIEWED IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE ENVIRONMENT ACT 1995. WHERE APPROPRIATE, NEW CONDITIONS WILL BE IMPOSED, TO ENSURE HIGH STANDARDS OF OPERATION AND RECLAMATION FOR THE PROTECTION OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES AND THE ENVIRONMENT

However, where conditions are imposed without the operator's agreement, which fundamentally alter the economic structure of the operation, the County Council could be liable for compensation.

12.25 In determining schemes of conditions the County Council will follow the requirements and advice contained in the Environment Act 1995 and MPG14. Within this framework, the aim will be to agree conditions which will ensure the satisfactory operation and reclamation of all sites. In drawing up conditions, operators should follow the principles set out in the Plan's Code of Practice (chapter 10) and the requirements of the chapter on reclamation (chapter 11). POLICY MD5

APPENDIX A

Relevant Northumberland County Structure Plan Policies adopted May 1996

Policy L2

The natural beauty and heritage of the North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty will be conserved and enhanced with detailed policies to achieve this being included in Local Plans. The Local Planning Authority will not permit development which would adversely affect the quality and character of the landscape. In addition, major developments will only be permitted in exceptional circumstances where they conform with Policy M1.

Policy L3

The natural beauty and heritage of the Northumberland Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty will be conserved and enhanced with detailed policies to achieve this being included in Local Plans. The Local Planning Authority will not permit development which would adversely affect the quality and character of the landscape. In addition, major developments will only be permitted in exceptional circumstances where they conform with Policy M1.

Policy L8

Local Plans shall identify Areas of High Landscape Value. Within the defined areas proposals for development will be expected to respect the character of the landscape, and the Local Planning Authority will not permit development which would have a significant and adverse visual impact. Detailed policies for the protection of these areas should be included in Local Plans. In addition, major developments will be assessed under Policies M2-M11.

Policy L9

The environment of South East Northumberland will be improved and enhanced on a comprehensive basis through the implementation of management initiatives. These will involve the improvement of the visual environment, the creation and enhancement of areas of wildlife interest, the improvement of access from the urban areas to the countryside for passive, informal recreation and the resolution of conflict between agriculture and recreation.

Policy L13

The Local Planning Authority will not permit the use of the best and most versatile agricultural land for development not associated with agriculture and forestry unless it can be demonstrated that the need for the development on the particular site overrides the need to protect such land. Where development is permitted, it should, as far as possible, use the lowest grade of land suitable for the development.

Policy N1

Existing and proposed Internationally Important Nature Conservation Sites will be conserved. The Local Planning Authority will not permit proposals for development which is not connected with or necessary to

the management of the site and which would adversely affect the site, either directly or indirectly, unless the developer can demonstrate that there are imperative reasons of overriding public interest for the development and there is no alternative solution.

Where the site concerned supports a priority Natural Habitat Type and/ or a Priority Species, development or land use change will not be permitted unless the developer can satisfy the Local Planning Authority that it is necessary for reasons of human health or public safety or for beneficial consequences of primary importance for nature conservation.

Where such development does proceed it may be subject to Planning Conditions or Obligations to secure all compensatory measures necessary to ensure the overall coherence of Natura 2000 is protected.

Major development proposals will also be assessed under Policy M1.

Policy N2

Existing Designated and Potential Sites of Special Scientific Interest and sites identified as being of national importance for marine nature conservation will be conserved. The Local Planning Authority will not permit development which would adversely affect these sites, either directly or indirectly, unless it can be demonstrated that there are no reasonable alternative means of meeting that development need and the reasons for the development clearly outweigh the value of the site itself and the national policy to safeguard the intrinsic nature conservation value of the national network of such sites. Where the affected site is also a National Nature Reserve or a site identified under the Nature Conservation Review or Geological Conservation Review regard will be paid to the particular importance of the site.

Major development proposals will also be assessed under Policy M1.

Policy N3

Sites of Nature Conservation Importance, Regionally Important Geological and Geomorphological Sites, Local Nature Reserves and Ancient Semi-Natural Woodlands will be conserved. The Local Planning Authority will not permit development which would adversely affect these sites, either directly or indirectly, unless it can be demonstrated that there are no reasonable alternative means of meeting that development need and the reasons for the development clearly outweigh the need to safeguard the intrinsic nature conservation value of the site.

Policy N4

The designation of Local Nature Reserves, Wildlife Corridors and other sites of nature conservation interest will be encouraged and supported. The Local Planning Authority will not permit development which would threaten the integrity of Wildlife Corridors and other areas of nature conservation interest unless it can be demonstrated that the reasons for the proposed development outweigh the need to safeguard the intrinsic nature conservation value of the site or feature.

Policy N5

The Local Planning Authority will not permit development which would adversely affected Protected Species or their habitats unless it can be demonstrated that the reasons for the proposed development outweigh any adverse affect on the species or their habitat.

Policy N6

In cases where development is to be permitted which would adversely affect either designated or non designated areas of nature conservation importance, Protected Species or their habitats, the Local Planning Authority will require the developer to implement measures for protection or habitat replacement. In addition, the creation of appropriate areas of wildlife habitat will be encouraged as part of major development schemes.

Policy HC1

There will be a presumption against development which would adversely affect Hadrian's Wall. The Local Planning Authority will not permit development which would be detrimental to the landscape or archaeological setting of the Wall.

Policy HC2

There will be a presumption in favour of the preservation of Scheduled Ancient Monuments, other nationally important archaeological sites, and their settings. The Local Planning Authority will not permit development which would be detrimental to these sites or their settings.

Policy HC3

The Local Planning Authority will not permit development which would be detrimental to any regionally or locally important archaeological site unless the proposed development is of overriding regional importance and no alternative site is available.

Policy HC4

Where the impact of a development proposal on an archaeological site or an area of archaeological potential, or the relative importance of such an area, is unclear the Local Planning Authority will require the developer to provide further information in the form of an archaeological assessment and in some cases an archaeological evaluation.

Policy HC5

Where the Local Planning Authority decide to grant planning permission for development which will affect sites known to contain archaeological remains, and preservation in situ is not appropriate, such permission may be subject to a condition or an agreement requiring the developer to make provision for the excavation and recording of the remains and publication of the findings.

Policy HC6

Within Conservation Areas development must have regard to the preservation or enhancement of the areas special character and appearance. The Local Planning Authority will not permit development which would be detrimental to this character or appearance. District Councils and the National Park Authority should produce proposals for the enhancement of the character and appearance of these areas.

Policy HC7

There will be a presumption in favour of the preservation of Listed Buildings. The Local Planning Authority will not permit development

proposals which are likely to result in damage to, or will detract from, Listed Buildings or their settings unless it can be demonstrated that the national, regional or local need for the development outweighs the importance of retaining the building in its unaltered form.

Policy HC8

The Local Planning Authority will not permit development proposals which would be likely to be detrimental to the character and setting of registered Historic Parks and Gardens and Battlefields unless the proposed development is of overriding national importance and no alternative site is available.

Policy S2

Open countryside and viable countryside uses shall be maintained between settlements in South East Northumberland. The Local Planning Authority will not permit development which would be detrimental to the landscape character, heritage and nature conservation interests of the undeveloped coast, the valleys of the Rivers Blyth, Wansbeck and Seaton Burn. In addition, major developments will be assessed against Policies M1-M11.

Policy S3

The existing Northumberland Green Belt, the boundaries of which lie west of the A1068 and the Newcastle to Edinburgh railway, around Ponteland, south of the B6318, north and east of Hexham and along the Tyne Valley to the County Boundary will be maintained with the following alterations:

a. the exclusion of an area for the operation of Newcastle International Airport;

b. the designation as Green Belt of the majority of land to the west of Darras Hall which is currently allocated as White Land.

Precise Boundaries, including those around settlements will be defined in Local Plans.

Policy S4

An extension to the Green Belt is proposed, from the existing boundary eastwards to the coast, south of the town of Blyth and south and east of Cramlington, which will be continuous with the proposed North Tyneside Green Belt.

Precise Boundaries, including those around the settlements of Seghill, Seaton Delaval, Seaton Sluice, Holywell and New Hartley will be defined in Local Plans.

Policy S5

An extension to the Green Belt is proposed from the existing boundary westwards, to lie west of the River North Tyne, around Newbrough, east of Haydon Bridge, south of Hexham Race Course and south of Hexham.

Precise Boundaries, including those around Hexham, will be defined in Local Plans, having regard to the maintenance of the role of the town as defined in Policy S8.

Policy S17

The Local Planning Authority will, where appropriate, seek to enter into Planning Obligations with developers to ensure that proposed developments have due regard to the environment and the interests of the local economy and community. Developers may be required to meet infrastructure or other consequential educational, social, recreational or community facilities and nature conservation benefits, in accordance with the scale of development proposed. This will be my means of developer contributions and, where appropriate, commuted payments and direct provision of facilities. Detailed policies in respect of the above will be included in Local Plans.

Policy M1

The Local Planning Authority will assess proposals for Major Development within the Northumberland National Park, The North Pennines and North Northumberland Coast Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the Heritage Coast and affecting sites of national and international nature conservation interest against policies L1, L2, L3 and N1 and N2, and will only permit them in the most exceptional circumstances where the developer can demonstrate that:

a. the development contributes to meeting an overriding national need;

b. the cost and scope for the development outside these designated areas has been examined and no alternative sites are available in less sensitive areas' additionally, in the case of proposals within the National Park;

c. the cost and scope for meeting the demand in some other way has been examined and no suitable alternative is available;

d. the development is in the public interest, and in the case of proposals affecting sites of International Nature Conservation Importance;

e. the proposal meets the tests set out in Policy N1.

Proposals which are deemed to have demonstrated the above will then be assessed against Policy M2.

Policy M2

The Local Planning Authority will only permit Major Developments where the benefits clearly outweigh any potential environmental damage. Developers will be required to demonstrate that their proposals include measures to minimise their impact on the environment and applications should be accompanied by an Environmental Assessments, where appropriate. In additional all proposals will be assessed against the following:

a. the impact on the landscape character, visual amenity and areas of heritage and nature conservation interest, and potential conflict with other policies in this plan;

b. the impact of emissions, including noise, to air, land and water;

c. the impact on the local community;

d. the impact on the local economy;

e. the impact on the transport network, including the accessibility to the road, rail and public transport network. Any assessment will include the transport requirements arising from the development and the transport and disposal of waste;

f. the effect on agriculture in relation to land quality, farm structure and fixed assets;

g. the cumulative impact of proposals on the local environment and community;

h. further criteria for the assessment of major developments contained in local plans.

Policy M6

Land will be made available for mineral working to maintain an adequate supply of minerals to contribute to local, regional and national needs.

Proposals for major mineral workings, including energy minerals, will be assessed against Policies M1 and M2. Proposals for other mineral workings will only be permitted where they have no significant adverse effects on the environment and local community. Such proposals will be assessed against criteria a-g in Policy M2, taking into account any benefits which might outweigh the environmental disadvantages.

In addition, all proposals will be assessed against the policies in the Northumberland Minerals Local Plan or the Northumberland National Park Minerals Local Plan.

Policy M7

In the case of aggregate minerals land will be made available to meet the County's agreed share of the regional supply of aggregates. For the period 1992-2006, provision will be made for the supply of at least 15.5 million tonnes of sand and gravel and 41 million tonnes of crushed rock. A landbank of permitted reserves of aggregates, will be maintained in accordance with national policy guidance and the advice of the Northern Regional Aggregates Working Party, unless exceptional circumstances prevail.

Policy M8

In the interests of conserving primary aggregates, where developments require the use of aggregates the potential for the use of secondary aggregates should be examined.

Policy M9

In assessing proposals for land use change and development, account will be taken of the need to safeguard proven mineral resources against sterilisation.

Policy T6

Measures will be taken to reduce the adverse impact of large, heavy vehicles on the environment and on the amenity, safety and convenience of residents.

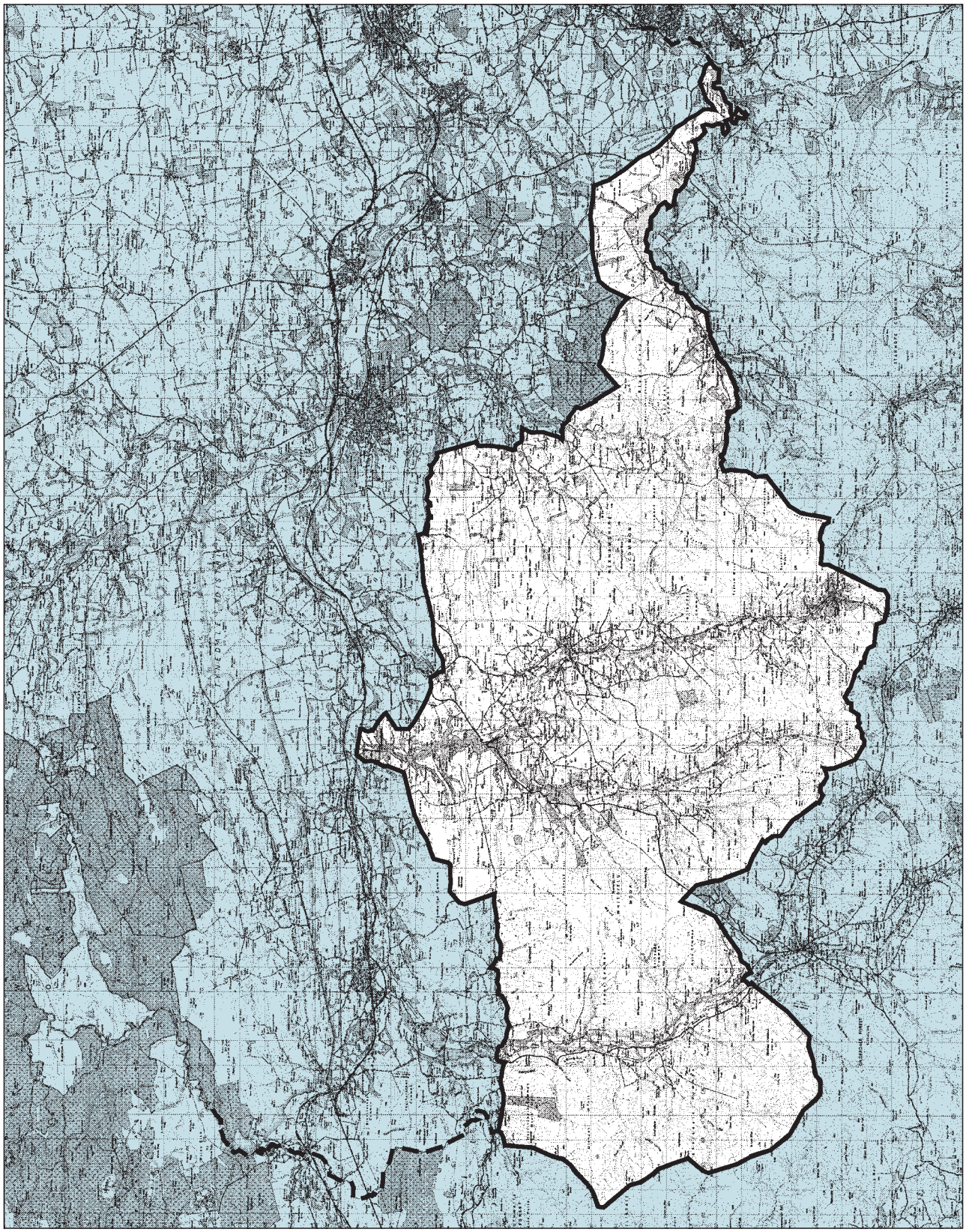
Policy T7

The Local Planning Authority will seek to ensure that, where practicable, new development which generates the movement of bulky or dangerous materials is located on sites which are or can be connected to the rail network. In such cases, conditions will be imposed to minimise the volume of goods transported by road. In cases where development is justified on a site that cannot reasonably be connected to the rail network, development will only be permitted where developers provide a dedicated road connection to the primary road network or enter into agreements on improving the local road network to provide safe and efficient access to the primary road network, including, where necessary, the provision of by passes to affected communities.

Policy T11

The Local Planning Authority will permit proposals to carry good by pipeline provided that their routing and the design and location of above ground facilities does not adversely affect the environment, particularly archaeological interests, and does not conflict with other Structure Plan Policies.

APPENDIX B

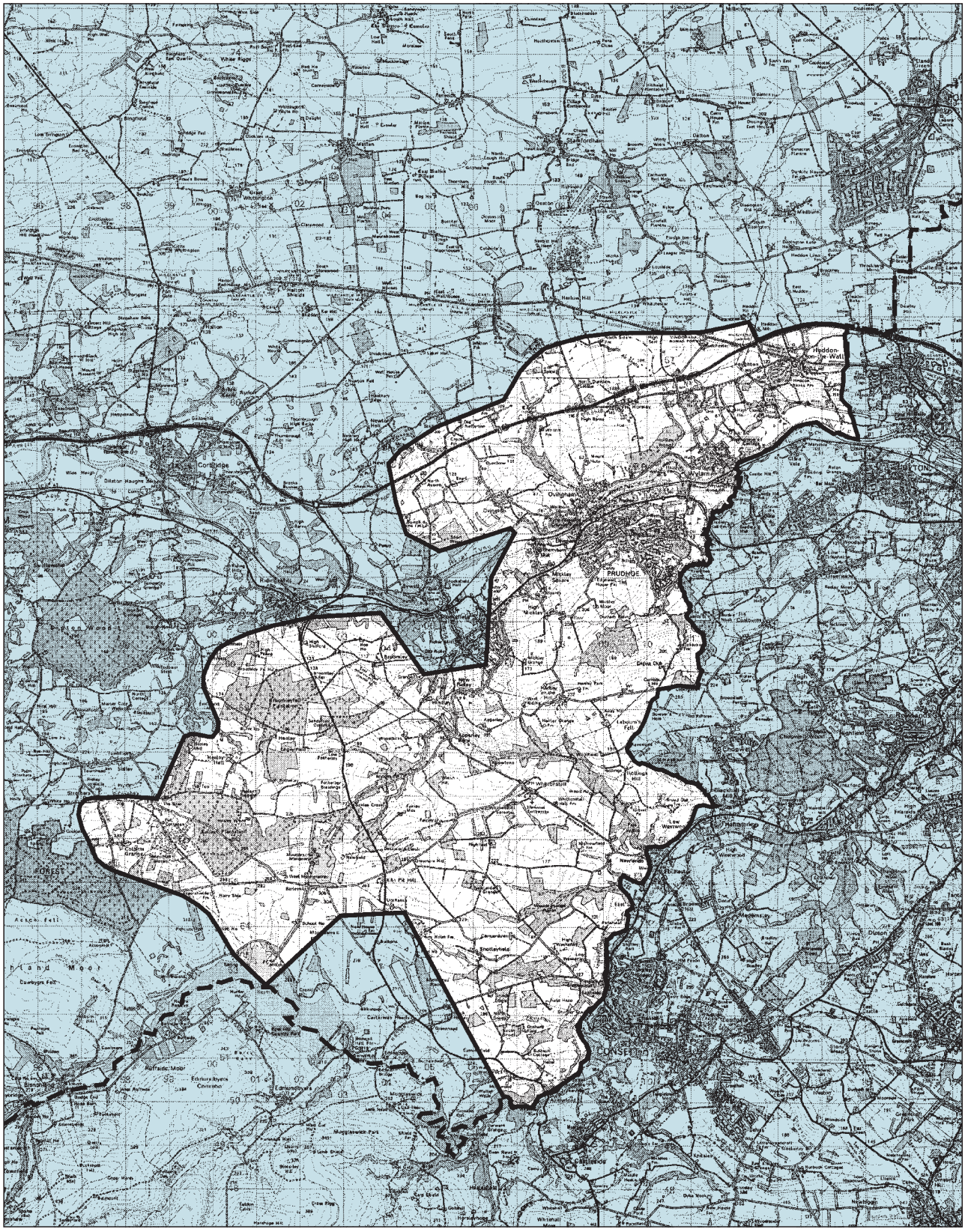


OPENCAST COAL CONSTRAINT AREAS

1. North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Scale: 1:130,000

OPENCAST COAL CONSTRAINT AREA



OPENCAST COAL CONSTRAINT AREAS

2. Tyne/Derwent Watershed

Scale: 1:130,000

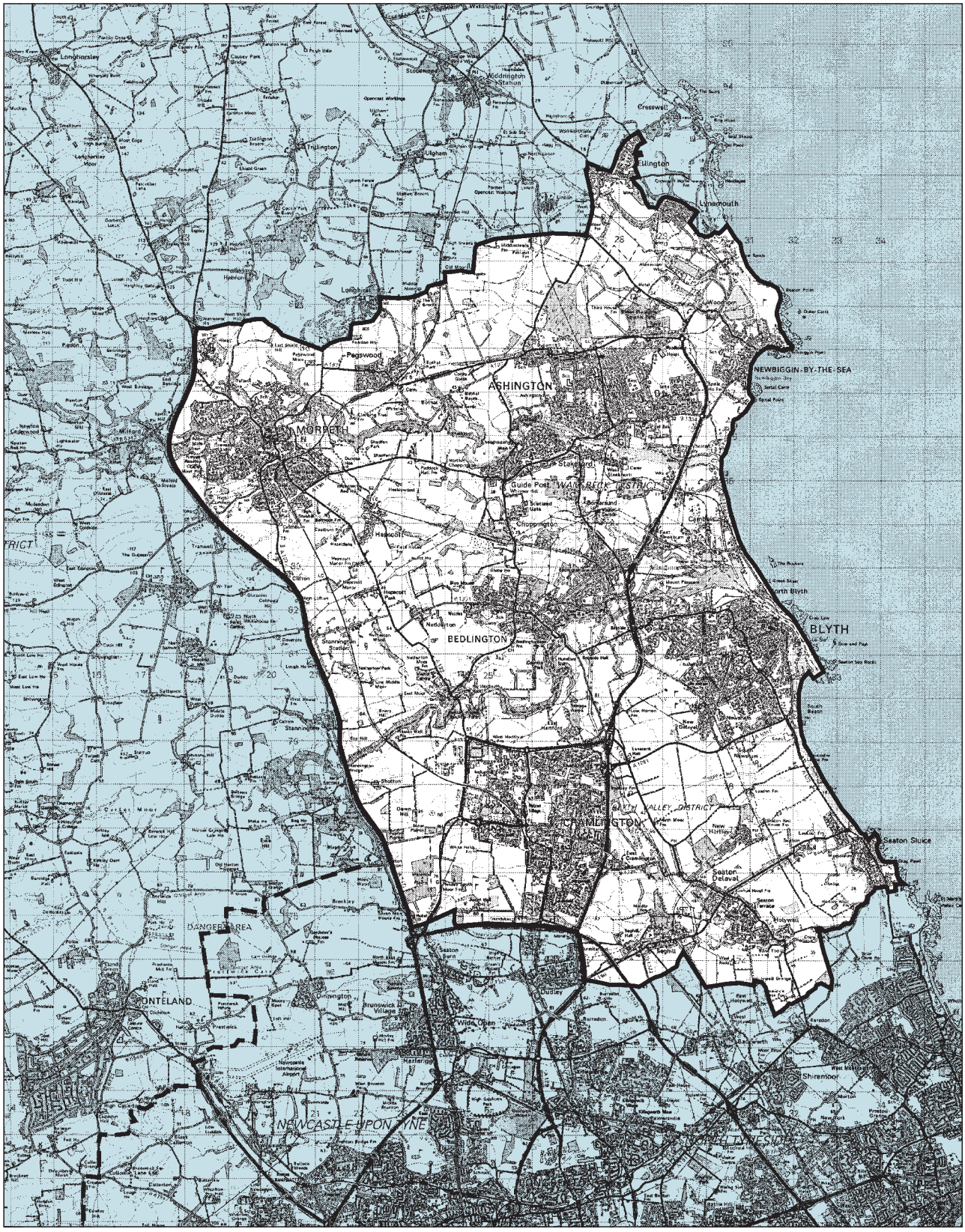
OPENCAST COAL CONSTRAINT AREA

OPENCAST COAL CONSTRAINT AREAS

3. Northumberland Coast between Amble and Lynemouth

Scale: See Map © Crown Copyright.

OPENCAST COAL CONSTRAINT AREA



OPENCAST COAL CONSTRAINT AREAS

4. South East Northumberland

Scale: 1:130,000

OPENCAST COAL CONSTRAINT AREA

GLOSSARY

After-care	Steps necessary to bring restored land up to the required standard for either agriculture, forestry or amenity use.
Aggregates	Sand, gravel, crushed rock and other bulk materials used by the construction industry.
AHLV	Area of High Landscape Value as defined in district-wide local plans.
Air overpressure	The effects of blasting from a mineral extraction site which results in air waves travelling over the ground surface and is measured in decibels (dB).
Alluvial Sand and Gravel	Sand and gravel laid down by river waters.
AONB	Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.
Backfilling	Filling of a void created by mineral workings with waste material.
Baffle Bank	A screening mound constructed to reduce the noise impact of workings as well as a visual screen.
Coating Plant	Mechanical equipment used to coat crushed rock with bitumen or tar for use in road construction.
Crushed rock	Hard rock (whinstone or limestone) which has been quarried and fragmented for use as aggregate.
Disposal Point (DP)	Area where coal is screened and graded and loaded into train wagons or HGVs for carriage to its markets. Coal may also be stocked at the DP.
Dormant Site	A site with planning permission on which minerals operations have temporarily ceased.
Fluvio-glacial sand and gravel	Water-borne sand and gravel laid down by glacial melt waters.
General Permitted Development Order (GDO)	This Order provides a detailed list of types of development which do not require express planning permission, i.e. are “permitted development”.
High Specification Aggregates (HSA)	Aggregates that are suitable for use in road surfacing materials and comply with BS criteria.
Inert waste	Waste which does not give rise to toxic leachate and which does not easily decompose, e.g. builders’ rubble.
Interim Development Order (IDO) permissions	Before full planning controls were introduced in 1948, some surface mineral workings were granted planning permission by Interim Development Authorities. These are commonly called IDO permissions. Under the 1991 Planning and Compensation Act, holders of IDO permissions were required to register them with Mineral Planning Authorities by 25 march 1992, or the consents would lapse. In Northumberland, 10 applications were received and registered. The operators of these sites must apply to the MPA for the approval of a scheme of operating and restoration conditions. The legislation therefore provides an opportunity to bring these IDO permissions with outdated and inadequate conditions into line with modern practice.
Landbank	A stock of permitted reserves.
Marine-dredged Aggregates	Aggregates dredged from deposits on the sea bed. The term is usually applied to material worked below the low tide watermark.
MAFF	Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

MPG	Mineral Planning Guidance Note issued by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions.
NNR	National Nature Reserve
NRAWP	Northern Region Working Party on Aggregates. This is one of the 10 Regional Aggregates Working in England and Wales. Membership is drawn from MPAs, the minerals industry and Central Government.
Opencast Working	A form of surface mining to win minerals wherethe overburden is returned to the void, literally “cast” from the working face to the rear as the mineral is exposed.
Overburden	Material other than soil that overlies a mineral deposit.
Peak Particle Velocity	A measure of ground vibration from blasting.
Permitted reserves	These are reserves having the benefit of planning permission for extraction.
Planning Condition	Conditions attached to a planning permission for the purpose of regulating the development.
Planning Obligation	A planning agreement which may be bilateral or unilateral regarding the use or development of land.
PPG	Planning Policy guidance Note issued by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions.
Preferred Area	Those areas where mineral resources are known to exist and which could be extracted to maintain an appropriate level of reserves, provided the proposal is environmentally acceptable and does not conflict with the policies and proposals in the development plan.
Primary Aggregates	Naturally occurring sand, gravel and crushed rock used for construction purposes.
Processing Plant	Mechanical equipment that may be used for the purposes of washing, crushing, de-watering, screening, grading and weighing of excavated mineral.
Polished stone value (PSV)	A measure of the resistance to polishing of aggregates used for the wearing course of roads.
QPA	Quarry Products Association
Railway ballast	Aggregate etc, used to form the bed of a railway.
Reclamation	Operations associated with the winning and working of minerals designed to return the area to an acceptable environmental state, whether for the resumption of the former land use or for a new use. It includes restoration, after-care, soil handling, filling and contouring operations.
Reserves	Mineral deposits which have been tested to establish the quality and quantity of material present and which could be economically and technically exploited.
Resources	A potential mineral deposit where the quality and quantity of material present has not been tested.
RIGS	Regionally Important Geological/Geomorphological Sites.
RPG	Regional Planning Guidance Note issued by the Department of the Environment.
SCA	Special Area of Conservation.

Secondary Aggregates	Waste or synthetic materials used as a substitute for crushed rock or sand and gravel as aggregate, e.g. colliery spoil, power station ash, construction waste.
Section 106 Agreement	A legal agreement between the local planning authority and any person interested in land in their area for the purpose of restricting or regulating the development or use of the land, under Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act, 1990.
SNCI	Site of Nature Conservation Importance.
SSSI	Site of Special Scientific Interest. It is an area of land of special interest by reason of any of its flora, fauna, geological or physiological features. English Nature is responsible for the selection of SSSIs.
SPA	Special Protection Area.
Sterilisation	When a change of use or the development of land prevents possible mineral exploitation in the foreseeable future.

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