

Opencast coal

Opencast mining has been a constant problem for our countryside in the exposed coalfield in the north east of England for 60 years or more.

CPRE Durham began to seriously challenge opencast applications in the late 60's and in the 70's when the local authority, and many local objectors, defeated the National Coal Board quest for mining opencast coal near Dipton in the Derwent Valley. That was the first of 36 public inquiries in which CPRE has been involved and given evidence. In the event 21 of these applications were refused, including 10 out of 10 within the Derwent Valley.

There is a caveat, however, the Inspector's Report into the 10th proposed opencast site at Bradley, in the Durham area of the Derwent Valley, refused the application. This was challenged by UK Coal, the challenge hearing taking a year to conclude that the Inspector's report should be quashed and a further Inquiry should be held with a different Inspector.

We hope that a new Inspector would come to the same conclusion to dismiss the Appeal as the first Inspector did. However, in a further twist, the Secretary of State together with Durham County Council are now considering challenging the High Court decision!

It is now 6 years since UK Coal held an exhibition outlining their proposals to opencast mine at Bradley and we are no further forward. Unfortunately the people living in Bradley and those affected by the application are living in a period of great uncertainty and planning blight.

Across the valley, in the Northumberland area, there is in the pipeline a very large opencast site at Whittonstall. This is likely to go to the Planning Committee later this year for a decision. Both CPRE Northumberland and Durham have been working with the Whittonstall Action Group who are campaigning against the application.

It should be noted that UK Coal is virtually bankrupt but has been bailed out by the Government.

There are 2 other sites in Gateshead at present moving through the planning system: Marley Hill and Birklands Lane near Kibblesworth; and another site at Pitlington in County Durham