

Coal

COAL

a. Deep Coal Mining

Policy 18 Deep Coal Mining

If having had regard to all relevant policies contained in this local plan and the Leicestershire Structure Plan, it is decided to grant planning permission for deep mined coal extraction, the County Council will ensure that adequate safeguards are imposed (or seek to obtain legal agreements) with regard to the following:

- a) dirt disposal**
- b) subsidence**
- c) the environment (during both construction and operational periods) concerning for example, appearance of buildings, traffic, dust, noise, other pollution**
- d) landscaping**
- e) rail traffic**
- f) implications of recruitment of labour**
- g) contribution to infrastructure and other costs (including road improvements)**
- h) the protection and management of interests of nature conservation importance and the creation of new wildlife habitats**
- i) the protection and management of sites of archaeological interest.**

- 5.1 The last working colliery in North West Leicestershire (Bagworth) closed in February 1991. The new coal mine that is currently being developed at Asfordby will not be able to extract all the workable reserves that lie under North East Leicestershire (the Vale of Belvoir and adjoining areas). British Coal had originally intended to work the Coalfield from 3 mine sites, but the proposed development was not regarded as environmentally acceptable by the Secretary of State for the Environment. Policy 18 identifies safeguards which the County Council would wish to see imposed in the event of applications for further deep mined coal extraction.

b. Opencast Coal Mining

- 5.2 British Coal has identified a relatively small area of the County within North West Leicestershire as an area of opencast coal interest. For a number of years, opencast coal has been derived from one large opencast coal site near Heather (called "Coalfield North") together with smaller joint fireclay and coal operations in the Ashby Woulds area and a further large site near Ashby ("Lounge") which has been worked in order to avoid the sterilisation of coal reserves as a result of the construction of the A42 Trunk Road.
- 5.3 Opencast coal production figures for the period 1983/4 to 1992/3 are shown below. These indicate that production has generally risen during the period to 1989/90, but fallen in the region and the County subsequently. In 1989/90 the County was the second highest producer, supplying 13% of national output. Annual average production between 1987 and 1991 was 2.2 million tonnes. This is higher than earlier levels, mainly due to the Lounge operation which was only permitted to avoid the sterilisation of reserves. The fall in production since 1990/1 is as a result of the completion of operations at Lounge and Coalfield North. The majority of opencast coal production is derived from British Coal sites. About 18% of national output was from licensed operations in 1992/3. About 30% came from such sources in Leicestershire in 1992/3, the highest level in the 10 year period.

<u>Opencast Coal Production</u>			
	Great Britain (Million tonnes)	Central West Region (Million tonnes)	Leicestershire (Million tonnes)
1983/84	14.799	2.809	0.973
1984/85	14.898	2.509	0.974
1985/86	15.263	2.879	1.196
1986/87	14.596	2.618	1.309
1987/88	16.299	3.479	1.851
1988/89	18.047	4.874	2.260
1989/90	18.616	4.911	2.482
1990/91	18.271	3.824	2.069
1991/92	19.019	2.721	1.274
1992/93	17.842	1.931	0.483

Source: Opencast Coalmining Statistics
Compiled by County Planning Officers' Society

- 5.4 Minerals Planning Guidance Note 3 (MPG3) entitled "Coal Mining and Colliery Spoil Disposal" was issued by the Department of the Environment in July 1994. It provides advice to Mineral Planning Authorities on how to ensure that the development of coal resources can take place at the best balance of social, environmental and economic cost, whilst ensuring that extraction is consistent with the principles of sustainable development. The Government's energy policy is to ensure secure, diverse and sustainable supplies of energy in the forms that people and businesses want, and at competitive prices consistent with wider economic policies, the promotion of energy efficiency and the full and proper protection of the environment.
- 5.5 MPG3 does not provide any target for national production, but states that it is for the operators to determine the level of output they wish to aim for in the light of market conditions. Policies for opencast coal mining should be consistent with national policy considerations and set out clear criteria against which individual proposals will be assessed.
- 5.6 Minerals and Waste Disposal Policy 5 of the Leicestershire Structure Plan (1994) states:

"Planning permission will normally be granted for the extraction of coal by opencast operations provided that the environmental impact and other effects of the proposed development can reasonably be kept to an acceptable level. In addition, in respect of major opencast coal operations (sites usually containing more than one million tonnes of workable coal reserves) planning permission will normally only be granted where:

- (a) not more than one major site is operational, wholly or substantially, in Leicestershire at any particular period of time unless more sites would not have unacceptable environmental or other effects in the locality;*
- (b) the coal is not removed from the site by road unless the environmental or other effects of this are acceptable; and*
- (c) the site is contained within an agreed programme of opencast coal mining sites for the County".*

The County Council believes that not more than one major 'coal only' site should usually be operational at any one time because of the cumulative environmental effects of such operations within such a small geographical area. It is anxious to avoid the adverse environmental effects generated by road borne transportation and to avoid the effect of extensive opencast coal workings damaging investor confidence in the North West Leicestershire Area of Mining Decline Priority Area and holding back the process of economic, environmental and social regeneration.

Policy 19 Joint Coal and Fireclay Opencast Operations

Proposals for the joint extraction of coal and fireclay by opencast operations will normally be granted provided that the environmental impact and other effects of the proposed development can reasonably be kept to an acceptable level and where:

- a) the sterilisation of valuable clay reserves is avoided;**
- b) it will not be necessary to stockpile clays over large surface areas; and**
- c) the proposal will substantially improve the environment or reclaim derelict land.**

Where materials other than fireclay are associated with opencast coal, proposals for their extraction will normally be permitted provided that this does not prejudice the final satisfactory reinstatement of the land.

5.7 MPG3 suggests that provision should be made for proposals where extraction of coal from a site would facilitate the efficient and economic working of other mineral deposits on that site. Such joint working can avoid wasteful restoration, minimise subsequent environmental disturbance and prevent the unnecessary sterilisation of valuable mineral reserves. Joint operations involving the extraction of fireclay and coal within the Ashby Woulds area has led to the problem of clay stockpiles due to the more limited demand for the clays. Clay stocking problems could be compounded if more joint workings are allowed. The County Council recognises however the potential which such operations may have in assisting the reclamation of derelict land and general schemes for the improvement of the environment. Joint workings would not be acceptable where they are likely to prejudice the final satisfactory reinstatement of the land.

5.8 In an effort to resolve the environmental problems of the Ashby Woulds area of Leicestershire and create certainty for residents, landowners, and mineral operators, the Department of Environment promoted (through the County Council) the preparation of a regeneration strategy for the area. The preparation of a strategy has been overseen by the Ashby Woulds Regeneration Forum, which includes representatives from the local community, local authorities, the Department of the Environment and environmental organisations. A draft strategy was published for public consultation in July 1993. This involved a package of proposals for mineral working (coal and fireclay extraction), built development, land reclamation and community benefits. It was intended that the strategy would form the basis of the submission of a major consolidating planning application for mineral working in the area.