

FERMANAGH OMAGH DISTRICT COUNCIL

DfE RESPONSE TO PREFERRED OPTIONS PAPER

Main Issue 7: Minerals Development.

Question 9: Do you agree with the Council's preferred option for addressing minerals development?

Yes [] No []

The Department for the Economy (DfE) does not agree with the preferred option as set out in the Planning Options Paper (POP) as it does not adequately take account of the economic value of minerals or address the points made by DfE/GSNI in previous responses and in discussions with FODC.

Minerals are essential to support sustainable economic growth and quality of life. It is vital that there is a sufficient supply of raw materials for manufacturing, construction, power generation, transportation and agriculture. Minerals are a finite natural resource and can only be worked where they are found. It is important to make the best use of the mineral resources and to secure their long-term conservation through the mechanism of mineral safeguarding.

In relation to the preferred options, the Department welcomes Option One which recommends continuing with the planning policies for minerals development currently contained within PSRNI. The Department also welcomes the recommendation in Option 3 to identify areas for safeguarding minerals within the plan area.

However, the Department would question the additional constraints proposed in Option 2, which do not appear to be compatible with the minerals strategy established in the Strategic Planning Policy Statement 2015 (SPPS) or in the Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland (PSRNI). For example, Paragraph 6.155 of the SPPS states that:

“However, where a designate area such as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) covers expansive tracts of land, the LDP should carefully consider the scope for some minerals development that avoids key sites and that would not unduly compromise the integrity of the area as a whole or threaten to undermine the rationale for the designation.”

Furthermore, Option 2 does not appear to be compatible with the minerals policy as set out in the Rural Northern Ireland (MIN 4) or in relation to mineral deposits of high value. Paragraph 6.157 of the SPPS states clearly that there will not be a presumption against their exploitation in any area as follows:

“From time to time minerals may be discovered which are particularly valuable to the economy. Their exploitation may create environmental effects which are particular to the methods of extraction or treatment of that mineral. There will not be a presumption against their exploitation in any area, however in

considering a proposal where the site is within a statutory policy area, due weight will be given to the reason for the statutory zoning...”

In addition, the Department wishes to seek clarity on the evidence base for the proposed 15 year restriction on mineral development in the proposed areas of constraint. DfE believes that each proposed mining development should be assessed on its own merits through the planning process. If a mine development receives planning permission it seems illogical to place an arbitrary time limit on mining operations which could be well below the economic lifespan of that mine. For example, the Tara mine in Navan, County Meath, which is the largest zinc mine in Europe, has been in production since 1977. This mine has 586 employees and indirectly supports many more jobs in the local area and further afield in the Republic of Ireland.

It would appear that the POP is based on an understanding of the aggregate industry which is to be expected given there is a long history of extraction from hard rock quarries and sand & gravel pits in the Council area. However, whilst exploration for high value minerals has taken place for many decades across the Council area the POP does not reflect insight into the nature of these exploration activities. Likewise, the POP document reveals little experience or knowledge of the development of high value minerals by underground mining given the lack of such operations in the council area within recent years. In addition, the paper briefly mentions oil & gas but provides little information about this potential resource. There may be potential within the council area for conventional oil & gas resources. Again, a distinction should be made between exploration for, and extraction of, unconventional hydrocarbons, such as shale gas, and conventional oil & gas because the scale and methodologies of these are quite different and raise quite different sustainability issues.

As a result the Department considers that the preferred options would benefit from modification to take account of the differences in the exploration and development in 3 main categories - low-value aggregates, high value metalliferous minerals and energy minerals.

The attached paper sets out more fully the Department's position on mineral development to inform planning authorities and aid understanding of the types of mineral that may be found, their likely distribution, and the techniques used in the exploration and development of the main different mineral types.

The Department would recommend that the POP is revisited in light of this additional information and subject to further engagement with DfE/GSNI on safeguarding of minerals.

Question 9b: Are there any other areas that should be considered as Areas of Constraint on Mineral Development?

Yes [] No []

The Department would like to reiterate that we would not support further constraint on mineral development and in particular we would ask that the council consider the position in relation to UNESCO Geoparks as set out below.

UNESCO Global Geopark

A UNESCO Global Geopark should place no restriction on economic development as outlined in Options 2 and 3 under Main Issue 7 – Minerals Development. This goes against the fundamental principle under which UNESCO Global Geoparks were established, in that they are not a statutory designation and should not restrict planning and development providing the main geological heritage of a UNESCO Global Geopark is maintained and protected. This should be achieved on a site by site basis and not applied to the entire area.

The following are extracts from the recent UNESCI publication on UNESCO Global Geoparks <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002436/243650e.pdf>

Listed under the Top 10 Focus Areas for UNESCO Global Geoparks:

Sustainable Development

Even if an area has outstanding, world-famous geological heritage of outstanding universal value it cannot be a UNESCO Global Geopark unless the area also has a plan for the sustainable development of the people who live there. This may take the form of sustainable tourism through, for example, the development of walking or cycling trails, training of local people to act as guides, encouraging tourism and accommodation providers to follow international best practise in environmental sustainability. But it can also be about simply engaging with local people and respecting their traditional way of life in a way that empowers them and respects their human rights and dignity. Unless a UNESCO Global Geopark has the support of local people it will not succeed. ***UNESCO Global Geopark status does not imply restrictions on any economic activity inside a UNESCO Global Geopark where that activity complies with indigenous, local, regional and/or national legislation***

Natural Resources

Since the dawn of humanity natural resources provided by the Earth's solid crust have been the basis for our social and economic development. These resources include minerals, hydrocarbons, rare earth elements, geothermal energy, air and water, and their sustainable use is vital for the continued future well-being of society.

Any element which can be found on Earth has its origin in geology and geological processes, is non-renewable and its exploitation has to be treated wisely. **UNESCO Global Geoparks inform people about the sustainable use and need for natural resources, whether they are mined, quarried or harnessed from the surrounding environment, while at the same time promoting respect for the environment and the integrity of the landscape.**

The following are taken from the UNESCO International Geoscience and Geoparks Programme Statutes and Guidelines.

http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/SC/pdf/IGGP_UGG_Statutes_Guidelines_EN.pdf