The role of the Coal Authority in safeguarding coal resources for future energy needs

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Background

The Coal Authority

• Government Body
  – Established upon privatisation of the coal industry in 1994
  – Responsible to Department of Energy and Climate Change

• Protecting the public and environment in mining areas

• Duties
  – Statutory consultee to the planning system under planning laws
  – Manage the historic liabilities from past coal mining
    • Permitting regime to regulate access into coal/coal mine workings to ensure safe site investigations and remediation strategies
    • Emergency service for hazards – land collapsing, gas emissions
    • Subsidence claims for historic coal mining
    • Mine Water – prevent, remediate, operate and manage infrastructure
  – Licensing regime to regulate the privatised coal industry
  – Provide access to mining information

Protecting the public and environment in mining areas
Planning and Local Authority Liaison

• Protect and promote coal resources

• Ensure new development will be safe and stable

• Discharge statutory planning consultee duties – responding to:
  – Emerging national planning policy and legislation
  – Local Authority Development Plans
  – Individual planning applications
  – Development Consent Orders for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects

• Primary point of contact for the organisation with Local Authorities and other key stakeholders on the coalfield
Planning and Local Authority Liaison

• On going liaison with 179 coalfield Local Authorities

• Working across the planning systems of England, Scotland and Wales, different:
  • Legislation
  • Policy
  • Procedures

• Statutory planning consultee
  • Bespoke, locally distinctive and constructive comments to add value to the planning process
  • Deadlines set by legislation
  • Performance monitored by Government

Protecting the public and environment in mining areas
Context for Safeguarding Coal Resources

• Coal still part of the energy mix for UK
  – accounted for 40% of electricity supplied in the UK during 2013

• However, an increasing reliance on imports:
  – Indigenous coal production in 2013 was 12.8 million tonnes; a 25% reduction from 2012
  – Imports of coal were 10% up in the same period, to 49.4 million tonnes

(Source: DECC statistics 2013)
“Since minerals are a non-renewable resource, minerals safeguarding is the process of ensuring that non-minerals development does not needlessly prevent the future extraction of mineral resources, of local and national importance.”

Coal is defined as a nationally important mineral

(Source: National Planning Practice Guidance for England 2014)
Safeguarding Coal Resources

• National Planning Policy:
  – Minerals Planning Policy Wales and Minerals Technical Advice Note 2: Coal
    • Mineral Safeguarding Areas and Areas of Search for Extraction
  – Scottish Planning Policy
    • Areas of Search for Extraction only

• Additional professional guidance:
  “Mineral safeguarding in England: good practice advice”
  Published jointly with British Geological Survey in 2011

Protecting the public and environment in mining areas
Safeguarding Coal Resources
Planning Policy

- We seek relevant emerging Development Plans to:
  - Define a Mineral Safeguarding Area
    - Based on geological fact for whole surface coal area
  - Include a criteria based mineral safeguarding policy
    - Promote prior extraction ahead of non-mineral development
    - Require developers to assess potential for prior extraction/mineral recovery as part of their development
  - Assess implications on mineral resources when allocating sites for future non-mineral development
  - Include flexibility in policies for emerging technologies
  - Define areas of search or constraint for future mineral extraction
Safeguarding Coal Resources
Planning Policy

Example – Surface Coal Resource Plan provided to Local Authorities

Protecting the public and environment in mining areas
Progress to date on Development Plans

- 57 of 96 (59%) of all coalfield local authorities now safeguard surface coal resources
  - England: 67% of plans
  - Wales: 57% of plans
  - Scotland: 43% of plans now include some policy context to protect coal resources from sterilisation

- 39 of 96 (41%) plans awaited to comment on and influence
Safeguarding Coal Resources
Planning Applications

• Consultation responses on planning applications in relation to coal resources:
  – Promote prior extraction
    • Especially where instability exists from past shallow mining activity
    • Publish on-line monthly list of planning applications where prior extraction has been recommended
  – Review ‘Prior Extraction Feasibility Reports’ / ‘Coal Recovery Reports’ prepared by developers
  – Advise on licensing regime for prior extraction process

Protecting the public and environment in mining areas
Prior Extraction of Surface Coal Resources
Prior Extraction of Surface Coal Resources

- Prevents sterilisation of nationally important mineral resource – national policy requirement
- Financial contribution to the development
- Alternative remediation option for unstable land
  - Incorporated into remediation strategy at the planning application stage
  - Removes risk of gas from abandoned mine workings
  - Creates greater certainty for ground conditions
Conclusion

• We will continue to protecting and promote coal resources for future generations to access to meet their energy needs

• We will remain a statutory consultee to the planning process
  – Local planning policy
  – Individual planning applications
  – Development Consent Orders for nationally significant infrastructure projects
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