

MINING WITHIN THE SPERRIN AONB



Regeneration of site surface with vegetation and native woodland



Proposed plant will be shaped to tie in with natural slopes of the landscape

Designated in 2008, the Sperrin Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) encompasses a largely mountainous area of great geological complexity. Gerard Boate was the first to record finding gold in the area in 1657. In more recent times Government has safeguarded it and issued licences for its exploration.

Last year Dalradian submitted a 10,000 page planning application detailing how the gold can be responsibly mined. This included a careful assessment of the potential effect of the project on the scenic quality of the AONB.

This is an underground mine, what is proposed above ground?

Mining will be entirely underground and not 'open cast', meaning that it will not create a large, unsightly void.

Some surface level infrastructure will be required. These will include a processing plant, a Dry Stack Facility (DSF), water management ponds and a water treatment plant, plus administrative buildings, car parking and accesses.

DSF's are regarded in the industry as best practice for safely storing by-

products such as uneconomic rock in a manner which is sensitive to the local environment.

The material in the DSF will build up over the life of the mine, helping to screen the processing plant and buildings 'behind' it. It will be shaped to tie into the natural slopes of the Curraghinalt Ridge and Owenreagh Valley as far as possible and progressively restored with extensive planting.

What steps have been taken to minimise the potential visual impacts?

Dalradian is proposing extensive measures to reduce any potential effects. For instance, the mine's new entrance and surface infrastructure will be located on southern facing slopes at the lowest height possible.

This area is characterised by a network of small fields and the proposal is to insert the structures into this area. We will ensure where possible that distinctive field boundaries are retained or reinstated post closure.

These fields have a markedly different character to the more open upland area beyond, forming part of a natural depression in the hillside. This area was identified in the site selection process as the best

place to integrate the DSF into the surrounding topography, locating it within a naturally shallow valley head.

The other infrastructure is designed to be as low lying as possible using muted colours and non-reflective materials. Exterior lighting has been minimised and specified to avoid light pollution.

Approximately 80% of waste rock and 44% of tailings will be retained underground in the worked out mine to minimise the size of the DSF.

Once mining has finished the majority of structures will be removed, returning the landscape to its rural appearance. Engineered slopes will be regraded to tie into the natural landscape more closely. Wetlands will be naturalised and access tracks will be allowed to soften to give them the appearance of farm tracks.

What is the overall assessment of the impact?

The Department for Infrastructure (DfI) has indicated that it will refer planning to the Planning Appeals Commission (PAC), an independent body, to hear and report on a Public Inquiry. This was recommended by the then Minister, Chris Hazzard, and endorsed by Dalradian at the time. Landscape, visual impact and the potential effect on the AONB will be an important topic at the Public Inquiry.

Although the project has been carefully designed, there is the potential for very localised and visually contained landscape and visual impacts. However, the wider scenic qualities of the Sperrins AONB will be largely unaffected by the mine and the analysis is that the AONB designation will not be prejudiced.

There will be no visual impact, even in theory, from the project on Rouskey, Glenhull or Scotch Town. From Greencastle, the majority of the village is outside what's called the 'Zone of Theoretical Visibility' with only limited theoretical visibility from the north-west of the village.

There are four scenic driving routes around the Sperrins and in only one, the Central Sperrins Route, is there limited theoretical visibility. There is no visibility of the proposed site from either the Ulster Way or Vinegar Hill walking routes. Of four cycle routes in the Sperrins, only one, the White Hare route, has theoretical visibility.

Curraghinalt is an opportunity to establish a new mining industry in Northern Ireland, operated to the highest standards and regulated by multiple layers of legislation to protect the public interest. The Sperrins is undoubtedly an area of outstanding natural beauty; mining and safeguarding our visual environment, however, need not be mutually exclusive.

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