

Proposed Airfield Opencast Coal Site

Background

Scottish Coal lodged a planning application, on 24 July 2009, to operate an opencast site, 700 metres south of Cousland, to be known as Airfield.

The proposed site would result in the extraction of 2 million tonnes of coal over a 5-year period, with 6 months for start up and a year for restoration.

Although the proposed site would be in Midlothian it extends virtually to the border with East Lothian and due to the prevailing wind and topography the environmental impacts from such an operation are likely to be significant in East Lothian.

Parts of the community of Ormiston such as Tynemount Farm, Tynemount Farm Cottages and West Byres are only a few hundred yards from the proposed site boundary while the village itself is about 1200m away. (See map for physical layout)

Potential Impacts

The potential significant impacts from this site within East Lothian are likely to be noise, dust, vibration, visual intrusion and traffic movements. The sources of these potential impacts being soil stripping, soil and sub-soil storage, overburden mounding, excavation, backfilling, re-instatement and HGV traffic.

Although the HGV route that is being proposed, from the site, is via the A6093 on to the A68, it should be borne in mind that the shorter route to Cockenzie Power Station would be through Ormiston and Tranent.

Planning Process

Under the arrangements that currently exist it would be for Midlothian Council, in the first instance, to determine any planning application associated with this proposal. An Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is required to be submitted along with the planning application.

It is our understanding that, where a community is within 500m of the application site, Scottish Ministers would need to be notified by the Planning Authority if they were of a mind to grant planning permission, thereby giving the Scottish Ministers the opportunity to call in the application for their own determination.

After ensuring that the local community had had the opportunity to be made aware of what was being proposed the Community Council surveyed every household, within the Community Council ward, on their view with respect to this particular planning application. The result, which showed that 60.29% had

responded, was 91% opposed to the proposal and 8.8% in favour of the proposal.

The Community Council have made a submission to Midlothian Council on this proposal; which can also be viewed on this web site.

Nevertheless we still think the best way in having this unwelcome proposal stopped would be through having it called in by Scottish Ministers.

We are also of the opinion that Midlothian Council would not be competent to determine this application for such a proposal.

Our reasoning for this is threefold: -

- 1) Due to the location of the proposed site, the vast majority of the environmental impacts, caused by it, would be within East Lothian. It would therefore be impracticable for the Midlothian Planning Authority to rigorously examine an Environment Impact Assessment when most of the related locations would be in another Planning Authority's area.
- 2) For the same reasoning, if such an application were approved, how would Midlothian Planning Authority be able to police breaches in planning conditions (which would almost certainly occur) within East Lothian?
- 3) As a result of a request from Scottish Coal, Midlothian Council has, rather obligingly, agreed a modification to the Midlothian Local Plan, which would allow Airfield to be considered before the next Local Plan review. This is in spite of the reporter recommending against any additional areas of search, other than textual amendments, in exceptional circumstances. With this in mind one wonders if such a magnanimous local authority would be robust enough to rigorously examine an opencast application in such an area.

Conclusion

There were several objections to the Midlothian Local Plan areas of search amendment, particularly from people in and around Cousland.

I hope this has given you a flavour of what is being proposed and its potential concerns and possible consequences.

Jim Blane
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