



Save Our Sperrins (SOS) have witnessed with growing alarm the failure of the Planning System here in Northern Ireland to treat environmental regulations seriously. We have seen how a Canadian gold exploration / mining company has been granted planning approval for an extensive exploration / extraction project in the Owenkillew River Valley in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and with a toxic discharge point a few metres upstream of a Natura 2000 site, designated because of its fresh water pearl mussels, salmon spawning, trout and otters (Ref K/2013/0072/F Jan 2014). The exploratory mining project was granted planning approval without the benefit of an Environmental Impact Assessment despite community protests. Post Planning Approval, permission for constructing an explosives store on a protected peatland site was written into the approval and 2 planning conditions specifically aimed at protecting the water quality of the Natura 2000 site were removed. The mining company has been granted a self monitoring methodology for checking the levels of pollution being discharged into the SAC. There is effectively no objective monitoring or control. Since 2014 it has become clear that the enforcement authority, the local District Council has neither the resources or the where-with-all to ensure environmental safeguards and depends on the mining company's 'expertise'. Even in 2014 we identified clear evidence that the company was being given unreasonable statutory facilitation with their project to the detriment of the environment, water, air and of people's health. Now, with the 2014 planning approval having expired the company is being facilitated to an unreasonable extent, considering the huge environmental risks, by statutory agencies to prepare their planning application in a manner that will undermine planning regulations yet again. We have written hundreds of letters to the planning authorities lodged objections and all our well considered approaches have failed abjectly.

We had considered going down the Judicial Review avenue and have taken legal advice on this but the costs we have been quoted for doing so (up to £60,000) is prohibitive. We acknowledge the steps taken through Aarhus to limit costs but in a complex case as it would be when taking on this industry means that the cost makes it off-putting. Unfortunately, this is well known to the other side, and I include the Planning Department here as they are quick to point out in their own defence that their decision are beyond challenge where they 'have not been successfully challenged in court'. As we await the submission of a major Planning Application for a full scale mine and cyanide fuelled ore processing plant in Tyrone we are both alarmed and worried at the systemic failure of the planning process to consider environment regulations as valid safeguards of our water air and health rather than as an obstacle to be circumvented. Small indigenous rural communities in the Greencastle / Rouskey / Gortin valleys see that their well being means little to Canadian mining company or indeed to the Belfast or London based planning authorities. With Brexit looming many people here see their situation becoming even more desperate and helpless than before.

Save Our Sperrins (SOS) supports wholeheartedly your efforts to secure environmental justice for the Faughan and we are very pleased to be associated with your approaches to Aarhus. It has been our experience over the last four years of trying to raise serious environmental issues that the authorities here just do not take the environment seriously. Those raising environmental concerns are immediately branded as opponents of job creation and economic development. The attitude of Planning at all levels even regarding gold mining appears to be one of, 'tick all the boxes to make

Dalradian's Curraghinalt project happen in a way that is not open to challenge and stay close to the company so that you have a rebuttal for anyone raising an environmental problem'.

I find that the reasons to have any confidence in the Northern Ireland Planning system is fast disappearing altogether. The case of the Dalradian gold mining project in the Sperrins AONB cries out for redress. We hope you can include it in your submissions for the attention of Aarhus.

Cormac McAleer

Chair

Save Our Sperrins (SOS)