

Report on	Underground valuable minerals mining and exploration, surface level development including processing plant and other associated development and ancillary works, Greencastle, County Tyrone.
Date of Meeting	3 August 2021
Reporting Officer	Dr Boomer
Contact Officer	Dr Boomer

Is this report restricted for confidential business?	Yes	
If 'Yes', confirm below the exempt information category relied upon	No	X

1.0	Purpose of Report
1.1	The purpose of this report is to advise members of the planning application that is currently under consideration by the Department for Infrastructure. The report will also provide advise on the position of MUDC in relation to the issues of concern with the proposed use.
2.0	Background
2.1	In November 2017, Dalradian Gold Limited (DGL) submitted a planning application to the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) to construct an underground gold mine and associated surface water infrastructure at a site located between the towns of Gortin and Greencastle, Co Tyrone. The application was based on the development of an underground mine producing between 1,200-1,500 tonnes of ore per day, a surface crushing facility, processing plant and dry stack storage facility (DSF). The DSF is designed to receive and permanently store dry stack tailings and waste rock after the removal of the valuable metals.
2.2	<p>The application was accompanied by an Environmental Statement (ES). DfI wrote to the applicant on 8 January 2019 seeking Further Environmental Information (FEI). The addendum to the ES was received by DfI on 6 September 2019. Following the submission of the original planning application the applicant reviewed the proposed development and has made some amendments which are outlined as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes in infrastructure linking mine operations to surface operations; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Relocation of primary (first-stage) crushing underground; ○ Introduction of ore-sorting equipment underground; ○ Introduction of a conveyor to be used as the primary method to transport material from the underground mine to surface; ○ Change in the orientation of the portal to accommodate the conveyor system.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Process and product changes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Simplified ore processing resulting in the removal of cyanide from the process and consequent change in product; ○ Transportation of concentrate off site and out of NI; ○ Changes to tailings and paste backfill; • Optimisation of the mine design and changes in the mine waste management; and • Changes to construction management.
2.3	In addition to the design modifications, DGL now assert they are committed to delivering the project as carbon neutral over its lifetime.
2.4	<p>In the addendum of 2019 the agent has listed the key reasons for the amendments to the project design which are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A system of conveyors has been introduced to reduce the number of vehicle movements between the underground workings and the process plant. This extends the conveyor system already proposed to feed the process plant, back towards the portal and down the main decline. This will significantly reduce the project diesel consumption. To accommodate the conveyor, the haul road and the portal design has been modified and its orientation changed. • The extension of the conveyor system will result in the relocation of the primary crusher from surface to the underground mine. DGL has also introduced an underground ore sorting process. • Although cyanide is used safely in gold mines all over the world, DGL recognized that local communities are strongly opposed to the use of cyanide in the mineral processing operation. DGL has investigated means to remove cyanide from the processing operation and still achieve economic viability of the mine. It has now been established as being possible through production of a gold flotation concentrate that will be transported off site for final processing. The removal of the carbon-in-leach circuit, and associated reagent-handling facilities, has resulted in a smaller process plant footprint and removal of several external tanks. The remaining external flotation tanks that were located to the south of the process plant building have been relocated to the north side of this building.
2.5	Upon receipt of the Further Environmental Information, DfI issued consultations to all the relevant consultees though not all consultees have responded to date.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	The proposed development and associated study area is located in Co Tyrone, between Strabane, to the northwest and the proposed

	<p>Curraghinalt project, c. 7.5km east of Gortin. The landscape is predominantly upland, rural in character and utilized for rough pasture grazing. Most fields are lined by stone walls, fences or hedgerows with some broadleaved and coniferous shelterbelt woodland planting with scattered mixed broadleaved woodland along streams and rivers.</p>
3.2	<p>The landscape within the study area is primarily associated with the Sperrin Mountains, which runs generally east to west between Newtown Stewart and Carrntogher. Many of the peaks within the Sperrins are over 500m, which are surrounded by broad rounded ridges. To the south of the Sperrins, more elevated land gives way to the Carrickmore Plateau, which is generally more even in elevation though still used primarily for rough pasture land given its upland nature.</p>
3.3	<p>The north-western portion of the study area is the most urbanised, with the proximity of Strabane. The settlement areas of Ballygamorry, Plumbridge and Rousky are in close proximity to the proposed development. Outside of these settlement areas, scattered residential properties and farmsteads are in close proximity to the local road networks.</p>
3.4	<p>Views in the north-western portion of the study area contain visibility of the operational Owenreagh Windfarm, whilst scattered single wind turbines are also found throughout the study area located on elevated valley sides. Much of the study area associated with the proposed development is traversed by timber poles carrying overhead lines, both adjacent to the local road network and as separate features which cross the upland agricultural landscape.</p>
3.5	<p>From a Mid Ulster District Council landscape viewpoint the site straddles two NIEA identified distinct Regional Landscape Character Areas (RLCA's) in NI, RCLA 7 - Sperrins and RCLA 12 - Carrickmore Plateau and Pomeroy Hills. The site also traverses three NIEA identified Landscape Character Assessment areas (study was carried out in 2000) and these are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> LCA 29 - Sperrin Mountains LCA 28 - Glenelly Valley LCA 24 - South Sperrin
3.6	<p>In addition the proposed development and associated study area are primarily located within the Sperrins AONB. This is considered to have a high sensitivity to change due to its designation. The proposed development is primarily located within the AONB and is considered to give rise to direct landscape impacts during both the construction and operational phases.</p>

3.7	The Ulster Way is protected and maintained by the relevant District Councils through which it passes. It is promoted as a national walking route by the NITB. The Gortin to Moneyneany route lies in close proximity to the proposed development. There are also a number of Way Marked Trails and Cycling Trails within and close to the study area and area of proposed development.
3.8	Materials and equipment will be brought to site by road from Dublin, Belfast and Derry. During construction it is estimated there will be an average of 40 loads per day delivered to the proposed infrastructure site. During periods of heavy concrete pouring, a peak of 50 loads per day is anticipated. During operations the average daily HGV movement is estimated at 13 trips per day to site i.e. 26 two way movements.
3.9	During construction, transport is expected to take place 6 days per week during regular business hours. During operations, transport will be planned for weekdays during regular business hours. However, the deliveries of materials to and from site will be dependent on suppliers and upon which days they operate.
3.10	The planning application has implications for policy in Fermanagh and Omagh Draft Plan Strategy. It is clear that if the planning application is approved it is of such a scale that it would not only be contrary to the policy but it would have implications for its future implementation if adopted and so would be prejudicial to future decisions in the District.
4.0	Other considerations
4.1	Financial, Human Resources and Risk Implications Financial: None Human: None Risk Management: None
4.2	Screening and Impact Assessments Equality & Good Relations Implications: None Rural Needs Implications: None
5.0	Recommendation(s)
5.1	It is recommended that the Planning Committee, based on the information currently available and without the advice of all consultees, to object to the planning application as proposed based on both the long term visual impact and issues of concern relating to volumes of traffic both during the construction stage of the proposal and the operational

	<p>phase of the proposal as these will have a significantly detrimental impact on the amenity of the residents in the area.</p> <p>Members are advised the application is premature to the Fermanagh and Omagh Draft Plan Strategy public examination by reason of its scale that it would prejudice future decision making.</p> <p>Members are advised to reserve the right to raise further issues of concern at the public inquiry or at any time preceding the date of the inquiry should additional or amended information be received.</p>
6.0	Documents Attached and References