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National Park Authority to pursue top-level support over quarry dispute

The Peak District National Park Authority is to take its case for strengthening the law over quarrying in national parks to the highest government level.

The Authority, at its meeting on October 14, agreed to seek the backing of MPs, Defra, national parks minister Jim Knight, the Association of National Park Authorities, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, and at the highest possible level for a review of shortcomings in current legislation.

Frustrated by the six-month postponement of a public inquiry over quarrying at Backdale, on Longstone Edge, the National Park Authority will also stress at the top level the consequences of such a delay on the landscape and environment.

The Authority faces major challenges over quarrying in the Peak District National Park, which with 70 active and inactive sites, has the highest number of quarries of any British national park. The industry contributes to the economy but inevitably has an adverse impact on the environment which national parks were set up to conserve and enhance.

National Park Authority chair Tony Hams said: "We need to be pro-active on this, there is a national case for a re-examination of current legislation for planning control of mineral extraction, especially on issues which the 1995 Environment Act has left unclear. We need to raise these issues at the highest possible level, and that is what we fully intend to do."

The Authority's decision to press for stronger legal powers was among a series of actions it decided to take following the postponement of the Backdale case, but others were not made public on legal advice that it could prejudice the Authority's case.

The public inquiry started in mid-September, but to the deep concern of the Authority, it was immediately adjourned after the planning inspector decided it required more time. A new date could not be set until April 4 2006 due to the unavailability of the barrister representing the Backdale landowner, Bleaklow Industries.

It is the Authority's opinion that limestone is being extracted at Backdale beyond the scope of planning permission granted in 1952. This permission, which still has many years to run, allowed vein minerals to be extracted, with limestone only as a consequence of getting at those minerals.

The Authority issued an enforcement notice in November 2004, and the public inquiry was called to deal with the appeal against that notice by Bleaklow Industries and the quarry operator, MMC Ltd (a subsidiary of Merrimans, of Leicester).

The Authority has fought strong legal battles over quarrying in the past – its stance on the Lees Cross and Endcliffe quarries at Stanton Moor being officially dormant was upheld by the court of appeal in June.

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Notes to editors

- **Under a 1952 planning consent, limestone may only be taken out of the quarry in the course of extracting vein minerals such as fluorspar, barytes or lead. An independent geological expert advised the National Park Authority that considerably more limestone was being extracted than necessary to get at the vein minerals, in breach of the planning consent. MMC Ltd and Bleaklow Industries Ltd contend the work is within the 1952 planning permission.**
- **MMC Ltd began operations at Backdale quarry in July 2003, and the National Park Authority issued the enforcement notice in November 2004 once legal advice had been fully considered.**
- **The quarry is close to popular walking areas near the villages of Hassop and Calver.**