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- over hills,

Gneiss

1 1/2 - spoils.

PRIME MINISTER

For your meeting with Mr. Latham and his colleagues, you may find it helpful to have a note of the current state of play on the Vale of Belvoir Inquiry.

The Development

The National Coal Board's proposal is to mine 510 million tons of coal under 90 square miles of mainly agricultural land in the Vale of Belvoir in Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire and Lincolnshire. The coal would be brought to the surface at three mines all situated in N.E. Leicestershire. Annual production will be about 7 million tons. Development of the mines would take about 12 years and 3,800 men would eventually be employed.

The Public Local Inquiry

Because the proposal raised issues of national and regional importance the Secretary of State for the Environment called in the planning applications for his own decision in January 1979. A wide-ranging public local inquiry into the proposal, lasting 84 working days, was held between 30 October 1979 and 2 May 1980. It was conducted by Mr. Michael Mann, QC, who was assisted by an environmental assessor (the DOE's Chief Planning Inspector) and a mining assessor. The major issues dealt with included the long and short-term need for the coal and the tipping of waste both on site and at remote locations.

Receipt of Inspector's Report and Decision

It is now expected that the Secretary of State for the Environment will receive the Inspector's Report before the end of this month. The decision process is likely to take some time because of the complexity of the issues involved and the consultations within Government (particularly the Department of Energy and the Ministry of Agriculture) which will be required. I understand

/ that the Report

that the Report is expected to be "about the length of War and Peace".

Petition

As you will remember, Mr. Latham came with a group who handed in a petition against the mining proposals signed by 102,000 people. But there has been an approach to you from another group who claim that most of the 102,000 signatures came from summer visitors to Belvoir Castle, and not local residents.

Mr. Heseltine's office have particularly asked that you should avoid making any comment on the merits of the issue - or at least, any comment which might become public. Anything said by a Government Minister at this stage could be regarded as prejudicing the eventual decision, and so invite challenge in the High Court.

MA

12 November 1980