

Prime Minister

VALE OF BELVOIR.

1. Herewith note of your meeting with our three back-benchers yesterday.
2. As Michael is acting in a quasi judicial capacity, we dare not risk the enclosed note getting into the official machine.
3. I could either show this note to Michael but not give him a copy, or send it to him at his home address, as you prefer.

14th November, 1980

Ian Gow.

NOTE OF A MEETING HELD AT THE HOUSE OF COMMONS AT 3.40 P.M. ON
THURSDAY, 13TH NOVEMBER, 1980.

Present:- The Prime Minister.
Mr. Stephen Hastings, MP (Chairman, Countryside
Conservation Sub-Committee of the Agriculture,
Fisheries and Food Committee.)
Mr. Peter Mills, MP (Vice-Chairman.)
Mr. Michael Latham, MP (Secretary.)
Mr. Ian Gow.

1. Mr. Stephen Hastings said that the statistics for land loss varied from Department to Department. He said that we had no reliable records of the extent of land loss, although it might be the case that for every acre of land loss which is recorded, there was another acre unrecorded.

Mr. Hastings said that the main predator of land was the National Coal Board. He added that his Committee was very greatly concerned about the continuing land loss in Britain.

2. (a) Mr. Michael Latham reminded the Prime Minister of the terms of the Petition which he had delivered to 10 Downing Street on 29th October, which read as follows:-

"PETITION TO THE PRIME MINISTER.

We, the Undersigned, deplore the proposals for coal mining the Vale of Belvoir and surrounding areas which would gravely change the environment and lose a great deal of very valuable agricultural land and we call upon the Government to reject any such plans which we believe are neither necessary or desirable."

(b) Mr. Latham referred to the hose mine, which it was estimated would produce $4\frac{1}{2}$ million tons of coal a year, of which $1\frac{1}{2}$ tons would be spoil; and the Saltby Mine (Croxton Kerrial) which it was estimated would produce 2 million tons of coal a year, of which 0.67 tons would be spoil. The first mine would result in a loss of 962 acres of first class agricultural land; and the second would result in the loss of 625 acres of agricultural land.

(c) Beyond the coal and the spoil would come factories, chemical plants, and the present beautiful rural scene would become wholly industrialised.

(d) Mr. Latham said that the political effect of the granting of permission to mine coal would be catastrophic for the Conservative Party. He said that he might be able to hold Melton for ten years, but not for longer than that. Mr. Douglas Hogg believed that he would

lose Grantham if the N.C.B.'s proposals went ahead. This would involve the loss of two of the safest Conservative seats in the East Midlands.

- (e) Mr. Latham said that if the proposals went ahead, his own Association would fall apart. Mr. Douglas Hogg also holds this view.

3. Mr. Peter Mills said that this was a very important Sub-Committee indeed which was dedicated to the preservation of the countryside. Mr. Mills said that if the N.C.B. proposals went ahead, there would be a very big loss of prime agricultural land.