



ACTION stations . . . protesters outside the quarry entrance with MP Phil Woolas

Tip, tip away!

by **KEN BENNETT**

DELIGHTED campaigners opposing a controversial tip which they believe would have blighted a community were celebrating victory today.

Residents living near Birks Quarry, Austerlands, had fought a bitter year-long battle to prevent tipping starting at the site off Huddersfield Road.

Today, the Environment Agency revealed it had been told that the appeal by Royton-based Opengal Limited against the EA's decision to refuse a permit to tip 540,000 tons of mud and rubble at Birks Quarry, had been dismissed.

Keith Ashcroft, the EA's area manager, said: "The EA is pleased with the planning inspectorate's decision."

Delighted

The campaign against the site was headed by the Birks Quarry Action Group, formed by residents and supported by Phil Woolas, MP for Oldham East and Saddleworth and local councillors.

Mr Woolas said: "I am delighted. Not only is this a victory for the hundreds of residents who live near the quarry, it is a victory for commonsense."

"The inquiry heard overwhelming evidence from the EA, backed by statements from Birks Quarry Action Group, Oldham Council's highways department and Greater Manchester Police that the risk of mud on the road was an unacceptable increased hazard to road safety and properties. The

Campaigners win the battle of Birks Quarry

campaign against the tipping has been superbly led by the Birks Quarry Action Group which has worked tirelessly to bring about this excellent result."

He added: "The group was formed after a stormy public meeting held in January last year when Oldham Council and local councillors who chaired the meeting failed to inform the residents that the council had not objected to the licence to tip."

"It was only the following day — the last day for objections — that I was told by the Environment Agency that the council had not objected to the licence."

Objection

"At the very last minute, following a meeting in my Oldham office, an e-mail was dispatched by Geoff Willerton, then Oldham's chief planning officer, lodging an official objection."

Mr Woolas added: "This victory shows what can happen when a determined group of residents run a thoroughly professional campaign to stop what would have been the nightmare of thousands of HGVs tipping over half a million tons of waste in the midst of a highly populated residential area."

A spokesman for Birks Quarry Action group said: "The inspec-

torate's thorough inquiry has produced a most welcome outcome.

"Such an ill-conceived scheme deserves to be rejected."

"We thank the public for the excellent support in opposing the scheme and also Phil Woolas for his help and direction throughout the last year as we prepared our case."

Grateful

"We are also we are grateful for the contribution made by Oldham Council officers."

Councillor Mark Alcock, cabinet member for environment and infrastructure, said: "We are absolutely delighted. Our position on this matter has never flinched."

Councillor Barbara Beeley, Saddleworth West and Lees, added: "The decision endorses the view which Oldham Council, local councillors, the Birks Quarry Action Group, and local residents have maintained ever since the proposal was first made some 20 years ago."

"Birks Quarry is not a safe site for landfill of any kind. I hope now a good alternative use can be found for it, such as a wildlife haven, or a recreational area for local residents."

"I understand that Opengal can seek a judicial review on this ruling, although we have not yet



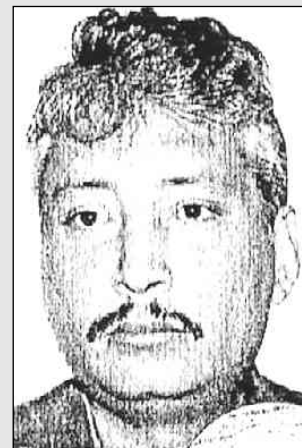
QUARRY could now be a wildlife haven . . . Councillor Barbara Beeley

heard what its future intentions are.

"The Birks site does still have planning permission for landfill operations, so the firm could again decide to re-apply for a permit."

"I would hope, however, that this latest ruling will finally convince the firm that this site is completely unsuitable."

The public inquiry was prompted by Opengal's appeal against a decision by the EA to refuse the permit in April, 2009.



MISSING . . . Jan Chromy

Fears for missing decorator

POLICE are searching for a man who was working in Oldham and has gone missing.

Slovak Jan Chromy was last seen at 5.30pm on Saturday when friends dropped him off near the Gorton Wine Lodge.

He is originally from Slovakia, is hard of hearing and speaks very little English.

The 45-year-old of Mount Road, Gorton, had been working as a painter and decorator in Werneth and may have paint on his clothes.

Det Insp Nicky Porter said: "We have growing concerns for this man as he cannot speak English and will struggle to ask for help."

"He has only been in the country for a month, so is unlikely to know his way around."

People with information should contact police on their dedicated "missing from home" mobile, 077963-13627, or 0161-872 5050.

Bumper year at the pictures

THE number of people going to the cinema rocketed last year to the highest levels since 2002.

Last year saw 173.5 million customers going through the doors of UK cinemas. In 2002 annual UK admissions were at 175.9 million, dipping to 156.6 million in 2006.

The total UK gross box office for 2009 was a record £944 million, up 11 per cent on 2008.

First Lady in waxwork

A WAXWORK of America's First Lady, Michelle Obama, has taken up residence alongside a figure of her husband Barack to celebrate the first anniversary of his inauguration as president.

Mr Obama's figure was unveiled at London's Madame Tussauds one year ago, and Mrs Obama's is joining him for a "limited period".

Visitors can meet the pair in a recreation of the Oval Office.

'Action group has worked tirelessly to bring about this excellent result' MP Phil Woolas