Press release: Coal Authority and Environment Agency release new data tool

Developers can now identify mining and groundwater constraints thanks to a free online tool created by the Coal Authority and Environment Agency.

The innovative pilot scheme uses their expertise and data to give essential guidance to local planning authorities, developers and consultants to help them design sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) in coalfield areas.

SuDS cause minimal or no long-term damage to the surrounding environment and can even provide environmental benefits when created in the right way.

Dr Ian Watson, environment manager at the Coal Authority, said: “SuDS are a sequence of water management practices, designed to efficiently and sustainably drain surface water, to minimise the impact on flooding and local water quality.

“SuDS usually incorporate infiltration to ground within their sequence of management practices and it is these systems that this tool can help design.

“In areas with specific geology, in particular those affected by mining, and a high water table, infiltration-based sustainable drainage systems may not work and could result in groundwater flooding or pollution risks. Additionally, such issues might not occur immediately, but could take many years to manifest themselves as mine water levels rise over time.

“For that reason, it is now necessary to consider the potential future spatial pattern of mine water and groundwater levels and the potential pollution impacts together.”

Sally Gallagher, from the Environment Agency’s Groundwater and Contaminated Land Team, said: “The screening tool provides developers and local authorities with a better understanding of what they will need to consider in new development proposals to reduce the impact of drainage systems now and throughout their design life.

“The Environment Agency has provided technical input to help bring this new tool to life. It’s an exciting and successful project that we have worked closely with the Coal Authority on to provide a clear picture of the risks associated with the Durham and Northumberland coalfield. The support of local authorities in trialling and helping develop the tool over the past year has been invaluable.”

“SuDS provide real benefits to society and to the environment, moving surface water from a problem to a valuable resource. This screening tool will help ensure that where SuDS are used in mined areas their design and long term management could provide measurable benefits and improve our environment by

reducing flooding and pollution of our rivers, lakes and groundwater.”

The new screening tool covers most of North East England, but there are plans to extend its reach if this pilot project is successful.

Use the new screening tool to identify mining and groundwater constraints for development