

Derbyshire County Council shaves a third off its budget for local projects

Cut in Sustainability Fund angers quarriers

By PAUL THOMPSON

QUARRIERS in Derbyshire are livid at plans to cut cash for local projects funded by the aggregates tax.

Derbyshire County Council has decided to use some of its share of the money raised under the Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund to balance its books.

It had been told by the Government that cash for its Safer and Stronger Communities Fund, which the ALSF is part of, had been cut.

In response, the county council decided to cut the

£308,000 it had set aside under the ALSF for its environmental agency, the Derbyshire Environmental Trust.

Now council officials have lopped more than a third off the total budget, telling the DET it has just £202,000 to spend during 2007-08.

But projects competing for the money are valued at more than £750,000, 3.5 times the amount of funding available.

Peter Huxtable, secretary of the British Aggregates Association, said: "I am sympathetic to the Derbyshire Environmental Trust, it has just been told that it will not have the promised

levels of money to carry out projects where demand was already 2.5 times greater than available resources.

"Now the ability to meet this demand has been further reduced and it is a public disgrace."

Mr Huxtable complained that the £29.3 million set aside under the ALSF in England had already been dipped into by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

He said: "It's bad enough that Defra has short changed the Treasury allocation to £23 million to cover departmental over expenditure.

"We now seem to have a further £106,000 cut in Derbyshire alone.

"If this is happening in the east Midlands and Derbyshire there is no reason to think its not happening elsewhere."

The ALSF was initially set up as a two year pilot scheme in 2002 to help areas hit by quarrying and minimise the demand for primary aggregates.

Although the Government has announced it is to up the tax by a £0.35 per tonne next year to £1.95 per tonne, it is yet to decide whether the ALSF will remain.

paul.thompson@emap.com