Platinum was discovered on Zimbabwe’s Great Dyke in the early 20th century, at around the same time that the metal was found in the Bushveld Complex. However, comparatively little development has occurred in Zimbabwe in the platinum mining sector since that date.

Interest in mining this 550 km long, 12 km wide geological structure has, though, increased in recent years. The four major platinum deposits on the Great Dyke (Hartley, Musengezi, Ngezi and Selukwe) are located in a 3-4 m thick mineralised seam which lies at shallow depths, typically of 250 m or less. The reef is platinum-rich but also has high base metal content, leading to high by-product credits and making mining potentially very economically attractive.

The Hartley mine which opened in the mid-1990s was the first serious attempt at platinum mining in Zimbabwe. Although this no longer produces any ore, active mines at Mimosa and Ngezi have since begun operations. A new mine is also under development at Unki. After several years of inactivity, exploration has restarted at a small number of other properties too.

Investment in Zimbabwean platinum mining has been gradual to date, inhibited by an uncertain political climate. The establishment in 2009 of a cross-party inclusive government in Zimbabwe has given grounds for cautious optimism over the operating environment for the mining industry, but the political situation remains somewhat fragile. In April 2010, confusion emerged over whether the new indigenisation law (equivalent to South Africa’s Black Economic Empowerment rules) which required 51 per cent local ownership of large businesses would be enacted or not.

Recent expansions at Mimosa and Ngezi have increased production at both sites. Outline plans have also been developed for Phase 2 expansion at Ngezi – adding 2 million tonnes of ore to output, roughly equivalent to 200,000 oz per annum of pgm – and for Wedza Phase 6 at Mimosa. If these occur, together with production from Unki, this would make Zimbabwe the world’s third largest producer of platinum as it finally starts to fulfil its potential.