

**WARWICKSHIRE MINERALS CORE STRATEGY – ISSUES AND OPTIONS
NOTES OF MINERALS FORUM HELD ON FRIDAY 11TH AUGUST**

Attendance List

**Jim Davies - WCC
Tony Lyons - WCC
Derek Greedy – WCC
Ron Gale - WALC
Brian Shaw – Tarmac
Becky Bailey – Cardiff University
Ken Hobden – QPA
Magnus Alexander – WCC
Peter Toon – Hanson
Tim Claxton – Aggregate Industries
Gary Steddon – Lafarge Aggregates
Spencer Warren – Heaton Planning Ltd
Andrew Ambrose – ALP Ambrose Minerals Consultancy
Simon Cook – The Coal Authority
Patricia Wyatt – WALC Rep
Martin Bradley – WGCG**

Jim Davies (WCC Planning) gave a brief summary of where we are in the Minerals LDF process. The Issues and Options paper had been put out for Consultation on the 28th July. We had identified 19 key issues which have formed the basis of the consultation. The timetable set out in the Development Scheme is very tight and it is critical that we meet the next stage of the process in October which is the Preferred Options stage and then the Allocations Development Plan Document (DPD) stage in December 2007.

Magnus Alexander (WCC Museum Field Services - Archaeology) gave a presentation on the relationship between archaeology and the planning process with particular emphasis on minerals planning.

Magnus explained that archaeological finds can be artefacts, sites, and landscapes and once lost are lost forever. In terms of the planning process the onus is on the developer to fund archaeological provision which when archaeology is identified as an issue, could be a number of different activities ranging from desk based assessments to watching briefs or excavations. These can be required at any stage of the planning process. Information is kept on databases and GIS systems. Warwickshire has a HER system (Historic Environment Records) which also covers Solihull. Many of the existing archaeological sites lie in areas where aggregates are found. Magnus explained the difference between archaeology in aggregates which are from the Lower and Middle Palaeolithic period (to 40000 years b.p) whereas archaeology on aggregates is everything else. Where archaeological remains are found in aggregates, these can be at any depth and minerals excavation is one of the best ways to discover such deposits. It helps if quarry workers are interested in the work and can help to spot features of interest. Magnus gave examples of where this was successful at Waverley Wood Farm.

Where archaeology lies on aggregates it can be exposed via extraction although extraction can also destroy features. Ling Hall is the best preserved prehistoric landscape in the region and a comprehensive study has been able to take place over a period of 15 years. This shows how sites can be revealed through extraction and how important the minerals industry is for archaeology. A pattern has emerged of Anglo Saxon sites along the Avon on gravel beds.

In summary the minerals industry provides opportunities for archaeology especially to discover Palaeolithic material and to study large scale open areas. The planning system is seen as reactive and may sometimes hinder the process as it can lead to tight timetables and impose commercial pressures on extractors to minimise costs. A longer term view is required where possible to assimilate as much information at an early stage to ensure there are few surprises; in addition there may be a chance to involve the local community in fieldwork and improve relations between the community and operators.

A Breakout session was then held and two groups discussed the Issues and Options paper and specifically the questions in the questionnaire.

Vision – we should seek to achieve nothing less than was there before and more emphasis on local rather than national need was mentioned.

Objectives – rail links should be encouraged eg Southam. At present road haulage is more flexible and more economically viable. The Government must take the lead on this issue.

Economic Growth is a national aim not necessarily supported by local people when it involves quarry development in their backyard.

Issues

Issue 1 (Criteria for assessing sites) – Option A was considered to be good for the operators as it allowed greater certainty. Option B could provide flexibility but the wording was considered woolly and gave emphasis to consultation responses. The way this could work would be for the industry to submit their sites to the County Council who would have to assess their relative merits.

Issue 2 (Sand and Gravel Extraction) – Option A provides certainty and advanced warning which benefits both operators and the community alike. Option B allows all the benefits of Option A and additional information re: Areas of Search and the future potential of the area to provide minerals. A Hierarchy of Sites was one of the main points to come out of the discussion with specific sites at the top of the list, preferred areas next down and finally safeguarded areas.

Issue 3 (Location options of Existing Sand and Gravel extraction in Warwickshire) – There was concern about Option A that communities close to existing minerals operations would suffer loss of amenity for a long time and that a policy along these lines would benefit only existing operators while preventing the entry of new industry. However Option A would be more sustainable than

the other options. Operators felt Option B would entail the County Council doing their job for them. A mixture of Options A and B was generally supported.

The discussion also raised the issue of “phasing” allocated and permitted sites as outlined in Draft MPS1 (Annex on Aggregates), which Nottinghamshire already implements. Another general point stemming from this discussion was that in the allocation of any sites Officers would require quality information on which recommendations and comparisons could be made.

Issue 4 (Crushed Rock Production)

Option A provides certainty for the community. Option B proposes Safeguarding of sites from other development such as housing or employment uses, but in practice this is not always possible as it may not be possible to extract all the mineral prior to development starting.

One forum member raised the idea of having a general policy relating to mineral sterilisation which would seek to protect all potential mineral resources from other forms of development. This would at least provide a mechanism for evaluation and where possible extraction, of mineral deposits before the development.

There was general support for Option A.

Key Issue 5 (Secondary and Recycled Aggregates)

A flexible approach should be taken for the siting of new aggregate recycling facilities which recognises the dynamic nature of the source of material. Where such facilities were permitted ancillary to quarrying operations the recycling activities should be time limited by condition to the life of extraction and possibly restoration.

Issue 15 (Buffer Zones)

In the current Minerals Plan there is a set distance of 200m which is normally required between quarry development and adjoining residential uses. However in many situations the distance could be much less where there would be no loss of amenity to the community. This is a site specific issue and depends on other factors such as the existing topography of the area, the type of mineral quarried and the type of equipment that would be used. In some cases a maximum figure of for instance 200m might be appropriate but it would need to be demonstrated either by the operator or the County Council that there would be no adverse effect. It was requested that the words “close proximity” be defined in terms of a distance.

There was a well supported point that stand off areas from mineral development should be calculated on a site by site basis and the responsibility of proving that there would be no adverse impacts on local settlements and sensitive properties caused by the proximity of mineral developments. This creates flexibility for applications and takes into account local site specific factors and avoid unnecessary sterilisation of mineral reserves.

The final preferred option may be a mixture of all these options.

Issue 16 (Restoration and After Use)

Option A was considered somewhat irrelevant as agriculture is in decline. Option B was considered more sensible as an option but there was concern that there is not always funding for future maintenance. In addition, the County Council should include Landscape Character Assessment in the option as a guide to the final restoration strategy. Option B also allows the County Council greater variety of end uses based on informed technical studies.

GENERAL COMMENTS

The point was raised that Sterilisation of mineral reserves could occur as a result of mine/groundwater rebound in areas where deep mining operations have recently ceased. It was accepted that this may not apply to most of Warwickshire but the Council should be aware that such events have happened.

SUMMARY

There was insufficient time to cover every issue. However, it was felt that we covered the most important issues and that many of the individual mineral issues would have had similar responses. The conclusion to be drawn so far is that both the industry and local communities in the vicinity of mineral sites, prefer the certainty of knowing which sites will be allocated at an early stage. This allows the operators to plan ahead, allows specialists such as archaeologists/ geologists to work with operators to undertake surveys and the general public will know when workings are likely to start.

