

Landscape Report		2nd November 2017
From: HCC Landscape Officer, Natural Historic and Built Environment Advisory Team		To: HCC Planning Officer, Spatial Planning
Application No.	3/2352-17	
Location:	Land at Ware Park, Wadesmill Road, Hertfordshire	
Proposal:	Application for the phased extraction of 1.25 million tonnes of sand and gravel, mobile dry screening plant, weighbridge, wheel cleaning facilities, ancillary site offices, construction of a new access onto Wadesmill Road with phased restoration to landscaped farmland at a lower level	

1 Landscape Policy & Guidance

1.1 Hertfordshire Minerals Local Plan Review 2002 – 2016, Adopted March 2007

Minerals Policy 3 – Preferred Areas

The proposed extraction phases 1, 2 and 3 are located within ‘Preferred Area 2.’ This policy states that there should be specific consideration for the following:

- The site as an extension to the existing Rickneys Quarry
- Buffer zones to properties
- Advanced planting
- Phased working
- Protection of ancient woodland
- Archaeological interest
- Provision of safe public rights of way network
- Ground water protection zone
- Sufficient balance of materials for restoration

Minerals Policy 12 – Landscape

All mineral extraction and related Planning applications may be refused where there is significant local landscape intrusion and loss of important landscapes or distinctive landscape features.

Development proposals will be expected to:

- i. respect landscape character both during operations and in proposals for reclamation;
- ii. ensure that any distinctive landscape features are protected from the impact of development;

- iii. be accompanied by landscape conservation, design and management measures that both strengthen the character and enhance the condition of the landscape.

The County Council will have regard to the visual impact of proposals (including any proposed mitigation measures to minimise visual or other intrusion) on sensitive land uses, including areas of public access.

Particular regard will be had for the Hertfordshire Landscape Strategy in assessing proposals.

2 Background

2.1 Previous application

A previous application (reference: 3/0770-16) for a minerals development at this site was refused and is currently subject to an Appeal.

The reasons for refusal that relate to landscape and visual matters include:

- The location of the proposed working phase 4, plant and stockpile area outside the 'preferred area' for mineral working
- The significant negative landscape and visual impact of the proposed working phase 4 (at operation and restoration), and the site access, plant and stockpiling area (including the loss of hedgerow associated with the site access)
- The impact of the screening bunds, plant and stockpile area that would not preserve openness and is therefore inappropriate development within the Green Belt

(Other reasons for refusal relate to the existing rights of way, noise and air quality.)

2.2 Current application

The previous application has now been revised and re-submitted to include the following key amendments:

- Removal of working phase 4, plant and stockpile area
- Relocation of haul road (to remain outside the preferred area)
- Reduction of material for extraction from 1.75 million tonnes to 1.25 million tonnes
- Reduction in duration of development from 7.5/10 years to 5/8 years

- Introduction of load out area into a pre-extracted area within Phase 2, to include mobile dry screening plant, weighbridge, wheel cleaning facilities, ancillary site offices
- Alteration of final restoration landform to include reduction of northern and western boundary slope from 1 in 7/8 to 1 in 4/5.
- Relocation of attenuation pond
- Creation of additional new hedgerow in phase 3

3 Landscape and Visual Effects

3.1 Operational stage

3.1.1 Scale and duration

The proposed reductions in the site area, the quantity of material for extraction, and overall duration of the development are supported in principle and should serve to further mitigate the negative landscape and visual effects of the proposed development.

3.1.2 Working phases 1 – 3

The principle of minerals extraction is established within working phases 1-3 due to their location within the 'preferred area' for mineral working. Within these areas, the negative landscape and visual impact of the extraction activity is mitigated due to the containment of works within the elevated and/or flatter part of the plateau landform, and the screening effect of the local topography and established vegetation in combination with the temporary screening bunds.

3.1.3 Mitigation measures

With regards to mitigation measures the submitted Planning Statement (paragraph 4.11.1) states that it is proposed to implement a '*10m undisturbed margin along the northern and western boundary with woodland.*' It is also noted that from the progressive operations plan (1217/PO/2) that it is proposed to retain 3 field trees within working Phase 1.

The intention to protect the existing trees and woodland is fully supported. However, tree protection measures and method statements are required in line with BS5837:2012 Trees in relation to design, demolition and construction – recommendations.

3.1.4 Site access and haul road

It is proposed to upgrade an existing agricultural access and unsurfaced field track to accommodate the required HGV movements for minerals extraction. The proposals

include the introduction of new concrete surfacing and carriage widening in places to create passing bays, and the creation of a wider bell mouth with associated turning circles and visibility splays.

There is strong concern for the negative landscape and visual effects as a result of the proposed access and the section of haul road where it is located outside the designated preferred area for minerals working. The large scale and hard engineered appearance of the new access and haul road detracts from the rural character of the sensitive sloping valley sides that are more open to views from users of Wadesmill Road and from the wider valley landscape to the east.

There is strong concern for the potential removal of a significant length of roadside vegetation to accommodate a wider bell mouth with associated turning circles and visibility splays. A tree survey, tree protection plan and method statement are all required in line with BS5837:2012 Trees in relation to design, demolition and construction – recommendations.

On completion of the minerals extraction the submitted Planning Statement (paragraph 4.10.7) states that *'The concrete access will be retained for future agricultural use together with approximately 30 m of the concrete road. If required the 'bell mouth' can be reduced in width by placing kerbs and covering the concrete with soil.'*

This approach is not supported and does not provide sufficient mitigation to address the large scale and hard engineered appearance of the access and haul road. Further mitigation is required, in the first instance the opportunity to *avoid* the creation of a new haul route should be explored and consider options to utilise the existing Rickneys Quarry access to the north. In the event that this is not deemed feasible then a temporary solution should be employed and include the restoration of the field access, track and roadside vegetation.

3.2 Restoration stage

3.2.1 Restoration landform (Phases 1-3)

The proposal to create a broadly sloping landform profile, and a distinct undulation in the area broadly consistent with working Phase 2, is supported in principle.

However there is strong concern for how the proposed restoration contours 'tie in' with the existing contours and levels along the length of the byway. From the submitted information the contours appear to indicate a sharp change in levels that is not considered appropriate along this sensitive edge. The transition between the proposed restoration landform and the sloping valley side is critical and should blend seamlessly.

There is concern for the proposed restoration landform in the northern half of the working Phase 3 and the creation of a distinct hump and hollow that is not characteristic of the plateau landform.

Along the north and west site boundaries with Sacombe Road, Rickneys Quarry and St Johns Wood, it is proposed to reduce the bank from 1: 7/8 to 1 in 4/5 to accommodate the change in levels. Whilst not characteristic of the local landscape, the bank is further mitigated by the proposed woodland planting.

3.2.2 Restoration planting and attenuation pond

The proposed new woodland and hedgerow planting is fully supported.

However there is concern for the approach to the new hedgerow and tree planting along the southern section of the byway that is not continuous but switches from one side of the footpath to the other.

The location and appearance of the proposed attenuation pond is queried. It is proposed to locate the attenuation pond within the previously dry undulation across the sloping valley side. Further information is required to show how it sits in relation to the existing and proposed contours and levels, and the byway. It should be clearly understood that the pond is not a permeant wet feature and will predominantly appear as a dry depression within the landscape. The proposed wildflower meadow is supported in principle however there needs to be certainty that it will be managed appropriately in the long term.

3.2.3 Site access and haul road

The retention of the upgraded site access and haul road on a permanent basis is not supported, in the event that the existing Rickneys Quarry access cannot be used, then a temporary solution should be employed and include the restoration of the field access, track and roadside vegetation.

4 Conclusion

The principle of minerals extraction is established within working phases 1-3 due to their location within the 'preferred area' for mineral working. However there is concern for the permanent negative landscape and visual effects as a result of the proposed access and haul route that lies outside the preferred area and requires further mitigation.

The restoration strategy is supported in principle, however further detail is required with regards to the following aspects:

- Arboricultural Report to include tree survey, tree protection plan and method statement, in line with industry good practice guidance 'BS5837:2012 Trees in relation to design, demolition and construction – recommendations,' is required as a minimum standard for this type of development and should address all trees and vegetation affected by the development including the site access and haul road.
- Contour plans (1m intervals) and site cross sections to show the proposed restoration landform within each working phase in context with the wider

contours to the east as far as Wadesmill Road. Cross sections should include the hump and hollow, the attenuation pond and the byway.

- Detailed cross sections to show the treatment of existing and proposed levels where the proposed restored landform meets the byway.
- Further information regarding the approach to the hedgerow planting along the byway, and the treatment of the attenuation pond