



Stop Bengo Quarry

Response to submission of further information in respect of

**Planning Application for Extracting Sand and Gravel
from Land at Ware Park**

(known as Bengo Field), Hertford

Ref 3/2352-17



**Submitted by Stop Bengo Quarry
April 2018**

Introduction

This document constitutes the response of the Stop Bengo Quarry (SBQ) group representing over 3000 residents (and with well over 3000 active followers on Facebook) to the letter of consultation from Brian Owen dated 8th March. This said that 'The extra information requested by the Planning Inspectorate (and submitted with the planning application) is as follows:

- A ground and soil survey to assess the risk of soil contamination within the site area and adjacent and
- A cumulative impact assessment to take account of the anticipated impacts from the HERT4 development and Rickneys Quarry together with the proposed development and
- A revised Non-Technical Summary (NTS) incorporating elements referred to above.'

Our comments on this and other recent developments in respect of this planning application are as follows.

General

The SBQ group maintains its fundamental objection to the opening of a gravel quarry in Bengo Field.

We found the documents provided by the developer difficult to follow as the appendices referred to in the Non-Technical Summary were not presented coherently and needed to be sourced on a CD which was not widely available to the public. The naming of appendices in the Non-Technical Summary differed from those of the matching documents on the disk. Although a CD was available by application to Douglas Symes, it was not until near the end of the consultation that some of the material appeared on the HCC website.

Ground and soil survey

In our opinion the submitted desk-based study does not sufficiently cover the risk of soil contamination from external sources. This is because Bengo Field is a sensitive water catchment zone and therefore a full survey of the surface chalk is required in order to protect Hertford's water supply. A precautionary approach would also seek further survey work and protective measures across the area most at risk of contamination due to possible fuel spills etc. from trucks moving across the site. The section below outlines our approach to groundwater issues.

Hafren Water Report

Stop Bengo Quarry's Expert Hydrologist and Geologist Rick Brassington has made the following comments with regards to the Hafren Water Report:

“The Chalk carries its water through fractures that have been enlarged by being dissolved in the percolating groundwaters over the last 10,000 years or so and in some cases these fracture systems have been enlarged to the extent that water will flow to the well in a matter of hours rather than any longer time. Recent hydrogeological studies on the Hertfordshire Chalk show that these enhanced fractures (or karstic features) are more widespread than was previously thought. On that basis there is a high chance that some exist in the area and help provide the yield to the Wadesmill Road source.

Most of the proposed site lies in an SPZ1 for the Wadesmill Road boreholes that in theory means that the water will get there in 50 days or less. The model code does not take account of the existence or size and location of such enhanced fractures and so is only a generally guide which is what was intended in the first place.

The work carried out by Hafren Water and reported in January 2018 does not help them disprove the SBQ case at all”.

Noise

The applicant has indicated that they estimate noise levels will be very close to the acceptable limit. However, no noise assessment has been supplied to validate this claim. We feel this is a major omission. So far as we can see there has been no further work to meet the previous objections on the grounds of noise. HCC’s Independent acoustic consultant concluded that for “The Orchard” and “Sacombe Road” **...it is deemed that an unacceptable noise situation is likely to occur for residents**. We fully concur with this conclusion and note that on noise grounds alone the developer has failed to meet previous grounds for refusal. Therefore, the revised application should be rejected.

Cumulative impact assessment

The revised application fails to address our previous comments on landscape.

The Cumulative Impact Assessment document “1517 LV Cumulative Impact Assessment 18 01 15.pdf” is wholly inadequate and in places muddled and confusing. From the beginning of section 3 the assessment discusses Rickneys Quarry and quotes a long section of the 2016 Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) section 3.1.2. to cover the possibility of both schemes operating at the same time. Rickneys is mentioned again in section in section 3.1.4.

In mentioning Rickneys the author appears to be trying to couple together the restoration strategy for Rickneys with that of the new quarry. It is not at all clear how there is any connection between the two schemes.

Rickneys is separated from Bengo Field by St. John’s Wood and to the west by a wooded border. Furthermore, Rickneys quarry is a significant local eyesore even 20 years after quarrying. Local residents have raised many complaints about the ongoing

state of Rickneys. Despite repeated efforts by local people Hanson Aggregates have only just begun to remedy the situation.

Ongoing problems created by Rickneys seem to be a powerful argument against further quarrying in Bengo.

In trying to deal with the possibility of concurrent extraction of both Bengo Field and Rickneys in section 3.1.7. the developer raises far more questions than are answered. While it is noted that this would lead to extra lorry movements, the document makes no attempt to examine the effects of these additional movements on traffic flow or road safety. The viability of two site entrances so close together is also not examined. The cumulative visual effects are touched on but not actually examined.

We feel that the possibility of any concurrent working would in fact be a reason not to quarry Bengo Field.

In section 3.2.2 it says:

“In the long term, the views across the HERT4 allocation towards the Site from the restricted byway that passes from the edge of Hertford heading north through the centre of HERT4 and the eastern boundary of the Site, would be significantly altered as a result of the new residential development, which would limit views of the mineral workings from the existing settlement.”

This appears to be saying that the damage to the landscape caused by the quarry would not be visible due to the new housing development and further that the housing development is likely to damage the field even more than the quarry. We find this a very worrying approach that seems to totally ignore the reality of Bengo Field and how it is used and viewed by local residents. It seems to be typical of the entire approach of this developer, who has made no attempt to engage with the local community.

Stop Bengo Quarry has been keen throughout our campaign to separate the housing development from the quarry as we view them as entirely different. For one thing some local residences are actually closer to the quarry than most of the proposed development at HERT4. By trying to couple the two together the developer has tried to put forward the claim that the housing cannot go ahead if the land is not quarried first. Stop Bengo Quarry remains totally unconvinced by this argument particularly because Bengo Field is excluded from the new Mineral Local Plan so the presence or not of minerals should not affect the potential of land proposed for housing.

One very key point on the discussion of Bengo Field is that the most common view seen by residents is not the view from the roads but the view from the central pathway running through the field. Very little is said by the developer to address or calculate the adverse effect of the quarry on the views from the path. The HCC Rights of Way Officer is very astute to pick up the total inadequacy of provision for users of the path when he says *“The new application requires all lorries to cross the restricted byway, some 80 movements a day, with inevitable damage to its surface and increased risk of conflict between them and users.”*

We are pleased to note the new objections raised by HCC's Landscape Officer on the grounds of the access road and the removal of trees. We fully concur with both points

and also note her worry about the planned restoration. However, our work on surveying the use of Bengo Field and the results of our recent amenity survey reveal both considerable anxiety about the future shape of the field and also damage to the landscape – openness and also to the sustainable transport route between Bengo and Chapmore End. The latest cumulative impact assessment does absolutely nothing to ameliorate these concerns.

In Appendix A it says that “(extraction) would not only result in a change in the landscape... but restoration could lead to a differing profile with lower related land levels. This would allow significant appropriate screening of any development”.

Here the developer appears to be suggesting that the damage caused to the landscape by quarrying would help in the concealment of the housing.

The cumulative study does not properly address the significant threat of **water pollution**. The developer has also not taken account of **the negative impacts on the landscape or green belt** by HERT4.

We at Stop Bengo Quarry continue to believe that the landscape would be permanently damaged by the scheme, the development would also severely affect the ability of residents to use and enjoy the local countryside on health walks and other activities (including biking, dog walking, horse riding etc.).

Amenity Use and Survey Results

Our e-petition "Protect our public rights of way and views from quarrying on Bengo Field (Land at Ware Park)" has reached 635 signatures. This is not an insignificant achievement and shows the value placed on the field as an amenity by local people.

We also have completed our own amenity survey which took place between January and April 2018. We had 228 respondents and many detailed comments about use of the field and how highly it is valued by the local community.

Of the respondents 36% said they use the field more in the last 12 months. This is in line with our experience which is that the use of Bengo Field has been increasing. This may in part be the result of our campaign but we believe that it reflects a growing interest in a range of outdoor pursuits which the field is particularly favourable for – such as running and biking.

To back this up we surveyed use of the field on 3rd December 2017, a cold and wet day unsuitable for outdoor activities. Despite this during the time we monitored it 55 people used the field

8 joggers
11 walkers
29 dog walkers
5 cyclists
2 motor bikers

87% of our amenity survey sample said that quarrying the field would damage the views currently enjoyed, while 93% felt it would leave them exposed to unwanted dust, while 72% said it would stop them using Bengo Field. Given the County Council's

commitment to sustainable transport we feel that the negative effect on activities in the field (which could take a generation to reverse) should be a significant reason why this quarry should be rejected.

Revised Non-Technical Summary

The section on the cumulative impacts on the landscape acknowledge that there are likely to be some adverse impacts. But in the absence of Appendix 3 we cannot assess these and in the absence of a clear explanation we do not see how these would be rendered acceptable.

The section on the cumulative impacts on traffic acknowledges that there could be an extra 10% of traffic on the roads to the site. It says that this is 'not unacceptable' as it is at (not below) the threshold for the need for an Environmental Impact Assessment. It does not say that it is acceptable in congestion and road safety terms.

Summary

In our opinion the developer provided the new information in a very piecemeal manner and references proved difficult to follow. This also made it difficult to disseminate the information and ensure that all the correct documents were available to the public.

The second response of the highway authority was written in November 2017, 3 months before this material was published. We believe that HCC Highways' views should be sought again.

The Cumulative Impact Assessment "1517 LV Cumulative Impact Assessment 18 01 15" is flawed and only examines the visual impact of a quarry together with houses in a very perfunctory manner. Many of the points put forward appear to argue against having a quarry rather than in favour of having one.

We do not believe that the Hafren Water report sufficiently covers the actual risk to groundwater.

We therefore urge Hertfordshire County Council to reject this application.