



POLICY STATEMENT

STONE QUARRYING AND EXTRACTION OF OTHER MINERALS

Background

Gloucestershire is regionally important as a source of crushed rock and sand and gravel. It is a source of dimension stone and roofing flags, both limestone and sandstone, which are evident in the many stone buildings, especially in the Cotswolds. Brick clay is locally worked. Coal was a major product from the Forest of Dean, but production has almost ceased and the only likely future extraction, if allowed, would be by opencasting.

Work is in hand by the minerals planning authority (MPA) on a replacement for the former Minerals Local Plan (MLP). A Minerals Core Strategy is in preparation which will be a key component of the County's Minerals and Waste Development Framework (MWDF). Most policies from the MLP have been "saved" pending adoption of the new document. Formal sub-regional apportionment of primary aggregate production no longer applies since the disbandment of the regional planning body and proposed scrapping of the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS).

Environmental issues

Almost all of the rock suitable for crushing to aggregate or for use as building stone lies within or adjacent to land designated as AONB – the Jurassic limestone of the Cotswolds and the Carboniferous limestone and various sandstones of the Forest of Dean and Wye Valley.

These landscape issues were recognised and led to the Minerals Local Plan being adopted with a potential "shortfall" of 7 million tonnes of crushed rock due to environmental constraints. They also led directly to the adoption of a crushed rock "landbank" requirement of 7 years as against the 10 – 15 years adopted in most MLPs.

Sand and gravel production is concentrated in the Upper Thames valley where there are special settlement protection policies in the Cotswold Water Park and the county's only current Mineral Consultation Area (MCA) - within which district planning authorities should consult the County Council on proposed development which could "sterilise" mineral deposits (ie. could make it impractical ever to extract the mineral). Sand and gravel also occurs in the lower Severn valley and in other drift deposits.

Apart from the major landscape issue, other environmental constraints which are locally significant to mineral working include effects on hydrology, archaeology, biodiversity and loss of high quality agricultural land. Generation of HGV traffic on

unsuitable country roads can severely affect tranquillity as well as pose new safety hazards.

Issues for the future

The South West Region faces the prospect of major growth in population and built development over the next 20 years, which is likely to affect the demand for aggregates. There is wide acceptance, in principle, of planning for the “best environmental options” to meet the region’s mineral needs, but not yet a mechanism for so doing. For example, Gloucestershire has a current “sub regional apportionment” for aggregate production up to 2016 which is c.8 million tonnes above identified resources, whereas South Gloucestershire and Somerset have actual landbanks which are larger than their apportionments.

We cannot say simply that adjacent authorities should “bail out Gloucestershire”, but there is a case to press that mechanisms should be explored to seek the best environmental options to meet the region’s real needs, including maximising efficient use of secondary and recycled aggregates.

Policies in respect of mineral working in Gloucestershire

1. CPRE will oppose new quarries and extensions to existing aggregate quarries where we believe that would adversely affect existing AONBs in the county or the prospective designation in the Forest of Dean (this accords with Government guidance that quarrying in National Parks and AONBs should be the exception).
2. CPRE will seek to ensure that good practice is adhered to in the Cotswold Water Park and that settlements and environmental assets continue to be fully protected during the phased extraction of sand and gravel.
3. CPRE recognises the importance of local sources of building, roofing and walling stone in maintaining the distinctive character and quality of the county’s built environment and landscape. Working of these resources will be supported where the scale is consistent with local need and there are not substantial adverse environmental consequences. We shall seek to ensure that where there are such proposals any production of aggregate is genuinely secondary and necessary for operational purposes.
4. CPRE will oppose opencast coal working in the Forest of Dean which it considers to merit designation as an AONB (proposals for opencasting coal in the Forest are unlikely in the foreseeable future, but c.12 million tonnes have been estimated to be potentially recoverable).
5. In respect of all mineral working proposals CPRE will seek to ensure that the potential effects on landscape, rural settlements, hydrology, archaeology, biodiversity and best and most versatile agricultural land are fully evaluated before planning consent is given. Transport consequences, for tranquillity as well for road safety, will be examined thoroughly. Where appropriate we shall seek to work with other relevant organisations to oppose environmentally damaging proposals.

6. Where we do not oppose mineral extraction, or cannot prevent it, we shall press for detailed and credible restoration proposals which maximise environmental benefit. Where technically feasible we shall seek progressive restoration as work proceeds. We shall seek to ensure after-use which maintains or enhances the environmental quality of the site, including the opportunity for good habitat creation. Where the land prior to working is of “best and most versatile” agricultural quality we would expect restoration to that quality wherever practicable.

Implementation of policies

CPRE Gloucestershire will make representations as necessary to the new LDF based minerals plan. We may seek to influence CPRE National Office responses to minerals related issues, including pressing for greater incentives to encourage more use of secondary and recycled aggregates. The Minerals Officer will lead on this work, consulting Districts to ensure all views are taken into account, normally via our Policy Sub-committee.

CPRE Districts will take the lead in respect of mineral extraction within their bounds, in respect of new planning applications and of monitoring/ enforcement issues. The Minerals Officer will be kept informed as appropriate.

Revised August 2011

CPRE Gloucestershire Policy Statements are regularly reviewed and updated as necessary. They should be read as a set