

BY EMAIL 25 February 2016

For the attention of Jason Betty
Minerals Development Control Section
Gloucestershire County Council

Dear Mr Betty

REPRESENTATIONS ON APPLICATION 15/0108/FDMAJM – EXTENSION OF STOWE HILL QUARRY AND ASSOCIATED OPERATIONS

CPRE objects to the application and makes the following representations in support of its objection:-

Relevance to the previous application

CPRE objected to the previous application which was submitted under reference 14/0119/FDMAJM in 2014. That application was withdrawn and replaced by this current one, supported by a new Environmental Statement (ES).

There are significant differences between the 2 applications. The proposal to make a phased transfer of the main processing plant from Clearwell Quarry and to re-arrange the access routes should reduce the potential adverse effects on some residential properties close to the site. Conversely the proposal to raise the annual output from 600,000 to 800,000 tonnes would exacerbate the potential traffic problems.

Adverse effects on landscape and public enjoyment of it and potential loss of agricultural land quality apply to the current application as they did to the previous one. Concern over the potential effect on hydro-geology also remains relevant.

Landscape and its enjoyment

Chapter 12 of the ES goes into great analytical detail about the consequences of the proposals for landscape and its public enjoyment. However, it is based on the ultimate conclusion that adverse effects on landscape and its enjoyment, mitigated as proposed, are not a justification for refusing the application. In view of the 'need' factor (which is addressed below), CPRE disputes this opinion and believes that the proposed scale of quarry extension would have major adverse consequences for landscape and its appreciation.

It is not practical to screen quarry operations in the northern and eastern parts of the proposed extension area from northerly viewpoints. The view from the B4228 in the vicinity

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of the Orepool Inn is of an attractive rural landscape with the land falling broadly north-eastwards. That view would be severely marred by quarrying operations and could not be effectively mitigated by perimeter bunds, which themselves would adversely affect the landscape. The specific location of Representative Viewpoint 7 has a lot of foreground and does not represent the most potentially damaging view from the B4228 southbound.

The loss of views of attractive landscape would also apply to users of the public footpaths which currently traverse the site, the use of which would be subject to major diversions for operational reasons. This would be a substantial loss of public amenity, which should not be dismissed on the questionable grounds of limited current usage.

However much thought is put into the restoration profile, it is acknowledged that it would be quite different from the existing landform with Longley farmstead sited prominently on the shallow ridge. Although the associated modern farm buildings are of no special architectural merit, Longley farmhouse is a visually attractive building which is a historic part of the landscape and would be permanently destroyed.

'Best and most versatile' (BMV) agricultural land – paragraph 112 of the NPPF refers

Chapter 4 of the ES deals with agricultural land quality. The consultants' ALC survey indicates that the site contains 18.9ha of grade 2 and 16.2ha of grade 3a land. CPRE has no reason to doubt the survey results, but we question some of the consultants' comments.

Paragraph 4.3.7 states *'Consequently, the magnitude of losses smaller than this threshold [20 ha of grades 1, 2 or 3a] is considered to have a small effect on the national stock of best and most versatile land'*. That is irrational - losses are cumulative. The '20 hectare threshold' is an administrative one, presumably related to Government's prioritisation of finite staff resources.

Chapter 4 contains sound, detailed proposals for soil handling, storage and restoration. However, CPRE disputes the assertion in para 4.6.5 that *'Restoration....will ensure agricultural land is restored to the same ALC grade or higher'*. In our experience there is a substantial gap between theoretical expectations and what is actually achievable in practice.

In restoration of sand and gravel workings, which are usually much shallower and of shorter duration, maintaining high land quality requires ideal soil moving and storage conditions and considerable skill – it is far from a certainty. For a crushed rock quarry, relying on imported inert fill to achieve final landform, successfully restoring land to its original quality cannot be ensured, even with phased restoration. In our experience it is highly probable that the proposed quarrying operations would result in loss of BMV agricultural land quality.

Transport issues

There is a current planning consent to export up to 600,000 tonnes of aggregate per annum from Stowe Hill/Clearwell Quarry. It is now proposed to raise the output limit to 800,000 tonnes. The existing road network is far from ideal for HGVs and the scale of the current proposals would mean intensified use of that infrastructure for another 20 + years.

Aggregate lorries going south have to negotiate either the congested junction of the B4231 with the former A48 road in Lydney or very narrow sections on the B4228. Sections of the B4228 from St Briavels to Hewelsfield X roads are notably hazardous, in particular for pedestrians and cyclists, because of narrowness and the lack of verges. CPRE is not persuaded by the detailed appraisal in Chapter 9 of the ES that the *'capacity of the local road network should not be considered a constraint to the proposed development'* (para 9.7.18).

Socio-economic issues

Chapter 6 of the ES appraises 'Community and Social Effects'. It concludes that there is no reason to believe the quarrying proposals would adversely affect tourism and there would be a benefit through securing employment for 39 people for the quarry's extended life.

CPRE has no evidence as to what the effect of the extension would be on tourism. We accept that there would be an economic benefit for those people whose jobs would be secured for longer. Conversely, despite the modifications from Breedon's previous planning application, CPRE believes the current proposals would have a substantial adverse effect on the lives of those residents living close to the site boundary, from both quarrying and transport operations. On the transport aspect the adverse effect would be felt more widely.

We do not share the view that the proposals represent a net benefit in overall community and social terms.

Hydro-geology

CPRE has no expertise on this and does not make specific comment on the likely hydro-geological consequences of the quarrying proposals. However, we are aware of the adverse effects of the proposals on the Slade Brook SSSI identified in a report commissioned by the Parish Council. The report also identifies a potential contamination risk if the checks on importation of inert fill were to be less than rigorous. We would therefore urge that the potential hydro-geological consequences of approving the application should be thoroughly tested before a decision is taken.

Need

Given the environmental constraints listed above CPRE believes that the application should be determined against society's need for the resource and not just against the commercial case for the applicants.

Proper assessment of how much primary aggregate extraction should be planned for is a key purpose of the evolving Gloucestershire Minerals Local Plan (MLP). We understand that a critical public consultation on revised demand figures and preferred sites is due during the course of 2016.

Chapter 2 of the applicants' Environmental Statement covers 'alternatives' to the proposals. Paragraphs 2.2.2 to 2.2.5 seek to demonstrate that there are no sound alternative site options to provide an adequate supply of crushed rock. The appraisal is very superficial and is based on the premise that the supply has to be sourced in the Forest of Dean.

Paragraph 2.2.7 refers to the Local Aggregate Assessment (LAA) for February 2015 and acknowledges that aggregates are subject to 'cross border' movement. The paragraph concludes that *'although Gloucestershire's aggregate demands could be met from outside the county the resulting increase in transport costs would have a negative economic impact ...and a negative environmental impact by increasing vehicular emissions, road wear and tear and traffic congestion'*. Paragraph 2.4.3 states *'Should sufficient reserves of crushed rock aggregate not become available, primary won materials will have to be imported from outside the county by road. For financial and environmental reasons this is undesirable'*. There is no detailed appraisal to support this contention and CPRE disputes it. For example, Tytherington Quarry in South Gloucestershire is adjacent to the M5 motorway; it is no further from the county's major Gloucester/Cheltenham demand area than Stowe Hill and with far better road links. That the quarry is currently moth-balled is, to the best of our knowledge,

for commercial rather than technical operational reasons. Whilst we acknowledge that the quarry is in another mineral planning authority's area, we understand it to have permitted reserves well capable of meeting a significant part of Gloucestershire's crushed rock needs during the life of the evolving MLP.

In CPRE's representations on the previous Stowe Hill application we said: _

'CPRE does not consider that the 'duty to co-operate', as set out in the NPPF and the Localism Act, had been effectively implemented at the time of [the Site Options consultation] publication in June 2014 (there has been no public dissemination of the outcome of any subsequent co-operation with other MPAs). CPRE believes there are sound reasons for other MPAs to supply part of Gloucestershire's needs from existing permitted reserves, not least in the light of existing major quarries, well located to supply the Gloucester/Cheltenham market area, being 'moth-balled'.

Secondly, the principle of adopting the 10 year rolling average figures to assess future demand is essentially a tool for 'plan, monitor and manage' – a principle which CPRE supports. However, to use the figures from one 10 year period to allocate a landbank up to 2040 is a reversion, in effect, to the previous 'predict and provide' mechanism which was shown to be seriously flawed and prone to over-allocation. It may well be that demand will increase as economic activity increases after the recession, but no long term assumptions can reasonably be made and other factors, such as changing construction technology, may influence future demand. That is the purpose of using rolling average figures rather than making long term extrapolation'.

Those comments on the way in which market demand and supply options are assessed are still relevant and should be dealt with rigorously in the course of the evolving MLP.

Conclusions

We recognise that there may be valid commercial reasons for seeking to extend the life of Stowe Hill Quarry. If there were no significant environmental constraints then it would be reasonable to grant long term certainty to the mineral operator. However, the commercial case must be weighed against the adverse environmental consequences.

In this case the applicants have sought a major extension which would have substantial adverse consequences for landscape and its enjoyment, for 'best and most versatile' agricultural land, for the local transport infrastructure and road safety and for public amenity. In CPRE's view, given those circumstances, it is neither necessary nor justifiable to grant such a major extension in advance of fully evaluating the need via the local plan process.

Yours faithfully

Bob Brown

On behalf of the Branch Chairman