



The countryside charity
Gloucestershire

POLICY STATEMENT

STONE QUARRYING AND EXTRACTION OF OTHER MINERALS

Summary of Policy Position

We will oppose new quarries and extensions to existing aggregate quarries where we believe that would adversely affect existing AONBs or the prospective designation in the Forest of Dean; and seek to ensure that good practice is adhered to in the Cotswold Water Park.

We recognise 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 will oppose opencast coal working in the Forest of Dean.

In respect of all mineral working proposals we 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 are examined thoroughly; and that there are appropriate detailed and credible restoration proposals which maximise environmental benefit.

The issues of fracking for gas and underground coal gasification are addressed in our Policy Statement on Energy.

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 currently production is limited to very small scale and intermittent 'free-mining', which has a strong cultural association with the Forest. Future applications for opencast coal mining are possible, but unlikely given the environmental constraints and current planning policy on coal.

Work is in hand by the minerals planning authority (MPA) on a replacement for the former Minerals Local Plan (MLP). A new Gloucestershire Minerals Local Plan is in preparation by the County Council and in July 2018 the Branch made representations on the publication version of the Plan (Regulation 19), focussing on the key issue of the Duty to Cooperate

(DtC) between Minerals Planning Authorities. Although the DtC is relevant to all minerals, CPRE does not challenge the identified site options for sand and gravel or for crushed rock from the Cotswolds. Our representations specifically relate to the Forest of Dean crushed rock site options, where major environmental constraints have not been adequately addressed and where a credible solution could be achieved by more effective implementation of the DtC.

Environmental and land use planning 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. The revised NPPF specifies “at least” a 10 year landbank for crushed rock (paragraph 207f). However, paragraph 207 also requires annual re-assessment of need using a rolling average of 10 years sales data, which is *prima facie* “plan, monitor and manage” – an approach welcomed by CPRE. Potential problems are commercial confidentiality restrictions on access to sales data and the substantially reduced resources of the MPA.

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. Paragraph 204c of the revised NPPF indicates that MPAs should define Mineral Safeguarding Areas (MSAs) and MCAs based on them, “whilst not creating a presumption that resources defined will be worked”.

The revised NPPF (paragraph 205g) notes the special case of small scale building and roofing stone quarries, which are important in Gloucestershire, especially in the Cotswolds. Paragraph 211 states that “Planning permission should not be given for the extraction of coal unless...environmentally acceptable or can be made so by planning conditions or obligations or if...national, local or community benefits...clearly outweigh its likely [environmental] impacts”. This should be helpful in challenging any future opencast coal proposals in the Forest of Dean.

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

Gloucestershire 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 society’s mineral needs, but not yet an effective mechanism for so doing. Gloucestershire has particular problems because a high proportion of its aggregate resources lie within its AONBs.

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 society’s needs, including maximising efficient use of secondary and recycled aggregates. The revised NPPF requirement for effective collaboration between planning authorities under the Duty to Cooperate and through statements of common ground (paras 24 - 27) should be helpful.

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 (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 continue to make representations as necessary to the new minerals plan as it evolves. 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.

Updated September 2018

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