

Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole Minerals Sites

Inspectors Matters, Issues and Questions Additional Statements

Submitted on behalf of Aggregate Industries UK Ltd

SAND AND GRAVEL MS-1 PRODUCTION OF SAND AND GRAVEL

Issue 74 – Do the allocated sites appropriately match the demand for each type of sand and gravel, and as far as reasonably practical, appropriately located geographically?

Response

The allocated sites do not match demand for each type of sand and gravel and are not appropriately located geographically, particularly in relation to West Dorset. The Plan is therefore not justified or effective.

Aggregate Industries UK Ltd (hereafter referred to as the Company) operate the Chard Junction Quarry which is currently in production with around two years sand and gravel reserves remaining. The Quarry is included within Policy MS-1 (Production of sand and gravel).

The Company are currently promoting an extension to Chard Junction Quarry at Westford Park Farm. Assessment work for this proposal is at an advanced stage, a Scoping Opinion has been issued by Dorset County Council, Public Consultation events have taken place and a Planning Application is to be submitted shortly.

In considering the future allocations in Policy MS-1 of the Submission Draft Minerals Sites Plan there is a combination of new greenfield sites and extensions to operational quarries. These sites are set out in Figure 1 (Sand and Gravel allocations) of the Submission Draft Minerals Sites Plans. The allocations are all located east of Dorchester, in the south of the county and east of Bournemouth. The nearest source of sand and gravel to Chard Junction Quarry is Woodsford Quarry, 34 miles away. In terms of spatial distribution of future sand and gravel provision, there is a clear shortfall in the west of the County. If Chard Junction Quarry was closed, there would be a considerable increase in transportation costs and extra road miles to meet local markets in the west of the County and beyond in Somerset and Devon. This is discussed later in this report.

The allocated sites in the Submission Draft Minerals Sites Plan have been assessed against Minerals Site Assessment criteria and Sustainability Assessment objectives. Some allocated sites have scored "A" very significant adverse impacts against one or more of the Minerals Site Assessment criteria. Considering these significant impacts, until a Planning Application is submitted on the allocation, it will be difficult to assess the deliverability of the site and questions the future provision identified to maintain the County's landbank.

The Chard Junction Quarry lies within Dorset but is near both the Somerset and Devon borders and supplies products to both markets.

Somerset currently has no land-won sand and gravel workings and superficial deposits of sand and gravel in Somerset are generally limited. The most significant local resource is the Lower Triassic Budleigh Salterton Pebble Beds which form the bedrock at the south western section of the county.

This formation is currently worked for sand and gravel at Whiteball Quarry on the Somerset/Devon border.

Due to its historic arrangements and limited sand and gravel resources, Somerset does not maintain its own landbank of permitted resources for sand and gravel and has not extracted sand and gravel for the past 10 years. As a result, Somerset does not have a 10-year sales average that can inform any potential future provision.

Paragraph 6.82 of the Somerset Minerals Plan (adopted February 2015) states that “in addition to the Whiteball operation, the Chard Junction site on the Somerset/Dorset border is a large contributor to Dorset’s sand and gravel export into Somerset, predominantly serving local markets around the Yeovil, Taunton and Tiverton areas”.

This reflects the importance of Chard Junction Quarry with regard to serving markets in Somerset and the lack of suitable alternative suppliers.

The latest position of sand and gravel supply in Devon is set out in the 6th Devon Local Aggregates Assessment which was produced in July 2017. The landbank for sand and gravel, calculated using the average sales over the past 10 years, although greater than the seven years minimum required in the NPPF, does not extend to the end date in the Devon County Council Minerals Plan.

The major source of sand and gravel in Devon, accounting for 81% of the County’s production in 2015 is the Budleigh Salterton Pebble beds which occurs as a series of outcrops running north from Budleigh Salterton to the Somerset border near Burlescombe. Elsewhere in Devon, sand and gravel is worked on a smaller scale.

Devon County Council Minerals Plan defines Preferred Areas within the southern and northern areas of the pebble beds that together would provide up to 9.2 million tonnes of sand and gravel. Although preferred areas are identified, no specific sites are allocated in the plan. Furthermore, it is recognised in the Devon Minerals Local Plan of the constraints on the ability of the adjoining Counties to contribute to the sub-regional supply. These constraints would be increased significantly if the quarry at Chard Junction was closed with no alternative sites within 34 miles in Dorset.

With regard to this need assessment, it clear that the vast majority of Dorset’s existing (and future) permitted sand and gravel reserves are in the south and east of the county between Dorchester and Bournemouth. Chard Junction Quarry stands out as the major exception in the far west on the Devon/Somerset border. Were Chard Junction to cease operations, sand and gravel would need to be imported from further afield such as Dorchester or Exeter, increasing lorry miles and carbon footprint. Retaining this quarry is considered essential to the local rural economy and the supply of local materials. A significant proportion of the products made at Chard Junction Quarry are nationally sought after for their texture, physical properties and golden colour. 20mm single sized gravels command a premium in the market place and travel as far as Belgium, being used for driveway and decorative purposes.

The extension to Chard Junction Quarry at Carters Close was granted Planning Permission in 2012 by Dorset County Council. This site, like Westford Park Farm, was in the AONB and was not in a Preferred Area for sand and gravel in the Dorset Minerals and Waste Local Plan 1999. In the officer’s committee report on 4th May 2012, the Carters Close site was assessed against the AONB exceptional circumstances test set out in paragraph 116 of the (2012) NPPF. The following extract from the Committee report (Paragraphs 7.7 to 7.9) is set out below.

“Chard Junction Quarry serves a local market to the west of the county, Devon and Somerset, with over 70% of the Quarry’s destination of delivered material being within a 30-mile radius. There is no other alternative source of supply within an 18-mile radius, the majority of the permitted reserves being located in the east of Dorset, between Dorchester and Wareham, and in the Avon Valley close to Hampshire, at some distance from the market served by Chard Junction Quarry. Having regard to the absence of an alternative supply of sand and gravel within the area, the proposed development is considered to provide significant gains in terms of sustainability because it would minimise transportation distances to the market that would otherwise have to be served by road from more distant sources. In view of national policy and emerging local policy to reduce carbon emissions and minimise transportation distances, this is an important consideration”.

The above assessment undertaken in 2012 remains completely relevant today in the consideration of Westford Park Farm. The exceptional circumstances assessments which have to be met to permit major development in the AONB have not changed when compared to the assessments required of the new NPPF which has recently been issued in July 2018. Whilst it is acknowledged that there are different environmental considerations between Westford Park Farm and Carter’s Close, the recognition of the importance of Chard Junction Quarry and maintaining production in the consideration of extending the site in the AONB has been accepted by the MPA.

The position regarding supply in West Dorset, Somerset and Devon has also not changed significantly since 2012 and therefore, if the extension at Westford Park Farm was permitted, it would allow the continuation of sand and gravel extraction for a further 4/5 years utilising the existing infrastructure at the quarry, maintaining employment and serving local, regional and national markets with a particular material sourced at the quarry, which is unique in character in comparison to aggregates supplied elsewhere in Dorset.