Stonehill Quarry, Off Kings Cliff Road, Yarwell, Northamptonshire

Importation of Inert Material for Restoration of Stonehill Quarry

Revised January 2016

Supporting and Planning Statement
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1. Introduction

1.1. In January 2013, planning permission was granted by Northamptonshire County Council (ref 12/00078/MINFUL) for the importation of soils around three water bodies to the south of the oil depot off Kings Cliffe Road. The waterbodies were originally designed as a potential water supply should the need arise in the case of an emergency at the oil depot and the subsequent consent in 2013 sought to enhance the ecological value of the lake margin shallows and areas immediately surrounding those water features. The consent included permission to extract a small volume of limestone.

1.2. That planning permission required the regrading of the ponds and enhanced site restoration works to be completed by March 2016. The limited operations are on-going with restoration anticipated within that timeframe apart from a short section of the eastern shore of one of the water bodies where an alternative area of enhanced wetland is now being proposed.

1.3. Furthermore, the opportunity now exists to restore the remainder of the formally worked Stonehill Quarry and create a significant area of calcareous grassland which is a Biodiversity Action Plan priority habitat of the County. (This figure includes a small parcel of land surrounding the water bodies which will be returned to a calcareous grassland habitat).

1.4. In order to achieve this new restoration profile, it is proposed to import sufficient inert soil resources over a four year period to provide a minimum soil profile depth of 2000mm.

1.5. The application is accompanied by operational and restoration plans which assist in explaining the working sequence of the project. The existing waterbodies (Ponds 1, 2 and 4) are already established whilst Pond No 3 is currently being regraded. These waterbodies when complete will be integrated into the final rehabilitation of the land.
2. Proposals

2.1. It is proposed to enhance the biodiversity and natural capital balance of the former quarry site by importing approximately 302,000 cubic metres of suitable inert materials over a 4 year period to enable the calcareous grassland and complementary habitats to be created on the land in question which is essentially an unrestored quarry located in the north-east extremity of the County. Moreover, a small reserve of unworked limestone has additionally been identified and in revising the wider rehabilitation scheme for the former quarry, this additional mineral will be extracted and removed from site for processing elsewhere. The area where this limestone exists will enable an extended wetland area with emergent vegetation to be established to the east of Pond 2. (See Drg N° S22/15/03).

2.2. Suitable inert materials will be imported to the site at a typical rate of 1,600 cubic metres per week equating to on average 32 loads per day (or 64 HGV movements). Any unprocessed limestone produced will be removed from the site as a return or “backload” thereby not increasing HGV movements to and from the site. The site benefits from a good access onto the public highway being the same as the access point for the oil depot (Watson Fuels).

2.3. It is proposed that activities on site will be undertaken during the following operational hours;

- 0700 to 1800 hours Monday to Friday
- 0700 to 1300 hours Saturdays
- Extraction of limestone from 0730 hours (Mondays to Fridays only)

2.4. Given the nature of the proposals, a wheel cleaning facility will be provided to ensure all HGV’s leaving the site will do so in a clean condition. The wheel cleaning facility (the location of which is shown on Drg N° S22/15/03) will be located at the southern end of the existing tarmacadam road used by HGV’s accessing the Watson oil depot. A small portacabin building will be provided along with welfare facilities.

2.5. There is an estimated 7,500 tonnes of limestone remaining on site and this will be extracted during the period that wider restoration works will be ongoing. As noted above, any unprocessed mineral will be exported from the site using HGV’s that would have imported restoration materials (i.e. on a backload basis).

2.6. To minimise the potential dust impacts of the scheme, operations will be conducted in accordance with best practice guidance, the essence of which is that dust emissions will be controlled by effective site management. The measures for the control of dust on site will comply with any conditions which may be specified by the planning authority, including a dust management scheme, and will additionally accord with Mick George Ltd’s Environmental Management System (EMS).
2.7. Consistent with central government advice, Mick George Ltd will apply a pro-active approach to the management of fugitive dust by adopting a Dust Action Plan. General matters and the management of the site can affect the likelihood of significant dust emissions. These include: provision on site of a pressurised water bowser, high standards of house-keeping to minimize track-out and windblown dust and effective staff training in respect of the causes and prevention of dust.

2.8. The site manager will carry out daily inspections and log observations of site conditions including any occurrences of dust or the onset of potential dust generating conditions. A graded scale of dust occurrences is proposed within the Dust Action Plan, together with responses, as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Action required</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>No visible dust</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Visible dust travelling up to 5m from the source</td>
<td>Damp surfaces down, review operations and weather conditions, and take further preventative actions as appropriate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Visible dust travelling reaching the sides of the quarry void, or edge of stripped areas during restoration</td>
<td>Damp down and reduce/relocate any operations causing the release; review operations and weather conditions, and take further preventative actions as appropriate to prevent further releases.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Visible dust crossing the operational area</td>
<td>Carry out emergency damping down and treatment of source areas; carry out inspections to ascertain extent and amount of dust migrations and provide plan for any modification to operations to prevent recurrence.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.9. The above seeks to identify circumstances when additional dust suppression measures should be considered during site operations. In general, the strategy will require the site manager to take necessary precautions to prevent adverse dust emissions. Under critical conditions when the wind direction is towards dust sensitive locations then the additional dust suppression measures will be implemented.

2.10. The site access road will be inspected by the site manager on a daily basis to determine the need for maintenance, cleaning and dust suppression. All loaded vehicles will be sheeted in order to minimise spillages or wind whipping of loose material. All departing road transport will be inspected for cleanliness prior to leaving the site.

2.11. In respect of HGV routing, a similar traffic management scheme will be implemented to that agreed with the County Council for the current permitted operations. The essence of this agreement was that drivers accessing the Stonehill Quarry shall be issued with clear instructions that HGV’s will not pass through the villages of Kings Cliffe and Wansford, both of which have weight restriction orders which would limit access to HGV’s in any event.
2.12. As noted above, typically 32 loads of material would be delivered to the site daily. All MGL vehicles are fitted with a tracking device which can be accessed from the logistics department of head office at any time to check vehicle compliance with the proposed routing agreement.

**Design and Access**

2.13. The following design principles have been examined in relation to the import of inert materials to beneficially finally restore the Stonehill Quarry, although it should be noted that no built structures are proposed as part of this planning application;

- Site context and use;
- Layout and scale; and
- Landscaping and appearance.

2.14. Details of the proposals are set out within the application form, with the location and site context shown on Drg No S22/15/01 and S22/15/02 Rev A. The proposed development is located within an established quarry, and currently comprises partially unrestored limestone workings.

2.15. In respect of the layout and scale, Drg No S22/15/03 details the proposed area for importation of inert materials, which is accessed by the established haul route into the quarry, and the existing access point onto the public highway to the north. The existing road layout provides an adequate turning circle and manoeuvring facility of HGVs that will be used to deliver suitable material to restore the area. A wheel cleaning facility will be provided on the site to ensure that HGVs leaving the site do so in a clean state before exiting onto the public highway. With regard to landscaping and appearance, the importation operations will generally be screened from public view.

2.16. The proposed development is within the boundary of the former limestone quarry and the proposals seek to restore the quarry to a recognized Biodiversity Action Plan priority habitat.

2.17. In order that the operations on site can be fully managed, it is envisaged that the previously approved traffic management system will be retained to ensure the vehicle movements associated with the proposed operations do not pass through the surrounding villages of Wansford and Kings Cliffe. The public will not be allowed to access the area for health and safety reasons.
3. Potential Impacts

3.1. Noise

3.1.1. The proposed operations are limited in scale and nature, and are generally remote from residential dwellings. The noise appraisal undertaken by L.F Acoustics (see Annexure 3) confirms that all site activities can be undertaken fully in accordance with current published central government guidance in the form of the Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) published in 2014. For normal daytime works the guidance seeks to ensure that the operations do not result in significant adverse effects and advises for normal daytime operations that the following limits should not exceed 10dB above the background (LA90) noise level; subject to a maximum value of 55dB LAeq, 1 hour (free field).

3.1.2. The appraisal has considered the potential impacts of the progressive reinstatement of the Stonehill Quarry upon the limited number of isolated residential dwellings and Wansford village which is located east of the site. The closest dwelling to the site is Linley Cottage, which is located approximately 150 metres from the south eastern site boundary. Beyond this property is Hill House, which is approximately 400 metres from the eastern quarry boundary.

3.1.3. Given that the present noise environment at the two properties would be broadly equivalent, assessing the acceptability of noise from the proposed site operations at Linley Cottage would also seek to ensure an acceptable noise environment at Hill House. Sulehay Cottage, to the west, is located 225 metres from the western boundary and separated by fields. Nightingale Farm is located approximately 600 metres to the north west of the quarry. This property is located close to Cooks Hole Quarry, which is presently operational, with the quarry operations influencing noise levels at this location.

3.1.4. The Old Pump House is located approximately 400 metres to the north east of the quarry. This property is located adjacent to the road between the A47 and Kings Cliffe and is used by vehicles accessing the industrial estate. This road would also be used by vehicles accessing the quarry. Finally, dwellings within Wansford Village are located beyond 600 metres to the east of the quarry.

3.1.5. A noise monitoring exercise was carried out to determine the existing noise environment at locations representative of dwellings surrounding the quarry. The measurement exercise comprised unattended measurements taken at three locations during the course of the day, supplemented with attended noise surveys make at a further two positions. During the survey, weather conditions were good, fine and dry, with very light winds.
3.1.6. The resultant background noise levels were recorded as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Property</th>
<th>Noise Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Linley Cottage</td>
<td>42 to 44 dB Lₐ₉₀</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sulehay Cottage</td>
<td>36 dB Lₐ₉₀</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nightingale Farm</td>
<td>39 dB Lₐ₉₀</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old Pump House</td>
<td>49 dB Lₐ₉₀</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wansford Village</td>
<td>47 dB Lₐ₉₀</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.1.7. The calculations of the noise levels from the restoration and limited mineral extraction operations at the above properties have been made using the methodology contained within BS 5228-1. Where barrier corrections have been calculated, the algorithm used within a Calculation of Road Traffic Noise has been used.

3.1.8. The worst case predicted levels at each of these properties (using BS:5228) confirmed the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Property</th>
<th>Noise Level</th>
<th>dB Below PPG Criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Linley Cottage</td>
<td>47 dB Lₐₑₐq</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sulehay Cottage</td>
<td>42 dB Lₐₑₐq</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nightingale Farm</td>
<td>32 dB Lₐₑₐq</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old Pump House</td>
<td>47 dB Lₐₑₐq</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wansford Village</td>
<td>31 dB Lₐₑₐq</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.2. Dust

3.2.1. By implementing the Dust Action Plan (referred to in para 2.7) dust can readily be controlled to ensure there will be no detrimental harm to the local amenity. Best available techniques shall be employed to minimise dust during site operations and the following measures will be used in order to minimise and control dust nuisance:

- All active haul roads will be kept damp as required by motorised spraying units during site operations (i.e. water bowsers).
- The direction of exhausts of on-site vehicles will be such that exhaust gases cannot be emitted in a downward direction.
- Observations will be made of the wind direction, by the site manager during operations, when it appears from visual inspection that the wind direction is towards dust sensitive locations.

3.2.2. Such good working practices and additional mitigation measures are generally accepted by central government and the surface minerals industry as providing effective control against the impact of airborne dust. With the implementation of these measures, the risk of a dust-related impact at the closest residential dwellings will be negligible.
3.3. Traffic

3.3.1. A traffic management system will be implemented so that HGV’s access the site from the A47 ensuring no traffic travels through the villages of Kings Cliffe or Wansford. With such a management system in place, there will be no significant adverse impacts in respect of HGV movements.

3.4. Drainage (Flood Risk Assessment)

3.4.1. The application site consists of a former operational quarry and is contained within a shallow depression. The creation of the lakes has further lowered the levels within the site and will contain any surface water run-off from the surrounding land. The site is primarily located within Flood Zone 1 and therefore is of low probability of flooding (i.e. less than 1 in 1,000 annual probability of either river or sea flooding) and in any event the proposed operations are identified as being less vulnerable within the National Planning Policy Framework. A small sector of the site along the northern site boundary is in Zone 3a but no engineering works are proposed within that area.

3.4.2. The application seeks to import suitable inert materials to improve the habitats on site although the landform will continue to drain into one of four bodies of water that exist on site. These water bodies are situated south of an unnamed tributary of the River Nene and some 1.2km to the west of its confluence with the main river. The development proposals do not involve any amendment to the water discharge from the site. Moreover, the project does not involve the construction of any bridges, pipes, ducts or culverts of any watercourse. No streams or culverts cross the site and there will be no additional run-off from the revised scheme of working.

3.4.3. Any storm water generated on site will be channelled to one of the four existing waterbodies on site which will effectively attenuate surface water discharge thereby ensuring no adverse impacts downstream of the site.

3.4.4. There are no residential risks associated with the development and predicted impacts from climate change. Previous planning applications of 2003 and 2013 concluded there was no risk of downstream flooding and the creation of the waterbody should be considered as a positive benefit in flood risk terms. The revised scheme of working will not alter that conclusion.

3.4.5. A separate flood risk and hydrology report has been prepared by Amber Planning and this confirms no adverse impacts. The site can readily accommodate any storm water storage calculated to be some 10,500 cubic metres. (The report prepared by Amber Planning is enclosed at Annexure 4).
3.5. Ecology

3.5.1. The site has recently been surveyed by Whitcher Wildlife to consider the potential ecological value of the existing site. The conclusion is that a majority of the site currently consists of bare ground of limited value. The report is contained at Annexure 2 of this Statement.

3.5.2. The existing ponds have been identified as having potential value and these features will all be retained along with the peripheral vegetation (including scrub and small trees around the Pond No4 to the west of the site). The potential for dormice to be present in the woodlands forming the southern boundary of the site has been highlighted, and as such additional hazel trees will be established (around the Pond No4 area).

3.5.3. A key element of this application is the proposed significant contribution to an identified BAP priority habitat which is wholly consistent with sustainable development objectives of the NPPF as well as Policy 28 of the adopted Northamptonshire Minerals and Waste Local Plan (2014). As detailed within Section 4 of this Statement, the proposal to import suitable materials will enable the creation of 18.9ha of calcareous grassland across the site which will enable a significant proportion of this BAP target habitat to be achieved within the County and therefore potentially enhance the natural capital balance of the land in question.
4. Restoration Detail

4.1. It is proposed to restore a majority of the Stonehill Quarry to create lowland calcareous grassland, making a valuable contribution to one of the County Council’s target Biodiversity Action Plan targets. Given the identified rarity of this priority habitat within the Northamptonshire region (around 300ha) and given the site’s scale, a large area of calcareous grassland can be created to increase species population size of associated priority national species.

4.2. The Northamptonshire Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) (2008 2nd Edition) states that “specific target areas are limestone slopes, mineral extraction and landfill sites” for areas of calcareous grassland creation. Northamptonshire’s BAP Target 4 for lowland calcareous grassland relates to expansion of the habitat requiring the establishment of “30ha of LWS-standard Lowland Calcareous Grassland from arable, improved grassland and mineral extraction and landfill sites…….”. Although the target date was 2015, a significant proportion of this objective can be achieved largely on a single site through the restoration of Stonehill Quarry.

4.3. The main body of the site is of limited ecological value but some features of potential value are present on the periphery of the site. The cliff face on the western and southern boundary of the site will be retained in-situ to maintain the integrity of the ecological features that exist along such corridors. Imported fill will not be placed within the root protection zone of any small trees that presently exist along that cliff face.

4.4. Pond No 4 in the south-western sector of the site will be retained as a feature along with what appears to be part of a remnant settlement lagoon immediately north of Pond No 4. The round shaped hollow feature to the north-west of Pond No 4 will also be retained along with the self set trees which have established in the base. Although this feature is dry, with the re-contouring proposed, surface water will be channeled to this feature which could develop as a seasonally wet feature.

4.5. All scrub habitat along the northern boundary of the site will be retained and a 5m stand-off zone will be provided from the top of the steep embankment leading down to the unnamed stream to the north.

4.6. A shallow cut-off ditch will be established along this northern boundary to ensure the scrub area and embankment will be protected during storm events (particularly until such time as the site becomes fully vegetated).

4.7. Where the former hedgerow crossing the site joins the northern boundary of the site, the small area of scrub habitat will be retained. This area is in a shallow hollow, and that will be re-contoured to create an additional seasonally wet area which could develop into a complimentary habitat attracting a variety of fauna.

4.8. These features are all shown on the Restoration Plan (Drg No S22/15/04 Rev A).
4.9. Within the main body of the site following ground preparation, a suitable seed mix will be selected and sown in the areas as they are progressively reinstated from the western sector of the site. The restoration soils will be progressively seeded between April to September as restored areas become available to promote successful establishment and the following seed mix below (EM6 – Meadow Mixture for Chalk and Limestone Soils) is suggested as an appropriate example.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>%</th>
<th>Latin Name</th>
<th>Common Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>Achillea millefolium</td>
<td>Yarrow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Anthyllis vulneraria</td>
<td>Kidney Vetch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>Centaurea nigra</td>
<td>Common Knapweed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Centaurea scabiosa</td>
<td>Greater Knapweed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Daucus carota</td>
<td>Wild Carrot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>Filipendula vulgaris</td>
<td>Dropwort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Galium verum</td>
<td>Lady’s Bedstraw</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Knautia arvensis</td>
<td>Field Scabious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>Leontodon hispidus</td>
<td>Rough Hawkbit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>Leucanthemum vulgare</td>
<td>Oxeye Daisy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>Lotus corniculatus</td>
<td>Birdsfood Trefoil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>Origonaum vulgar</td>
<td>Wild Marjoram</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>Pimpinella saxifraga</td>
<td>Burnet saxifrage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>Plantago media</td>
<td>Hoary Plantain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>Poterium sanguisorba</td>
<td>Salad Burnet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>Primula veris</td>
<td>Cowslip</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Prunella vulgaris</td>
<td>Selfheal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Ranunculus acris</td>
<td>Meadow Buttercup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>Reseda lutea</td>
<td>Wild Mignonette</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>Scaviosa columbaria</td>
<td>Small Scabious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Briza media</td>
<td>Quaking Grass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Cynosurus cristatus</td>
<td>Crested Dogtail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Festuca ovina</td>
<td>Sheep’s Fescue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Festuca rubra</td>
<td>Slender-creeping Red-fescue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Koeleria macntha</td>
<td>Crested Hair-grass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Phleum bertolonii</td>
<td>Samller Cat’s-tail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Trisetum flavescens</td>
<td>Yellow Oat-grass</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.10. In the first two years of establishment, weeds can be cut or spot treated with herbicide, this is important to stop the spread of weeds before grassland has been established. Once grassland is established it will be cut in the initial establishment phase (end of June, July and the end of September). The grass will be cut to a height of 75mm. Arisings will be removed from the mown areas to reduce fertility and encourage a diverse range of plant species to become established. Bare areas where seeding has not been successful in the first year can be left to improve habitat diversity for invertebrates. In subsequent years, mowing will take place two times a year, one early cut to reduce weeds in June and another cut in August or September.
4.11. Whilst a majority of the site will be restored to calcareous grassland, 1.7ha will consist of open water (Ponds 1, 2 and 3 as previously approved and the existing Pond No. 4) along with a new wetland extending to 0.43ha. The proposal to extract additional limestone on the eastern shore of the central waterbody (Pond No. 2) will enable this further wetland area to be created providing a greater diversity of habitat, particularly for amphibians and invertebrates.

4.12. This additional wetland area will consist of individual seasonal pools with emergent vegetation, and although limited in geographical extend will create valuable complementary wetland habitat. In general, the margins of this wetland area will be made as sinuous as possible within the constraints of the available materials. Margins will generally be formed using nutrient poor subsoils, which will allow the development of more diverse aquatic plant communities. A range of plants will be allowed to naturally develop in the open water to provide habitats for colonisation by invertebrates and amphibians. However, where individual plant species dominate the areas of open water, removing a proportion of any invasive plant as part of the aftercare management will promote species diversity. Also, if alien species have colonised these areas, then they will be removed completely as soon as possible. The invertebrate fauna of shallow water is generally diverse and includes dragonflies, water beetles, aquatic snails, crustaceans and mayflies which will be attracted to the site.

4.13. The area of open water and pools will have the following characteristics:

- gently sloping sides and a range of shallower and deeper areas;
- the edges of the ponds will be clear of overhanging vegetation;
- a range of aquatic and emergent plants to act as refuges and provide egg laying sites;
- areas of rough grassland surrounding the ponds with small pockets of scrub; and
- provision of shelter and hibernation sites in the form of logs, piles of stones, tree roots etc.

4.14. Such areas could also provide potential habitat suitable for colonisation by water voles, with the inclusion of a range of bank profiles within the proposed restoration including some steeper faces whilst the increased wetland and marginal habitat should also increase feeding opportunities for bats.

4.15. Annual review meetings will be held with the Mineral Planning Authority, when the previous year’s operations will be discussed and the proposals for the following year presented for approval. The operator will maintain records combined into an “aftercare terrier” for the re-instated land and which will include the following details recorded annually:

- proposed species/variety/mixture used and the seeding rate;
- details of any secondary treatment undertaken;
- cultural operations undertaken; and
- results of the grassland monitoring for species establishment.
5. Planning Policy Considerations

Introduction

5.1. The government’s objectives within the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and policies within the Northamptonshire Minerals and Waste Plan (adopted 2014) are to promote sustainable development and also ensure that biological diversity is conserved and wherever possible, enhanced as an integral part of the environmental and economic development, and additionally to conserve, enhance and restore the diversity of England’s wildlife by sustaining and, where possible, improving the quality and extent of natural habitat sites. As a direct result of the scheme at Stonehill Quarry valuable alternative habitats will be created with a long term gain to biodiversity objectives.

5.2. The Bio-Diversity Action Plan for Northamptonshire is intended to guide local authorities in translating advice into action for habitats and species alike. The County’s development plan determines the strategic role of development control in the delivery of bio-diversity action and as such is guided in part by the Bio-diversity Action Plan for Northamptonshire. As well as playing a role in the protection of the important statutory sites, such as SSSI’s and County Wildlife Sites, development plans also play an important role in the protection and enhancement of the wider countryside. This opinion is reinforced within the National Planning Policy Framework.

5.3. The Northamptonshire Bio-Diversity Action Plan sets out targets for the conservation and enhancement of the County’s bio-diversity and it is recognised to progress the delivery of these targets it is important to establish a means of monitoring the plans as a whole, which serve to evaluate the effectiveness of working partnerships and ultimately the achievements of actions towards agreed targets. The stated ultimate goal seeks to identify a tangible difference on the ground for the habitats and species that are subject of the targeted action.

5.4. The development at Stonehill Quarry has been considered against policies within the up-to-date Minerals and Waste Local Plan and no conflict is found to arise and in many instances they provide positive support for the development. The NPPF emphasises that “policies in local plans should follow the approach of the presumption in favour of sustainable development so that it is clear that development which is sustainable can be approved without delay.”

Northamptonshire Minerals and Waste Local Plan (2014)

5.5. The Minerals and Waste Local Plan contains the land use planning strategy for both minerals and waste related development within Northamptonshire. The vision for the County envisages sustained growth and development within Northamptonshire up to 2031 and the document is intended to act as a driver for new investment within the County identifying how investment in minerals (and waste) development can be optimised for everyone’s benefit. The Local Plan has been prepared in the context of a
set of national and regional guidelines and strategies are provided by a number of key policy documents.

5.6. In respect of the final restoration of quarries, it is recognized that all minerals and waste related development of a temporary nature should ensure that the site is progressively restored to an acceptable condition and stable landform and the after-use of a site will be determined in relation to its land use context, the surrounding environmental character and any specific local requirements, but on the basis that it enhances biodiversity and the local environment. The revised restoration scheme for Stonehill Quarry satisfies the requirements of this objective in that the former Stonehill Quarry will be finally reinstated to a beneficial afteruse generating significant bio-diversity gains, improving the local environment and satisfying other creative conservation policies and objectives of the County and District Councils consistent with sustainable development objectives of the NPPF.

5.7. The beneficial use of inert waste (or fill) is recognized within the Mineral and Waste Plan. The strategy notes that is an expectation that the disposal of such material will normally be at “worked mineral extraction sites where the material can be used as much needed restoration material”. This strategy is reflected in Policy 20 of the Minerals and Waste Local Plan.

5.8. With regard to consideration of the potential impacts of the development, Policy 22 is the most appropriate. The Policy states that proposals for minerals and waste development must demonstrate that a number of matters need to have been considered and addressed. In the context of this current application the relevant issues are;

- Protection of Northamptonshire’s natural assets;
- Avoiding and/or minimising potential adverse impacts to an acceptable level;
- Flood risk; and
- Ensuring that local amenity is protected.

5.9. Each of the above have been considered within the planning application and no conflicts were found to arise.

5.10. In developing the working and restoration scheme at Stonehill Quarry, full regard has been paid to minimising any potential environmental harm or adverse impacts. There are no significant landscape designations to impact upon whilst the closest important ecological designated area lies to the south of the site.

5.11. The Minerals and Waste Local Plan recognizes that natural assets cannot be easily re-created once lost and as such, in conjunction with protecting designated natural assets and resources, the main focus of the restoration strategy seeks locally specific development management measures to secure enhancement of those features.

5.12. The BAP sets the County’s targets for protection and creation of a range of habitats and species that have been identified as being important in Northamptonshire. It describes areas where the identified habitats already exist and those areas likely to be most
suitable for their re-creation. The BAP is administered by a partnership of organisations that have individual targets to achieve. This includes a range of habitat creation targets that could be achieved through the restoration of minerals and waste sites.

5.13. In the case of the site at Stonehill, consideration has been given to how the site can contribute to the County’s BAP targets.

5.14. Requirements regarding natural assets and resources to be addressed by proposals for minerals and waste development are details in Policy 24 which states;

“Minerals and waste development should seek to achieve a net gain in natural assets and resources, through:

• Protecting and enhancing international and national designated sites,
• Delivery of wider environmental benefits in the vicinity where development would adversely affect locally designated sites or other features of local interest,
• Protecting and enhancing green infrastructure and strategic biodiversity networks, in particular the River Nene and other sub-regional corridors, and
• Contributing towards Northamptonshire Biodiversity Action Plan targets for habitats and species.”

5.15. The enhanced restoration proposals at Stonehill will achieve a tangible net gain in natural assets and resources delivering wide environmental benefits. The development will not adversely impact upon any international or national designated sites and will positively contribute towards a County Biodiversity Action Plan priority habitat target. Accordingly, positive support exists for the current proposals at Stonehill in the form of Policy 24.

5.16. With regard to restoration and afteruse of quarries, the Local Plan recognizes that responsible stewardship and restoration of minerals and (temporary) waste development sites can provide for a wide range of opportunities for enhancement and beneficial after-uses.

5.17. The Local Plan notes that restoration should maximize potential environmental benefit, but its after-use should be determined in relation to its land use context and surrounding environmental character. Such environmental benefit could include habitat creation that meets Northamptonshire BAP priorities. A wider scope of restoration, rather than a simple re-instatement to the previous use, allows for consideration of both local circumstance and broader linkages and can support the integration of investment priorities in line with spatial planning principles.

5.18. Paragraph 6.4.4 of the Local Plan states that “minerals and waste developments have the potential to make a significant contribution to a number of BAP species and habitat targets. For some specific habitats, the entire creation target for the County could be achieved through appropriate restoration of minerals development.”

5.19. The following paragraph recognizes that “mineral extraction offers some of the best habitat creation opportunities in the County for calcareous grassland, due to the exposed
underlying geology and poor soils. Therefore, the need to create BAP habitats should take precedence over other restoration aims in situations where suitable conditions exist.”

5.20. **Policy 28** supported the above objectives and states;

“All minerals and waste related development of a temporary nature must ensure that the site is progressively restored to an acceptable condition and stable landform.

The afteruse of a site will be determined in relation to its land use context, the surrounding environmental character and any specific local requirements, but on the bases that it:

- Enhances biodiversity, the local environment and amenity, and
- Benefits the local community and/or economy.”

5.21. The Policy goes on to state that the restoration of minerals and waste sites should meet certain requirements and these include that;

- “Precedence should be given to the establishment of Biodiversity Action Plan habitat, strategic biodiversity networks, promotion of geodiversity and enhancement of the historic environment and heritage assets where the specific conditions occur that favour such after-use objectives, and
- Sites connecting or adjacent to identified habitat areas should be restored in a manner which promotes habitat enhancement in line with Biodiversity Action Plan targets and green infrastructure plans”.

5.22. The final restoration of Stonehill Quarry as detailed within this application has the opportunity to create positive gains to the biodiversity of the site, contributing to a clearly identified BAP priority habitat of the County. This can be achieved with limited impact over a modest timescale wholly in compliance with the sustainable development objectives of Policy 28.

**North Northamptonshire Core Spatial Strategy**

5.23. The North Northamptonshire Core Spatial Strategy was adopted in June 2008 and relates to an area covered by the administrative districts of Corby, Kettering, Wellingborough and East Northamptonshire Councils. **Policy 13** relates to General Sustainable Development Principles requiring that “development should meet the needs of residents and businesses without compromising the ability of future generations to enjoy the same quality of life that the present generation aspires to”. This policy primarily relates to build design of new developments but, nevertheless, does consider protection of local amenity and existing assets (i.e. parts I to G of the policy).

5.24. As detailed within this Supporting Statement, matters such as noise and dust emissions from the development can readily be controlled to acceptable standards consistent with current central government advice documents whilst there will be no adverse impact upon the highway network. The existing landscape character will not be harmed by the
working and restoration of the site and the natural biodiversity asset value of the land will be increased following restoration.

**National Planning Policy Framework**

5.25. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) confirms that the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. The site at Stonehill Quarry will be progressively restored to an acceptable condition and stable landform enhancing biodiversity and the local environment consistent with this objective. The enhanced restoration scheme for Stonehill Quarry satisfies the requirements of this NPPF policy objectives in that the project will be progressively reinstated to a beneficial afteruse making a significant contribution to identified Biodiversity Action Plan objectives. The scheme of working seeks to limit any harm to the local community as noise and dust control measures will be applied, as will the traffic routing provisions.

5.26. Paragraphs 186 and 187 of the NPPF relate to the decision making process (for all types of development) and local planning authorities are advised that they should “approach decision taking in a positive way to foster the delivery of sustainable development” and “seek to approve applications for sustainable development where possible”. Notwithstanding the limited volume involved, the recovery of an isolated limestone mineral resource that would otherwise be discarded, is wholly consistent with recognised sustainable development objectives alongside the significant contribution to priority Biodiversity Action Plan objectives.

5.27. Paragraph 196 confirms that the planning system is plan-led and that “planning law requires that applications for planning permission must be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise and that the NPPF is a material consideration in the planning process.” Paragraph 197 states “in assessing and determining development proposals, local planning authorities should apply the presumption in favour of sustainable development”. In the case of Stonehill Quarry there is compliance with the development plan and sustainable development objectives and therefore there is a presumption in favour of the development.
6. Summary and Conclusions

6.1. In summary, it is proposed to undertake the final progressive restoration of the former Stonehill Quarry site converting the land into a positive biodiversity asset creating nearly two thirds of Northamptonshire BAP Priority Target Habitat of calcareous grassland within a single site. The stated target within the BAP was to create 30ha of calcareous grassland and the site at Stonehill Quarry alone will establish over 60% of that target figure. This target can readily be achieved by the use of imported materials over a reasonably limited time period ensuring the progressive creation of calcareous grassland with minimal impact upon local amenity.

6.2. No significant adverse impacts have been identified that would warrant refusal of the scheme that is consistent with the sustainable development objectives as contained within the National Planning Policy Framework.

6.3. The scheme can operate with minimal impact and within acceptable criteria levels identified within the development plan policies. It is therefore concluded, that given the predicted limited environmental impacts and the policy support that exists for the restoration proposals which are consistent with recognised sustainable development objectives then planning permission should not be withheld for the proposed development on land at Stonehill Quarry.