

**Ringstead Grange
Quarry
Northamptonshire**

Planning Statement

**Variation of Conditions 2, 42,
48 and 52 of consent
15/00073/MINVOC –
Approved Restoration Detail**

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Contents

| | |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| P1. Introduction | 1 |
| P2. Proposals | 2 |
| P3. Environmental Considerations..... | 4 |
| P4. Planning Policy | 5 |
| P5. Conclusions | 7 |

Appendix 1 - Site Location Plan

Appendix 2 - Revised Ecological Management Plan including;

- Drg N° R15/04 Rev D – Concept Restoration Scheme
- Drg N° R15/203 Rev C – Detailed Planting Plan

P1. INTRODUCTION

- P 1.1. In December 2012, planning consent was granted for the extraction of 1,950,000 tonnes of limestone and the importation of 1,100,000 cubic metres of inert material at the Ringstead Grange Quarry, near Ringstead, Northamptonshire. The application made clear the intention to reinstate the site to a mixture of arable fields with conservation grassland bounded by species rich hedgerows along with smaller blocks of calcareous grassland and broadleaf woodlands.
- P 1.2. The planning permission had 56 conditions attached, some of which related to the details of the proposed restoration.
- P 1.3. It is proposed to vary the wording of four conditions of the latest planning consent for the site (ref 15/00073/MINVOC), to ensure consistency of the restoration detail due in part to a previous misleading graphical error on the restoration plan.
- P 1.4. Accordingly, within Condition 2 (Approved Documents), we wish to amend the reference to “Drawing No. R15/04 Rev C Concept Restoration Plan” to “Drawing No. R15/04 **Rev D** Concept Restoration Plan”.
- P 1.5. In respect of Condition 42, the approved landscaping documents refer to the incorrect drawing references and therefore would suggest the wording of the Condition is amended as follows;

*“Landscaping shall be in accordance with **Drawing No. R15/04 Rev D and Drawing No. R15/203 Rev C dated 19th February 2019** ~~the scheme received on 1st February 2013 and discharged by letter on the 7 August 2013 as amended by the non material amendment 15/0039/MINNMA.~~ The approved scheme shall be implemented in full.”*

- P 1.6. It is proposed to revise the wording of Condition 48 to;

*“The Ecological Management Plan submitted to the Mineral Planning Authority in ~~19 March 2013 and discharged by letter on the 7 August 2013~~ **February 2019** shall be implemented in accordance with the approved plan including monitoring, aftercare and long term management.”*

- P 1.7. And Condition 52;

*“The progressive restoration scheme, reference ~~R15/04/B~~ **R15/04 Rev D** received by this Authority and hereby approved shall be implemented upon cessation of mineral extraction operations in each phase of the development, and shall be implemented progressively and completed in its entirety before the end date of this permission as stated in Condition 5.”*

P2. PROPOSALS

- P 2.1. It is evident within the original Environmental Statement (March 2012) that the majority of the land is to be reinstated to high quality arable land following the sequential completion of the mineral extraction operations. However, a drafting error within the plans suggested the land would be restored to agricultural ‘grassland’. The early restored areas of the quarry are currently under crop and it’s the landowner’s intention to remain utilising the land for agricultural purposes as originally envisaged and assessed within the earlier planning application. To that end, the Company are seeking to vary Conditions 2, 42, 48 and 52 of planning consent 15/00073/MINVOC in order to rationalise the situation.
- P 2.2. In accordance with the above, the Concept Restoration Scheme (Drg N° R15/04 Rev C) and Detailed Planting Plan (Drg N° R15/203 Rev B) have been revised, simply amending the previous graphical errors. Minor amendments have also been made to the approved Ecological Management Plan to remove any reference to “agricultural grassland”. All other details regarding grassland restoration and aftercare remain unchanged as the aftercare scheme for the agricultural land was detailed within the submission to discharge Condition 52, which clearly states; *“The details relate only to land being reinstated to future agricultural use as the requisite details relating to calcareous grasslands, woodland, hedgerows etc has been approved under the provisions of Condition No 48”*.
- P 2.3. The original proposed (and subsequently approved) restoration scheme was designed having regard to maintaining high value agricultural land whilst considering the findings of the landscape assessment, drawing upon information provided in landscape character assessments and landscape policies applicable to the site. The restoration of the site, as approved, will take on the typical character of the locality with agricultural fields, delineated by hedgerows combined with broadleaved woodland planting coupled with areas of permanent grassland. The proposed amendments to the various planning conditions only seek to amend the drafting error and not the designed restoration detail, and the restored Ringstead Grange Quarry site will therefore continue to meet these previous aims of integrating the site into the typical character of the locality.
- P 2.4. The original application included an Agricultural Land Classification Assessment which confirmed that some 66% of the site consisted of “best and most versatile” agricultural land (i.e. ALC grade 2 and 3a). The following land grades were identified within the site;

| Grade/sub-grade | Area (ha) | % of agricultural land |
|------------------------|------------------|-------------------------------|
| Grade 2 | 9.3 | 14 |
| Sub-grade 3a | 33.4 | 52 |
| Sub-grade 3b | 21.5 | 34 |
| Total | 64.2 | 100 |

- P 2.5. The restoration scheme sought to retain all high quality agricultural land, with a sector of sub-grade 3b land “lost” to accommodate restoration features with greater ecological and biodiversity benefits, and the proposed variations within this application seek to maintain this objective by retaining the early restored areas for arable use (as has always been envisaged), rather than converting them to agricultural “grassland” as incorrectly stated on the current approved plans.

P3. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

- P 3.1. The Environmental Statement (2012) considered the potential impacts of the proposed Ringstead Grange Quarry development and the restoration of the site which sought to ultimately add to the site's biodiversity asset balance by converting a percentage of the identified lower quality agricultural land to permanent calcareous grassland and woodlands.
- P 3.2. The Statement concluded that the scheme could operate with minimal impact upon the surrounding environment and local amenity, and within acceptable criteria levels identified within development plan policies and central governmental advice documents. These conclusions remain unaltered in relation to the proposals to retain the restored arable land on the site and amend the drafting errors on the previously approved plans. In any event, as noted above the restored arable land is already under crop and no adverse impacts on the area in question have resulted.
- P 3.3. The original Environmental Statement concluded *"It is considered on balance that with appropriate mitigation the proposal to extract limestone and import suitable inert material to achieve a beneficial afteruse on land at Ringstead Grange can be carried out in an acceptable manner, without causing demonstrable harm to matters of noted importance. The resultant restoration scheme particularly reflects County Council objectives and governmental advice in that it will result in an improved restoration profile integrating the restored quarry into the wider landscape and promoting nature conservation and biodiversity initiatives in line with local and national policies."* This conclusion was not disputed hence the granting of planning consent.

P4. PLANNING POLICY

P 4.1. Policy 20 (Natural assets and resources) of Northamptonshire’s Minerals and Waste Local Plan (adopted 2017) 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.*

Proposals for minerals and waste development will be required to undertake an assessment (where appropriate) in order to:

- *identify and determine the nature, extent and level of importance of the natural assets and resources, as well as any potential impacts, and*
- *identify mitigation measures and / or requirement for compensation (where necessary) to avoid, reduce and manage potentially adverse impacts.”*

P 4.2. In line with Policy 20, Section 5 of the original Environmental Statement outlined details of the restoration provisions for the Ringstead Grange Quarry site, which sought the progressive reinstatement of the land to productive high quality arable land with conservation headlands along with smaller blocks of calcareous grassland and broadleaf woodland. These restoration objectives, consistent with the policy, remain unaltered by the current variation of condition proposals as the reinstatement of the land to arable use was originally considered as part of the assessment of the site. The proposals therefore remain consistent with Policy 20 (which is considered similar to Policy CMD7 of the Control and Management of Development DPD 2011 document relevant at the time of the application).

P 4.3. Policy 24 of the Minerals and Waste Local Plan relates to ‘Restoration and after-use’ and states that quarries and landfill sites should ensure that they are progressively restored to an acceptable condition and stable landform and the after-use will be determined in relation to its land use context, the surrounding environmental character and any specific local requirements.

P 4.4. The policy goes on to state *“The restoration of minerals and waste sites should meet the following requirements (where appropriate):*

- *sites previously comprising high-grade agricultural land or good-quality forestry use should be restored to the original land use and coupled with a secondary after-use objective,*
- *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,*

- *sites connecting or adjacent to identified habitat areas and green infrastructure networks should be restored in a manner which promotes habitat enhancement (in line with Biodiversity Action Plan targets) and green infrastructure plans,*
- *sites located near to areas identified as lacking recreational facilities should be restored in a manner that promotes such opportunities,*
- *sites located within river corridors should be restored to support water catchment conservation and incorporate flood attenuation measures, and*
- *in specific instances, and where fully in accordance with policies in other local plans in Northamptonshire, sites may be restored in a manner that promotes economic opportunities.*

Sites for mineral extraction in river valleys should not be restored to a predominantly open water based form. Restoration of mineral sites elsewhere in the county to a lower level form will be acceptable if it is able to retain the integrity of the local landscape character and minimises overall traffic movements associated with extraction and restoration of the site.”

- P 4.5. The scheme at Ringstead Grange sought to achieve such objectives by sustainably reinstating all high quality agricultural land whilst also providing positive gains to bio-diversity, utilising lower quality land, reinstating species rich hedgerows as well as areas of calcareous grassland and woodland.
- P 4.6. The Environmental Statement confirmed that high quality agricultural land would be reinstated upon restoration to its previous use, whilst with the associated landscaping (i.e. calcareous grassland, broadleaf woodland and hedgerow planting) provided the opportunity to create contributions to local and nation BAP targets, with habitat linkage and green infrastructure corridors all of which are consistent with this policy provision. The proposals do not seek to amend these original proposals, and therefore the current variation of condition application is consistent with Policy 24.
- P 4.7. Consistent with the government’s objectives in respect of sustainable development, the working and restoration scheme at Ringstead Grange seeks to ensure that biological diversity is enhanced in the longer term. Replacement species rich hedgerows, (with hedgerow trees) broadleaf tree planting and the creation of calcareous grassland, along with the introduction of wetland areas, when combined with an aftercare management programme, were all considered to have the potential to beneficially contribute to the long-term biodiversity of the site, whilst still ensuring high quality agricultural land could be retained for productive arable production, in-line with the proposals of this application.
- P 4.8. The proposed restoration strategy for the site was specifically designed to ensure there was no permanent loss of "best and most versatile" land (i.e. ALC Grades 2 and 3a) re-establishing all prime quality agricultural land, with a range of alternative habitats to complement the existing landscape setting and provide opportunities for contributions to green infrastructure improvements.

P5. CONCLUSIONS

- P 5.1. In relation to the proposals to vary Conditions 2, 42, 48 and 52 of planning consent 15/00073/MINVOC at Ringstead Grange Quarry, it is considered there are no adverse environmental impacts associated with such proposals. The application is simply seeking to amend an earlier drafting error on the approved restoration plans for the site and this does not alter the conclusions of the original environmental assessment undertaken as part of the application of the quarry development, which considered the reinstatement of agricultural land, not agricultural “grassland”.
- P 5.2. Nor do the proposed amendments seek to vary any other aspect of the proposed restoration scheme which was designed to contribute to BAP habitats and green infrastructure networks consistent with policies 20 and 24 of the current adopted Minerals and Waste Local Plan.
- P 5.3. *‘Agricultural land (including conservation headlands and hedgerows)’* is clearly identified as a restoration feature within Section 5.2 of the Environmental Statement, whilst the table within the ‘Summary’ on page 52 identified that 52.6ha of agricultural land would be reinstated. The impacts of such restoration features have clearly been assessed and conclusions of the original Environmental Statement remain unaltered. All maintenance and aftercare details will also remain as currently approved.