

# Item 7

## REPORT TO CABINET

22 December 2005

### REPORT OF DIRECTOR OF NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

#### Portfolio: Regeneration

#### COUNTY DURHAM MINERALS AND WASTE DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK – MINERALS ISSUES AND OPTIONS REPORT

#### 1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 The Minerals Issues and Options Report has been produced by Durham County Council to help prepare a new range of documents to replace the existing Minerals Local Plan. These documents will follow the same format for preparation as our Local Development Framework. Within the current Minerals Local Plan, there are a number of minerals allocations within Sedgefield Borough. These are an Area of Search for Sand & Gravel at Embleton and Lea Hall, Preferred Areas for brick making at Eldon and Todhills, and Preferred Areas for Magnesian Limestone at Thrislington Quarry.
- 1.2 Within this document, the County Council are asking for comment on sites that have either not yet come forward for development from an existing allocation or comments on sites that have been proposed for development by the mineral industry. The Borough Council's response to this Issues and Options Report focuses on its Vision, the approach to Landbanks, Sand & Gravel issues, brick making materials, Magnesian Limestone and industry supported sites.
- 1.3 The contents of this report have been discussed and agreed with the Local Strategic Partnership.

#### 2 RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 That Cabinet endorses the comments made within the Report as the formal response of the Council to the County Council's consultation.

### 3 THE MINERALS ISSUES AND OPTIONS REPORT

3.1 The Sedgefield Borough Community Strategy (2004-2014) sets out a vision for a 'healthy, prosperous and attractive Borough with strong communities'. The Sedgefield Borough Local Development Framework provides the spatial vision for the Community Strategy and this document has identified that;

'...the natural environment of the Borough needs to be conserved, enhanced and valued by the community. The quality of the natural environment is sometimes undervalued but it is important to our sustainable future. It is not only important that resources are allocated for the management of the natural environment but that new development is encouraged to help diversify the biological and natural interest in the surrounding area.

3.2 As part of this process, the Borough Council has designated a number of Local Nature Reserves close to the main settlements and has developed a wildlife garden for Bishop Middleham. The drive to create, maintain and enhance the network of bio-diverse sites in the Borough will continue. Similarly, new development should respect and, where possible, enhance the Landscape Character of the Borough. By ensuring that the design of new developments compliments rather than conflicts with Landscape Character, it helps the setting and vibrancy of the Borough's communities and helps provide an attractive Borough.

3.3 Moreover, the development and maintenance of good green space in communities is an important characteristic of sustainable communities. The opportunities for new development in the Borough should respect the existing provision of green space within settlements and where possible, make improvement either through new provision or the improvement of existing facilities.'

3.4 In arriving at this position the LSP agrees that the key drivers that support this view are;

- Ensuring development does not adversely affect Landscape Character
- The creation, maintenance and enhancement of a functional network of bio-diverse sites
- The promotion of good green space in communities and surrounding area

The County's Minerals Local Development Framework should take account of these within its vision.

#### **Overall approach to a Mineral Landbank<sup>1</sup>**

3.5 The Issues and Options Paper states that, in accordance with Government Guidance, there is a need to provide a minerals landbank for sand & gravel, crushed rock, dimension stone, cement making materials, brick making material and burnt dolomite. However, the County Council has not yet decided whether this end-date of the Plan should either 2016 or 2021. Until this is resolved in the Preferred Options Paper next year, it is not possible to assess how much mineral reserves are required for the landbank and as a result, we are unable to assess whether some or all of the proposed sites in Sedgefield Borough will come forward for development.

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<sup>1</sup> A landbank is a stock of planning permissions for the winning and working of minerals including dormant sites or currently non working sites. For energy minerals e.g. coal, oil or gas, there is no system of landbanks.

3.6 The following paragraphs provide some commentary on the potential sites that are included in the Minerals Issues and Options Paper.

**Lea Hall, East of Newton Aycliffe - Area of Search<sup>2</sup> for Sand and Gravel**

3.7 The existing Minerals Local Plan identifies an area of search for sand and gravel at Lea Hall. The primary reason why the Local Plan took this approach was the lack of detailed geological information as to the precise location of where workable deposits lie. The current sources of information on which areas of search was made are an independent study commissioned by the then Department of Environment in 1989 entitled “Assessment of the potentially workable sand and gravel resources in County Durham” and Mineral Assessment Reports produced by the Institute of Geological Sciences, now known as British Geological Survey.

3.8 There has been no material change in the information base since the adoption of the Minerals Local Plan in 2000. The production of sand and gravel resources is an important element in the development industry and the protection of land with potential resources should be welcomed.

**Eldon Brickworks – Preferred Area<sup>3</sup> for brick making materials**

3.9 The existing preferred area for future extraction by Eldon Brickworks is an area to the north of the existing quarry. The new owners of the Brickworks, Weinerberger Ltd, have indicated to the County Council that they would like to replace this preferred area with another area to the east of the existing quarry. It has been estimated by the owners that there are approximately 1.7 million tonnes of recoverable reserves and allow them to have a 25-year landbank. This landbank would allow the owners to make significant investment decisions in the knowledge that they have sufficient reserves to help pay for this investment. This should be supported. However, this new area of mineral extraction would bring quarrying in closer proximity to the residents of Old Eldon. It is important therefore that the County Council work with the Brickworks owners to limit the extent of mineral activity to an acceptable distance away from Old Eldon and put in place measures that will ameliorate the visual effects of quarrying upon these residents. Furthermore, it will be important to safeguard the existing screening provided by the mature woodland within the south-eastern part of the proposed Preferred Area.

**Todhills Brickworks, Byers Green – Area of Search for brick making materials**

3.10 Todhills Brickworks has benefited from a number of planning permissions for extracting brick making materials. The Clarence Farm site is currently undergoing restoration work and quarrying has recently begun at the Long Lane site. An Area of Search was identified in the Minerals Local Plan to help maintain a 15-year landbank. To enable this development to come forward in an acceptable manner, the allocation requested significant planting to screen the development in the future. This process has already

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<sup>2</sup> An area of search is defined as a broad area within which some mineral extraction may be acceptable, subject to detailed consideration

<sup>3</sup> A preferred area is defined as an area within a Mineral Consultation Area containing mineral resources which can be identified with a high degree of precision and where there is a strong presumption in favour of extraction. (Mineral Consultation Areas are areas defined in order to ensure consultation between the relevant District Planning Authority, the minerals industry and the County Council before certain non-mineral planning applications made within the area are determined.)

begun, showing the company's commitment to the long-term future of this Brickworks. This Area of Search remains within the Issues and Options document to enable the Brickworks to effectively plan for its future. This area of search should be supported.

#### **Thrislington Quarry - Preferred Area for Magnesian Limestone Extraction**

- 3.11 Thrislington Quarry, lying to the south of Cornforth produces high grade magnesian limestone which is suitable for use in the steel and chemical industries and significant amounts of construction aggregates. The reserve of high grade magnesian limestone have been recognised by the Minerals Local Plan as a nationally important mineral and allocated a Preferred Area to the east of the A1(M). This approach has been taken forward within the Issues and Options Paper. The Issues Paper goes further by identifying the full extent of high grade mineral to be protected from non-mineral related development. The quarrying operations at Thrislington have been a major employer within this area of the Borough and these allocations would continue this practice. However, the continued expansion of mineral activity in this area will have a negative effect on the landscape character and could become over-dominant if the full extent of the reserve is exploited. It is therefore vitally important that this potentially negative impact can be successfully ameliorated to allow the exploitation of this nationally important mineral.

#### **Bishop Middleham – Industry Proposed Extension to Quarry**

- 3.12 The operators of Bishop Middleham Quarry have requested that a western extension to be included in the Minerals Development Framework. This western extension would bring quarrying operations up to the extent of quarrying proposed by the operators of Thrislington. It would appear that there is no nationally important mineral to be found in this extension area, and would likely to be used for agricultural lime to supplement UK farming activity. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, the continued expansion of mineral activity in this area will have a negative effect on its landscape character and could become an over-dominant activity.

#### **Aycliffe Quarry – Industry Proposed Extension to Quarry**

- 3.13 Aycliffe Quarry lies to the south-east of Aycliffe Village and in close proximity to the A167, River Skerne and East Coast Mainline railway. The operators have requested that two extension areas be included in the Minerals Development Framework, one to the north and one to the south. The northern extension would bring quarrying operations closer to the Aycliffe Village Conservation Area and it is important that if this site does come forward, that measures are put in place to ameliorate this impact. The southern extension would take operations away from the Village but would take operations closer to the East Coast Mainline railway and the River Skerne. The Borough Council has recently produced a Strategic Flood Risk Assessment to help make sure that future development activity does not have an adverse impact upon flooding. This Assessment identified that the River Skerne does pose a potential flood risk in this area. The County Council, in conjunction with the Environment Agency, will need to assess whether this potential flood risk can be overcome.

## **4 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 None

## 5 CONSULTATIONS

- 5.1 The Borough Local Strategic Partnership has been consulted on this response to the Issues and Options Report.

## 6 OTHER MATERIAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 6.1 None

## 7 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 None

## 8 LIST OF APPENDICES

- 8.1 None

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### Ward(s)

All

Key Decision Validation: This is not a Key Decision as the report relates to a consultation document

### Background Papers

County Durham Minerals and Waste Development Framework – Minerals Issues and Options Report

### Examination by Statutory Officers

	Yes	Not Applicable
1. The report has been examined by the Councils Head of the Paid Service or his representative	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. The content has been examined by the Councils S.151 Officer or his representative	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. The content has been examined by the Council's Monitoring Officer or his representative	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. The report has been approved by Management Team	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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