

Article for Mineral Planning Magazine

Title: Is MPS1 meeting its landscape and nature conservation objective?

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A recent study¹ for the Minerals Industry Research Organisation, funded by the Aggregates Strategic Research Programme, shows that aggregates companies are generally not submitting planning applications in or immediately adjacent to nationally important landscapes (AONBs and National Parks), European wildlife sites or World Heritage Sites. Policies aimed at protecting the qualities of these sites for which they were designated, appeared to be working well.

The research examined all planning decisions in England on proposals involving predominantly aggregates extraction on new land since the publication of Mineral Policy Statement 1 (MPS1) *Planning and Minerals* in November 2006, provided these were sufficiently significant to merit an Environmental Impact Assessment. The study therefore aimed to analyse the impact of MPS1, particularly on decisions in designated areas. Sixty applications met the chosen criteria (which excluded, for example, extensions of time or variations of conditions). Just four of these were wholly or partly within designated areas (Table 1). A further four sites bordered designated areas (Table 2).

Table 1: Relevant applications within designated areas since MPS1

Site name	Designations affected				
	National Park	AONB	SPA	SAC	World Heritage Site
Marston's Quarry, Suffolk	No	No	Yes	No	No
Busta Triangle, Hampshire	No	No	Yes	No	No
Plumley Wood, Hampshire	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
Broadway Quarry, Worcestershire	No	Yes	No	No	No

Table 2: Relevant applications bordering designated areas since MPS1

Site name	Designations affected				
	National Park	AONB	SPA	SAC	World Heritage Site
Brassington Moor, Derbyshire	Yes	No	No	No	No
Land off Avon Common, Dorset	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
Low Lane, Wiltshire	No	Yes	No	No	No
Lavant, West Sussex	Yes	No	No	No	No

All the applications within or close to the designated areas were recommended by officers for approval, and this was the outcome in all but two cases. At the time the research concluded, one site within an SPA (Busta Triangle, Hampshire) was awaiting a High Court decision (as a result of an appeal against the Inspector's decision on the planning appeal), and one other site adjacent to a National Park (a new quarry at Lavant, West Sussex) was refused but not appealed.

The proposal at Broadway quarry, Worcestershire, which was within an AONB was treated by the MPA as a 'non-major' development and found the application acceptable on landscape grounds. The other proposals, which were all within European wildlife sites, were found, after Appropriate Assessments had been completed where necessary, not to pose a risk to the integrity of the sites concerned (though the proper approach to handling European wildlife interests was the subject of the High Court case). For each application within a designated area a review of the documentary evidence suggested that the interests of the designation had been properly assessed (for its relevance to the decision, by applying the correct policy, and reflecting the importance of the designation in the decision). The decisions therefore appeared reliable for analytical purposes.

Review of Environmental Statements

The research aimed to compare the approach taken to aggregates planning decisions inside and outside designated areas. In the event, the small number of cases inside them prevented meaningful comparison. Some subsidiary analyses were nonetheless carried out. First, all Environmental Statements (ESs) and MPA officer reports were studied. This was initially to consider the environmental impact of proposals outside designated areas as a reference point, and to see if higher standards of operation could overcome constraints within protected areas. The study included the following reviews (amongst others):

(a) *the topics on which most attention focused*: 25 different subjects/mitigation factors were identified, but some were consistently more frequently analysed than others (landscape & visual, dust & air quality, highways & transport); in addition, ecology, archaeology, soils & agriculture, geology and rail infrastructure were all more frequently included in ESs for applications within designated areas than outside;

(b) *any preference for short term impact mitigation or long term landscape restoration*: these options were given different weight by the various applicants and authorities, but the matter was specifically addressed in 73% of the Non-Technical Summaries of the ESs, 23% of the Committee Reports and 92% of the decision notices (particularly in the choice of conditions); there was more attention to both short- and long-term restoration within designated areas than outside them;

(c) *reference to MPSI*: this key policy document was specifically mentioned in only 37% of MPA officer reports (though that does not necessarily mean its content was completely ignored in the other cases);

(d) *exemplar quarry proposals*: 17 of the 60 sites were considered to have the potential to reach very high standards in planning and design, minimising impacts during

operations, and providing beneficial restoration/after-uses; two of these were in designated areas.

The influence of local cultural pressures

The study attempted to identify if any underlying cultural pressures sympathetic or unsympathetic to aggregates working were influencing MPA decisions and, if so, whether these correlated consistently with any local circumstances (such as unemployment levels). Decisions taken contrary to officers' recommendations were taken as the trigger for in-depth analysis of cases. There were eleven of these in the 60 applications (one approved and ten refused), shown in Table 3. Only one of the eleven cases was within a designated area (Busta Triangle), so there was an insufficient sample to merit a further analysis of cultural pressures inside and outside designated areas.

Table 3. Applications where officer recommendations were overturned by Councillors.

MPA date of decision	Site name	MPA	Application type	Officer recommendation	MPA decision
19.12.05	Runfold South	Surrey CC	Extension - area	Approve	Refuse*
21.9.06	Runshaw	Lancashire CC	New Quarry	Approve	Refuse*
29.11.06	Busta Triangle #	Hampshire CC	Extension - area	Approve	Refuse**
13.12.06	Sandons Farm	Lancashire CC	New Quarry	Approve	Refuse*
31.10.07	Berkyn Manor	RB Windsor & Maidenhead	New Quarry	Approve	Refuse*
14.1.08	Shipton-on-Cherwell	Oxfordshire CC	Extension - area	Refuse	Approve
6.3.08	Chilton Estate (1)	Suffolk CC	New Quarry	Approve	Refuse
21.10.08	Ball Mill Quarry (1): Church Farm South	Worcestershire CC	Section 73 Amendment	Approve	Refuse**
24.11.08	Stonehenge Farm	Oxfordshire CC	Extension - area	Approve	Refuse**
4.12.08	Chilton Estate (2)	Suffolk CC	New Quarry	Approve	Refuse
17.3.09	Lavant	West Sussex CC	New Quarry	Approve	Refuse

Denotes site within designated area.

* Application was subsequently granted on appeal (before November 30th 2009).

** An appeal has been lodged, but a final verdict has yet been determined (as at 30/11/09).

In all eleven cases, the overwhelmingly important consideration in the decision was councillors' perception of the impact of the proposals on local amenities. In all cases

little weight was given to strategic issues such as the policy of sustaining a sufficient local landbank of permitted reserves, however low that landbank had fallen. Councillors also appeared to be influenced to some degree by the planning history of the site or by the operator's past performance, though conclusions are difficult to draw in the absence of an analysis of the 49 other cases where the officers' recommendations were accepted.

Public beliefs, attitudes and acceptance of aggregates production

The study included an overview of public perceptions and the degree of acceptance of quarrying, with particular reference to designated areas. This was based on a literature review. It identified only a few relevant studies, which often focused on controversial cases, favoured qualitative methods, and rarely captured the factors which determine how an individual's preference is formed. However, two UK-based studies addressed attitudes to quarrying: the London Economics study for DETR in 1999 to inform the setting of the Aggregates Levy, and the market research study by Saint Consulting in 2009 into public attitudes to planning (with these framed as 'NIMBY' responses). UK adults were found to have a generally negative view of quarrying close to their homes, and the Saint study found that quarrying was now the least accepted form of land use out of 13 categories evaluated. Behind the headline results, attitudes were found to be shaped by deeply held values which tended broadly either to towards preservation of natural environments or towards their utilisation. Attitudes in designated areas focused on national parks, where the policy of landscape protection coloured not only local people's views but those of visitors.

Conclusion

The study found that MPS1 has a key role in reinforcing the preference for aggregates extraction outside the five types of designated area reviewed. Application of MPS1 policies examined during this study suggests there is likely to be limited replenishment of permitted reserves within those areas over time. As a result, a progressive switch of aggregates supply could be expected from within protected areas to locations outside them, which is – of course – the current landscape and nature conservation policy objective.

1. *An evaluation of decisions for aggregates working in designated areas since the introduction of MPS1*, by authors from British Geological Survey, David Jarvis Associates, Green Balance and Placewise (at Manchester University), January 2010. Available from:

http://www.sustainableaggregates.com/strategic_research/reports/project_2_final_report.pdf or <http://www.bgs.ac.uk/downloads/start.cfm?id=1663>

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Images:

A crushed rock aggregates quarry, Derbyshire.