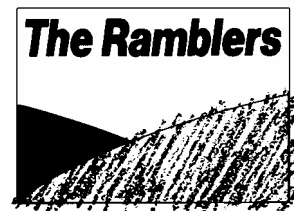




Ten Principles of Sustainable Minerals Planning

Wildlife and Countryside Link

August 2004



Wildlife and Countryside Link's ten principles of sustainable minerals planning

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Minerals are a non-renewable natural resource that can only be won where they exist geologically. Their exploitation often involves the loss of other non-renewable resources like archaeology, ancient woodland and other habitats contributing to the historic character of the landscape, though the appropriate management of post-extraction minerals workings has the potential to enhance wildlife. Generation of traffic, changes in hydrology, loss of land to farming and restoration for waste disposal are amongst the other complex environmental interactions that arise from terrestrial minerals working. Meanwhile marine dredging can damage marine wildlife and heritage, as well as changing erosion and sedimentation patterns.

We want the future supply of minerals in England to be sustainable and avoid irreversible damage to the environment. To achieve this it is essential to plan to source our minerals supplies in ways that recognise the importance of protecting wildlife, landscape, historic environment and the interests of both recreational users and local communities.

Wildlife and Countryside Link (WCL) believes that a truly sustainable national policy for minerals extraction in England should seek to fulfil a number of objectives, to:

- *place the conservation and enhancement of the terrestrial natural and historic environment and protection of the marine environment at the heart of the minerals planning system;*
- *reduce the need for extraction by managing the demand for minerals and improving the efficiency of their use, recognising that economic prosperity does not require increasing levels of minerals consumption;*
- *maximise the use of recycled and secondary aggregates; and*
- *promote public participation in minerals planning and improve the transparency of the process.*

WCL recommends that these objectives should be delivered through the Government's new *Minerals Planning Policy Statement 1* (MPS1) which relates to both aggregates (sand, gravel and crushed rock) and to the extraction of other minerals. MPS 1 should establish the following ten principles for national, regional and local minerals planning. They should also be a key influence in shaping implementation of the Government's Communities Plan.

1. **Minerals policy at national, regional and local levels should promote the use of 'environmental capacity' as an indication of the extent of minerals extraction that would be sustainable in any given area, within any given time.** This means abandoning the discredited 'predict and provide' approach to minerals planning through which minerals have been supplied solely on the basis of crude forecasts of demand. Instead new planning policy should promote the adoption of a more flexible 'plan, monitor and manage' approach within new Minerals Development Frameworks and Regional Spatial Strategies which does not rely on the use of landbanks. Environmental capacity should also inform and influence the extent of mineral extraction associated with the implementation of the Government's Communities Plan. We commend the Welsh Assembly's

introduction of environmental capacity assessment into aggregates planning through Minerals Technical Advice Note 1 – Aggregates.

2. **Apportionment of aggregates production at the regional and local level should inform strategic planning of minerals extraction, but should not be used as a target for extraction.** The merit of proposals for extraction should be determined at the development control stage, according to the impact of such development on the environment and the potential to mitigate local adverse impacts. The Regional Spatial Strategy should guide developers to reserves where the impacts of quarrying would be least detrimental to the countryside and marine environments.
3. **Designated areas and other sites with habitats, species and features of national or international importance should be afforded the highest degree of protection from loss or damage by mineral extraction.** New permissions for minerals extraction affecting such areas should not be granted except in the most exceptional circumstances. The importance of valuing and protecting the wider countryside and species of conservation importance outside of designated areas, should also be recognised in policy at national, regional and local levels.
4. **Demanding targets should be set for the use of recycled and secondary and alternative materials.** These should inform the formulation of minerals policy in Regional Spatial Strategies and Minerals Development Frameworks. At the development control stage, local planning authorities should use conditions to secure the recycling of construction and demolition waste and ensure design specifications make greater use of recycled, secondary and alternative materials.
5. **Minerals planning should be supported by further investigation into issues concerning the control of minerals at their end-use, to reduce consumption and waste, and maximise productivity.** The ODPM already has a programme of research on minerals underway. With the introduction of the more flexible Plan Monitor Manage system for minerals planning, it should be possible to amend policies in Regional Spatial Strategies and Minerals Development Frameworks more swiftly so they are underpinned by this research.
6. **Sustainability Appraisal (SA) (which must incorporate Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)) of Regional Spatial Strategies and Minerals Development Frameworks should help to identify the most environmentally appropriate means and sources of meeting our need for minerals.** At a regional level, the SA should direct the need for quarrying within the region by taking into account the impact of sourcing materials from outside a plan area eg. from marine deposits, and therefore avoid simply exporting the environmental costs of minerals extraction to other landscapes and ecosystems. This should ensure that marine and terrestrial minerals extractions are planned together. Legally SEAs must consider the cumulative impact of existing and possible future quarrying operations, and the complex indirect effects and interactions between environmental issues. They must also consider alternative strategies, including prioritising the use of other materials. Marine aggregate extraction must have its own SEA which should be within the context of a marine spatial planning system (See http://www.wcl.org.uk/downloads/2002/Links_Marine_Spatial_Planning_paper.pdf).
7. **The minerals planning system should offer practical ways to encourage public participation.** Meaningful consultation with local communities during the

development of Minerals Development Frameworks should help secure improved policies and minimise local conflict during development control. The public should also be closely engaged from the earliest scoping stages in both the process of Sustainability Appraisal of minerals policies and plans, and in EIA for specific development proposals and take into account new guidance on public participation.

8. **Enforcement of planning controls must be taken more seriously within the planning system if policies are to be upheld.** Minerals Planning Authorities need to be provided with sufficient resources and guidance to enable them to successfully monitor and review conditions and legal agreements attached to planning permissions, and to take enforcement action quickly where breaches of planning control occur. This could include through the use of temporary stop notices.
9. **Where mineral extraction is permitted, measures should be firmly put in place to provide wildlife habitats when working has ceased, whatever the primary end use of the site.** In particular, opportunities should be taken to contribute to the achievement of the specific targets set out in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan.
10. **Finally, minerals planning policy needs to be supported by economic instruments which encourage the more efficient use of aggregates and greater development of markets for secondary and recycled materials.** WCL strongly supports the objectives of the Aggregates Levy as one mechanism that acknowledges the environmental costs of quarrying. We believe that the Government should announce a clear commitment to the continued implementation of the levy, fixing the value of the levy to escalate in line with inflation. This should be accompanied by assurance of the continuation and improvement of the Sustainability Fund, to enable more complex projects and those involving longer time frames to be realised to enhance the sustainability of minerals in practical planning terms.

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