



**OXFORDSHIRE
COUNTY COUNCIL**

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29 May 2012

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MJT/PD/WF

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Dear Ed

Oxfordshire Minerals and Waste Core Strategy

Thank you for your letter dated 15 May 2012 about the County Council's new minerals planning strategy and the proposal for gravel extraction between Cholsey and Wallingford.

At the meeting of the County Council on 3 April 2012 the Minerals and Waste Core Strategy was approved for publication, to enable representations to be made, and for submission to the Secretary of State for independent examination. The Core Strategy 'proposed submission document' was published on the Council's website on 25 May and relevant consultation bodies and other interested organisations and persons have been notified. The period for making representations on the plan ends on 16 July.

The Council's decision followed the public consultation that we carried out on draft Minerals and Waste Planning Strategies in September/October 2011 and earlier consultation with stakeholders on strategy options. We received 779 responses to the 2011 consultation, which included 548 objections to a proposed new mineral working area at Cholsey. All the points raised in these responses have been considered by the Council.

The Council concluded that the consultation did not lead to any new substantive issues being put forward that called into question the principles on which the draft strategies were prepared. The minerals planning strategy therefore remains as it was in the consultation



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draft document; but some changes have been made to policies in response to more detailed issues.

In response to the particular concerns you have raised, I have the following comments:

1. The area between Cholsey and Wallingford that is included in the minerals planning strategy (policy M3) as a 'principle location for sharp sand and gravel working' is a broad area, not a specific site allocation. Within this area there are specific sites that have been nominated by minerals operators and landowners for possible inclusion in the new Minerals and Waste Plan, but at this stage we are establishing the overall strategy for where future mineral working should take place, not specific working sites. The Cholsey area is smaller, and therefore contains fewer potential site options, than some other areas of sand and gravel resource; but other area options that are similarly constricted have also been considered. The Council considers that it contains sufficient sand and gravel resource to provide flexibility for subsequent identification of a specific working area (or areas).
2. The Cholsey area was selected because a need was identified for a new sand and gravel working area in southern Oxfordshire and the Cholsey area was assessed as being the least constrained in terms of strategic level considerations; and as having the shortest lorry route distance to the main areas of demand for construction materials in southern Oxfordshire, particularly Didcot and the Science Vale area, with good access to the lorry route network. The process of developing the minerals strategy is set out in the Council's background paper Development of Minerals Planning Strategy (revised April 2012) which is on the Council's website alongside the Core Strategy document. A copy is enclosed. Also enclosed are two papers from meetings of the Council's Minerals and Waste Plan Working Group on 27 September 2010 and 24 January 2011, which set out the consideration and assessment against a series of criteria of the sand and gravel strategy options; and the reasoning behind the revision of the Council's initial strategy to include the Cholsey area. As part of the evidence base for the Core Strategy, we have produced an updated 'Preliminary Assessment of Minerals Site Nominations' (revised February 2012), to inform assessment of likely deliverability of the area options, and a copy of this is enclosed as well.

On the issues of numbers of people living in the vicinity of the area and economic activity, the Council concluded that neither of these factors constituted an overriding strategic level constraint on mineral working in the Cholsey area. These are important issues but they are matters that should more properly and effectively be addressed at a site specific level when detailed proposals for mineral working are made. The Council considers that within the proposed Cholsey area there is sufficient scope to identify a specific sand and gravel working area (or areas) which should be commercially viable but which, with provision of adequate mitigation where required, should not have an unacceptable impact on residential amenity. Possible mitigation measures could include unworked buffer zones, planting, screening bunds, lorry routeing and hours of working restrictions.

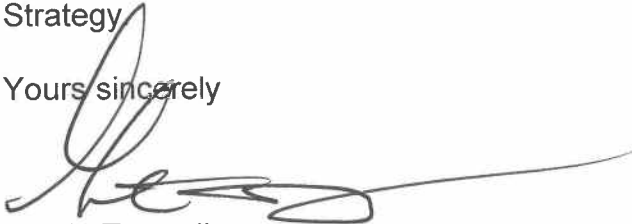
3. The County Council is aware that the North Wessex Downs and Chilterns AONBs both have concerns about the possible impact of mineral working in the Cholsey area on the two AONBs and their settings, and that they made objections to the

consultation draft minerals strategy accordingly. These concerns and objections were reiterated in letters from the two AONBs dated 29 March and 2 April 2012; and these letters were provided to all County Council members prior to the County Council meeting on 3 April. We have been working to address the concerns of the AONBs through discussions between County Council and AONB officers and a landscape assessment that has been undertaken by the County Council, and this dialogue is continuing.

The County Council did not send individual responses to organisations or individuals who responded to the September/October 2011 consultation on the draft Minerals and Waste Planning Strategies, replying to specific comments or concerns, and this included Wallingford Town Council and Cholsey Parish Council. We only sent a specific response where we considered this was required. Otherwise, we have responded to the comments made in response to that consultation through a general document which summarises and groups all the comments and gives the Council's response to each comment. This has been published on the Council's website alongside the Core Strategy document.

Following the close of the period for making representations on 16 July 2012, we will summarise the main issues raised in the representations and will submit the plan, the summary of issues and the full representations to the Secretary of State. We expect submission to be made in mid-August and the independent examination by an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State to take place in the autumn. We currently expect to receive the Inspector's report in spring 2013. If the plan is found by the Inspector to be legally compliant and 'sound', the Council will then adopt the Minerals and Waste Core Strategy

Yours sincerely



Martin Tugwell
Deputy Director – Growth and Infrastructure

c.c. Cllr Hilary Hibbert-Biles, Cabinet member for Growth and Infrastructure
Joanna Simons
Cllr Patrick Greene
Cllr Lynda Atkins
Peter Day