The new Mineral Local Plan for Staffordshire 2015 to 2030

Sustainability Appraisal / Strategic Environmental Assessment
Non-technical Summary  June 2015
Contents

1. Setting the Scene ................................................................................................................. 1
   1.1. Introduction ................................................................................................................. 1
   1.2. Background to the New Minerals Local Plan ............................................................ 1
   1.3. Sustainability Appraisal and Strategic Environmental Assessment ...................... 1
   1.4. The role of the new Minerals Local Plan ................................................................. 2

2. The new Minerals Local Plan .............................................................................................. 2
   2.1. The process so far ........................................................................................................ 2
   2.2. Developing and assessing the Vision ........................................................................ 3
   2.3. Assessing the Strategic Objectives .......................................................................... 3
   2.4. Assessing the Policies ............................................................................................... 3
   2.5. Assessing the Sites .................................................................................................... 4
   2.6. The next stages .......................................................................................................... 5
   2.7. Further Information ................................................................................................. 5
Sustainability Appraisal of the new Minerals Local Plan for Staffordshire – Non-technical Summary

1. Setting the Scene

1.1. Introduction

1.1.1. Welcome to the Sustainability Appraisal (SA) that has been produced to support the development of the new Minerals Local Plan for Staffordshire 2015 - 2030. Full details of the process can be found in the “Environmental Report” which has been produced to accompany the current consultation process.

1.1.2. This “non-technical summary” aims to provide key stakeholders and members of the public with a brief overall picture of how and why the document has been prepared, the options that we have considered, and the impacts that we expect it to have. It also provides a link at the end where additional information can be found.

1.2. Background to the New Minerals Local Plan

1.2.1. Staffordshire County Council is the Mineral Planning Authority responsible for the planning and control of quarrying and mineral extraction throughout its administrative area (except for that part of the County that falls inside the Peak District National Park, which has its own separate Mineral Planning Authority).

1.2.2. The policies that guide this process at the moment are set out in the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Minerals Local Plan (1994 – 2006), but this document is due for replacement, so we need to produce a new set of policies in a new Minerals Local Plan as soon as possible.

1.2.3. The current plan was produced jointly with Stoke-on-Trent City Council, but this time, we are producing plans separately, so our new plan will not cover the administrative area of Stoke-on-Trent City Council.

1.3. Sustainability Appraisal and Strategic Environmental Assessment

1.3.1. As we produce the new Minerals Local Plan, we have to carry out Sustainability Appraisals (SA) and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) to help to ensure that the Plan will promote sustainable development and help to balance social, environmental and economic priorities. The two processes are guided by different legislation, but they can normally be carried out together. This summary tells the story of both SA and SEA.
1.3.2. The SA / SEA process should be a key part of good plan making. It typically involves several stages of identifying options, assessing the possible impacts of policies, then adjusting the draft strategy and reviewing again.

1.3.3. The assessments attempt to predict how each part of the strategy would affect a range of “SA Objectives”, chosen to reflect key issues in the plan area and what the strategy has to achieve. We have consulted widely on the list, and collected enough information about the plan area to enable us to work out what impacts might arise.

1.4. **The role of the new Minerals Local Plan**

1.4.1. Staffordshire has significant mineral resources. The new Minerals Local Plan for Staffordshire sets out the vision and strategic objectives for the sustainable development of minerals in Staffordshire for the period 2015 to 2030. It needs to include policies that identify allocations of land for mineral working and policies for determining minerals related planning applications. The Plan also includes a policy monitoring framework.

1.4.2. A key role of the Plan is to determine whether existing quarries have sufficient capacity to meet the anticipated demand for minerals over the next 15 years, and then to allocate sufficient sites to produce any additional mineral resources that might be required.

1.4.3. The largest anticipated shortfall in resources is for sand and gravel, which account for the greatest volume of production. However, the plan also needs to make provision for additional resources of shale and of anhydrite and gypsum for cement manufacture.

2. The new Minerals Local Plan

2.1. **The process so far**

2.1.1. The new Minerals Local Plan has evolved through a series of publications and consultations since we consulted on an “Issues and Options” document in October 2008. Each document has attempted to consider a wide range of possible approaches to developing the strategy, so that the best options can be chosen.

2.1.2. The Sustainability Appraisal process began even earlier, with the first SA Scoping Report produced in November 2006, setting out how we intended to do the work, defining 17 SA Objectives against which we could measure impacts, and letting organisations such as the Environment Agency, Natural England and Heritage England (then known as English Heritage) offer their opinions.

2.1.3. Each time we have published a document to invite comments on our progress towards completion of the new Minerals Local Plan, we have also produced a report on the SA process, explaining how the impacts of the Strategy are developing.
2.1.4. Now we have reached the stage where the development of the Plan is complete, and interested parties and the wider public have their final chance to make comments on the new Minerals Local Plan before we send it to the Government for examination.

2.1.5. This non-technical summary should help people to understand what effect the plan may have.

2.2. **Developing and assessing the Vision**

2.2.1. The Vision is intended to set out what the new Minerals Local Plan hopes to achieve. We have considered the requirements for minerals plans, as well as the environmental issues and relevant Plans, Policies and Programmes identified in the preparation of the SA Scoping Report, and agreed on the following:

- By 2030 Staffordshire will be producing minerals to support sustainable economic development from sites that are:
  - Located where their impact on local communities and the environment has been minimised or mitigated
  - Operating to high environmental standards; and
  - Restored and subject to aftercare in a way that enhances local amenity and the environment

2.2.2. The Sustainability Appraisal has shown that the Vision shows a good level of compatibility with the SA Objectives. It can be expected to make positive contributions to all but two of those objectives, and is not expected to have any adverse impacts.

2.3. **Assessing the Strategic Objectives**

2.3.1. Four Strategic Objectives have been developed for the Strategy in order to show how the Vision could be achieved. They each concentrate on a specific aspect but, taken together, they offer broad support for 16 of the SA Objectives, and are not inconsistent with the remaining one.

2.4. **Assessing the Policies**

2.4.1. The policies of the new Minerals Local Plan are central to its impact as they will be used to determine whether applications for planning permission for new minerals-related development should be granted.

2.4.2. To develop policies for the new Minerals Local Plan we first identified key issues that needed to be addressed through the plan, then

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\(^1\) SA Objective 9 focusses on maintaining the ability to supply small quantities of highly specialised building stone for repairing historic buildings. The absence of specific support within the Strategic Objectives is not seen as a problem.
identified the full range of alternative approaches, and assessed the impact of each approach.

2.4.3. Six key issues were considered in this way, and each was subdivided to ensure that different impacts were assessed in sufficient detail. The options fell into 4 main themes:

♦ Ensuring a steady and adequate supply of aggregates and industrial minerals;
♦ Safeguarding mineral resources from sterilisation caused by built development;
♦ Minimising the environmental impact of mineral operations; and
♦ Ensuring that quarries are reclaimed at the earliest opportunity and that high quality restoration and that appropriate aftercare takes place.

2.4.4. Among the key option choices explored were:

♦ How much sand and gravel, and other minerals, we should plan to make available throughout the plan period;
♦ Whether we should show any preference for extensions to existing quarries, rather than new areas of production; and
♦ Where we should look for new sites as the opportunities in the Trent and Tame valleys are used up.

2.4.5. The findings of the assessment suggested that we should plan for a production level of 5 million tonnes per annum for sand and gravel (based on a ten-years average of sales), that extensions to existing sites were generally preferable, particularly in terms of deliverability, and that an “Area of Search” west of the A38, between Alrewas and Kings Bromley represented the most sustainable location to look for new quarry sites once any remaining opportunities to the east of the A38 had been developed.

2.4.6. The SA also explored the best ways of protecting the environment and ensuring that mineral workings are restored to a high standard and at the earliest opportunity.

2.4.7. Once the alternative approaches to all of the issues had been assessed, the best-performing options were identified and combined together to produce draft 6 policies which were made available for public consultation between May and July 2014.

2.4.8. Those draft policies have since been modified in the light of comments received.

2.5. **Assessing the Sites**

2.5.1. The delivery of the new Minerals Local Plan will require new quarries to be developed, mostly for sand and gravel, but also for shale and for anhydrite and gypsum. Therefore we invited landowners and quarry companies to submit proposals for areas where they would like to see
new quarries. We also checked through our records to find any other proposals that had been submitted in the past but had not been developed.

2.5.2. All of these sites were assessed against the SA Objectives. Their potential impact on flood risk has been assessed through a Strategic Flood Risk Assessment, and any potential impact on internationally important sites for nature conservation have been identified through a Habitats Regulations Screening.

2.5.3. Sites have also been checked for their consistency with the draft policies and for their likely deliverability within the plan period.

2.5.4. Sufficient of the best performing sand and gravel sites have been allocated in the Draft Plan in order to meet and maintain the required production levels. Most of the allocations are extensions to existing sites but an Area of Search is also allocated west of the A38 along the Trent Valley for the development of replacement sites once the remaining opportunities in the Trent / Tame valley have been developed.

2.5.5. There were no practical alternatives to the areas proposed for the development of other minerals, so the Plan also identifies areas of search for the development of shale resources to supply Cauldon Cement Works in the Staffordshire Moorlands and for the extension of Fauld Mine in East Staffordshire that produces anhydrite and gypsum for cement manufacture. The precise boundaries of any future working will be defined as planning applications come forward.

2.6. The next stages

2.6.1. The new Minerals Local Plan is now offered for a final period of public consultation in June and July. All comments received will be sent with the Plan when it is submitted to the Secretary of State.

2.6.2. A Planning Inspector will then be appointed to carry out a public examination of the Plan to determine whether it is sound and should be adopted. The Inspector will consider all of the responses to this consultation, and will invite individuals or organisations to attend the examination to present their objections.

2.6.3. The Inspector will eventually submit a report with recommended modifications that must be made to the Plan before it is adopted.

2.6.4. Staffordshire County Council intend to be in a position to adopt the new Minerals Local Plan in the autumn of 2016.

2.7. Further Information

2.7.1. If you want to find out more about the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent New Minerals Local Plan, you can find all of the relevant documents through the Policy Document Library.