



Committee and Date Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership 20 November 2012
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Item 8

WENLOCK EDGE QUARRIES

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Summary

This paper updates members with the current situation on the contentious planning application for Lea Quarry, and proposes submission of further comments.

Background

1. On 15 August 2012 the AONB Partnership submitted an objection to the planning application ref 12/03034/MAW by Edge Renewables for the temporary change of use of the quarry land and associated buildings; erection of two storage buildings; extension to quarry building and installation of photovoltaic panels; change of use and extension to the office building, at Lea Quarry on Wenlock Edge. The development, much of which has already taken place and is the subject of a retrospective application, has a significant impact on the AONB. It also runs counter to the interests of a project in which the AONB Partnership has been an active partner, to develop with the local community, future uses of the quarries which are compatible with the huge environmental value and potential of Wenlock Edge. For these reasons the AONB Partnership has taken a more active and campaigning approach to its opposition than with previous planning applications. The AONB Partnership Manager and Chair attended a public meeting held at Much Wenlock on 22 August. Information has been circulated through our website, social media outlets and communication networks. Shropshire Council currently have logged 250 comments on this application, with a significant majority opposed to it.
2. Due to submission of additional material, there is a chance to make further comments until 21 November 2012. Two documents are appended, on which it is proposed that further comments are made. The applicants have submitted a response to our objection. The points made do not negate our arguments, and this must be stated. The second document is Shropshire Council's screening opinion on the need for Environmental Impact Assessment. As well as apparently rehearsing the case for why the development will not have a significant impact on the AONB, the document goes into several lines of argument in support of the applicants, raising serious questions about the impartiality of what should be a completely objective process. Members' views on these documents will be valued to inform further comments. A third appendix is an aerial view showing clearly the sensitivity of the quarries' location in the exceptional landscape of Wenlock Edge.

Recommendation

The Partnership is recommended to support the submission of further comments on the application.

List of Background Papers

Planning application 12/03034/MAW available at

<http://planningpa.shropshire.gov.uk/online-applications/applicationDetails.do?activeTab=summary&keyVal=M7D217TD0BN00>

Human Rights Act Appraisal

The information in this report is compatible with the Human Rights Act 1998.

Environmental Appraisal

The recommendation in this paper will contribute to the conservation of protected landscapes.

Risk Management Appraisal

Risk management has been appraised as part of the considerations of this report.

Community / Consultations Appraisal

The topics raised in this paper have been the subject of earlier consultations with Partnership members.

Appendices

Appendix 1 Applicant's response to AONB Partnership objection

Appendix 2 Shropshire Council Screening Opinion on the need for Environmental Impact Assessment

Appendix 3 Lea Quarry and Wenlock Edge from the air

APPLICANT'S REPLY TO THE CONSULTATION RESPONSE OF AONB PARTNERSHIP
(28/08/12)

12/03034/MAW Application under Section 62 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 for the temporary change of use of the quarry land and associated buildings; erection of two storage buildings; extension to quarry building and installation of photovoltaic panels; change of use and extension to the office building, Lea Quarry, Presthoke, Much Wenlock, Shropshire, TF13 6DQ

The Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership objects to this application, which seeks to put in place inappropriate industrial use in a highly sensitive location, which would result in huge loss of existing and potential public benefits in terms of conservation value, access, amenity and recreation, and potential employment through tourism. This contravenes many aspects of national and local planning policy, and is incompatible with the statutory AONB Management Plan. The approach of a part retrospective application for development and use which is already in place is highly insensitive to public opinion, given the extensive local engagement over recent years in developing an integrated vision for after-use of the quarries, which is jeopardised by this unsuitable proposal.

A reasonable development, but in the wrong place. The contribution of this development to renewable energy generation meets both government and local objectives, and will have maximum sustainability benefits if supplied with local timber, which is unclear in the application. However, while the previous intrusive quarrying operation had to take place in this location because that is where the stone was, this storage and woodchip operation could be sited in many alternative locations where its impact would be minimal. This development does not take any advantage from the exceptional environmental value of the site, but at the same time detracts substantially from that value.

The logs being brought to site to supply locally installed biomass boilers supporting local farming business are pure, untreated virgin timber from certified sustainably managed woodlands sourced as locally as possible. The conditions of the quarry are ideal due to the wind tunnel aiding drying of timber. Operating from the site ensures minimum carbon emissions and distance involved with delivering to the very local market that has been created due to the demand for the product and the government policy for implementing renewable energy schemes into businesses. The need is local and if we do not supply this product it will be transported for many more miles.

Confusion has arisen that Edge Renewables are supplying woodchip to Ironbridge Power Station. We would confirm this is NOT the case. The product for the power station is being shipped in from Canada through another source.

Restoration of the quarry has not been completed to the required standard following the cessation of quarrying operations. This restoration would have brought the site up to the standard of a Greenfield site, and due to the areas of rock exposure, shallow soil limestone grassland (a rare and important habitat in Shropshire) and heritage interest in the quarry, the site has potential to be hugely important for conservation and quiet enjoyment. For the site to be treated as a brownfield site suitable for industrial use is to overlook not only the requirements for full restoration, but also its enormous significance in the context of the whole of Wenlock Edge, one of the strongest elements of Shropshire's environmental networks.

The buildings are outside the SSSI and the log storage is on the quarry floor and is a solid stone base with compacted hardcore on top by the previous operators. After 6 years of no activity, a survey shows this area of the quarry floor has remained uncolonised by flora. Three other industries operate within the confines of the SSSI unit within the AONB. The activities of the two other companies have already set a precedent in Lea Quarry, with Grange Fencing storing large quantities of treated timber product and recently having tarmaced the whole of their site including the storage areas on the quarry floor. We recognise the importance of the SSSI, calcareous grassland & developing scrub. Edge Renewables proposed area covers 5.8%, leaving 94.2% part of containing the Geological SSSI, shallow soil limestone grassland being of conservation importance. There is no loss of habitat connectivity, with the log store being centred closest to the buildings.

Value of the site and its importance as part of Wenlock Edge, the AONB and Shropshire's environmental network

Lea Quarry lies on the crest of Wenlock Edge, a limestone escarpment of international significance and a fundamental element of the Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding National Beauty. The southern portion of the site c 21.2ha lies within the boundary of the Shropshire Hills AONB and the northern portion, 34.0ha, is bounded along its western edge by the AONB. The landscape around the Lea Quarry area falls into the 'Wooded hills and estate lands' type, with a high level of tranquillity along much of its length.

The whole area with the exception of the immediate area of the old quarry buildings is designated for its geology and associated flora as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and also as a Regionally Important Geological Site (RIGS). The SSSI citation states: "The world famous Wenlock Limestone outcrops of Wenlock Edge rank amongst Britain's most important geological sites. Studied by generations of geologists, the Edge remains a key research and educational locality. These are the finest sections available in the Wenlock Limestone, and they provide the best examples of reef development during the Silurian Period in Britain. The limestones contain a rich fossil fauna, and many fossil species, particularly of corals, brachiopods, trilobites and ostracods were first described from specimens collected here: Wenlock Edge is thus the standard or type locality for these species. The middle part of the Silurian Period is named the Wenlock Series after this area and localities within this site constitute the best sections available in the upper part of the Wenlock Series. This is a site of international significance for its stratigraphy and its unrivalled reef exposures."

The citation also stresses the biological importance of the SSSI, stating "Grasslands are now scarce on Wenlock Edge, and are confined to two or three small areas above rock outcrops and to somewhat larger examples in areas previously disturbed by quarrying." Historically Lea Quarry is part of a wider group of quarries, lime kilns and associated features which have origins in the medieval period and are nationally and internationally significant in relation to the technological, economic and social development of early industry from the 17th Century onwards.

Wenlock Edge is an important and popular area for recreation and tourism in the Shropshire Hills. The National Trust's Presthope car park lies just south of the site, with paths along the Edge providing views into the quarry. Long distance routes the Shropshire Way and the Jack Mytton Way run along Wenlock Edge, and this year a new Wenlock Edge Wanderer Shuttle bus route has been established to aid exploration of the Edge and boost sustainable tourism. Shropshire's Core Strategy states:

"Sustainable tourism, and high quality cultural and leisure development can deliver wide ranging benefits for Shropshire by contributing to a successful visitor economy; providing a potential focus for regeneration; supporting the quality of life of local communities; and

promoting social inclusion. Within Shropshire, tourism is a key local economic sector which generates around £457m a year from around nine million visits and supports around 8,786 full time job equivalents.” The Shropshire Hills AONB accounts for over 5 million of those visits, and sustainable tourism has been formally adopted as the mainstream approach to tourism development in the area, the AONB being recently awarded the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas (see <http://www.shropshirehillstourismpartnership.org.uk/>) .

In the relevant area section, the Shropshire Hills AONB Management Plan states “The closure of some quarries on Wenlock Edge creates important opportunities to secure sustainable long term uses, making the most of biodiversity and geological interest, and the potential for appropriate quiet forms of recreation. ... The need to retain character and limit the negative impacts of change and development is probably more acute here than anywhere else in the AONB. ... A sustainable tourism approach is vital in this part of the AONB, and also made more possible by the good transport links, attractiveness for walking and landscape interest of the area.”

Shropshire’s Core Strategy 2011 states (para 7.7) “ For development affecting the Shropshire Hills AONB, particular regard should be paid to the Shropshire Hills AONB Management Plan”.

The value of environmental networks lies not just in the value of individual sites of conservation importance, but in their connectivity and their ability to deliver multifunctional benefits. “This includes providing opportunities for informal recreation for local communities and tourists; improving health and community wellbeing, sense of place and identity, social cohesion, increasing biodiversity value and maintaining air quality.” (Shropshire Core Strategy para 7.4). Wenlock Edge is therefore not only one of the longest continuous woodlands in England, but also a unique corridor in which limestone geology and wildlife, tranquillity and beauty, and important access and recreation opportunities all coincide.

Inappropriate development in a key part of this corridor can therefore undermine the integrity and economic potential of the environmental network.

Edge Renewables recognises and agrees with all of the above. Environmental connectivity will not be affected. The proposal does not have any bearing on current woodlands, rights of way, public access or is detrimental to visitors current enjoyment of the area. Edge Renewables can only enhance the area of the previous industrial activity which is currently an eyesore and has been since activity ceased. The substantial areas of litter, rubbish and mess throughout the site left by industrial activity will be addressed by us with the owners.

The potential for educational access is a huge part of our plans and we will actively encourage schools and interest groups along with the Geological Society to visit the site. We believe the whole scenario of renewable energy, history of the site, the SSSI interest, flora and fauna offers a fantastic learning opportunity for local people and visitors to the area. We are as excited by this potential as we are by renewable energy. Access provisions are in line with Natural England and AONB policies.

The vision for the site is to recruit an ecologist (as a company employee) to manage the area, secure an ELS/HLS through Natural England with the aim of maintaining the unit in favourable condition through scrub clearance, continued grazing, minimum intervention in other areas and to facilitate and manage the educational access element of the area. Part of the existing redundant quarry building has been refurbished with toilet facilities together with a meeting room and this will be ideal to facilitate structured managed access visits. During a recent meeting many local

views were aired regarding peoples wishes to visit the site, so there is much interest already.

Disregard for the comprehensive vision for the quarries, supported by the local community

The proposed development and activity undertaken on the site already without planning permission have been without regard to the extensive work carried out over recent years by the National Trust supported by the AONB Partnership, to develop with local residents an integrated vision for the after-use and future of the quarries on Wenlock Edge. With a focus on maximising environmental value and becoming a place for local and visiting people to enjoy, this vision anticipates that the return in the quarries of natural biological systems and access to the special geological features will enhance the wider landscape and link well with the Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. By including appropriate business opportunities, leisure pursuits and lifelong learning initiatives there is an excellent possibility that the site can become the focus of an integrated regeneration of this rural hinterland to the market towns of Shrewsbury, Church Stretton, Much Wenlock and Bridgnorth and beyond to the West Midlands.

The company communicated with the Shropshire Planning Authority throughout regarding the plans and although the Directors of Edge Renewables are local people (Longville) were not initially aware of the National Trusts work with local residents although we were aware of the grazing and scrub clearance through Bardon Aggregates. The National Trust does not own or lease the site. We are an expanding company providing jobs for the local community. We very much hope Edge Renewables can be central to the vision of the AONB for Lea Quarry as we wish our Renewable Energy company be a showcase if not just for the area, but nationally. See comments above regarding access. We embrace localism & partnership working on this site in order for the local community to gain maximum benefit. The revenue from our activities will remain local and therefore benefit the local community through wages to local people and investment in the site.

Potential impacts of the development

The impacts of the development on this highly sensitive site need to be studied in a **full Environmental Impact Assessment**, which should be required before any decision on the application is made. They are likely to include:

- Industrial scale development affecting the quality and integrity of a key part of the Shropshire Hills AONB.
- Prevention of full restoration of the former quarries to non-industrial use, and limiting their considerable potential to deliver public benefits and economic return based on their high environmental value.
- Impact on landscape character and visual amenity
- Noise and loss of tranquillity from considerable passage of heavy vehicles and from the chipping operation.
- Limiting the achievement of optimal condition of part of the Wenlock Edge SSSI, by preventing restoration of quarried areas to valuable limestone grassland habitat.

The scale of the operation is low key but the product utilised is bulky (logs).

We are positively encouraging 'Quiet forms of recreation' See previous comments. We are not limiting the achievement of optimal condition of the SSSI far from it, we are utilising areas that are unlikely to restore any further ie Quarry floor. Current level of inappropriate tree planting by the owners of the site is going to do a lot more damage by shading out grassland areas and encroaching on rock faces however, it is stabilising massive areas of scree and loose rock waste left over from mining activities. Over time, this tree growth will undoubtedly block out the view of the quarry floor and the view of the walkers up on the edge. This could act as a natural screening of the site if necessary, however we believe people will be interested by our activities. The chipping machine will be housed in a building and lorry movement is 2.2 units per day therefore we do not envisage excessive noise or additional road transport. We are keen to preserve, enhance and educate the general public on the history of the site through educational access and hopefully negotiating a higher level environmental stewardship scheme on the site to facilitate the correct ongoing management of all of the significant features of the site.

Policy Background

National Planning Policy Framework

Paragraph 115 "Great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding National Beauty."

Para 113." Local planning authorities should set criteria based policies against which proposals for any development on or affecting protected wildlife or geodiversity sites or landscape areas will be judged.

Distinctions should be made between the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites, so that protection is commensurate with their status and gives appropriate weight to their importance and the contribution that they make to wider ecological networks."

Paragraph 118 "Proposed development on land within or outside of a SSSI likely to have an adverse effect on the SSSI should not be normally permitted".

Shropshire Core Strategy

CS5 Countryside and Green Belt "In the open countryside, new development will be strictly controlled in accordance with national planning policies protecting the countryside and Green Belt from inappropriate development."

" there will be areas where development will need to pay particular regard to landscape character, biodiversity or other environmental considerations including in the Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty". (explanation to CS5)

CS16: Tourism, Culture and Leisure "Supporting development that promotes opportunities for accessing, understanding and engaging with Shropshire's landscape, cultural and historic assets including the Shropshire Hills AONB, rights-of-way network, canals, rivers and meres & mosses.

Development must also meet the requirements of Policy CS17."

CS17: Environmental Networks Development will identify, protect, enhance, expand and connect Shropshire's environmental assets, to create a multifunctional network of natural and historic resources. This will be achieved by ensuring that all development:

- Protects and enhances the diversity, high quality and local character of Shropshire's natural, built and historic environment, and does not adversely affect the visual, ecological, heritage or recreational values and functions of these assets, their immediate surroundings or their connecting corridors. Further guidance will be provided in SPDs concerning the natural and built environment;
- Contributes to local distinctiveness, having regard to the quality of Shropshire's environment, including landscape, biodiversity and heritage assets, such as the

Shropshire Hills AONB, the Meres and Mosses and the World Heritage Sites at Pontcysyllte Aqueduct and Canal and Ironbridge Gorge

- Does not have a significant adverse impact on Shropshire's environmental assets and does not create barriers or sever links between dependant sites;

CS20 Strategic Planning for Minerals. Priority will be given to environmentally acceptable restoration and aftercare proposals which can deliver targeted environmental or community benefits consistent with Policies CS8, CS17 and CS18.

Shropshire Hills AONB Management Plan 2009-14 (Policies formally approved and adopted by Shropshire Council).

POLICY 18. Tranquillity should be taken fully into account in both strategic and specific decisions.

Proposals having a significant impact on tranquillity in the AONB should be prevented where possible.

POLICY 30. Renewable energy developments in the AONB should generally be of a small scale appropriate to local use. Larger scale energy developments will be more suitable outside the AONB,

e.g. linked to market towns where transport links are better, closer to larger scale demand, etc.

POLICY 39. Existing areas of high quality habitat must be retained, and networks developed of higher quality habitat through targeted improvements on privately owned land.

Summary

The AONB Partnership strongly objects to the application, which is at odds with national and local policy, with the statutory aims of the AONB and its Management Plan, and with a great weight of local public opinion.

Yours sincerely

George Chancellor
Chair, Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership

Determination of screening opinion request on the need for an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) in connection with a proposed planning application

Part 2 of The Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2011.

Proposed Development: Change of use of former quarry land and buildings to a mixed use of temporary timber storage, timber processing and ancillary permanent uses including the erection of two storage buildings, the extension of an existing storage building and an office building and the installation of photovoltaic panels.

Location: Lea Quarry, Wenlock Edge, Much Wenlock, TF13 6DG.

- as set out in the planning application by A.C.Craig Associates dated 17th July 2012.

For the purposes of the above Regulations the proposed application detailed above has been screened by the Local Planning Authority under Regulation 7 of the above Regulations.

No Environmental Impact Assessment has been requested for the following reasons:

- 1) The proposed development falls above the relevant area threshold (0.5ha) at which it is appropriate to consider the need for EIA under Schedule 2 of the above Regulations (threshold 10a, 'industrial estate developments'). The proposed development has therefore been considered against the criteria detailed in Schedule 3 of the Regulations and related government advice. In the opinion of the Local Planning Authority it is not considered that the proposed development would be likely to give rise to significant environmental effects including potential impacts which are of more than local significance or which cross significant boundaries. This is taking into account the potential magnitude, complexity, probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the potential impacts.
- 2) It is not considered on the basis of available relevant information that the environmental impacts likely to arise from the proposed development would result in the loss of natural resources, create additional waste or be associated with an unacceptable risk of accidents which would trigger the requirement for EIA.

In reaching this decision the Local Planning Authority has taken account of the following considerations:

- a) Visual impact: The application site (area 25.97ha) is located within and adjacent to an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) which is afforded statutory protection by planning policies. The buildings and the south-western storage area are just within the AONB boundary whilst the north eastern area is just outside it. The proposed storage areas would occupy a total of 5.8ha within the overall site and would be set down within the base of the former quarry, in contained locations surrounded by steep slopes and wooded areas. Some localised views of the storage activity are available including from rights of way / permissive footpaths on higher ground 60-100m to the north. However, it is considered that the timber storage activity would be a peripheral

element of a wider panorama from such viewpoints and that the appearance of stored timber would not be incompatible with the sites location adjacent to areas of mature and developing woodland. It is not considered on the basis of available evidence that the timber storage element of the development would be likely to give rise to significant visual effects on the AONB or its setting which would trigger the requirement for EIA. The applicant is applying for temporary storage use for a 5 year period. Hence, any residual visual impacts associated with the storage activity would potentially be reversible and capable of being reviewed within this timescale.

- b) The proposed buildings are located within the AONB, and comprise mainly existing structures within the former plant site or alterations / extensions to these structures. The plant site is in a relatively elevated location and the buildings and structures are visible locally from some external viewpoints. However, screening is provided by young woodland in the vicinity of the plant site and this would be expected to increase further as the woodland matures. One additional building is currently being used by Shropshire Council as a salt store. Other redundant items will be removed as a requirement of the mineral working permission. This does not however prevent the current applicant from seeking to retain some buildings and such proposals must be considered on their merits in the context of relevant planning policies.
- c) It is considered that, relative to the existing situation, the proposed development would potentially result in a visual improvement by facilitating an improvement to the appearance of retained buildings. Relative to the historical (1993) quarry restoration scheme (involving removal of all plant and structures) there would be some increased visual impact. The opportunity would exist however to exercise planning control to reduce the extent of any such impact (e.g. through surface treatment and localised landscaping). On the basis of the available information it is not considered that the proposed retention, alteration and addition to some of these existing structures would be likely to give rise to visual impacts on the AONB or its setting which are sufficient to trigger the requirement for EIA, either individually or in combination with the proposed timber storage use.

Note: The AONB Management Plan recognises the opportunity which the closure of quarries on Wenlock Edge creates to secure long-term sustainable uses, making the most of biodiversity and geological interest, and the potential for appropriate quiet forms of recreation. The applicant has acknowledged the geological, ecological and amenity potential of the wider site and has taken proactive measures to facilitate sustainable management for the 19 hectares of land within the application site which falls outside of the identified development areas. An ecologist has been appointed and meetings have taken place with other stakeholders. Elements of such wider management proposals including interpretation and provision for increased public access may need to form the subject of a separate planning application. It is considered on balance however that the current proposals are potentially compatible with the above AONB Management Plan objectives.

- d) Geology / SSSI: The application site is located within a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) which, within the quarry site, has been designated mainly for its geology. The areas of geological interest are located around the edges of the application site, away from the proposed operational areas. The applicant has confirmed that an appropriate level of geological access would continue to be afforded and measures for sympathetic management of geological areas are being considered. The opportunity would exist to negotiate more detailed reassurances in relation to

geological conservation as part of the current application. It is not considered at this stage however that the proposals would be likely to give rise to any unacceptable impacts on geological features within the SSSI which would justify the requirement for EIA.

- e) Noise: Five residential properties are located within 90-250m to the south east of the former quarry plant site. Protecting the local amenities would be an important planning consideration. The former use of the site as a quarry generated some noise. However, the noise baseline against which the current proposals must be judged is the requirement of the mineral working permission to restore the site to grassland and woodland. The submitted information indicates that the activities within the former plant site would take place under cover and would not be likely to generate any significant noise. Wood chipping operations would take place intermittently during an average working week. No other mechanical processing operations would take place within the identified storage areas. Drying of wood chip is another potential noise source. A number of controls are potentially available to minimise noise, including controlling the location of chipping, the hours of operation and the type of chipping and drying plant used. Appropriate conditions would be imposed if planning permission is granted. The distance to the nearest residential properties and the location of timber storage areas within a topographic depression offers benefits in terms of noise attenuation (as witnessed by the lack of noise complaints from the former mineral working use). It is not considered on the basis of available information that the proposals would be likely to give rise to levels of noise which would be sufficient to trigger the requirement for EIA.
- f) Traffic / Access: The applicant has stated that the average number of return HGV movements associated with the storage use would be 2.2 HGV per day. This is substantially less than the level of daily HGV movements associated with the former quarrying activity (15-20 HGV's) and represents a limited addition to the number of existing HGV movements using the B4371, including traffic generated by nearby industrial sites. The site has a dedicated access onto the B4371. Whilst access and highway matters would be an important planning consideration, it is not considered on the basis of available information that level of traffic associated with the proposals would be likely to give rise to significant environmental impacts which would justify the requirement for EIA.
- g) Ecology: The historic mineral permission for Lea North Quarry encompasses an area of 32.6ha, of which 25.97ha is within the current application site. Of this, under 7ha would be occupied under the terms of the current application. The areas affected by the development are existing hardstandings and buildings within the plant site and other compacted stone hardstandings to the north and south of the plant site. Until recently all these areas have been extensively trafficked by quarry machinery, hence, the existing habitat value of the affected areas is low. Land surrounding the operational part of the application site is restored and has re-vegetated to provide wildlife habitats, but would not be directly affected by the current proposals. Additional areas have the potential to be reclaimed to wildlife uses such as calcareous grassland as part of the outstanding restoration requirements linked to the mineral working permission. The Local Planning Authority is actively progressing this with the mineral company as a separate process. The proposed timber storage areas are also capable in principle of being restored to grassland after the requested 5 year period for use of these areas has expired.

- h) The applicant is investigating options for the sympathetic management of surrounding habitat areas and has appointed an ecologist. This initiative has the potential to yield significant overall biodiversity gains relative to the current situation, which could fully mitigate any temporary loss of habitat creation potential in the proposed timber storage areas. Nearby semi-natural woodland on Wenlock Edge which forms part of an ecological SSSI would not be affected and is separated from the site by a strip of land which remains in the ownership of the mineral company.
- i) A survey commissioned by the applicant has acknowledged the potential for Great Crested Newts to be present within and adjacent to proposed operational areas and has recommended that appropriate stand-offs are implemented, with a further newt population survey being undertaken in 2013. A wider habitat survey of the application site has also been undertaken. The need to ensure protected species interests are adequately safeguarded will be an important planning consideration. Measures for protecting Great Crested Newt habitats would also need to be controlled under a licence issued by Natural England. However, it is not considered on the basis of available information that the proposals would be likely to give rise to any possible effects on protected species or their habitats which would be of more than local significance and/or which would justify the need for EIA.
- j) Cultural Heritage: The proposals would not affect any designated heritage assets in a way which would suggest the need for EIA.
Note: Wenlock Edge has been extensively quarried over the past 200 years and historic quarrying has left a significant imprint on the character of the area. The availability of local supplies of limestone and other minerals was an important factor in the growth of industry at Ironbridge and the industrial revolution. However, limestone quarrying has now ceased and the buildings at Lea Quarry represent perhaps the main surviving built legacy of this important historic use. It is considered that the retention and careful refurbishment of some existing buildings at the centre of the former quarrying area could serve to reinforce links to this past mining heritage. It may also assist public understanding in the future of the importance of the former quarrying industry, its imprint on the landscape within and adjacent to the AONB and of the link between quarrying and the geological SSSI. The applicant has indicated a willingness to work with other stakeholders in this regard to provide improved informal public access and interpretation within the application site.
- k) Other issues: The implications of the proposals in relation to other land use issues including cultural heritage, hydrology, pollution, dust and other air emissions have been assessed. It is not considered on the basis of available information that any of these issues would have the potential to give rise either individually or in combination to significant environmental effects which would suggest the need for EIA.
- l) Expectations of restoration: The proposals have been assessed against the requirements for restoration linked to the quarrying planning permission. The quarry restoration scheme would deliver a habitat based restoration for the entire quarry site, including for the 7ha area which would be directly affected by the current proposals. The potential to deliver these additional habitat gains is a material planning consideration against which the benefits and impacts of the current proposals will need to be assessed. However, it is not considered that the layering on of an alternative renewable energy use in the affected areas of the site would raise environmental issues which are significant enough on their own to trigger the need for EIA. The applicant's commitment to undertake sympathetic management of the peripheral areas

of the quarry has been noted above, as has the relatively small proportion of the total former quarrying area which would be affected by the current proposals. The temporary nature and reversibility of the proposed timber storage operations being applied for has also been noted.

Note: It should be recognised that the existing quarry restoration scheme is out of date and would have been due for updating under the Review of Old Mineral Working Permissions (ROMP) procedures in 2011 had the quarry been operational at that stage. Discussions on updating the final restoration requirements for the site are currently taking place between the Local Planning Authority and the mineral company.

- m) Cumulative Impacts The implications of combinations of effects from the development proposals has been assessed. Combined effects such as visual impact and noise may have the potential to increase the overall level of impact of the development, including on the AONB designation. However, it is not considered on the basis of available information that any potential combinations of effects would be sufficient to justify the need for EIA. This is having regard to the anticipated nature of the individual effects, the scale and nature of the development proposals and the available mitigation measures.

Notes:

- i. This decision and the reasons for it should not be interpreted as meaning that planning permission for the development is likely to be permitted.
- ii. Whilst there are no current proposals for subsequent intensification of renewable energy uses within the site the applicant should be aware that any subsequent proposals to increase the scale or intensity of the development would also need to be subject to EIA screening, having particular regard to the location of the site within and adjacent to an AONB and a SSSI.

Date: 28th September 2012

Officer:
Senior Planner, Minerals & Waste

