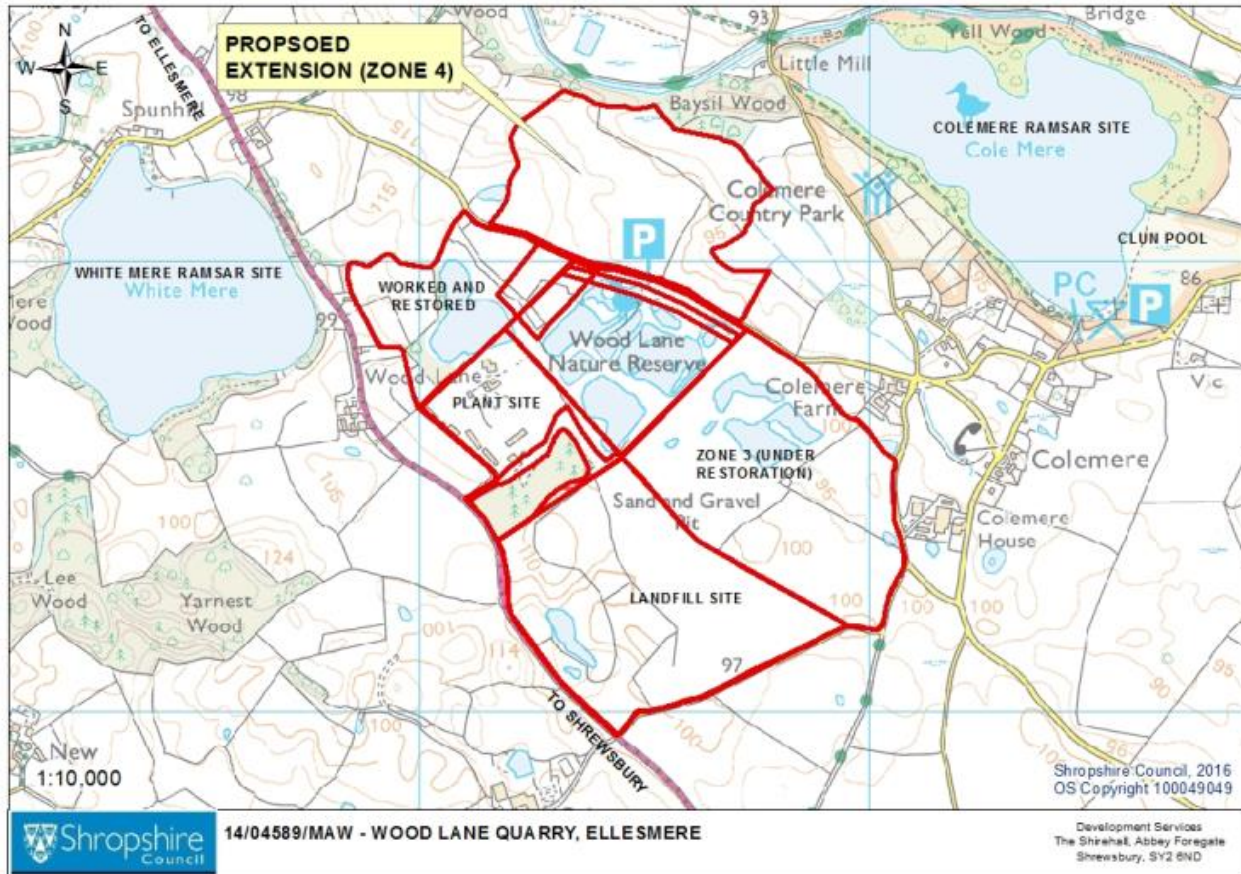


APPLICATION SUMMARY

14/04589/MAW Extension to Wood Lane Quarry, Spunhill, Ellesmere - Tudor Griffiths Ltd



The Proposal: The proposal is for a 19.85 hectare extension to the existing quarry workings at Wood Lane, Ellesmere. The extension area is to the immediate east of the existing quarry workings from which is separated by the minor road to Colemere. Material extracted from the site would be transported by dump truck across Wood Lane to the existing processing plant via a new dedicated crossing point.

The proposals as originally submitted involved the extraction of 2.1 million tonnes of sand and gravel in 3 phases at a rate of 250,000 tonnes over 8 years. However, the proposals have been amended to address hydrological concerns linked mainly to the nearby Cole Mere RAMSAR site. It is now proposed only to work the uppermost phase (phase 1a – to 90m AOD) and this has in turn reduced the reserve by about 30%, yielding 5-6 years of mineral supply. Any subsequent proposal to work the deeper phases (1b and 1c) below the ground water table (to 80m AOD) would be subject to a separate planning application and associated Habitat Risk Assessment.

The application is supported by an Environmental Statement which includes supplementary reports on hydrology / hydrogeology and ecology.

The site: The extension area is located 180m to the north east (Cole Mere) and 420m to the west (White Mere). The Shropshire Union Canal passes 50m to the north, behind a shallow wooded ridge. The nearest settlements are the village of Colemere 400-850m to the south east and the hamlet of Spunhill 560 - 950m to the west. Further isolated properties are located at Wood Lane Farm 400m south west and Little Mill 180m to the north.

Community consultations: Welshampton and Lyneal Parish Council maintains its objection on the basis that it is not satisfied that damage to the habitat will not occur, and there is insufficient habitat creation. They do not consider that the test set in SAMDev policy MD5a requiring no adverse impact on the Cole Mere or White Mere RAMSAR sites can be met.

The Environment Agency does not object and considers that the applicant has demonstrated that the water environment will not be adversely impacted provided there is no physical dewatering. The applicant has demonstrated that Cole Mere has not been impacted by quarry operations to date so the extension should have no adverse impact, especially if worked wet. White Mere has been demonstrated to be maintained

largely by rainfall runoff. Long term groundwater level monitoring carried out shows there is no hydraulic connection between the groundwater under Zone 4 and the small watercourse running through the peat body (White Moss) to the immediate north east. The suggested 2 stage excavation approach is accepted in principle. A planning condition for the continued monitoring of the operational quarry and extension area should be included. Restoration to intensive agricultural use should be avoided.

Natural England has no objection following detailed discussions with the applicant and Council officers regarding planning conditions and has indicated that it accepts the conclusions of the Council's Habitat Risk Assessment.

Shropshire Wildlife Trust has emphasised the need to protect the Meres and the peat area (White Moss) adjoining the extension area and to properly understand the nature of the local hydrology.

The Canals and River Trust has not objected provided appropriate noise and dust controls are in place.

SC Public Protection has no objection and accepts the proposed noise control limits.

Highways development control have not objected provided the crossing point is maintained in good order and subject to a financial contribution to provide some improvements to the minor road to Colemere.

SC Ecology has no objection subject to conditions relating to habitat creation, ecology and hydrological monitoring and has produced a Habitat Risk Assessment which Natural England has accepted.

SC Archaeology has not objected subject to a pre-commencement condition providing for archaeological evaluation and a Written Scheme of Investigation has been agreed in principle.

Public representations: The application has attracted a representations from 23 individuals. The main concerns are inappropriate countryside location; impact on ecology / RAMSAR sites; noise, dust and light nuisance; impact on drainage and highway safety.

Officer appraisal: National policy requires the Council to maintain a 7 year supply of sand and gravel and the site is allocated as part of this 'landbank' under SAMDev policy MD5. The policy sets out detailed criteria for the site to comply with and the amended satisfies these criteria. The required quarrying infrastructure is already in place, the quarry has good access to the primary road network and Core Strategy Policy CS20 establishes a presumption in favour of extensions such as the current site rather than new greenfield sites.

The scheme is capable of complying with appropriate criteria for the control of noise and dust. There would be no increase in traffic relative to the existing situation and the applicant's highway contribution is to be welcomed. There would be up to 40 return movements across the crossing point each day at peak periods but these would be carefully managed and existing highway traffic would have priority. A visual appraisal confirms that the site is capable of being effectively screened once the proposed containment bunds have been formed on the northern and eastern boundaries. The amended scheme would result in no overall loss of agricultural land.

In terms of ecology no impacts on protected species are predicted once appropriate mitigation has been put in place. A significant amount of hydrological information has been provided and this indicates that phase 1a (to 90m AOD) can be worked safely without adverse impacts on hydrology including the nearby RAMSAR sites. The applicant's consultants acknowledge that some further monitoring data is required for the lower phases which are below the groundwater table and these have now been omitted from the scheme. Natural England and the Natural Environment section has worked with officers to agree detailed planning conditions providing appropriate monitoring and safeguarding provisions for the proposed operations. These consultees are now satisfied that phase 1a can be worked without adverse impact to the water environment, including the RAMSAR sites. Funding has been agreed to install 2 silt interceptors on the Ellesmere Road and this will result in an overall environmental improvement for White Mere.

Conclusion: The proposals would secure production at Wood Lane for a further 6-7 years at the anticipated production rate. The mineral is a proven resource with an established local market and would make an important contribution towards the county's agreed proportion of sand and gravel production in the West Midlands region. The applicant has amended the scheme to remove the originally included lower extraction phases.

No issues have been identified which would be likely to give rise to unacceptable impacts on the local environment or amenities once available mitigation measures have been implemented. Detailed conditions have also been recommended in consultation with relevant consultees. It is concluded that proposals are sustainable and can be accepted in relation to relevant development plan policies and guidance subject to the recommended condition and legal agreement.