



11. Minerals

- 11.1 The minerals industry in Oxfordshire provides local employment and raw materials for the construction and maintenance of buildings and roads. Minerals are finite resources. A more sustainable approach to the management of these resources requires that they are only worked when there is a need and are used efficiently, that they are otherwise conserved for possible future use, and that where possible suitable waste and secondary materials (such as concrete, road planings and pulverised fuel ash) are recycled and used in place of primary aggregates.
- 11.2 The Oxfordshire Minerals and Waste Local Plan was adopted by the County Council in 1996. It contains more detailed policies for mineral working and supply, including site specific proposals, for the period to 2006. Under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, the Council is now preparing the Oxfordshire Minerals and Waste Development Framework, with a Core Strategy and Minerals and Waste Sites Proposals Documents proposed to be adopted in 2008. These will reflect changes in Government guidance and cover the period at least to 2016, in line with this Structure Plan and the new South East Plan. The Core Strategy will in due course replace the minerals policies in this Structure Plan and the documents in the new Development Framework will together replace the Minerals and Waste Local Plan. The Minerals and Waste Local Plan is currently saved (continues in force) until September 2007. The Oxfordshire Minerals and Waste Development Scheme was published in May 2005. This sets out the programme for preparation of the Development Framework and explains how this new system of development planning will operate and what each component document will cover.

The supply of minerals

- 11.3 The minerals worked in Oxfordshire are sharp sand and gravel, soft sand, limestone and ironstone (mainly for aggregate use), chalk, clay and fullers earth. They are worked predominantly to supply local markets. The main exception is fullers earth, which is a nationally scarce mineral.
- 11.4 The Government provides advice on the quantities of aggregate minerals supply for which provision should be made in each region. In June 2003 the Government published new guidelines for aggregates provision⁴⁰. The South East England Regional Assembly (SEERA) published a draft sub-regional apportionment of the regional guideline figures for the South East⁴¹, for consultation in March 2004, as part of its proposed Regional Minerals Strategy⁴². This strategy was the subject of an Examination in Public in October 2004 and the subsequent report of the Panel (December 2004) recommended a revised apportionment. The decision of the Secretary of State on the Regional Minerals Strategy is expected by the end of 2005.

⁴⁰ National and Regional Guidelines for Aggregates Provision in England, 2001-2016, ODPM, June 2003.

⁴¹ Since April 2001 the South East Region has comprised the counties of Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, East Sussex, Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Kent, Oxfordshire, Surrey and West Sussex. Prior to April 2001 the South East Region also included London and the counties of Bedfordshire, Essex and Hertfordshire.

⁴² Proposed Alterations to Regional Planning Guidance, South East – Regional Minerals Strategy, March 2004.



- 11.5 Based on the guidance in MPG6⁴³, the (former) London and South East Regional Planning Conference (SERPLAN) agreed a sub-regional apportionment of the supply requirement for the South East Region between counties in 1994. Oxfordshire's agreed apportionment for sand and gravel was 2 million tonnes a year. The Minerals and Waste Local Plan subdivided this into 1.8 million tonnes of sharp sand and gravel and 0.2 million tonnes of soft sand. There was no sub-regional apportionment for crushed rock. The draft new apportionment figures for Oxfordshire as recommended by the Regional Minerals Strategy Examination in Public Panel are 1.82 million tonnes a year for sand and gravel and 1.0 million tonnes a year for crushed rock. MPG6 states that Mineral Planning Authorities should aim to maintain landbanks of permitted reserves of aggregate minerals sufficient for at least seven years working.
- 11.6 When finalised, the new apportionment will be included in the South East Plan. The subdivision of the Oxfordshire's figure for sand and gravel between sharp sand and gravel and soft sand will be considered in the preparation of the Minerals and Waste Development Framework.

M1 Permission will be granted for mineral working at appropriate locations provided it can be demonstrated that any adverse environmental or other impact that the development would be likely to cause is outweighed by the need for the mineral, having regard to:

- a) the need to maintain landbanks of permitted reserves for aggregate minerals in line with national and regional guidance;
- b) the need to ensure a steady supply of mineral materials for local markets;
- c) the need to supply material for major construction projects from borrow pits; and
- d) national and regional needs for non-aggregate minerals.

Mineral working will not be permitted unless there are satisfactory provisions for the land to be progressively restored within a reasonable timescale to an acceptable use that is appropriate to its location. The County Council will seek to secure the restoration and long-term management of appropriate mineral working sites for nature conservation, recreation and public access.

- 11.7 The extraction of minerals has local environmental effects. It is a purpose of the planning system to ensure that necessary supplies of minerals can be obtained whilst the environmental impact of their working and transport is kept to a minimum.

⁴³ Minerals Planning Guidance: Guidelines for Aggregates Provision in England, MPG6, DOE, April 1994.

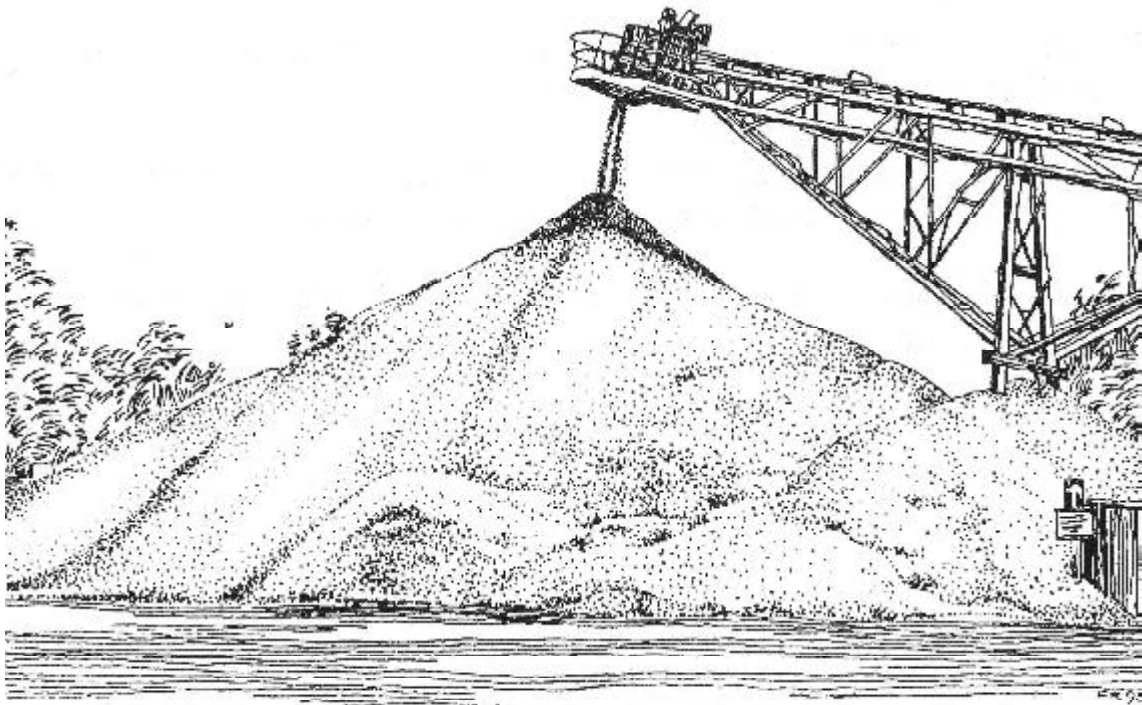


11.8 In deciding whether a location is appropriate for mineral working, the Council will take account of Government guidance, local circumstances, the restoration and after-use proposals for the site, development plan policies (in particular those which seek to safeguard important environmental features and areas) and other important interests such as neighbouring land uses and road users. Development plan policies taken into account will include in particular the following policies of this Plan: EN1 (landscape character); EN2 (biodiversity); EN3 (agricultural land); EN4 (historic and cultural heritage); EN6 (archaeology); EN8 (water quality) and EN9 (flood risk and surface water drainage). In considering the implications of locations for mineral working on landscape character and biodiversity, the Council will take the Oxfordshire Wildlife and Landscape Study (see paragraph 5.3) and landscape character assessments prepared by district councils into account. Mineral working can be acceptable on best and most versatile agricultural land (grades 1, 2 and 3a) where high quality restoration back to agricultural land can be achieved or where working of poorer quality land to meet the need for minerals is either not possible or would be inconsistent with other sustainability considerations. Policy G4 sets out policy on development in the Green Belt. Proposals for mineral working need not conflict with the objectives of the Green Belt provided high environmental standards are maintained and sites are well restored.

M2 Locations for sand and gravel working will be identified in the Minerals and Waste Development Framework. In identifying appropriate locations, the County Council will take account of the distribution of sand and gravel resources; the existing pattern of supply and distribution of workings; proximity to main market areas; accessibility to the main transport routes; risk of birdstrike; restoration and after use potential; and development plan policies, in particular which seek to safeguard:

- important archaeological remains, historic buildings and areas;
- areas and sites of nature conservation importance, especially Special Areas of Conservation and Sites of Special Scientific Interest;
- features of landscape importance, especially Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty;
- best and most versatile agricultural land;
- the water environment;
- land uses which are sensitive to nuisance; and
- the safety and convenience of all road users, including pedestrians and cyclists.

11.9 The identification in the development plan of locations for mineral working provides certainty as to where new mineral extraction development is likely to be permitted and where it is not likely within the period of the plan. The Oxfordshire Structure Plan 2011, adopted in 1998, identified four general locations where the principal of sharp sand and gravel working was accepted, at Sutton Courtenay; Sutton Wick; Stanton Harcourt (Lower Windrush Valley); and Eynsham-Cassington-Yarnton. This Structure Plan does not identify locations for mineral working; this will be done in the Minerals and Waste Development Framework.



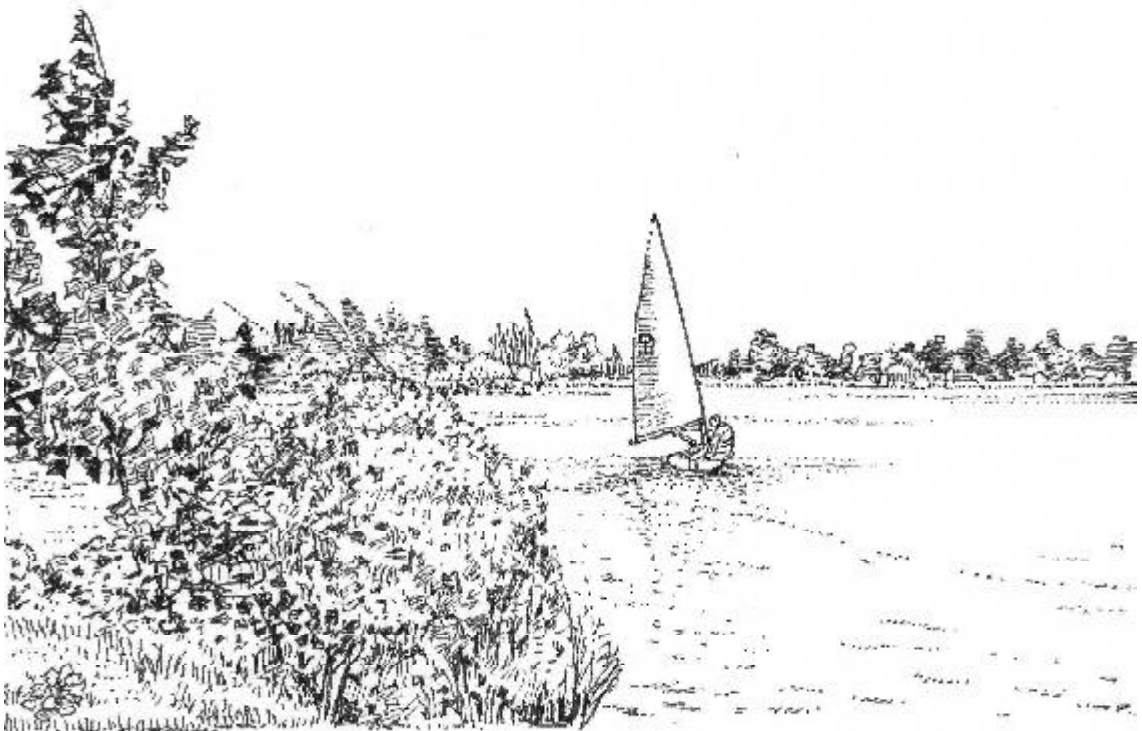
- 11.10 In identifying locations for sand and gravel working in the Minerals and Waste Development Framework, the County Council will seek to make sufficient provision for both soft sand and sharp sand and gravel for Oxfordshire to meet its agreed apportionment of the South East's supply requirement throughout the plan period, to enable continued supply of aggregates to the construction industry at appropriate levels. The assessment of options for locations will include consideration of the advantages and disadvantages of concentrating workings in large strategic resource areas compared with a more dispersed pattern of smaller working areas. It will also consider the scope that different locations offer not only for environmental damage to be minimised or mitigated but also for benefits to be secured, for example, through increased biodiversity or the creation of opportunities for recreation. In assessing the impact of new locations for mineral workings on environmental interests and on residential properties and other sensitive land uses, the Council will consider the cumulative impact of mineral working across an area and the impact of traffic, particularly on routes connecting workings to main transport routes. The potential for material to be transported other than by road will also be taken into account.
- 11.11 Pending preparation of the Minerals and Waste Development Framework Core Strategy and Minerals Site Proposals Document, the factors in policy M2 will be material considerations in the determination of planning applications for sand and gravel working.
- 11.12 The provision of borrow pits to supply materials for major construction projects can reduce the environmental impact caused by transporting large volumes of materials to a single site over a short period. Borrow pits will only be permitted where supply of the material from the borrow pit would have less environmental and traffic impact than if the material was sourced from existing permitted or allocated mineral working sites.



- 11.13 The need to make further provision for the working of other minerals, such as limestone, ironstone, clay and fullers earth will be addressed in the Minerals and Waste Development Framework. The Development Framework will also consider the need for specific policies for other minerals, such as hydrocarbons, which have not previously been worked in Oxfordshire.

Restoration

- 11.14 One of the most significant impacts of mineral working is the disturbance of the landscape and visual intrusion it can cause. Policy M1 seeks to ensure that the minimum amount of land is taken up by mineral working at any one time and that restoration is carried out to enable an acceptable after-use. An operator's past performance in carrying out restoration may be a material consideration in determining an application for planning permission.
- 11.15 Generally, restoration to agriculture, woodland, nature conservation or recreation are acceptable after-uses. Mineral working can provide opportunities for environmental enhancement and public benefit, such as the creation of new habitats and improved public access, which give local long-term gain to offset the impact of working. The County Council is keen to see an increase in the extent of woodland, nature conservation and general public access to the countryside, and will pursue these aims through the restoration of mineral workings. The Minerals and Waste Development Framework will give guidance on the types of after-uses that may be appropriate in different areas. It is important that agreed after-uses are managed and maintained following restoration. Where appropriate, aftercare schemes and/or long-term management and maintenance agreements will need to be secured.





- 11.16 Because of the generally high water table and a shortage of inert waste material for infilling (due in large part to increased recycling), most new sharp sand and gravel workings in Oxfordshire will have to be restored to water bodies. The issue of risk to aircraft from birdstrike will be an important consideration which may restrict the location of workings and affect the design of restoration schemes.
- 11.17 Where the impact of mineral working affects a significant area, as for instance in the Lower Windrush Valley, the Council will work with landowners, operators and others to secure a coordinated approach to environmental improvements across the whole area.

Recycled and secondary aggregates

- 11.18 It is a Government objective to increase the amount of recycled and secondary aggregate materials used in place of primary aggregates in the construction industry. The Landfill Tax and Aggregates Levy have been introduced in recent years to help achieve this. The Government's guidelines for aggregates provision assume a significant increase in supply and use of recycled and secondary aggregates in the South East. Materials such as crushed concrete from demolition projects, road planings and pulverized fuel ash from Didcot Power Station are already being used in Oxfordshire as substitutes for newly extracted materials. Policy G6 promotes the use of recycled and secondary materials in new developments. The Council will encourage an increase in the supply of these materials by, for example, permitting aggregate recycling plants in appropriate locations under policy WM2. The need for more detailed policy on recycled and secondary aggregates will be considered in the Minerals and Waste Development Framework.
- 11.19 An increase in the use of recycled and secondary aggregates should enable a reduction in the amount of aggregate minerals that need to be extracted and will reduce the quantity of waste materials that are disposed at landfill sites. This will both help conserve valuable mineral resources and reduce the overall environmental impact of mineral working and waste disposal.

Transport of minerals

- 11.20 Under policy T4 the County Council encourages the use of rail, waterways, pipelines, or other non-road means for transporting minerals. Transporting minerals other than on public roads can have advantages in reducing the environmental impact of mineral supply. Rail is an effective way of moving minerals in bulk and can be particularly economic where aggregates are moved long distances from source to market. This reduces long distance lorry traffic. At a more local level, conveyor belts are often used to carry minerals from the working to the processing plant, and haul routes can avoid the need to use public roads and to pass through villages.
- 11.21 The Government's guidelines for aggregates provision envisage that a significant proportion of the South East's requirement for aggregates will be imported from other regions. Hard rock, such as hard limestone and granite, does not occur in the region, which is therefore reliant on imports to meet needs for which this type of material is required. Crushed hard rock is imported into Oxfordshire for use as roadstone and rail ballast.



- 11.22 There are currently four rail depots for the import of minerals into the county although not all are in use. The County Council supports the continued use of rail depots for the import of minerals into Oxfordshire and will grant permission for further depots in appropriate locations under policy T4. Appropriate locations for rail depots will have good access to the major road network and will not have unacceptable local environmental effects. More detailed policies for rail depots are included in the Minerals and Waste Local Plan and will be reviewed in the Minerals and Waste Development Framework.
- 11.23 In most cases, minerals worked in Oxfordshire, and minerals delivered by rail into the county, will be transported to their markets by lorry. It is important that minerals traffic should use roads that are suitable for large vehicles and, so far as possible, avoid passing through villages. Under policy T8 the County Council will only permit mineral development where satisfactory access can be provided and suitable routeing between the production site and the main road network can be ensured. Before granting permission the County Council will seek to agree the appropriate routes that mineral traffic will take between the production site and the main road network. The need for more detailed policy on transport of minerals will be considered in the Minerals and Waste Development Framework.

Mineral safeguarding

M3 Mineral resources of potential economic importance will be safeguarded for possible future use. Development that would prevent or make significantly more difficult their possible future working will not be permitted.

- 11.24 Minerals can only be worked where they occur. It is a Government objective that minerals should be conserved as far as possible and that the unnecessary sterilization of mineral resources should be prevented. Especially in the case of minerals in relatively short supply or where the number of locations for working is restricted by planning constraints, it is prudent that potentially workable mineral resources are not sterilized by built development. The Minerals and Waste Local Plan describes how this policy is implemented. This will be reviewed in the Minerals and Waste Development Framework.
- 11.25 Most mineral exploration is permitted development and does not require a specific planning permission. When permission is required and granted this does not prejudice any decision on an application to work the mineral. The need for policy on mineral exploration will be considered in the Minerals and Waste Development Framework.



Old mineral workings

M4 The County Council will seek to secure the environmental improvement of mineral working sites that are not being worked and restored, or that have not been restored, to modern standards.

11.26 Some existing and old mineral workings are not being worked and restored, or have not been restored, to the standards that are expected today. The County Council will take advantage of opportunities that may arise to seek improvements, including in particular through the review of mineral planning permissions required by the Environment Act 1995⁴⁴. In considering the imposition of updated planning conditions through applications for the review of mineral planning permissions, the Council will seek to achieve the objectives of relevant Structure Plan and Minerals and Waste Local Plan and Minerals and Waste Development Framework policies.

⁴⁴ The Environment Act 1995 provides for the periodic review and update of conditions on planning permissions for mineral working, although it does not provide powers to look again at sites that have already been restored, and it is not possible to refuse applications for the review of mineral planning permissions.