

Comments on:

Revised application, phasing plans and updated information on need, landscape, transport, ecology, flooding, water supplies, drainage and climate change relating to planning application reference

MW.0115/21

Extraction and processing of sand and gravel including the construction of new site access roads, landscaping and screening bunds, minerals washing plant and other associated infrastructure with restoration to agriculture and nature conservation areas, using inert fill Land at White Cross Farm, Reading Road, Cholsey, Oxfordshire.

The current consultation is on the new documents sent by the applicant in response to the Objections given last year by Oxfordshire County Council, South Oxfordshire District Council and Chilterns Conservation Board.

Although these documents show the applicant has provided additional information about the proposal to extract and process sand and gravel, the fundamental reasons remain for Objection to this planning application.

1. Wallingford Town Council supports SODC and OCC Objections to the application on the basis this site is not suitable for aggregate extraction, because it is within the setting of the Chilterns AONB, a designated exceptional landscape whose distinctive character and natural beauty are precious enough to be safeguarded in the national interest.

OCC considers ‘the development to be in conflict with national and local landscape policies.’ The key landscape planning policies from the NPPF (2021) are:

- Para 174 a) requires planning decisions to contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by protecting and enhancing valued landscapes.
- Para 174 b) requires planning policies and decisions to contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.
- Para 176 requires that great weight is given to conserving and enhancing the landscape and scenic beauty in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.
- Para 177 requires permission for major development in the AONBs to be refused other than in exceptional circumstances and where it can demonstrate that the development is in the public interest.

2. Wallingford Town Council supports the SODC reasons for Objection re: the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) which underestimates the impact of the gravel extraction on the setting of the Chilterns AONB, and overestimates the benefits of the mitigation proposed and of the restoration of the site. SODC states the proposed development is contrary to SOLP Policy ENV1 and Cholsey Neighbourhood Plan Policy E3, and planning permission should be refused.

3. Wallingford Town Council disagrees with the revised LVIA's Summary of Key Responses to Regulation 25 requests. This fails to acknowledge the site lies within the setting of the Chilterns AONB, is part of the designated ecological area Thames Wallingford to Goring Conservation Target Area for increasing the biodiversity of scarce wildlife habitats, and is within sight of historic and Listed Buildings at Mongewell, which are within the Chilterns AONB.

In particular, the Council does not agree with point 4 in the Summary. 'The site itself has a very limited zone of actual visual influence...Views into and out of it are limited'. In our opinion the site is very visible from the Thames Path National Trail, from the A4130, from the A329, and from the Carmel College site at Mongewell.

4. The Thames Path is a very popular National Trail long-distance walking and running route. The section between Cholsey and Wallingford, which passes through the White Cross Farm site, is also heavily used by local people for recreation, exercise and spotting wildlife in the fields. Spending time beside the river helps people improve their mental and physical health. The proposed bunds and straw bales, even if temporary for 6 years, will not enhance people's enjoyment of the Thames Path if the gravel extraction proposal goes ahead.
5. Wallingford Town Council supports the comments by the Chilterns Conservation Board: 'This proposal harms the AONB during the operational and restoration periods. Harms to the setting [of the AONB] will be clear, with a denuded and quasi-industrial landscape juxtaposed with the AONB'.