

Planning Application Response

Landscape

To: Mary Hudson

From: Haidrun Breith, Landscape Officer, Oxfordshire County Council

Site: White Cross Farm, Reading Road, Cholsey, Oxfordshire

Detail: Additional Information - 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

Application number: MW.0115/21

Date sent: 24th April 2024

Recommendations: Further Comments.

Additional Information reviewed:

- Flood Risk Assessment
- Waste Recovery Plan (WRP)
- Plan R25 – 7 – Proposed Phasing Plan v4 – dated 20 February 2024

Landscape comments

The following comments should be read in conjunction with my previous comments and those of my colleagues and other interested parties.

Waste Recovery Plan

I have the following observations on the Waste Recovery Plan:

- the phasing plans and concept restoration plans within the Waste Recovery Plan include limited information on levels. Information on the height of storage bunds is provided in the notes but not for the strawbales. Information on this should be included on the drawings.
- The phasing plans don't show internal access points between phases to help understand how excavation and restoration is achieved without disturbing the existing vegetation or the Restored Land areas (eg for phase 3). This information should be provided.
- The Concept Restoration Plan (dwg KD.WLF.D.010B) no longer includes scrapes/shallow pools providing fewer ecological and landscape benefits. It is important that the restoration seeks to achieve significant enhancements.
- The phasing drawings state under 5) that all restored land will be managed under a 5-year aftercare period before being handed back to the landowner. As mentioned previously, long-term management is required to ensure the proposed restoration habitats get established and deliver the envisaged ecological and landscape benefits. It is my understanding that long-term management of 30-years is required from a biodiversity gain point of view. The County ecologist should be consulted on this.
- I note from the District Council comments that the plans might not accurately show the Root Protection Areas (RPA). I recommend that the Council's tree officer is consulted.

Supplementary comments to my previous response:

Following my previous response I have been made aware that the noise assessment submitted as part of the application does not suggest a significant increase in noise levels on receptors in the area. This is also reflected by the Environmental Health Officers' comments, who is not objecting to the scheme.

Tranquillity is '*a state of calm and quietude*' and not just about noise levels, however, noise is a contributing factor. I accept that the operational noise will be lower than I had envisaged and therefore that selected receptors, especially on those further away, will be less affected.

As such I consider that effects on tranquillity of the Chilterns National Landscape (Chilterns NL) would be limited to nearby areas that also offer some level of visibility of the site such as the River Thames corridor and locations on the eastern bank of the river (e.g. St. John the Baptist).

The information does not materially change my view about effects on tranquillity on receptors within or in close proximity of the site.

It should be noted that no visualisations were submitted as part of the application. SODC mentioned the lack of photomontages in their comments (Oct '21). I, like the applicant and others have based my judgements on the information in front of me and my knowledge of the locality. However, photomontages or wireframe images for selected viewpoints (e.g. the Thames Path, Nosworthy Way, Reading Road) usually form part of an Environmental Statement (GLVIA3, TGN 06/19), and planning committee members might find these helpful in the decision-making process in the light of differing views.

It should also be noted, that the recently passed Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 (Section 245) has placed a strengthened 'duty to further' the statutory purposes of the National Landscapes on local authorities. This replaces the previous 'duty of regard' local authorities had under Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.

It is anticipated that the government will provide further guidance on how this duty should be applied, however, interim advice from Natural England is that the duty has been strengthened, and that it is an active duty rather than a passive one. This means that developments are not only required to avoid and mitigate effects but to explore what can be done in addition, to further the purposes and qualities of the National Landscape.

This is of relevance to this development in so far that the site directly adjoins the Chilterns NL. It is therefore important that adverse effects on the river corridor and the Thames Path are not only avoided or mitigated, but that these characteristic elements are actively enhanced in the restoration.

The information discussed above does not materially change my previous comments. As previously stated, the development would introduce quarrying into an area that I consider sensitive in landscape and visual terms due to its location adjacent to the Chilterns NL, the River Thames and the Thames Path National Trail. The proposal would cause adverse landscape and visual effects, including adverse effects on the Thames Path, the River Thames Corridor and the Chilterns NL and its setting. I recognise that these effects would be temporary and that the site would be progressively restored to biodiversity and landscape, which is a mitigating factor in LVIA terms. However, I don't consider this to justify the impacts, and judge the development not to meet the requirements of national and local planning policy. My previous recommendation still applies.

Conditions:

Conditions covering the following aspects will be required should the development be approved:

- Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP)
- Retention of existing vegetation
I assume that conditions suggested by the County's Arboricultural Officer will cover this
- Lighting
- Mitigation planting and bunding
- Details on treatment of the eastern excavation boundary with the Thames Path
- Detailed Restoration Plan
- Landscape Management Plan
This can usually combined with a Landscape and Ecological Management Plan condition put forward by my ecology colleagues
- Aftercare scheme
- Long-term management