

JOINT WEST SUSSEX MINERALS LOCAL PLAN – UPDATE 18 August 2015

The draft policies of the Plan were issued for consultation in May 2014, followed in August by the draft sites which were being considered by the Minerals Planning Authority (MPA) which consists of West Sussex County Council and the South Downs National Park Authority. This revealed that the MPA was considering silica sand (a specialised and valuable form of soft sand) within its targeted figure for soft sand. (The two are often distinguished as ‘industrial’ and ‘building’ sand.) The Plan also makes provision for ‘sharp’ or concreting sand, and gravel, in one separate category. There are thus two categories of aggregate: Soft Sand, and Sharp Sand/Gravel. These categories are dealt with quite separately in the Plan and an abundance of one type cannot be used to compensate for a shortage of the other.

A report on the Sites Consultation was issued by the MPA in the spring of 2015. The two local silica sites, Wickford Bridge (Pulborough) and Horncroft (Bury) have not been withdrawn. The next stage has been to filter all sites in the South Downs National Park through a Sustainability Appraisal. This evaluates specific features of all sites, such as landscape quality. These two sites are both in the Park.

The MPA originally expected to publish a series of updates on the appraisals and it also wrote of consulting local communities which would be directly affected by proposed sites, such as Pulborough. (All sites affect people to some extent, but the Wickford Bridge site is adjacent to a high density of housing on the outskirts of Pulborough, at Mare Hill and in the approaches to Nutbourne and West Chiltington. The Wiggonholt Association has twice written to the MPA requesting such a consultation.

The MPA has also undertaken a Soft Sand Study, which would evaluate the amounts of soft sand in West Sussex and no doubt identify and distinguish between ‘industrial’ and ‘building’ sand (see above). The conclusions of this document are much anticipated as they will determine the amounts which the MPA must provide for in its Plan. They will also shed light on other areas of

silica sand. (Silica sand was previously unknown in West Sussex and it has a higher value than building sand.)

In July, the MPA revealed that it had decided not to give out any more information to “stakeholders” (those affected by, or with an interest in, minerals extraction). All must now await the draft Minerals Plan itself, when special studies (such as the Soft Sand Study), amended policies, and the short list of sand sites will all be revealed at a blow. At this stage evaluations of each site will be published and it will be either “in” or “out” of a short list. This is likely to happen at the beginning of 2016, and the information will come in a flood. There will then be a formal consultation, probably lasting six weeks. But even if a site is “out” of the shortlist, the industry – and anyone else with an interest – will have the opportunity to challenge its exclusion before and during the public hearing on the Plan (the Examination-in-Public) which will be held by a Government inspector, probably later next year.

The Wiggonholt Association is considering what action might be taken to persuade the MPA to release some of its background papers ahead of the Draft Plan as it believes that publication as a flood would put non-professional stakeholders at a great disadvantage.