

MIDDRIDGE QUARRY LANDFILL PLANNING APPLICATION

AGENDA ITEM No. 10

MEETING: ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

DATE: 11th JANUARY 2023

REPORTED BY: CORPORATE AND POLICY OFFICER

1.0 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to request members to consider the Council supporting Middridge Parish Council in making a corporate response to a consultation on a planning application for the infilling of the disused quarry, situated on Walkers Lane in the parish of Middridge, by Wards Estates Ltd.

2.0 Current Situation

- 2.1 The full description of the planned scheme is 'Reclamation of Middridge Quarry by partial infilling with inert construction and demolition waste and soils to create a geological and nature conservation area with improved public access'.

The full application details may be viewed under reference DM/22/02110/WAS via this link to the Durham County Council planning portal:

<https://www.durham.gov.uk/article/8276/View-and-comment-on-current-planning-applications>

- 2.2 Great Aycliffe Town Council was not included on the official consultees list, probably because the quarry is in Middridge Parish. However, as immediate neighbours, there will be some impact on Great Aycliffe if the scheme proceeds.

3.0 Matters for Consideration

- 3.1 Middridge Parish Council remains opposed to this proposal and has requested the support of Great Aycliffe Town Council in its opposition.
- 3.2 The proposal will involve the import of 111,000 tonnes of inert fill material via some 18 HGV movements per day (2-way) of approximately 180 tonnes per day over a 2–3-year period. Operating hours are stated as Monday to Friday 7.30am to 6pm and Saturday 7.30am to 1pm.
- 3.3 Proposed access to the quarry is via the existing track and public bridleway off Walkers Lane, a minor rural road, which also gives access to a small number of local residences and businesses. The road is narrow and the planning proposal includes plans to provide six passing places to accommodate HGV movements. The almost constant movement of HGVs along this route will inevitably have a considerable impact on residents and businesses in this area and there are safety concerns as the road is also used for recreational and access purposes by local residents, walkers and runners.
- 3.4 Middridge Quarry is designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). It has the richest and most diverse Permian flora in Britain and is described as an internationally significant palaeontological locality, having yielded numerous

species of fossil fish, reptiles and invertebrates. Middridge Quarry is the best British Permian tetrapod locality. There is also the potential of the site for further higher vertebrate discoveries.

- 3.5 The Planning Statement indicates that this will be taken into account and the site preserved as part of the reclamation scheme but it seems likely that the deposition of 111,000 tonnes of landfill must have some adverse effect on the site.
- 3.6 As almost all of the planning application site is within the SSSI, as well as planning permission and an environmental permit (or exemption) from the Environment Agency, the consent of Natural England will also be required for the proposed development.
- 3.7 The Bishop Auckland to Darlington railway, which runs alongside the southern boundary of the site is a section of the route of the Stockton and Darlington Railway, the world's first public railway, opened in 1825 and celebrating its bicentenary in 2025, with public events planned to commemorate this which may also be affected by the proposal.
- 3.8 There are two public Rights of Way which will be temporarily closed if the works proceed, although the Planning Statement provides for alternative routes and, eventually, improved public access to the area.
- 3.9 Relevant County Durham Plan Policies for this proposal are Policy 41 – Biodiversity and Geodiversity and Policy 43 – Protected Species and Nationally and Locally Protected Sites, Policy 46 – Stockton and Darlington Railway and Policy 47 – Sustainable Minerals and Waste Resource Management should be taken into account by the Planning Department before planning permission is granted.

4.0 Impact on Great Aycliffe Town Council

- 4.1 Although this planning application relates to Middridge Parish, the Parish of Great Aycliffe will inevitably be affected by the frequent movement of heavy goods vehicles, both through the main arterial routes and around the outskirts of the town. The new roundabout arrangement at the junction of Greenfield Way and Middridge Road may prove difficult for HGVs to negotiate, particularly during winter weather conditions and could lead to congestion.
- 4.2 Local heritage, ecological and geological assets will all be impacted by this scheme.

5.0 Policy Implications

- 5.1 This complies with the Council's Aims and Targets No. 8:
"To research information and make the case for Great Aycliffe".

6.0 Staffing Implications

- 6.1 None.

7.0 Financial Implications

- 7.1 None

8.0 Crime and Disorder Implications

- 8.1 An intended effect of the landfill proposal is to discourage young people from gathering in the quarry, where safety is currently an issue, and prevent anti-social behaviour and fly tipping.

9.0 Equal Opportunity Implications

- 9.1 None

10.0 Environment and Climate Change Implications

- 10.1 The environmental impact of the scheme would be assessed by Durham County Council, the Environment Agency and Natural England, as previously outlined.

11.0 Risk Assessment

- 11.1 It is not considered that the matter contained in this report poses a risk to health and safety of staff or to the financial or public standing of the Council to a degree that a risk assessment should be appended to this report.

12.0 General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)

- 12.1 Is any personal or sensitive data required for this proposal which may have any implications for GDPR? **NO**

13.0 Recommendations

- 13.1 It is recommended that Members:

- i) Receive the report.
- ii) Advise if members wish for an objection to be sent to Durham County Council Planning Department on the grounds that:
 - The access route to the quarry is too narrow to safely accommodate the proposed high number of HGV movements over a number of years.
 - Local roads in and around the Parish of Great Aycliffe will be adversely affected by the near-constant movement of HGVs.
 - There is concern that heritage, ecological and geological features of international importance in and around the quarry site will be adversely impacted by the scheme.
 - The scheme will have an adverse impact on the overall amenity of local communities.

Corporate and Policy Officer