

Minerals Safeguarding in Solihull

Introduction

The Borough contains sand and gravel aggregates that are being worked south-west of Meriden. There are also deep coal reserves in the east of the Borough which are being exploited north-east of Meriden from Daw Mill colliery in North Warwickshire. Historically, brick clay has been worked north of Hampton in Arden, although the associated Arden Brickworks closed many years ago.

This study investigates the need for the safeguarding of economically viable mineral resources in the Borough, within the Solihull Local Development Framework (LDF). It will inform the definition of Mineral Safeguarding Areas for the Borough as required by national guidance in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The location of any Mineral Safeguarding Areas will be indicated on the Solihull Local Plan diagram and will be defined on the Solihull LDF Local Plan Proposals Map.

Context

National guidance on minerals planning is contained in section 13 of the NPPF. The guidance advises that Mineral Safeguarding Areas should be defined in Local Plans, in order to avoid the sterilising of proven mineral resources by non-mineral development. In unitary planning areas, such as Solihull, Mineral Safeguarding Areas can alert prospective developers to the existence of valuable mineral resources and help to ensure that prior extraction takes place wherever practicable. The guidance makes clear that there is no presumption that the working of resources defined in Mineral Safeguarding Areas will be permitted.

The British Geological Survey (BGS) published A Guide to Mineral Safeguarding in England (BGS guidance) in October 2007, which sets out a step by step approach to effective safeguarding. The approach involves:

- Assessing the best geological and resource information
- Determining which minerals are or may be of economic importance
- Determining the extent of the resource areas
- Incorporating the results into planning policy
- Determining how to safeguard mineral resources most effectively
- Deciding whether to define Mineral Consultation Areas (for two tier planning areas).

This study addresses the first three steps of the approach to effective safeguarding. Steps four and five will be addressed as part of the preparation of the core strategy for Solihull. As a unitary authority, it is not necessary to identify a separate Mineral Consultation Area for Solihull.

A Mineral Consultation Area is identified in the Solihull Unitary Development Plan (UDP) 2006 between Berkswell, Hampton in Arden and Meriden. This is intended to safeguard known sand and gravel resources from possible sterilisation by non-mineral development. The Mineral Consultation Area includes past, current and future workings from Berkswell and Meriden quarries and surrounding areas where resources have been found.

Geological and Mineral Resource Information

BGS Mineral Resource Information for Development Plans West Midlands: Resources and Constraints 1999 provides details of mineral resources in the Borough. The BGS guidance on safeguarding indicates that this information should be adequate for defining Mineral Safeguarding Areas.

Sand and Gravel Aggregates

The Mineral Resource Information shows significant glacial and river sand and gravel resources in the area defined as a Mineral Consultation Area in the UDP2006. It also identifies substantial areas of sand and gravel aggregates in the south-east, south-west, west and north of the Borough, and in the river Blythe valley. Much of the rural area of the Borough has been assessed by BGS so that the minerals are defined at an indicated resource level, although information for the urban areas is largely inferred from geological information. Where information is at the indicated resource level, potentially workable minerals may occur, although the economic potential of sites can only be proved by a detailed evaluation programme.

Coal

The Mineral Resource Information shows deep coal resources under the eastern part of the Borough from Meriden to south of Balsall Common.

Brick Clay

There are no brick clay resources shown on the Minerals Resource Information for Solihull, although the map identifies the site of the former Arden Brickworks in Bickenhill.

Refining Resources in Discussions with Industry

Discussions with the two sand and gravel operators in the Borough, Cemex and Tarmac took place in May 2010. These indicated that the Mineral Consultation Area shown on the UDP 2006 Proposals Map would be adequate to cover proven resources. This land was also subject of a submission by Packington Estates during preparation of the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) supporting continued safeguarding of the Mineral Consultation Area.

Discussions have also been held with the main landowners Berkswell Estates and Packington Estates. Packington Estates has submitted evidence of sand and gravel resources to the east of the NEC, under the land bounded by the M42, A45 and A452. Other mineral related submissions to the SHLAA from Cemex and Berkswell Estates referred to land within the existing Mineral Consultation Area.

Discussions with UK Coal, the operator at Daw Mill colliery have taken place on a number of occasions, with the latest meeting in May 2010. UK Coal indicates that deep coal resources are potentially workable south of the A45 and as far as the railway line between Berkswell and Coventry. Any working will avoid land under the built-up areas of Meriden and Balsall Common.

Accounting for Possible Sterilisation from Adjacent Development

The BGS guidance seeks to ensure that mineral resources are protected from adjacent surface development and a joined up approach to safeguarding with adjacent local authorities. Discussions have been undertaken with Warwickshire county council and Coventry City council, and account

taken of the Warwickshire Minerals Core Strategy and the Coventry Core Strategy. The Warwickshire Minerals Core Strategy identifies Minerals Safeguarding Areas for sand and gravel and coal which adjoin the Borough. Any Minerals Safeguarding Areas for Solihull will need to be consistent with those identified for Warwickshire.

The Minerals Safeguarding Areas for Warwickshire ensures the protection of minerals from adjacent development by safeguarding a buffer to mineral resources. Based on the BGS guidance and subsequent refinement through discussions, Warwickshire propose buffers of 250 metres for sand and gravel and 400 metres for deep coal. Given that these buffers are being applied to the north and south of the Borough, it makes sense to use the same buffer distances for Mineral Safeguarding Areas in Solihull.

Taking into Account other Planning Considerations

The BGS guidance advises that Mineral Safeguarding Areas should be defined irrespective of other planning considerations or constraints. In urban areas, Mineral Safeguarding Areas can be defined where this will be of value, for example where economically viable minerals have been identified beneath large regeneration projects and brownfield sites. However, it does indicate that Mineral Safeguarding Areas may not be necessary in urban areas, especially where mineral resources exist extensively elsewhere in the authority area, or where working methods are likely to be unacceptable in an urban environment.

Defining Mineral Safeguarding Areas

Sand and Gravel Aggregates

The BGS Mineral Resource Information and the Mineral Consultation Area defined in the Solihull UDP 2006 provide an appropriate starting point for considering a Minerals Safeguarding Area for sand and gravel. There was support for defining the area identified in the UDP in the submissions for the strategic housing land availability assessment for Solihull. Discussions with landowners and operators indicated that a further area bounded by the M42, A45 and A452 may have economically viable minerals and should be safeguarded, and evidence has been submitted to support this. No evidence has been obtained to support the need for safeguarding of sand and gravel resources elsewhere in the Borough, although there are resources elsewhere identified in the BGS Mineral Resource Information.

Where appropriate, a buffer of 250 metres should be included in the Mineral Safeguarding Area, in line with BGS guidance and the approach adopted by Warwickshire county council. Consideration has been given to the need to safeguard resources beneath the urban areas of the Borough. Whilst North Solihull is undergoing a regeneration programme, this will not involve large scale restructuring of the urban environment. Nor are there any major brownfield sites, or likely sites where resources could be worked. On this basis, there seems to be little purpose in safeguarding land in the urban area.

Coal

The starting point for coal is the BGS Mineral Resource Information which indicates a need to safeguard the eastern part of the Borough from Meriden in the north to south of Balsall Common.

Discussions with the operator of Daw Mill colliery have confirmed that the coal is potentially viable. The Mineral Safeguarding Area will need to be consistent with that identified for Warwickshire to the north and south, which includes a 400 metre buffer.

Conclusion

This study has identified the need for Minerals Safeguarding Areas for coal and sand and gravel aggregates within the Borough. It will enable the definition of Minerals Safeguarding Areas within the Draft Local Plan.

References

National Planning Policy Framework (March 2012)

A Guide to Minerals Safeguarding in England – British Geological Survey (October 2007)

Mineral Resource Information for Development Plans West Midlands: Resources and Constraints – DETR/BGS (1999)

Solihull Unitary Development Plan 2006 – SMBC (February 2006)

Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment for Solihull – SMBC (November 2009)

Minerals Safeguarding Areas for Warwickshire – Warwickshire County Council/BGS (2009)