

WSCC COUNTY ARBORICULTURAL OFFICER response to planning consultation

Application reference number: WSCC/028/21

Location: Rock Common Quarry, The Hollow, Washington, Pulborough, RH20 3DA

Proposal: The continued winning, working and processing of sand from the existing Rock Common Quarry, the importation of inert classified engineering and restoration material, the stockpiling and treating of the imported material, the placement of the imported material within the quarry void and the restoration and landscaping of the quarry

District: Horsham

Date: 10th August 2021

Summary response: no objection subject to appropriately worded conditions to secure tree protection, landscaping, and a comprehensive long-term management plan.

Response: It is noted that the proposed restoration scheme is for a 'dry', restored landform with much shallower, engineered areas of some four water bodies rather than the one large, deep lake under the approved restoration scheme. The level of the quarry floor will be above that of the natural groundwater level, so the shallow lakes will be 'perched', i.e., there will be no hydraulic continuity with ground water (the concerns regarding avoiding leachate from the adjacent landfill site are acknowledged). Does this mean the lakes will be solely reliant on surface water / rainfall? How can their ecological benefit and integrity be maintained if there is a risk of them drying out, even with using pumped water from a proposed well? is that sufficient and can that be maintained in perpetuity? Would recreational activity such as swimming and kayaking be compatible with the wildlife habitat vision for the lakes?

Natural regeneration would be the preferred method of restoration rather than intensive intervention, but this will still require management to provide the habitat mosaic envisaged by the landscape design strategy: everything from open sand faces to woodland and all successional stages in between. This appears to be the intention of the first landscape objective and applied design principle 3. I would question the need to plant birch and willow, for example, given that they are pioneer species and will readily colonise areas. Biosecurity is critically important, and it would be better to minimise the plant material brought to site unless it is UK sourced and grown and complies with all biosecurity regulations.

The arboricultural impact assessment (AIA) notes that the proposal involves:

- complete removal of 7 woodland areas and tree groups of low value (the 'value' in this case is that defined by BS5837:2012, i.e., a non-fiscal sense, attributing a rating to qualities; arboricultural, landscape, cultural, conservation) amounting to around 3.2ha. This does not necessarily mean that low value trees do not have conservation value.
- Removal of 2 moderate value large poplars and partial removal of 2 moderate value tree groups = 500m²
- Removal of 9 patches of scrub = 4.2ha

The proposed tree planting should mitigate and compensate for this loss but should also seek overall habitat enhancement throughout the site in the long term.

It will be very important to retain, protect and sensitively manage the existing trees and woodland around the perimeter of the site, not only for their own sake but due to the reliance placed on this for screening. One of the areas of remaining sand reserves is alongside TPO 0204 to the north-west of the site and another alongside the whole western boundary which currently has good tree cover, providing important screening for the site. There would have to be a substantial stand-off from these areas – not just at the root protection area boundary – to avoid harmful root loss and damage. Page 1 and 3 for example, of the tree retention and protection plan appears to require clearance very close to retained category B trees which is of concern. It is very difficult to make out the tree protection barrier on any of the plans – is it actually shown?

The proposed tree protection plan is satisfactory but given the very long-term nature of the site activity through to final restoration, a phased, sequential approach to tree protection is likely together with site-specific method statement preparation to be agreed for certain elements, e.g., the pump construction and power supply installation. This would also be subject to regular monitoring and review at a frequency to be agreed within a detailed implementation programme.

Better integration into the wider landscape would be achieved by the inclusion of a well-connected hedgerow network across the site. Hedgerows were the subject of a condition (21) determined in 2004.

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