



## Plans to reopen Westdown quarry

Environmental Statement Addendum  
Non-technical summary

10.2023

With the mineral bank at Heidelberg Materials' Whatley quarry getting smaller, plans to reopen Westdown quarry were first initiated more than five years ago. Westdown has the benefit of planning permission for mineral extraction but has been dormant since the late 1980s. Resuming mineral extraction at Westdown would ensure a consistent and secure supply of limestone from Heidelberg Materials' quarries in the East Mendips for use in building and maintaining homes, hospitals, schools, and roads, as well as for use in the construction of major infrastructure projects that will support the transition to a low carbon future.

Heidelberg Materials' vision saw Whatley, which is one of the few rail-linked quarries in the UK, focusing on supplying national demand by train, helping to reduce carbon emissions. This would allow supplies from Westdown to support local demand, with HGV traffic kept away from local villages. Overall HGV volumes would remain the same, or be less, than the current permitted levels for Whatley. Heidelberg Materials' approach also included a transformative restoration scheme for Asham Wood Quarry

Void, which is adjacent to Westdown, with proposals including significant ecological enhancements to enrich fauna and flora and better represent the area's ancient woodland habitats, while also providing a valuable ecological buffer to nearby Asham Wood Site of Special Scientific Interest.

Heidelberg Materials' plans to update the existing conditions for Westdown quarry in the form of a consolidated planning submission, were submitted to Somerset County Council, now Somerset Council, in January 2021. Initial scoping and pre-application submissions to inform the consolidated planning submission had previously been undertaken in 2020. Following the submission of further information to assist with the validation process, the consolidated planning submission was validated and registered by Somerset Council in June 2021 as the four planning applications – SCC/3838/2021/ROMP, SCC/3837/2021/IDO, SCC/3836/2021/IDO, and SCC/3795/2021.

Extensive discussions with Somerset Council, as well as statutory and non-statutory consultees and local stakeholders followed. As is standard



planning procedure for this type of project, in April 2022 Somerset Council formally requested further information about the proposals under the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017. A Regulation 25 Additional Information Report providing more information, refinements, and revisions to the proposals, was submitted by Heidelberg Materials to Somerset Council in June 2022 followed by further discussions with statutory consultees and Somerset Council. It is Heidelberg Materials' understanding that all issues raised by statutory consultees have now been satisfactorily addressed and all objections withdrawn. The only outstanding concern, raised by the Somerset Council legal team in March 2023, is about the validity of the existing planning consent for Asham Wood Quarry Void - something which Heidelberg Materials continues to dispute.

## Westdown revised scheme of working

The time when it had been expected to see works at Westdown commence has long passed. Against a backdrop of resilient market demand and lengthening timelines for planning outcomes across the minerals sector, Heidelberg Materials are increasingly aware of the need to make progress. Consequently, Heidelberg Materials has now decided to be pragmatic and adapt their approach.

The revised scheme of working for Westdown removes the use of Asham Wood Quarry Void to store soils and overburden in the early phases of mineral extraction, with this area remaining completely outside of a revised scheme boundary. This significantly reduces the area that can be used for extraction within Westdown and will result in double handling of material, sterilisation of minerals, and the loss of what is a significant legacy benefit in terms of the restoration of Asham Wood Quarry Void. It is Heidelberg Materials' expectation that a simpler scheme - focused solely within the existing boundary of Westdown quarry - can now be consented and be operational sooner rather than await the outcome of lengthy legal challenges.

Importantly, the revised scheme of working will not change Heidelberg Materials' commitment to HGV volumes, and it would still include a new, safer entrance onto the Bulls Lodge Link Road. Similarly, plans for an offsite mitigation area to the north of the quarry remain and areas of established woodland around the boundary of Westdown quarry would be protected. Topsoils removed ahead of extraction would be used in 3m high screenbanks to screen the quarry and overburden would be stored within Westdown for use in phased and final restoration of the site.



-  2021 Submission boundary
-  2023 Area no longer within submission

## Potential environmental effects

An assessment of potential environmental effects has been undertaken of the Westdown revised scheme of working and is detailed in the accompanying Environmental Statement Addendum. This assessment has revisited the environmental effects assessment of the original scheme, as detailed in the 2021 Environmental Statement (ES) and updated as appropriate in the 2022 Regulation 25 Additional Information Report, to determine whether the Westdown revised scheme of working would materially impact the conclusions of the original assessment.

Changes in the assessment of the Westdown revised scheme of working have been identified for Landscape and Visual, Water Environment, Biodiversity, Socio-economics, and Agricultural Land and Soils, each of which is summarised in the table below. For all other environmental effects, it has been assessed that the conclusions of the 2021 ES and updated as appropriate in the 2022 Regulation 25 Additional Information Report remain unchanged and there would be no significant effects because of the Westdown revised scheme of working.

Potential environmental effect	ES Addendum assessment outcome
<p><b>Landscape and visual</b></p>	<p>The updated assessment has concluded that the extent/ magnitude of the landscape and visual effects of the Revised Development Proposals would change as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For grassland, the Westdown Revised Scheme reduces the magnitude of change from Medium to Low during the operational phase and increase the magnitude from Very Low to Medium during the restoration phase. Overall though, the effects would continue to be <b>Not Significant</b>.</li> <li>• For LCA A10.4, the magnitude of change would reduce from High to Medium during the operational phases, but the overall level of effect is still concluded to be <b>locally Significant</b> within the area of LCA which coincides with the Westdown Revised Scheme.</li> <li>• For Asham Wood Special Landscape Feature, the magnitude of change would reduce from Low during Phases 1-3 to Very Low for all phases. The overall level of effect has therefore been concluded to be <b>Not Significant for all phases</b>.</li> <li>• For users of Bridleway SM 8/9, the magnitude of change would reduce from High to No Change during the operational and restoration phases and the level of effect would change from Significant to <b>Not Significant</b>.</li> </ul> <p>There would also be changes to the assessments for the following receptors, however, these changes are primarily associated with the quantities of landscape elements lost and created as a consequence of the Revised Development Proposals and would not be of a sufficient scale to alter the conclusions of the 2021 ES:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Woodland: There would be changes to the quantities of woodland created within the Westdown Revised Scheme consolidated planning submission area although the overall magnitude of change and corresponding level of effect would not alter from that concluded in the 2021 ES.</li> <li>• Scrub: There would be changes to the quantities of scrub lost and created within the Westdown Revised Scheme consolidated planning submission area although the overall magnitude of change and corresponding level of effect would not alter.</li> <li>• Hedgerows: Whilst hedgerows would be translocated to within the screenbank corridor during Phases 1-5 rather than lost, landscape patterns would continue to be disrupted and the translocation would not alter the magnitude of change and level of significance concluded in the 2021 ES.</li> </ul>

<b>Water environment</b>	<p>The embedded site-specific mitigation measures relating to site working and restoration phases, adjacent to Flood Zone 2 and 3 within the Asham Wood Quarry Void area are no longer required given that there are no longer proposals to either excavate or restore soil in the Asham Wood Quarry Void area. It can be confirmed there will no longer be any works within Flood Zone 2 and 3 or in close proximity to the Fordbury Water as part of the revised scheme of working. It remains the case that <b>no significant effects</b> are anticipated in relation to the Water Environment.</p>
<b>Biodiversity</b>	<p>The Westdown revised scheme of working concentrates all mineral working and associated works within Westdown quarry and does not use the Asham Wood Quarry Void. Consequently, <b>the potential effects on the Mendip Woodland SAC, Asham Wood SSSI and ancient woodland are now considered to be not significant</b>. All other environmental measures, responsibilities and compliance mechanism for implementing these remain unchanged relative to the 2021 ES Biodiversity Chapter 11 (Table 11.20) and 2022 Regulation 25 submission.</p>
<b>Socio-economics</b>	<p>The Westdown revised scheme of working concentrates all mineral working and associated works within Westdown quarry and does not use the Asham Wood Quarry Void. Consequently, Bridleway SM 8/9 and Footpath SM 8/11 are now routed outside the Westdown Revised Scheme consolidated submission area. Consequently, the embedded environmental measures relating to users of these PRowS are no longer required. It remains the case that <b>no significant effects</b> are anticipated in relation to Socio-economics.</p>
<b>Agricultural land and soils</b>	<p>The Westdown Revised Scheme, like the original scheme of working, will see soils progressively stripped as quarrying progresses. All existing soil resources on the site will still be appropriately reused to provide ecosystem benefits for nature conservation and amenity land use within the site during final restoration. Importantly, there will be no permanent loss of soil resources because of the Westdown Revised Scheme.</p> <p>However, because stripped soils from phase 3 onwards will no longer be used in restoring the Asham Wood Quarry Void, the duration over which they may need to be stockpiled onsite before they can be used for restoration activities increases from between 1 to 5 years to over 5 years. <b>This results in the magnitude of the effect increasing from medium to high which given the medium sensitivity of the soil resources increases the level of effect from moderate (potentially significant) to high (significant).</b></p> <p>The change in significance for temporary loss of soil resources and soil functions in the Westdown Revised Scheme is a consequence arising solely from the loss of the Asham Wood Quarry Void, resulting in the potential for longer periods of stockpiling of soils being required before they can be used for restoration. Whilst there remain no further measures that could be employed to mitigate this significant effect, Heidelberg Materials will continue to employ best practice when handling and storing onsite soils.</p>

## Conclusions

Overall, the ES Addendum has demonstrated that the Westdown revised scheme of working has been designed in a careful and considered manner, which fully mitigates the anticipated effects brought about by the resumption of mineral extraction at Westdown quarry. Although the ES Addendum has concluded significant adverse effects in respect of agricultural land and soils, it is considered that these effects are significant tempered when balanced against greater movements across public rights of way and the benefits that the longer-term restoration of the site (facilitated by the resumption of quarrying) will bring.

