

**WHATLEY AND WESTDOWN QUARRIES**  
**COMMUNITY LIAISON GROUP MEETING**

**17 OCTOBER 2023 - 17:30**

**WHATLEY QUARRY**

**DRAFT MINUTES**

**ATTENDEES:**

Barry Clark (BC)	Councillor, Mendip Central & East Somerset County Council (SCC)
Steve West (SW)	Mells Parish Council
Richard Evans (RE)	Whatley & Chantry Parish Council (standing in for Will `Palmer)
Richard King (RK)	Great Elm residents' representative
Andrew Bramston (ABR)	Whatley & Chantry Parish Council
Simon Clegg (SC)	Nunney Parish Council
Ian Strachan (IS)	Heidelberg Materials, Strategic Development Manager
Vince Pitt (VP)	Heidelberg Materials, Operations Manager Whatley quarry
Trystan Mabbitt (TM)	Heidelberg Materials, Consenting and Development Manager
Alexandra Hemming (AH)	Heidelberg Materials, Senior Landscape Architect
Samantha Stagg (SS)	James Reed PR, communications for Heidelberg Materials
Hanson UK	

**APOLOGIES AND MEMBERS ABSENT:**

- Philip Ham (PH) Councillor Somerset County Council, Mendip Central & East (Chair)
- Martyn Ford (MF) Senior Enforcement Officer (Planning, Rights of Way, Gypsies & Travellers) Somerset County Council
- Richard Keith-Hill (RKH) Environmental Protection Officer, Mendip District Council
- Alan Townsend (AT) Coleford Parish Council
- Ann Crowcombe (AC) Cranmore Parish Council
- Neil Crump (NC) Leigh on Mendip Parish Council
- Paul Hooper (PHO) Downhead Parish Council
- Will Palmer (WP) Whatley and Chantry parish council
- Dave Barton (DB) Hanson Regional Transport Manager
- Steven Morton (SM) Hanson UK Marketing and Communications Manager
- Simon Stonehouse (SST) Natural England
- Lila Morris (LM) Somerset Wildlife Trust
- PC Toni Lines (TL) Avon and Somerset Police
- Colin Arnold (CA) SCC
- Andrew Gunn (AGU) Principal Planning Policy Officer, Somerset County Council
- Nieke Pengelly (NP) WSP

## Agenda

1. **Introduction** – Chair
  - Welcome and Chair introductions
  - Review of minutes from last meeting
  - Matters arising from last minutes (issues relating to agenda items below will be covered as part of the meeting).
  
2. **Whatley update** – Vincent Pitt, Operations Manager Whatley quarry, Heidelberg Materials
  - Operational overview and logistics (including road and rail)
  - Blasting
  - Feedback
  - Community support update
  
3. **Environmental Update** – Alexandra Hemming, Senior Landscape Architect
  
4. **Planning update: Whatley and Westdown** – Trystan Mabbitt, Consenting and Development Manager, Heidelberg Materials
  - Westdown progress
  - Whatley ROMP
  
5. **AOBs**
  
6. **Date of next meetings**

## MEETING MINUTES

### 1. Chair's introduction

#### Welcome & Apologies:

BC, standing in for PH welcomed attendees to the meeting and highlighted aim to complete meeting by 18.30.

Apologies received from: Philip Ham, Will Palmer, Martin Ford, Colin Arnold and Nienke Pengelly.

#### Review of previous minutes:

- VP had an action carried over from previous meeting to highlighting on a map where recent train line upgrades have taken place. ACTION VP
- VP did show where lined hoppers have been upgraded – highlighting location at the railhead.

- VP confirmed he would share more information about the improvements at the railhead at the next meeting. ACTION VP
- The Group confirmed the minutes from the previous meeting and these are now approved.

## 2. Whatley Quarry update

### Operational overview:

- VP provided an update on production and sales volumes year to date. Both are above plan.
- VP set out that stocks stored on site have been reduced due to demand being stronger than anticipated.
- RK asked if volumes slowdown in Q4. VP advised that this is not necessarily expected in 2023, though in previous years December is usually quieter.
- VP advised that 2024 expected to be similar to 2023 due to on-going supplies to major infrastructure projects.

### Capex

- VP set out that an additional £600K has been allocated for track replacement, and that the current dust suppression enhancement project will be completed by year end.
- AB asked for more information on the dust suppression project. VP advised that monitoring had taken place to ensure on-going compliance, with readings helping to inform where additional measures could be introduced – such as on some conveyors where screens are being installed .
- VP advised that new locomotives arrival have been put back. Now expected in January.

### Projects

- VP set out that the work creating improved footway access outside quarry is now complete and that work on enhancing the picnic area with a new viewing platform will be completed soon. The walk around the quarry is about 1hr 20 mins in total.
- AH advised this will include installation of information boards promoting the circular walk and signage, as well as some rubbish bins. Further enhancements possible in future.
- AH set out that there were concerns about a picnic area potentially being vandalized as there are indicators of anti-social behaviour near the viewing platform.
- RE asked about some fencing obstructing some footpaths. AH confirmed she will check this and address as necessary. ACTION AH
- RK asked if the plastic tubing around young trees would be removed at an appropriate time. AH confirmed that the material used to protect saplings is biodegradable.
- AB asked that the circular walk is not promoted widely – as the parish council is concerned about parking provision for those travelling to the area. VP confirmed that this was not the company's intention.
- VP confirmed that the hedging along the footpath at the front of would be kept trimmed to ensure pedestrians can pass easily. ACTION VP

## Recruitment

- VP confirmed a recent starter – an electrical apprentice from Westbury.
- VP confirmed that he had received approval for x2 engineering apprentices and x2 Higher apprentices to start September 2024. VP asked members of the group to share information about this with their contacts as recruiting apprentices can be challenging. More opportunities are available on the company careers pages of its website see: [www.careers.heidelbergmaterials.co.uk/en/apprenticeships](http://www.careers.heidelbergmaterials.co.uk/en/apprenticeships)
- VP confirmed intention for increase headcount further in 2024 by bringing a maintenance team back in house. Whatley also be used as a training hub for this for the company.

## Blasting Operations:

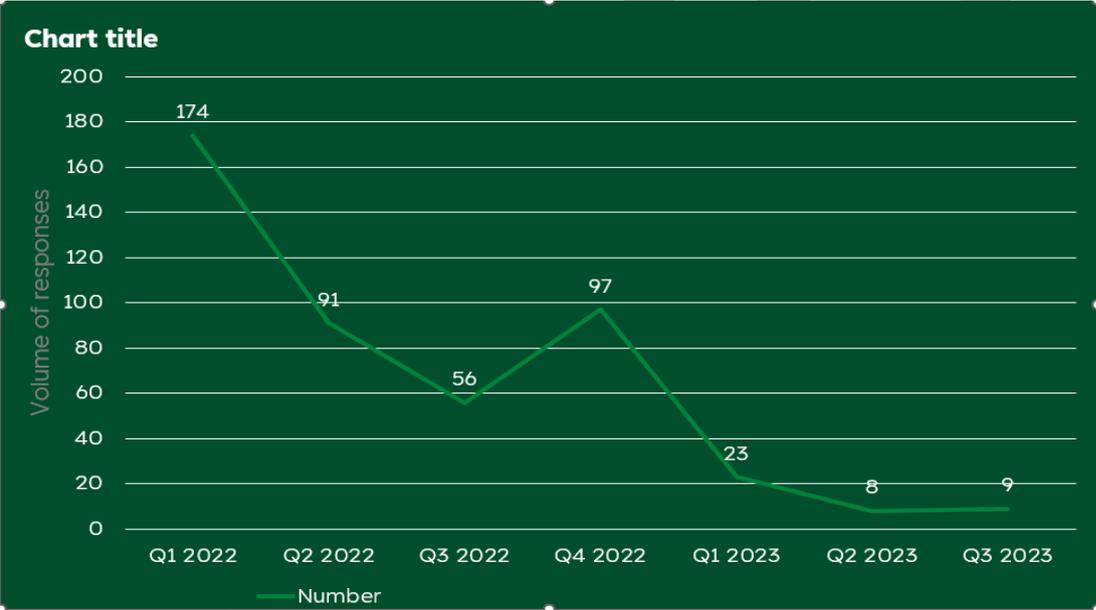
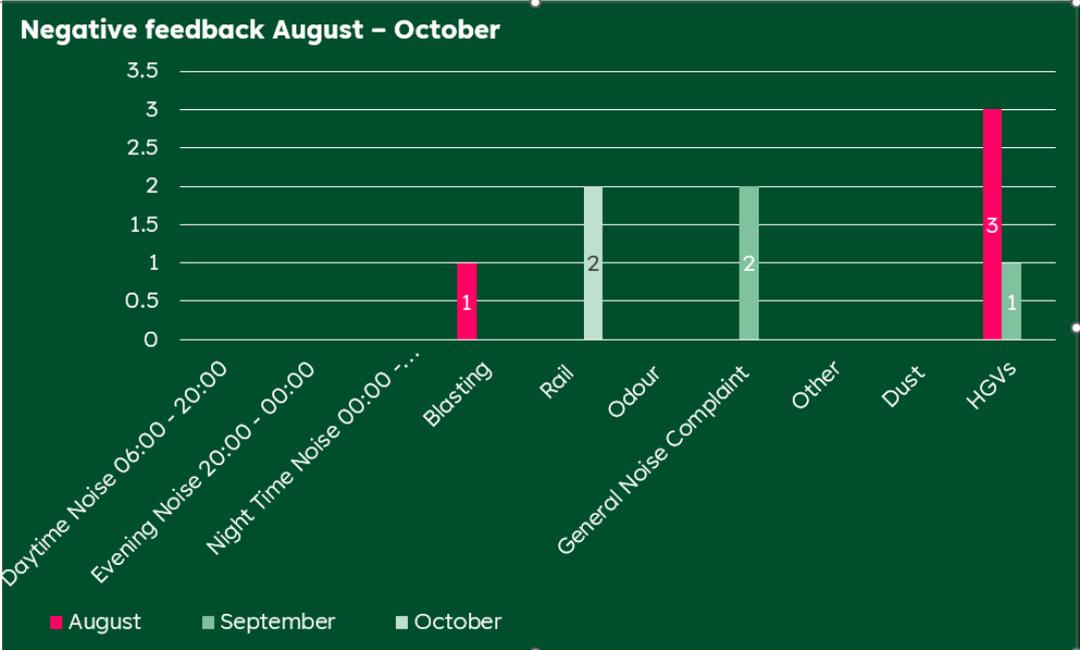
VP provided an update on quarry blasting:

- The average highest peak particle velocity (PPV) recorded in 2023 is 2.71mm/s.
- Of the 97 blasts so far this year (up to 13/10/23), 86% have been below 3.5mm/s PPV (self-imposed level we work to wherever possible on the south face of the quarry).
- 100% of blasts within permitted 9.5mm/s limit at 95% confidence.
- Average highest PPV recorded 7.45mm/s PPV (29/09/23 on south side of the quarry).
- AB asked if there had been any complaints about the blast on 13<sup>th</sup> October, as this had been a loud blast. SS confirmed that no complaints had been received.
- VP explained that the highest PPV (29.09.23) had been as a result of a geological fault, re an unexpected clay seam, but awareness of this is now built in to future blast planning.
- AB said that he now understood that often loud blasts on a wet day are due to air over pressure (AOP) and that it's a case of "*the bark being worse than the bite*". He added that the work the quarry had done, via staggering blasts etc to reduce nuisance, was impressive. He advised that he would follow-up on the offer to host a talk on blasting for residents.
- VP commented that now blasting is taking place on lower levels those in the office are more aware of blast vibration.

## Feedback

SS provided information on feedback received:

- Between August – October x9 pieces of negative feedback received, with issues being HGVs (due to highways works). See diagram shared at meeting below:



Community update

- SS confirmed that £18,000 in donations and materials have been made so far in 2023.
- Recent beneficiaries include, We Hear You’s Santa’s Grotto in Frome, Westfield FC, Leigh on Mendip Recreation Field Management Committee.
- Staff at the quarry have also carried out a voluntary food collection for Community Fridge Frome and will soon volunteer at Mells Primary School to repair and paint fences.

## Environmental update

- AH provided an update on a recent project in conjunction with the Environment Agency and Wild Trout Trust. The aim is to improve habitat for fish and invertebrates, with work including the installation of brushwood berms just upstream from the weir as well as felling trees in to the watercourse- these are staked so they do not wash away.
- VP and AH provided an update on a recent river clean. This includes the removal of dumped material included old tyres, a washing machine, mattresses etc and amounted to over 2 tonnes of rubbish. This clean-up was carried out in conjunction with Frome Angling Club.
- AH provided an update on licensed tree felling taking place at Vallis Vale, up stream from the duck pond. This is to address the on-going issue of ash die back (ADB). She stressed that during and after the works it can look a bit unsightly – but please bear with us as this work is absolutely necessary. Plus, while other sites landowners, including the National Trust, are closing access while they deal with ADB, our aim is to keep them open to the public – but it is more of a ‘see warts and all’ approach.
- RK asked for confirmation on location of the works and asked if signage would help.
- AH confirmed that contractors are using signage, but have been verbally abused by walkers about the work they are carrying out. She added that the felling is between the duck pond and the car park and also upstream of the duck pond.
- AH confirmed that Heidelberg Materials has received its deer management plan for Asham Wood. Responsible population management will start soon carried out by specialists under licence.
- VP added that structural reviews of all the footbridges are underway with improvements planned.
- SW asked for information on the state of the river as he had heard that at Vobster and Mells it was in a poor state. AH said she would provide more detail at a future meeting ACTION AH.
- AH added she has been working in conjunction with the EA to improve the riverbank’s condition which has been damaged by dogs.

## Planning update

TM provided an update on the planning application to update existing conditions for Westdown quarry ahead of reopening it.

- TM confirmed that Heidelberg Materials is still awaiting an update from Somerset Council with regards to when the proposals might be forwarded to committee for determination.
- TM advised that, since January 2023, all concerns raised by statutory consultees had now satisfactorily addressed.
- TM advised that the company’s patience with the process was being to run out and it was now considering all options including the possibility of appeals and or amendments.
- BC advised the group that as part of highlighting the importance of the minerals sector in the East Mendips he had arranged for Somerset Councils’ CEO Duncan Sharkey to tour a number of sites, including Whatley, the following week.
- BC asked if there was legal issue holding up progress of the application. TM advised that although the application had been verified by SCC (as it was then) an issue had

been raised by Somerset subsequently. Heidelberg Materials' KC barrister's opinion, shared with Somerset, strongly refutes this and hence we currently seem to be at an impasse whereby consideration is now being given to amending the scheme or appealing to the Secretary of State

- TM advised that there was no progress with regards to the outstanding Whatley ROMP submitted in 2012 and despite seeking to facilitate an update to the former scheme through a formal pre-application and request for a scoping opinion in April 2022 no response has yet been received.
- BC commented that issues relating to planning resources within the council are recognised and there is work ongoing to improve.

**Next meeting date**

The next meeting will take place on TUESDAY 16<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2024 at 17.30 at Whatley quarry offices.

Meeting Ends 18:30

DRAFT