

# Our proposals to update existing planning conditions at Westdown quarry: Your questions answered

Demand for limestone to build and maintain our homes, hospitals, schools, roads and low carbon infrastructure continues to grow.

Our mineral bank at Whatley quarry is depleting and it's becoming more challenging to extract the remaining reserves. That's why we are seeking to update the existing planning conditions for our nearby Westdown quarry, which has permission for mineral extraction until 2042 but has not been operational since the 1980s.

Reopening Westdown will help secure the long-term supply of limestone and will allow Whatley, which is one of the few rail-linked quarries in the UK, to focus on supplying national demand by train, helping to reduce carbon emissions.

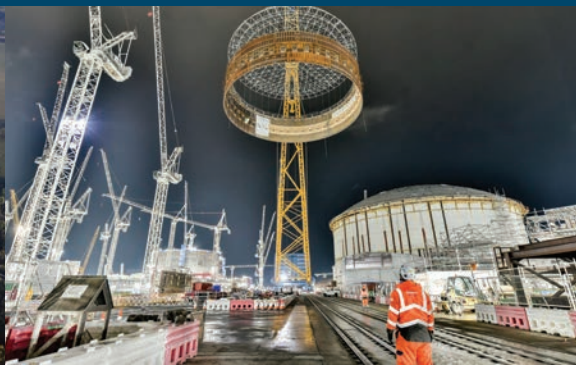
With most of the HGV traffic switched to Westdown, located on the Bulls Green Link Road, it will also mean road-related quarry traffic will be diverted away from neighbouring villages.



Updating our existing consents for Westdown will also deliver a transformative legacy project.

▲ Area included in our application to update permissions at Westdown quarry

The phased progressive restoration of the former Asham quarry (also known as the Asham quarry void), adjacent to Westdown quarry will create an important buffer and extension to the neighbouring ancient woodland of Asham Wood SSSI.



▲ Reopening Westdown quarry will secure supplies of limestone and serve local demand by road, allowing Whatley quarry to supply national projects by rail

### Q: Why do we need more limestone?

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**A:** In addition to its use in construction materials, limestone is used in a range of manufacturing processes including the production of steel, pharmaceuticals, fertiliser, glass, paper and even food production. Every man, woman and child uses the equivalent of 4 tonnes of aggregates a year.

There is an assumption that mineral products are in plentiful supply, but this is not the case and securing enough reserves to meet growing demand is just not taking place. Between 2009 and 2018 only 75% of crushed rock reserves were replenished with new planning consents. And, of course, quarries can only exist where the reserves naturally occur.

This means that there is an increasing supply gap – demand is growing but supplies and approved reserves are dwindling.

Reopening Westdown quarry would help to secure the long-term supply of this vital construction material and the consented reserve at Westdown is already accounted for in Somerset

County Council's (SCC's) minerals plan.

### Q: Will reopening Westdown lead to more lorries on the road?

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**A:** Our proposals will not lead to an increase of HGVs over the current permitted levels for Whatley quarry. Currently, permissions for Whatley allow the transport of 4 million tonnes of limestone per year by road. If Westdown reopens, 2 million tonnes a year of this will be reallocated to Westdown.

Our approach is to use Westdown's location, close to key roads, to supply local demand. This would free up the rail link at Whatley to allow more of the material for national markets to go by train. These combined steps will help cut our carbon footprint and reroute vehicles away from local villages. With both quarries in operation, the maximum number of HGV movements would remain the same as the current permitted levels for Whatley quarry.

### Q: Would rail activity at Whatley change if Westdown reopened?

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**A:** Reopening Westdown quarry to supply local demand via road, would



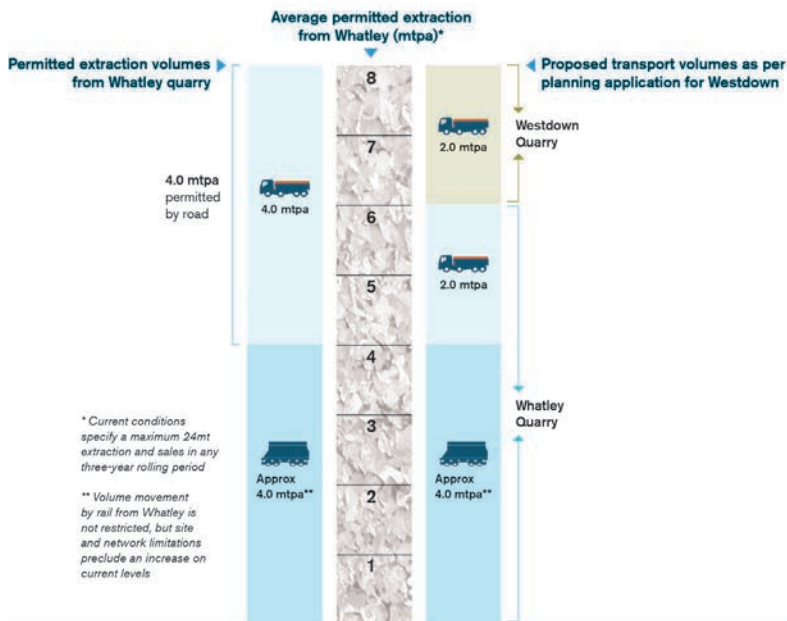
free up the rail link at Whatley to allow a larger proportion of the material for national markets to go by rail.

While our permissions do not restrict the volumes that can be moved by rail from Whatley, site and network limitations preclude an increase on current levels which are approximately 4 million tonnes per annum (mtpa). As the infographic below shows, this means that the number of trains will not change significantly on current

levels. Hanson is also committed to playing its part in the country's net zero carbon ambitions and our rail-linked quarries, including Whatley, have a critical role to play. Transporting a tonne of material by rail, instead of road, is estimated to cut the associated CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by more than 60%, highlighting the importance of rail-linked sites.

There have been rail-linked quarries in the East Mendips for over 100

▲ Even with both Whatley and Westdown quarries in operation, Hanson has committed to aggregate volumes and HGV movements not exceeding the current permitted levels for Whatley quarry



◀ Proposed permitted levels at our East Mendip quarries: volume and transport of materials



▲ Our aim is to minimise the impact of reopening Westdown quarry on our neighbours and the landscape

years. Whatley quarry itself has had a rail link since the 1930s and this was enhanced in both the 1960s and 1970s and again in the 1990s.

However, the timing of trains at Whatley is not something we can control as the schedules are dictated by Network Rail with passenger trains on the main line taking priority over freight.

### **Q: Will there be night-time working at Westdown?**

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**A:** As set out in our proposals, we are seeking an update on the existing permissions for Westdown. Our approach would see operations at Westdown cease at 20.00 Monday to Friday, and at 12.00 on Saturday and Sunday.

### **Q: What are you going to do to minimise the impact of reopening Westdown quarry?**

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**A:** We believe our proposals to update the existing conditions for extraction at Westdown include an extensive range of measures that will mitigate possible impact on local communities, the landscape and the environment. They also include planted screen banks, the continued

and potentially enhanced use of Public Rights of Way, and highway junction improvements. Recent updates to our scheme also include a commitment to additional upfront off-site mitigation. This would see the creation of at least 44 acres of well-connected new habitat with increased woodland planting and the creation of species-rich grassland – along with other integrated measures designed to support Westdown's ecological connectivity to the wider landscape in the short, medium and long term.

Importantly, our Westdown quarry proposals do not seek to increase the footprint of the approved consented area. We are seeking to resume extraction using modern practices and to provide a progressive and final restoration plan for the site.

### **Q: Will mineral extraction at Westdown quarry damage Asham Wood?**

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**A:** No, quite the opposite. Our proposals to update existing permissions for Westdown quarry do not threaten the integrity and biological diversity of Asham Wood SSSI. In fact, our proposals include



significant ecological enhancements through the restoration of the Asham quarry void area as well as the progressive restoration of the quarry, which will see a significant part of Westdown fully restored by the time extraction is complete.

This transformative legacy project will provide extensive biodiversity enhancements and our proposals have been shaped by the need to protect and enhance wildlife habitats as well as delivering safer access for pedestrians and horse-riders.

**Q: Will the regeneration that has taken place in Asham quarry void be lost if Westdown reopens?**

**A:** As local people will be aware, Asham quarry void, next to Asham Wood, has been left unrestored since mineral extraction ceased. This means that the regeneration that has occurred while the site has been lying dormant is not representative of the site's original woodland habitat and landscape prior to extraction.

We believe our planned restoration scheme would better support the ancient woodland habitats in the vicinity – providing enhanced

biodiversity gains and a significant legacy in the long term.

The progressive restoration of the Asham quarry void area, where there will be no mineral extraction, would take place from the end of year 3 to year 15 of resumed operations at Westdown. The approach will be to maximise the beneficial use of historic soils and soil-forming materials stripped from previously disturbed areas to make optimum use of the diverse woodland and grassland seed bank that has developed since original quarry workings. Some small sections of landform would also be retained as bare rubble/rock screes to enhance habitat diversity.

In addition, the restoration proposals for the Asham quarry void have been designed to reflect the key characteristics of the Mendip Landscape Character Area (LCA A10.4), defined as 'steep sided deep valley section' and 'heavily wooded'. The proposed approach will include:

- The wooded slopes serving as linear landscape features to act as bat navigation routes along the created slopes and also within the flatter upper area.

▲ Our proposals have been shaped by the need to protect the environment and enhance wildlife habitats



▲ Our proposals include extensive mitigation measures

- Replicating the bands of vegetation that follow the existing faces within the Asham quarry void and creating connectivity between existing areas of woodland to provide foraging and connective habitat for species such as bats and dormice.
- The addition of embedded pipe roosting features within the tip slopes to enhance the bat focused restoration.
- Advance habitat creation timed and phased to minimise potential effects and habitat connectivity retained and enhanced where possible.

### Q: What steps are you planning to minimise the impact of reopening Westdown on wildlife?

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**A:** Our proposals have been shaped by the need to protect and enhance wildlife habitats and provide a significant biodiversity uplift. For example, our phased mitigation and restoration seeks to increase and enhance the area of semi-natural broadleaved woodland habitat by at least a factor of 10, as a means of re-enforcing the important woodland

habitat in the locality and enhancing the integrity of (non-designated) existing ancient broadleaved woodland areas.

Our updated progressive restoration programme seeks to strengthen the ecological connectivity of the Asham Wood Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and SSSI to the wider landscape. Proposals include a commitment to additional upfront off-site mitigation to create at least 44 acres of well-connected new habitat with:

- Increased woodland planting.
- Additional hedge planting.
- Translocation of the existing important connecting hedgerows.
- Creation of new foraging habitat for badgers, dormice and bats.
- Provision of new roosting opportunities for bats.
- Creation of species rich grassland.

Following submission of our proposals to SCC in January 2021, we were asked to respond on a range of environmental issues by Somerset Environmental Services – mostly arising from the applicability of alternative environmental assessment models. Our response in our Regulation 25 submission sets



Before...



...after

out our strong belief that we have used the appropriate procedural measures to carry out environmental assessments, given the planning framework, supporting our submissions and previous agreements on these matters with SCC.

national economy by 2042 and a further £750.5 million in tax revenue during the same period. The two sites will also support over 200 jobs on site and a further 730 in the regional supply chain for at least the next 20 years.

▲ We are committed to providing a significant biodiversity uplift

**Q: What benefit will reopening Westdown bring to the area?**

**A:** An independent survey found that continuing operations at Whatley and reopening Westdown is expected to contribute over £2.2 billion to the

**Q: Why does Westdown need to reopen as well as other planned quarry extensions in the east Mendips?**

**A:** Understandably, we can't comment on our competitors' business

◀ Our proposals include the creation of an off-site up front mitigation area providing new connective habitats





strategies. For Hanson, our approach is based on working sustainably to secure the supply of aggregate to both local markets and nationally significant infrastructure projects.

Our aim is to take advantage of Westdown's location, close to key road routes, to supply local demand. At our neighbouring Whatley quarry this will enable us to maximise use of the rail link to supply national markets, including to important infrastructure projects such as Hinkley Point C nuclear power station. Together, these steps will cut our carbon footprint and reduce the impact of quarry HGV traffic on neighbouring villages.

Planning permission for the extraction of minerals at Westdown quarry is already in place. This means that the principle of extraction is established and the consolidating planning submission for the proposed development is not required to demonstrate a clear need for the mineral. In fact, the consented reserve

at Westdown is already accounted for in SCC's calculation of the county's mandatory aggregates landbank.

Our Environmental Statement (ES) accompanying our application to update existing consents at Westdown considered the cumulative impact of mineral extraction resuming and concluded that no significant cumulative effects would occur with other similar sites in the area.

### Q: What happens next?

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**A:** We wanted to share more detail on our updated proposals with local communities – as both our pre-application consultation and Somerset County Council's (SCC's) consultation took place during Covid-19 restrictions.

SCC has yet to set out when our application, first submitted in January 2021, will be determined, but we expect it to be reviewed by the council's planning committee soon.

▲ Whatley and Westdown quarries will provide training and apprenticeship opportunities for young people

**You can contact us at: 0800 644 4234 or [whatley.quarry@hanson.com](mailto:whatley.quarry@hanson.com)**

All our planning documents, including plans detailing the progressive restoration of Westdown and Asham quarry void are available to view via our website:

**[www.hanson-communities.co.uk/en/whatley-and-westdown-quarry-community-page](http://www.hanson-communities.co.uk/en/whatley-and-westdown-quarry-community-page)**