



➤ WESTDOWN QUARRY

Our response to queries about proposals to update existing planning consents

➤ INTRODUCTION

Following attendance at recent parish council meetings in the communities around Westdown, we wanted to provide further detail on some key aspects of our proposals in response to the queries received from local people.

We've also been listening to feedback. And, as part of our commitment to be a good neighbour, we have clarified our position on a number of issues and indicated where we would be seeking to work closely with local stakeholders in the future to further develop and implement aspects of our proposals.

➤ BACKGROUND

Westdown quarry has permission for mineral extraction until 2042, though it has not been operational since the late 1980s. Our application to Somerset County Council (SCC) is focused on bringing the existing permissions in line with modern environmental standards and quarrying practices and includes extensive mitigation measures to reduce any potential impacts on local communities and the environment.

Importantly, our proposals include significant ecological enhancements through the restoration of the adjacent Asham Wood void area and the progressive restoration of the quarry. This transformative legacy project will provide extensive biodiversity enhancements with the proposals shaped by the need to protect and enhance wildlife habitats. The plans will also deliver safer access for pedestrians and horse-riders.

Restarting operations at Westdown will help to secure long-term supplies of vital construction materials. Our approach is also to use Westdown's location, close to key road routes, to supply local demand, freeing up the rail link at our nearby Whatley quarry to allow more material for national markets to go by rail. This will help to cut our carbon footprint and reroute vehicles away from local villages. The overarching principle is that the operations of both quarries, including mineral volumes and vehicle movements, will not exceed the current permitted extraction levels for Whatley.

September 2021



> Response to feedback
1. Environment and restoration





We were asked about the environmental impact of our plans and for more detail about the restoration proposals, especially in light of concerns that biodiversity gains achieved since the quarry closed would be lost.

► OUR RESPONSE

- Hanson's parent company, HeidelbergCement, is the first company in the construction sector to adopt group-wide guidelines for species protection. And, in the UK, many of our sites have already made a positive contribution, with a number designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). In addition, we have developed Memorandums of Understanding with both Natural England and Countryside Council for Wales recognising the importance of bio and geodiversity and our commitment to natural resource protection and enhancing the environment.
- The Environmental Impact assessment (EIA), that informed the development of the Environmental Statement (ES) which supported our planning application, involved a thorough review of the potential effects of our proposals for Westdown. The purpose of the EIA is to identify how people and the environment could be affected by the proposals and to put forward mitigation measures that would avoid, minimise or offset any negative effects. A key aspect of our ES for Westdown, underpinned by the studies carried out in the EIA, is that that restoration of the quarry will be carried out progressively during the active phase of the quarry. This will help to ensure the promotion of biological diversity from the resumption of activities at Westdown.
- In the quarry itself, the restoration proposals would create a wide range of new habitats across the whole of the proposed development site including new woodland, scrub and calcareous grassland, with exposed quarry faces and areas of water body and marginal habitat also contributing to a diverse landscape within the site boundary. Native mixed broadleaved woodland and scrub mixes would be based on those set out in the detailed landscaping and planting mitigation strategy, which would be agreed prior to the resumption of quarrying.
- The progressive restoration of the Asham Wood void area, where no mineral extraction will be taking place, would take place from the end of year 3 to year 15 of resumed operations. The approach will be to maximise the beneficial use of historic soils and soil-forming materials stripped from previously disturbed areas in order 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 Wood void have been designed to reflect the key characteristics of the Mendip Landscape Character Area (LCA A10.4) which describes the location as a "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 in the flatter upper area.
 - Replicating the bands of vegetation that follow the existing faces within the Asham Wood 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 of the Asham Wood void. The detailed restoration would be developed in collaboration with local bat groups to ensure that bat focused and ecology-led restoration is delivered.
- In summary, our ES demonstrated that the proposed development has been designed in a careful and considered way, which fully mitigates most of the anticipated effects that would be brought on by the resumption of mineral extraction at Westdown quarry.



Local residents asked for more information on the biodiversity action plan, particularly in relation to how ash dieback disease would be addressed.

OUR RESPONSE

- All Hanson's quarry sites have a Biodiversity Action plan and plans are underway for all our quarrying operations to carry out biodiversity net impact assessments by 2025 in conjunction with BirdLife International.
- Our proposals for Westdown set out that we will prepare and implement a Landscape Mitigation Strategy. This will include a detailed planting scheme, as well as a Landscape and Ecology Management Plan (LEMP) and a Habitat Management Plan (HMP). Our approach will be to develop these collaboratively in conjunction with stakeholders to underpin the protection and enhancement of biodiversity at the site and will be formally agreed with SCC prior to Westdown reopening.
- Ash dieback disease was considered as part of the future baseline in the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) in our ES. Hanson also already has an approved Forestry Commission Woodland Management Plan for the Asham Wood (SSSI) drawn up in conjunction with Natural England and other stakeholders, including Somerset Wildlife Trust. However, with the extent of ash dieback becoming more readily understood, we now are working with these groups to review and update the plan. We'll share more details with local stakeholders on this in the future.



We were asked about the impact of our proposals on Chantry Pond.

OUR RESPONSE

- A hydrological and hydrogeological assessment, covering surface and groundwater, was carried out as part of the development of our proposals. This included assessing the potential effects on water dependent conservation sites, such as Chantry Pond, as well as the development of measures to avoid, reduce or compensate for the potential effects on the water environment close to Westdown. Measures to be included in a Construction Environment Management Plan (CEMP) will include:
 - Runoff to be controlled by the use of settlement lagoons to collect rainfall, runoff and intercepted groundwater.
 - Compound area to be constructed using Sustainable urban Drainage System (SuDS) principles.
 - No mineral extraction, soil/overburden storage, ground raising or attenuation lagoons in areas categorised as Flood Zone 2 or 3.
- Our studies concluded that the effect of our proposals on the water environment supporting Chantry Pond would be negligible.



We were asked why Red Kites did not feature within our Environmental Statement.

▶ OUR RESPONSE

The studies that informed our ecological assessment as part of the EIA were based on a summary of the protected species records from Somerset Ecological Records Centre (SERC). This details no record of Red Kites within the site and immediately outside the site area over the past 10 years. Similarly, a Phase 1 Habitat survey carried out using the accepted methodology (after JNCC, 2010) over the site and a 50m surrounding buffer area, in July 2020, also recorded no Red Kites.

> Response to feedback
2. Traffic and transport





Local people expressed concerns about increased HGV traffic on local roads.

OUR RESPONSE

- The overarching principle for our quarries in the East Mendips is that is that the operations of both Whatley and a reopened Westdown will not exceed the current permitted mineral volumes and vehicle movement levels for Whatley:
 - Whatley quarry is permitted to transport up to 4 million tonnes per annum (mtpa) via road. It is intended that the 2mtpa future activity at Westdown would be in lieu of these agreed traffic volumes, as set out in the planning conditions for Whatley quarry. This means that HGV traffic from Westdown quarry and Whatley quarry combined will not exceed 4mtpa.
 - The traffic and transport assessment considered the impact on local roads and concluded that the resumption of mineral development at Westdown quarry will have no significant traffic effects.



We were asked why the proposals include sending all HGVs via the A361 to reach the A37, rather than traffic heading north using the Bulls Green Link Road.

OUR RESPONSE

- Our proposals were developed to align with SCC's Freight Strategy (December 2011), which identifies the Old Wells Road (B3134) as a local freight route and the A361 as a county freight route. Consequently, our proposals are based on adhering with the need for all vehicles – regardless of their ultimate direction – to turn right out of the site onto the Bulls Green Link Road, before travelling along the C2533 to the A361 and continuing their onward journeys in line with SCC's adopted freight strategy.
- We acknowledge the feedback received on this issue and understand local people's concerns about north-bound HGVs initially having to travel south before continuing along the A361 to reach the A37. On review, we believe that either the proposed route (described above), or the use of the Old Wells Road (B3134) would represent a suitable route for quarry vehicles to travel north. We are now following up with SCC's highways team to discuss this in more detail and to seek their guidance on this important issue.



We were asked if Hanson would commit to preventing its HGVs from using the Waterlip cut through to travel from the A361 to the Old Wells Road.

► OUR RESPONSE

- We would be willing to enter into a formal Section 106 agreement, a legal planning obligation, committing our HGVs to only using the routes set out in the planning submission. This would mean that our HGVs would be precluded from using the route through the village of Waterlip.



We were asked if Hanson would contribute via Section 106 or other arrangements to improving the Beacon junction.

► OUR RESPONSE

- Our detailed traffic and transport assessment assessed the impact of the proposed development traffic on the surrounding network and key junctions. Although it concluded that development traffic can be accommodated on the existing transport network, in light of ongoing liaison with SCC on highway issues relating to our proposals (see above), we are keeping an open mind on this issue pending feedback and guidance from SCC Highways.



We were asked about the new entrance to Westdown quarry with local people expressing concerns about its proposed location.

► OUR RESPONSE

- Our site access study for Westdown quarry considered seven possible site access options, including two options opening onto the A361. It identified the proposed site access onto the Bulls Green Link Road – a road designed specifically for access to nearby quarries – as the most suitable and safest option for all road users.
- The new access is being designed to fully comply with existing national and local road safety standards and guidance and, again, our proposals are subject to ongoing discussion and approval with the local highways authority, SCC.



We were asked about our plans for bridleways and if we would consider amends.

► OUR RESPONSE

- Our proposals have been designed in a way that will allow the continued use of the Public Rights of Way (PRoWs), with Footpath SM 8/11, and Bridleway FR 12/43 sustaining no direct effects.
- Bridleway SM 8/9 will remain open but, for the period of the proposed Asham Wood restoration works between years 3–15 of resumed operations, our proposals include a temporary supplementary crossing point to allow quarry vehicles to cross between the main Westdown quarry to the Asham Wood void. The crossing will require the construction of an electronically controlled crossing point and associated corral area for horses with the design prioritising the safety of both horses and riders.
- We are willing to consider improvements and additions to the existing PRoW and bridleway network on our land within the Asham Wood and will work with local stakeholders to understand more about how best to enhance recreational use of the area.



We were asked if there would be more trains at Whatley as a result of Westdown reopening.

► OUR RESPONSE

- Transporting material by rail is limited by capacity availability on the rail network and at present there are no plans for additional volumes to be transported from Whatley by rail. However, as part of our 2030 commitments, the cornerstone of our sustainability strategy, we are committed to reducing the CO₂ emissions from downstream transportation (the transportation of materials from our sites to customers) by at least 15% compared to 2019. Consequently, as we work to reduce our carbon footprint, we would seek to increase the use of rail wherever feasible.
- Our internal analysis has calculated that transporting a tonne of material by rail, instead of by road, cuts the associated CO₂ emissions by around two thirds. For example, our calculations indicate that the CO₂ associated per tonne per kilometre transported by road is 0.168 CO₂ /t-km, whereas for rail it is 0.058 CO₂ /t-km.

> Response to feedback
**3. The need for quarry materials
and the low-carbon agenda**





We were asked how expanding mineral extraction can be compatible with the country's low carbon aims.

► OUR RESPONSE

- Quarrying is recognised at the highest level of Government as being a vital industry, which supports UK construction and the national economy. In fact, the Government's current Build Back Better campaign sets out its plans to support growth through significant investment in infrastructure, skills and innovation; to pursue growth that levels up every part of the UK and to enable the transition to net zero. For this to be successful, the construction industry must have a ready and consistent supply of raw materials – which the quarrying industry supplies. Without this, the construction sector would need to import supplies, which would not only have an economic disbenefit but would also increase carbon impacts through unnecessary transportation. In summary, the UK's journey to net zero carbon requires essential minerals and mineral products, sourced locally and extracted responsibly.



We were asked why, in addition to other planned quarry extensions in the East Mendips, Westdown also needs to reopen.

► OUR RESPONSE

- Understandably, we can't comment on our competitors' business strategies. For Hanson, our approach is based on working sustainably to secure the supply of aggregate to both local markets as well as to 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 greater use of the rail link to supply national markets, including to important infrastructure projects such as Hinkley Point C nuclear power station in Somerset and the High Speed 2 (HS2) rail link. Together, these steps will cut our carbon footprint and reduce the impact of quarry HGV traffic on neighbouring villages. (NB: The rail link at Whatley means that this quarry is only one of a handful across England that has the capacity to supply wider UK markets, including markets in London and the south-east of England, where geology dictates that most crushed rock requirements must be met by material from other English regions. Being able to supply these markets by rail means that Whatley quarry is considered by SCC, in its adopted Minerals Local Plan, as a strategic aggregate quarry.)
- Planning permission for the extraction of minerals at Westdown quarry is already in place. Thus, the principle of extraction is established and the consolidating planning submission for the Proposed Development is not required to demonstrate a clear need (in landbank terms) for the mineral – indeed, the consented reserve at Westdown is already accounted for in SCC's calculation of the aggregates landbank.
- Our ES considered the cumulative impact of mineral extraction resuming at Westdown and concluded that no significant 'in combination' effects are anticipated in respect of the environmental issues covered in the ES. Additionally, our proposals for Westdown do not seek to increase the footprint of the quarry, but to resume and complete the working while providing a progressive and final restoration for the site. Consequently, our ES sets out that no significant cumulative effects would occur with other similar sites in the area.

➤ **WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?**

We hope that this answers many of the queries the local community had about our proposals to update existing planning consents for Westdown quarry.

Further updates on the progress of our planning application will be provided to our Whatley and Westdown Community Liaison Group and the minutes of these meetings are posted to our website: www.hanson-communities.co.uk/en/whatley-and-westdown-quarry-community-page

The Mineral Planning Authority – in this case Somerset County Council (SCC) – has now completed its own public consultation on our proposals and we are expecting a determination of our planning application this autumn.



➤ **WHATLEY AND WESTDOWN COMMUNITY 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)
