

Our Ref R15/1

Mr P Watson
Planning Development Control
Northamptonshire County Council
PO Box 163
County Hall
Northampton
NN1 1AX

11th October 2011

Dear Mr Watson,

**Proposed Limestone Quarry - Ringstead Grange, Ringstead
Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations - Scoping Opinion**

- 1) Mick George Ltd are preparing a planning application to extract some 2 million tonnes of limestone along with limited volumes of clay for engineering purposes from within an area contained within the Ringstead Grange site edged in red on the attached plan (Drg N^o R15/SR711). It is also proposed to import an equivalent volume of inert material to achieve a restoration profile suitable for productive farming following completion of the works and subject to the rate of extraction of the limestone the project will be completed within an 11 to 15 year timeframe. The site is bounded to the east by Raunds Road (B663), the A45 to the south (in part) and open agricultural land on all other boundaries.
- 2) The MWDF, Location of Mineral Development was published in March 2011 and reiterates the general Core Strategy policies and aims. The Locations for Minerals Development DPD forms this component of the MWDF and it does this by taking forward, objectives and policies for minerals-related development in the MWDF Core Strategy by allocating specific sites for mineral extraction in line with the spatial strategy for mineral extraction that will deliver the required provision of crushed rock (limestone) thus maintaining landbanks to ensure an adequate supply of aggregates for the construction industry over the plan period. The site at Ringstead Grange is one such allocated site for the extraction of limestone (Site MA9).
- 3) Given the nature of the development, the application will be accompanied by an Environmental Statement and in accordance with the provisions of the Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations (2011) we seek a formal **Scoping Opinion** from your authority and the following is provided to assist in your authority coming to this view.

Mick George Ltd Registered no. 2417831 (England)

Mick George Managing Director

Jon Stump Financial Director

Geoff Craven Logistics Director

Neil Johnson Technical Waste Director

Pete Newman MSOE MIRTE (Eng-Tech) Engineering Director

Michael George Contracts Director



Provisional working and restoration scheme

- 4) In order to export the mineral a new access point will be constructed onto Raunds Road and all HGV's will be routed to the A45 to the south and Drg N° R15/SR711 identifies the possible access point. It is envisaged that an asymmetrical junction can be incorporated within the design to ensure all HGV's turn right out of the site entrance away from Ringstead village and this will be supplemented by a vehicle routing agreement if required. Provisional details of the geometry of this junction are continued on Drg N° 13150-01 A.
- 5) Within the quarry it is proposed that adequate surfaced roads will be established along with wheel cleaning facilities to ensure no deleterious material is carried onto the public highway. Mobile, temporary processing plant with mobile screens will be established at the base of the quarry workings with processed mineral stockpiles also located on the quarry pavement therefore reducing potential noise and adverse visual impacts. There are no proposals to blast the in-situ limestone thereby further mitigating potential adverse impacts. The mobile processing plant and screens along with associated stockpiles will progressively be repositioned generally to be close to the mineral excavation face to minimise internal haulage of mobile plant.
- 6) It is recognised that a public right of way traverses part of the site and this will require temporary and/or permanent division as part of the scheme. Moreover, it is not envisaged that any significant volumes of ground water will be encountered as part of the mineral extraction proposals, however, adequate provision will be made within the quarry design to manage any surface water discharges. It is envisaged that early landscaping proposals including woodland planting could take place in the north-west extremity of the site as generally shown on Drg N° R15/SR711.
- 7) When sufficient area of the worked out quarry is available suitable inert material will be imported to the site to achieve the desired restoration profile. Such operations will be controlled by way of an Environmental Permit issued by the Environment Agency.
- 8) A primary objective the restoration scheme aims to complement the surrounding rolling landscape with large open fields. Relevant Biodiversity Action Plan targets, planning policies and guidance from the Development Plan and the findings of the other relevant environmental impact assessments undertaken will be used to provide the framework for the restoration proposals, an integral part of which is to ensure the development entails a beneficial element by way of long term environmental improvements. The site design is aimed at balancing protection of the local environment with the requirement to extract limestone and subsequently restore the site to a beneficial afteruse with positive ecological and landscape benefits consistent with sustainable development objectives. The proposed restoration scheme will secure a suitable and characteristic long-term afteruse for the site, in terms of improved landscape character and as a biodiversity resource.



Environmental Information to be provided

Ecology

- 9) An independent consultant will be commissioned to undertake an **ecological assessment** of the site, and its environs. The brief will include the following baseline data:
- 10) A Phase 1 Survey (JNCC 1993 Methodology) to include identification of all recognised statutory and non-statutory sites of nature conservation interest within a 1km radius of the application site;
 - Observations of any protected species
 - An analysis of the importance of the recorded habitats in both a local and national context;
 - Full species list of vegetation; and
 - Detailed species list and description of the application site.
- 11) Furthermore, information will be provided on how the proposed development has the potential to impact upon the conservation objectives of the Upper Nene Valley Gravel Pits SSSI and proposed Special Protection Area (SPA) having regard to the Conservation (Natural Habitats and c) Regulations 1994. The closest SSSI is located over 600m to the southwest of the development site.
- 12) The Upper Nene Valley Gravel Pits SSSI is nationally important for its breeding bird assemblage of lowland open waters and their margins (including the largest nesting colony of grey herons *Ardea cinerea* in Northamptonshire) and a rare example of wet floodplain woodland. This chain of sand and gravel pits extends for approximately 35 kilometres along the alluvial deposits of the River Nene floodplain from Clifford Hill on the southern outskirts of Northampton, downstream to Thorpe Waterville, north of Thrapston. They form an extensive series of shallow and deep open waters which occur in association with a wide range of marginal features, such as sparsely-vegetated islands, gravel bars and shorelines, and habitats including reedswamp, marsh, wet ditches, rush pasture, rough grassland and scattered scrub. This range of habitat and the varied topography of the waterbodies provide valuable nesting, resting and feeding conditions to sustain nationally important numbers and assemblages of breeding and wintering birds.
- 13) The extensive open waters of the Upper Nene Valley Gravel Pits collectively form one of the most important inland localities in England for waterbirds in the non-breeding season. The open water associated with the six pit complexes at Thrapston, Ringstead, Stanwick, Ditchford, Earls Barton and Clifford Hill are all particularly significant as waterfowl refuges, together regularly supporting peak numbers of birds in excess of 20,000 individuals, comprising more than forty species.
- 14) Following an analysis of the survey findings, the site operations will be designed to minimise impact on habitats of greatest value although given the intensive arable farming that takes place on the fields in question no sensitive habitats are likely to be encountered within the site. The assessment will set out the impact of the proposals on ecological interests as identified in the ecological reports and discussion of the significance of such impacts, along with a description of the mitigation measures introduced in the site working and restoration design to reduce potential impact.



Landscape and Visual Assessment

- 15) An independent landscape consultant will be commissioned to undertake a **landscape and visual impact assessment** of the proposed development (during working and post-restoration). The assessment will take into account of Central government advice, and the latest available guidance on methodology. (Guidance for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment - 2002.) The survey will involve a landscape and visual assessment on the site and the surrounding landscape that contributes to its setting. The assessment will characterise the landscape in the context of existing landscape character assessment and visually sensitive receptors within the zone of visibility of the site will be identified in order to assess the extent and nature of views.
- 16) The landscape impacts will initially be assessed in relation to the impact of the proposed development on the landscape resources (quantified where possible) of the site and its character. In addition, the effects of the scheme on local landscape character, within the area surrounding the site, will be considered. Viewpoints will be used to indicate the degree of visual impact during site operations and subsequent restoration. The extent of site visibility from public vantage points will be graded and the character of the view described. The information gained from the landscape and visual assessment will contribute to influencing the scheme design and the baseline data will be ultimately used to visually assess each stage of site operations.

Hydrology and Hydrogeology

- 17) An assessment of baseline conditions of both **hydrology and hydrogeology** will be made of the site and surrounding areas by independent consultants. This will include information on:
 - Geology;
 - Condition of watercourses on and adjacent to the application site;
 - Extent of any catchment to be affected; and
 - Assessment of aquifers in the locality.
- 18) The assessment will describe the impact of the proposed operations on the local surface water network, as well as groundwater, including an assessment of the impacts on the water quality and catchment balance during the operations, and any proposed mitigation measures designed to combat these effects, i.e. overall drainage management regime. The assessment will also include;
 - Effects on local drainage channels;
 - Description of restored landform and impacts on drainage;
 - Description of mitigation measures included in the scheme to reduce impacts on the local water environment; and
 - Description of proposed monitoring of groundwater levels and quality and surface water flow measurement.
 - The applicant's hydrological consultant will undertake a flood risk assessment in accordance with the provisions of Planning Policy Statement 25 (PPS25).



Traffic

- 19) It is envisaged that the mineral will be processed at a rate between 150,000 and 200,000 tonnes per annum and will be exported from the site with HGV's using the internal access road to Raunds Road (B663) at the eastern extremity of the site and then travelling south away from the village of Ringstead. Inert restoration material will be imported onto the scheme using the same HVG route, at a typical rate of 100,000m³ per annum and a proportion of that material may be suitable to recycle as secondary aggregate. In total it is envisaged that up to 80 HGVs (equating to 160 movements) could visit the site daily with a significant proportion used to back-haul material (i.e. vehicles bringing waste to the site will be loaded with aggregate when leaving the site).
- 20) Appropriate visibility splays of 2.4m x 215m will be provided to ensure safe access onto the public highway and this access point will be sited to minimise the loss of roadside hedgerows. A comprehensive Traffic Impact Assessment will be undertaken to consider the full implications of working and transporting that material along the B663 and along with the importation of inert materials for restoration.

Soils

- 21) A comprehensive **soil survey** will be undertaken across the entire site and the working scheme will ensure any soils (particularly higher grade soils) are handled and conserved in accordance with accepted good practice guidance (originally published by MAFF in 2000). The detailed Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) survey will be carried out according to all ALC guidelines and will include soil auger sample points, set out on a grid system at a density of one sample point per hectare with supplementary observations to determine the natural variability of soil properties.

Cultural Heritage

- 22) An archaeological evaluation of an area in the centre of the site was undertaken following the discovery of flint and Iron Age pottery in the mid 1980's. A concentration of flint was identified coinciding with the smaller concentration of Iron Age pottery although trial excavation did not apparently identify any contemporary features. Sherds of pottery were recovered by fieldwalking and a majority of these were found in two concentrations. Previous aerial photographs, taken in 1980, revealed rather indistinct linear cropmarks in the field immediately to the north east of the Iron Age pottery scatter.
- 23) An area extending to just less than 4ha was subsequently surveyed using a Geoscan Research to identify areas around the two concentrations of Iron Age pottery and to test the remaining areas by surveying sample transects across the field although few positive results were obtained in the western area or in the sample transects whereas the results in the area of eastern site were more positive. Drg N^oR15/SR711 identifies the general location of these two areas of archaeological significance previously assessed. The magnetometer survey supported by the field walking results indicated that the eastern site comprised a small unenclosed settlement. The major features identified by the magnetometer survey were a series of linear ditches, a number of small, wide-ditched, sub-rectangular and oval enclosures and a ring ditch sited outside the enclosures. Trial



trenches were excavated in autumn 1990 to examine the sites revealed by fieldwalking and the magnetometer survey.

- 24) As part of the current proposals a further geo-physical survey of the entire site will be undertaken by means of a recorded magnetometer survey followed by a scheme of trial trenching will be agreed with the archaeological adviser to the planning authority. The general aim of the trench evaluation will be to obtain useful information concerning the presence, character, date and level of preservation of any surviving archaeological remains that could be affected by the proposed development.

Amenity protection (Noise and Dust)

- 25) An acoustic appraisal will be undertaken to identify potential noise sensitive locations around the application site (including occupied dwellings and the Upper Nene Valley Gravel Pits SSSI and pSPA), and propose any mitigation measures if required to reduce any potential noise impact although it should be noted the area of working is generally remote from any residential dwellings. The appraisal will assess impacts and may lead to the implementation of additional mitigation measures.
- 26) The noise assessment will consider potential noise sensitive locations, with the measurement and description of existing background noise levels at these selected locations. Prediction of noise levels from proposed operations at various phases of the project will use the procedures contained in the British Standards B.S. 5228: 1997 "Noise Control of Construction and Open Sites"; and Guidance contained within Mineral Policy Statement 2 (Annex 2). Noise monitoring will be undertaken using a Solo precision integrating sound level meter which fully complies with British Standard BS6698: Specification for integrating-averaging sound level meters, with the microphone in free-field conditions, the instrument being positioned at least 3.5 metres from any reflecting surface and 1.5 metres above the ground.
- 27) Dust generating activities will be located away from residential properties/ sensitive premises/ users and dust management issues reflected within the site design. Where appropriate, the distance between sensitive uses and dust-generating activities will be maximised. Consistent with advice within Mineral Policy Statement 2 (Annex 1), the Company will promote a Dust Action Plan which will provide a pro-active approach to dust control at the site.

Conclusion

- 28) In summary, having regard to the application site's location, the following subjects have been identified as being of potential significance in the context of extracting the mineral and restoring the area.
- Ecology;
 - Soil resources;
 - Landscape and visual impact;
 - Traffic;
 - Noise and Dust
 - Hydrology and hydrogeology; and



- Cultural heritage

29) The foregoing provides a broad outline of the manner in which Mick George Limited intend to structure the Environmental Statement to accompany the planning application to extract minerals from a site identified within Policy M2 of the adopted Minerals and Waste Development Framework DPD. We look forward to receiving your formal Scoping Response in accordance with the EIA Regulations as to the extent of technical detail to be included within an Environmental Statement required by your authority but should you have any queries regarding the proposals then please do not hesitate to make contact.

Yours Sincerely

John Gough
Planning Manager

Encs

Drg No: R15/SR711 (Crestwood Environmental)

Drg No: 13150-01 A (David Tucker Associates)