

2003 Sector review

Progress against Priority Actions

1. Develop solutions for extant planning permissions that damage designated sites.

- 1.1. During the year we have successfully piloted the concept of buying out damaging mineral permissions through our 'Nature for People' project. This has resulted in the purchase of Aldermaston Gravel Pits in Berkshire and Cocknowle Chalk Pit in Dorset. Both sites had extant permissions to quarry which, had they been used, would have severely damaged the nature conservation interest. Without the purchase of these sites it would have meant that these two SSSI would be in unfavourable condition indefinitely.
- 1.2. The purchase of these two sites means that we can begin the process of managing them for nature conservation as well as ensuring, in partnership with the local wildlife trust, that public access is provided. We have also gained valuable experience of the practicality of buying out mineral consents, which will be used to inform options for future safeguard of designated sites.

2. Influence the evolution and review of the mineral planning system

- 2.1. This area of work includes revisions of Mineral Planning Guidance, regional planning responsibilities, and policies relating to marine aggregates and strategic minerals.
- 2.2. With regard to strategic minerals we have played a major role in steering research commissioned by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) into planning for the supply of building and roofing stone, and planning for the supply of non-energy / non-aggregate minerals such as fluorspar. Planning guidance on these minerals is expected to follow as Annexes to a revised MPS 1.
- 2.3. We have been working with ODPM to produce environmental guidelines for the appraisal of aggregate extraction. This will allow Mineral Planning Authorities to use the same criteria nationally, which should ensure consistency in establishing the environmental impacts of aggregate extraction.
- 2.4. We have worked with ODPM and the British Geological Survey to produce fact sheets that explain the importance of a range of minerals including limestone, gypsum and silica sand. These will allow planners to get a better understanding of the issues, including the environmental issues, associated with extraction.
- 2.5. We have been working with Maritime Team to liaise jointly with the marine aggregates industry, to discuss their concerns over the planned designation of offshore Special Areas of Conservation.

2.6. An important element of our work has been to ensure that restoration of quarries is seen as an integral part of the planning system, and that this is planned for at the earliest opportunity. We have been working successfully to ensure that everyone in the planning system is aware of the huge potential that disused quarries have for geology and wildlife.

3. Promote sustainable extraction activities.

3.1. This is done through programmes such as the Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund, through developing links with companies, and through the identification and promotion of best practice in all areas of the sector.

3.2. During the two years we have been extremely active in this delivering a successful Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund (ALSF) grant scheme, and promoting it as an effective way of delivering a sustainable mineral extraction industry. We have grant aided 106 projects costing £6.9 million on sites associated with mineral extraction. We have worked to promote the success of the scheme as a tool in delivering sustainable development through: organising an ALSF 'Milestone Event' with the Countryside Commission and English Heritage (October 2003), publishing an ALSF insert with the September issue of Nature's Place, meeting with the Treasury to discuss the working of the scheme, and meeting with representatives of all the major aggregate producers to hear their views on how the scheme can be improved.

3.3. In our work with mineral companies we have renewed our Memorandum of Understanding with Hanson Plc, which commits them to manage the SSSIs they control in a way that delivers favourable condition, and also commits them to producing biodiversity and geodiversity action plans for their land holdings by 2005. We are also working with Aggregate Industries and Lafarge to address the condition of SSSIs under their control.

3.4. In March 2003 we published, with the Quarry Products Association (QPA) and the Silica and Moulding Sands Association, a guide to conserving geological features as part of mineral extraction. This publication, entitled 'Geodiversity and the minerals industry', has been distributed across the UK and elsewhere. In addition, the QPA recently agreed to include achievements for 'Biodiversity and Geodiversity' in their industry awards scheme.