BARFORD RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION

DRAFT WARWICKSHIRE MINERALS LOCAL PLAN – ASSESSMENT OF PROPOSED ALLOCATIONS, SITES 4 AND 5

LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL CONSTRAINTS REPORT

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Extract from Warwickshire Minerals Plan Publication Draft (2016) – Boundaries of Sites 4 and 5
1 INTRODUCTION

1.1.1 This report has been produced to outline the key landscape and visual constraints associated with Site 4 (Wasperton) and Site 5 (Glebe Farm, Wasperton) which are proposed site allocations for sand and gravel extraction within the Draft Warwickshire Minerals Local Plan (the ‘Draft Plan’).

1.1.2 The site boundaries are included at Appendix 1.

1.1.3 A site visit was undertaken on the 13th June 2017 during which the key landscape and visual constraints associated with the sites were identified. A number of photographs were taken during this site visit, which are included within this report where relevant.

1.1.4 Please note that this report does not at this stage comprise a full Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA).
2 BACKGROUND

2.1 Draft Warwickshire Minerals Plan

2.1.1 Warwickshire County Council (WCC) are currently preparing their Mineral Plan. In response to comments received during the latest round of consultation (which concluded in February 2017), WCC are reassessing the Draft Plan and the policies within it.

2.1.2 Land to the south of Barford and east of Wasperton is proposed for sand and gravel extraction within the Draft Plan, as Site 4 (Wasperton) under Policy S4, and Site 5 (Glebe Farm, Wasperton) under Policy S5.

2.1.3 The sites are located approximately 4.5km south of Warwick, and 6.5km north-east of Stratford-upon-Avon.

2.1.4 Site 4 is approximately 85ha in size and located to the south-east of Barford and east of Wasperton. The boundary of Site 4 has been amended (reducing the site area from 110ha) to increase the distance between the site and Barford.

2.1.5 Site 5 is approximately 14ha in size and is located to the east of Wasperton, and adjoins the southern boundary of Site 4. The site can only be worked in conjunction with Site 4 and as such would not be a freestanding minerals site.

2.1.6 The evidence base for the Draft Plan does not include a landscape assessment. Consideration of landscape and visual impacts is limited to a question on landscape character within the site assessments undertaken as part of the Sustainability Appraisal (SA) produced for the Draft Plan. Both assessments state that there will be a negative outcome for landscape character.

2.1.7 Policies S4 and S5 require a 100m standoff between the working area within the sites, and nearby properties (including The Forge Cottage, Wasperton Farm, Holloway Farm, Glebe Farm and Seven Elms).

2.1.8 The wording of the policies suggest that the sites could be developed in phases allowing the protection of hedgerows, as well as advanced planting. However, it is considered that in order to create a working area of a size that is operationally viable a substantial amount of hedgerow will still need to be removed, due to the size and shape of the existing fields. In addition hedgerow removal will be required to create access roads between phases, and between Sites 4 and 5.
2.1.9 The SA states that due to the size of Site 4, it is considered likely that significant adverse landscape and visual effects will occur as a result of it being worked. In addition, although Site 5 is smaller in size, as it can only be worked in conjunction with Site 4 it is likely that there would be significant adverse cumulative landscape and visual effects. The SA also states that although the policies allow for restoration of the site back to agricultural land using imported inert fill and by lowering the level of the land, permanent negative changes to the landscape are likely to occur.

2.1.10 The SA states that the working of Sites 4 and 5 would be likely to have significant adverse landscape and visual effects, which would result in significant effects against SA Objective 5 (to conserve and enhance the quality of the landscapes and townscapes).
3 SITE DESCRIPTION

3.1 Site 4 (Wasperton)

3.1.1 Site 4 is approximately 85ha in size and located to the south-east of Barford and east of Wasperton. The site is generally flat, with land beyond the site rising in the east and north towards Wasperton Hill and Watchbury Hill respectively.

3.1.2 Site 4 comprises irregular, large agricultural fields in a mixture of pasture and arable cultivation. The fields are divided by hedgerows, with scattered trees on field boundaries and small woodland blocks within the site. A track, designated as a public right of way (bridleway), crosses the southern extent of the site on an east to west orientation, providing access to Marl Pit Cottages to the east of the site.

3.1.3 Site 4 is bound by:

- The A429 to the west, with the River Avon and further agricultural land beyond, which rises steeply from the River Avon;
- Holloway Farm and Wasperton Farm (and associated access tracks) to the north-west, with further agricultural land and Barford beyond;
- Wasperton Lane to the north, with further agricultural land which rises above the site beyond;
- Further agricultural land to the east, which rises above the site; and
- Further agricultural land, Glebe Farm and Seven Elms (including Site 5) to the south.

3.2 Site 5 (Glebe Farm, Wasperton)

3.2.1 The site is approximately 14ha in size and is located to the east of Wasperton and adjoins the southern boundary of Site 4. The site can only be worked in conjunction with Site 4.

3.2.2 Site 5 is generally flat and comprises four agricultural fields, predominantly pasture, divided by hedgerows and scattered trees. Glebe Farm is located within the site adjacent to the western boundary, and Seven Elms is located immediately adjacent to the east of the site. Site 5 is divided east to west by a track which provides access to Seven Elms Farm and Seven Elms Barn, and is also designated as a Public Right of Way.

3.2.3 Site 5 is bound by Thelsford Brook and the adjacent tree belt to the south, and Seven Elms Farm and Seven Elms Barn to the east with further agricultural land beyond. To
the north and the west Site 5 is bound by further agricultural land (the land to the north is located within Site 4).

3.3 Landscape Character Assessments

3.3.1 The sites are located within National Character Area (NCA) 106: Severn and Avon Vales\(^1\), adjacent to the boundary with NCA 96: Dunsmore and Feldon\(^2\).

3.3.2 Natural England describes NCA 106 as follows: “Woodland is sparse and it is a generally open landscape... On the eastern boundary the area flows more subtly into the Arden and Dunsmore and Feldon NCAs... the Warwickshire River Avon meanders over a wide flood plain...” Natural England also highlight the important cultural associations of NCA 106, due to the “sense of history which is internationally important due to its links with Shakespeare.”

3.3.3 Natural England describes NCA 96 as a “predominantly a rural, agricultural landscape, crossed by numerous small rivers and tributaries... open character in the Feldon area”.

3.3.4 The Warwickshire Landscapes Guidelines (1993) identified Regional Character Areas within the county. The sites are located within the Avon Valley, described as “a prosperous agricultural and market gardening region closely associated with the river Avon and characterised by historic market towns, nucleated villages and orchards.”

3.3.5 The Guidelines also identify Local Landscape Types within each Regional Character Area. Site 5 and the majority of Site 4 are located within Terrace Farmlands, described as a “flat, open, intensively farmed landscape, with market gardening, on fertile river terrace soils”. The western edge of Site 4 is located within River Meadowlands, described as a “narrow, meandering river corridors landscape, with flood meadows and steep, wooded river bluffs”.

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\(^1\) http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/1831421?category=587130
\(^2\) http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/4878893332824064?category=587130
4 KEY LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL CONSTRAINTS

4.1 Landscape Constraints

4.1.1 The sites are located within a rural landscape that is generally intact. Individual elements are in good condition, with mature trees located on field boundaries and the majority of land in productive agriculture. Development is generally limited to individual farmsteads and scattered villages, which are rural in character and generally unaffected by urban influences. Stratford-upon-Avon is located approximately 6.5km south-west of the sites. The M40 is located approximately 1.9km north-east of the sites, with more densely developed areas on the edge of Warwick beyond. However there is no inter-visibility between the M40, or the edge of Warwick, and the sites, and therefore the landscape character is not considered to be influenced by these urban features.

4.1.2 The landscape character of the sites is considered to be representative of the relevant national and local landscape character assessments, as the sites (particularly Site 4) occupy the majority of the River Avon valley between Barford and Thelsford Brook. The River Avon is located to the west of the sites, with land rising up steeply beyond, and land to the east of the sites rises up on the eastern side of the valley. There are some effects on the tranquillity of the landscape due to vehicle movements on the A429, however these are very localised. The landscape also has cultural associations. The landscape of NCA 106 has important historic links with Shakespeare. Shakespeare’s Avon Way is a long-distance footpath located approximately 1.5km west of the sites, as it extends south-west from Warwick to Stratford-upon-Avon. The footpath is located on higher ground on the western side of the River Avon, with users of the footpath experiencing views of the sites.

4.1.3 It is considered that the local landscape is of good quality and high value. Inter-visibility between the sites and surrounding landscape is increased by the sites’ location within the broad valley of the River Avon, with raised land to the north, east and west of the site. It is therefore considered that the susceptibility to change of the site to mineral extraction is high. Therefore, it is considered that the sensitivity of the landscape to mineral extraction is high.

4.1.4 It is suggested within the policies that phasing would be used to reduce the impact of extraction, and potentially retain hedgerows. However it is considered likely that a significant amount of hedgerows and trees would still be lost, in order to create
operational access between phases. Thus extraction within Sites 4 and 5 would lead to a substantial loss of elements that contribute to the landscape character of the area.

4.1.5 A large section of the River Avon valley would be converted from agriculture to a mineral extraction site. No existing extraction, or other large scale commercial or industrial operations, have been identified within the local area and the mineral working would be out of character with the existing landscape.

4.1.6 Although operations within the site would not be permanent, it is considered that extraction activities and the subsequent restoration would be of a long enough duration for the effects to be considered long term. In addition, as acknowledged within the SA, there would be permanent negative effects on the landscape following restoration of the site. The sites would be restored for agriculture, but the landscape would no longer be intact; the topography of the site will have been altered and key landscape features, such as mature hedgerows and trees, lost.

4.1.7 Phasing of the extraction could reduce the geographical extent of the effects experienced at any one time, however it is considered large areas would still be affected due to the inter-visibility across the site and surrounding area.

4.1.8 Therefore, it is considered that the magnitude of change to the landscape, as a result of mineral extraction with Sites 4 and 5, would be high, and as such there would be substantial significant adverse effects on the landscape character of the sites and surrounding area. This is in line with the conclusions of the SA produced in support of the Draft Plan.

4.2 Visual Constraints

4.2.1 As the site visit was undertaken during summer, the visual effects described below may be higher in winter when screening provided by vegetation is reduced.

4.2.2 All views towards the sites are currently of open agricultural land, and therefore the majority of views would experience a high magnitude of adverse change if extraction was undertaken within the site.

4.2.3 Site 4 is a large, open site although views are filtered by the scattered trees on field boundaries and small woodland blocks. Site 5 has high visual prominence, as it is open and flat. Screening elements are generally limited to individual trees on field
boundaries, and the tree belt adjacent to Thelsford Brook on the southern site boundary.

4.2.4 Both sites are generally flat, located at the bottom of the River Avon valley. The surrounding land rises to the north and east, and to the west beyond the river, providing vantage points from which panoramic views of the site are available. As such there a large number of receptors that would experience adverse impacts as a result of extraction activities within the sites.

4.2.5 As stated within Section 4.1 above, Shakespeare’s Avon Way (a long-distance footpath) is located approximately 1.5km west of the site at the closest point. It is elevated above the site, on higher topography that slopes steeply up from the River Avon. Hedgerows adjacent to the footpath screen the majority of views, however views of the site within the valley are available from gaps in these hedgerows, as illustrated in Figures 1 and 2 below. Views of the site are partially screened by intervening vegetation, however plant and machinery would be visible above the existing vegetation. In addition the removal of vegetation within the site would adversely affect views, and reduce the amount of screening provided.

Figure 1 View from Shakespeare’s Avon Way across the River Avon valley. The River Avon is visible in the middle distance. The sites are located in the far distance, partially screened by intervening vegetation. The rising land on the opposite side of the valley, beyond the sites, is visible in the far distance.
Figure 2 View from Shakespeare's Avon Way across the valley. The River Avon is visible in the middle distance. The sites are located across the far distance, partially screened by intervening vegetation. The rising land on the opposite side of the valley, beyond the sites, is visible in the far distance.

4.2.6 There is a bridleway located within the southern section of Site 4, and a footpath within the centre of Site 5, both of which extend east from the A429 through the sites. Open views of the sites are available from both of these PRoW (as illustrated on Figures 3 and 4 below), due to the flat topography. Limited screening is provided by hedgerows and trees on field boundaries within the site. It is assumed the ProWs would remain in situ throughout operation as they provide access to Marl Pit Cottages, Seven Elms Farm and Seven Elms Barn, and therefore users of these PRoW would experience significant adverse visual effects during extraction and restoration. If the PRoW are diverted, then it is anticipated views of the extraction would still be available due to the nature of the landscape. Bunds may well screen views of extraction activities, however these would adversely affect the long distance views of an open landscape that are currently available.
Figure 3 View from bridleway within Site 4, looking towards eastern site boundary. Wasperton Hill Farm (beyond site) visible left of far distance.

Figure 4 View from the footpath in the centre of Site 5 looking north towards Site 4. The field boundary visible in the far distance is the boundary between Sites 4 and 5.
4.2.7 There is also a footpath to the north-east of the sites, on Wasperton Hill. Open views across Site 4 towards Site 5 are available from this footpath (as illustrated in Figure 5 below). It is unlikely that views of extraction could be effectively screened from this location, due to its elevated location above the sites. Therefore, users of this footpath would experience significant adverse effects.

![View from footpath on Wasperton Hill, looking south-west across Site 4 towards Site 5.](image)

4.2.8 The A429 is adjacent to the west of Site 4. At the time of the survey views of the site from this road were generally screened by hedgerows adjacent to the road (see Figure 6), however views across the site are likely to be available when these hedgerows are cut and during the winter period. In addition, views of plant, vehicles and bunds may be available above the hedgerows. Therefore users of this road would be adversely affected by the extraction activities.

4.2.9 Wasperton Lane is a rural lane extending east from Barford, and is located adjacent to the northern boundary of Site 4. Screening is also provided by hedgerows adjacent to the road, although there are gaps through which open views are available. Due to the current tranquil nature of this lane, and its intact rural character, it is considered there would be substantial adverse effects on its character as well as the visual amenity of this lane.
4.2.10 There a number of residential properties adjacent to the sites, including Holloway Farm and Wasperton Farm, (adjacent to the north-west boundary of Site 4); Glebe Farm (located within Site 5, adjacent to the western boundary); and Seven Elms Farm and Barn (located adjacent to the eastern boundary of Site 5).

4.2.11 Open views across the sites are available from the majority of these properties (see Figures 7 and 8) particularly from upper floor windows. Views are also available from ground floor windows, which are considered to be of high sensitivity.

4.2.12 It is assumed bunds would be placed on the boundaries of the worked area, providing screening of extraction activities. However due to the proximity of these properties to the site, and the flat nature of the site, views would still be available from upper floor windows and an extensive stand-off from the properties would be required to reduce these visual effects. The policy approach is for a 100m buffer will be required between properties and the worked area, however views from the upper floor windows extend well beyond 100m (as illustrated by Figure 8). Therefore it is considered a 100m buffer would not be sufficient to screen views of extraction from adjacent properties, and properties adjacent to the site would experience significant adverse effects.
Figure 7 View from access track between Holloway Farm and Wasperton Farm, on the north-west boundary of Site 4. Site 4 is visible across view, with the edge of Holloway Farm visible far right of view.

Figure 8 View from upper floor of Seven Elms Farm looking north-west across Site 5 towards Site 4. Holloway Farm (located 900m from the viewpoint) is visible far right of the far distance.
4.2.13 The Forge Cottage is located on the A429, approximately 60m north-west of Site 4 (see Figure 6). Whilst the property is enclosed by vegetation, there is a gap in vegetation at the entrance, and views may be available from upper floor windows here towards the northern section of Site 4.

4.2.14 The village of Wasperton is located to the west of the sites, on the opposite side of the A429. It is considered that ground floor views from properties in this village would generally be screened by intervening vegetation, however views of the site from upper floor windows may be experienced. Therefore properties in Wasperton may be adversely affected.

4.2.15 Site 4 was previously revised within the Draft Plan, amending the boundary in order to increase the distance between the site and Barford. However it is likely that properties on the southern edge of Barford could still experience views due to the flat landscape, with only partial screening provided by intervening vegetation (see Figure 9). Therefore it is likely that properties in Barford could experience adverse effects.

Figure 9 View from southern edge of Barford (south of properties located east of Wellesbourne Road) towards the north-west boundary of Site 4. Wasperton Farm and Holloway Farm are visible left and centre-right of far distance, with Site 4 located immediately beyond them.

4.2.16 There are a number of individual properties on the rising land to the north of Site 4, including Middle Watchbury Farm and Lower Watchbury Farm. It is likely that views
of the site will be available from these properties due to their elevated location. Views of the site will also be available from Wasperton Hill Farm, located on elevated land to the north-east of Site 4, as illustrated by Figure 10 which shows that the property overlooks the site. Therefore these properties will also experience adverse effects.

Figure 10 View from bridleway within Site 4. Wasperton Hill Farm is visible centre-right of far distance, overlooking the site.
5 CONCLUSION

5.1.1 Sites 4 and 5 are located within the River Avon valley and are rural in character, comprising productive agricultural land divided by mature hedgerows with scattered hedgerow trees. The villages of Barford and Wasperton are located to the north and west of the sites respectively, and the A429 is located adjacent to the western boundary of Site 4. The settlement pattern is dispersed with scattered farmsteads and properties, a number of which are adjacent to the site boundaries. The sites are generally flat, with land rising to the west, north and east, increasing the inter-visibility of the sites with the surrounding area.

5.1.2 Due to the proposed major loss of key landscape features and the introduction of new, incongruous features that would affect the currently intact rural character of the area it is considered that mineral extraction within Sites 4 and 5 would have significant adverse effects on landscape character.

5.1.3 The sites have high visibility due to their size and flat topography. The sites are generally open, with limited screening provided by vegetation within the site. Therefore receptors in the surrounding area (often at a higher elevation) would experience significant adverse visual effects as a result of mineral extraction within Sites 4 and 5.

5.1.4 It is considered that measures recommended within Policies S4 and S5, including phasing of extraction and 100m buffers to nearby properties, would not be sufficient to prevent significant adverse effects on landscape character and visual amenity.

5.1.5 It is concluded that sand and gravel extraction within Sites 4 and 5 would have significant adverse effects on landscape character and visual amenity, which it would not be possible to mitigate, predominantly due to the sensitivity of the existing landscape character and the size and scale of the sites.

5.1.6 This conclusion is in line with the SA undertaken for the Draft Plan, which states that the working of Sites 4 and 5 would be likely to have significant adverse landscape and visual effects. Therefore the working of Sites 4 and 5 would result in significant adverse effects against SA Objective 5 (to conserve and enhance the quality of the landscapes and townscapes).
Appendix 1

Extract from Warwickshire Minerals Plan Publication Draft (2016)

Boundaries of Sites 4 and 5