Lichfields has been successful in obtaining planning permission for Johnsons Wellfield Limited to extract a million tonnes of sandstone block over a term of 20 years from a new 24-hectare mineral working area on Crosland Moor in Huddersfield. This article concerns the contribution of Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) to biodiversity enhancement and scheme design, for minerals working and restoration at a greenfield countryside site located to the west of Huddersfield in West Yorkshire.

Stone-built properties are a familiar feature of the northern landscape, no less so than in the former mill towns of the West Riding, where the wealth of the area derived from local manufacturing industries was displayed in the form of magnificent civic, commercial and community buildings. The quarries which produced dimension stone for those buildings are long since exhausted, however, new stone workings continue to operate to meet today’s demand for the high-quality ashlar Yorkstone. The stone Johnsons Wellfield extract is used in exacting architectural and masonry applications, for both heritage projects and new build, not only in the immediate area but throughout the UK. Johnsons Wellfield operate one of the UK’s largest natural stone processing plants at its nearby Crosland Hill works.

Planning permission was granted for the development in October 2018 following consideration of a scheme assessed with respect to Regulation 2 (a) the old 2011 EIA Regulations (as amended). The key objective was to ensure a robust assessment of the proposed development, whilst ensuring those considerations identified during baseline data collection, consultation and initial assessment were fully addressed within the scheme design.

The development site, post restoration, offered the opportunity for biodiversity enhancement, and the developer wished to bring forwards meaningful proposals whilst retaining the ability to restore the worked site to a standard which would support a viable agricultural unit after the completion of development.

The site will be worked and restored progressively to agriculture using only soils, overburden and spoil encountered within the site as part of the extraction process. The developer, Johnsons Wellfield Limited’s key objective is to have available to it, a long term permitted reserves of block stone once its current reserves located elsewhere at Crosland Moor has become exhausted. The need is to provide an available supply of stone block which offers a variety of mineral beds to meet the company’s raw material requirements for the next 20 years. Stone block won from the Coal Measures sandstone is used to for processing into high quality architectural building products, together with by-products such as riven flagstone and walling stone.
The choice of site is driven by a number of factors, including: the availability of land which is proven to yield the character, appearance and bedding of stone required to meet processing needs; land which is not sterilised by other forms of development; and, of equal importance, the operation of a site which will not result in significant harm to the environment. The objective of the development is to win stone in a way which respects and safeguards the local environment, progressively returning the working area an agricultural use with ecological enhancement.

The site is located in an urban fringe area within the west of Kirklees, where agricultural land is characterised by lush pasture and the regular pattern of drystone walling, with few trees given the exposed nature of the upland landscape. Much of the area is farmed by small family concerns, for dairy, beef and lamb, with land also turned over for silage and haylage production. Here, due to its altitude, all land, no matter its quality is classified as Grade 4, the lowest meaningful agricultural classification.

The proposal allows for the extraction of mineral from the site in three broad phases. Initially soils and overburden are stripped and used to create screening bunds—mounds of materials situated on the periphery of the site. The bunds are to be planted with local species of grass and wildflower and maintained by sheep grazing. In conjunction with the extraction of block, (where each block can be as large as 5 tonnes a time), waste stone (otherwise known as spoil) is stripped away and used to backfill the exhausted working area. Due to bulking up of this material, the very same pre-extraction landform can be reclaimed to that which exists prior to development taking place. The reclamation is completed with the reinstatement of drystone walling to the pre-existing configuration.

Huddersfield University’s award winning £28 million Oastler building, with Crosland Hill stonework.

The development site, presently in agricultural cultivation, is situated in a policy sensitive setting. The site is unallocated, located within the countryside in an area designated as Green Belt within the development plan. The site has been promoted for inclusion within the emerging Kirklees Local plan as an allocated site for minerals development.

The proposal was the subject of comprehensive pre-application consultation with Kirklees Council and its consultees. Community engagement was integral to the EIA process, with an exhibition being held early in the process to obtain local feedback. This was followed up with meetings with residents and representatives who had a strong interest in different aspects of the scheme. The consultation process highlighted considerations of importance to the local community which can be summarised as; potential impact upon local amenity for the duration of the operations through traffic, noise and dust generation; potential the impact upon landscape and views; the effects of development upon drainage and the continued supply to ground sourced private water troughs which served the local area and the impact of development upon wildlife.

Continued under Part 2

Jonathan Standen, Planning Director, Lichfields, February 2019.

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