



Campaign to Protect
Rural England

Policy Position Statement

Minerals and Quarrying

Every year over 200 million tonnes of aggregates (sand, gravel and rock) are dug up in England for use in construction and by industry. The impact of this extraction on the countryside and local communities can be enormous, both during the operation and afterwards. There is a need to reduce the level of extraction in future by making better use of mineral resources and developing alternatives.

What are the issues for the countryside?

While having some small quarries to meet local needs may be appropriate (such as to provide stone to maintain locally characteristic housing) the size of modern quarries, combined with their location in often sensitive rural environments, makes aggregates quarrying one of the most controversial rural industries. Despite tighter planning controls over quarrying and improved methods of operation, quarrying can still have a devastating impact on the countryside. Noise, dust and heavy lorry traffic are characteristic during mining operations and too often landscapes are left scarred by extraction.

Many quarry sites with planning permission do not have appropriate reclamation conditions. Even when restoration is undertaken, it is seldom – if ever – able to recreate the character of the countryside which was built over centuries.

In 2000 approximately 113,640 hectares of land in England – an area the size of

Bedfordshire – are covered by planning permission for surface mineral workings. Nearly one-third of the area affected lies within designated Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and National Parks, with the consequence that some of our finest landscapes are still being stripped bare by mining. Current minerals policy implies that planning at a local level should meet society's demand for minerals. But this is driven by statistical forecasts for demand. The environment is too often taken into account only when considering where to quarry, not whether we really need to.

The extent of land with planning permission for quarrying means that in some areas, there are enough sites already secured (the 'land bank') to ensure that quarrying continues for decades. These unused reserves hold 6 billion tonnes of aggregates – enough to build over 500 M25 motorways – and hinder efforts by local authorities and Government to influence the rate of quarrying and to move towards a more sustainable basis for exploiting natural resources.

For further information about CPRE's campaigns and copies of other policy position statements visit our website or contact:

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CPRE's approach

The quarrying industry argues that planning permissions for aggregates account for only 0.35% of England's land area and, therefore, are not an environmental problem. In reality, the effects of quarrying are felt much more widely, and the location of many quarries in some of the most beautiful parts of the countryside gives added urgency to the need to reduce the level of quarrying and its impacts.

The Campaign to Protect Rural England aims to reduce the damage to the countryside from quarrying by encouraging the more efficient use of aggregates and managing demand. We believe this can be achieved through recycling, making greater use of alternatives and reducing waste in construction.

In recent years, the Government has put minerals policy on a more sustainable footing. In particular, CPRE welcomed the introduction of a levy on the extraction of primary aggregates in April 2002, and the commitment in the Rural White Paper (published in 2000) to a new approach to minerals planning. We are concerned that the Government's new forecasts for quarrying, set out in revision of National and Regional Guidelines for Aggregates Provision in England 2001-2016 (which suggest 2.6 billion tonnes of aggregate may be required over that period) will reinforce a narrow 'predict and provide' approach to quarrying. CPRE believes a fundamental overhaul of national policies on quarrying is urgently required, so that in future the policies:

- > value the whole countryside, its landscape, character and tranquillity by giving clear priority to reducing demand for aggregates, and including targets to steadily reduce the primary extraction of minerals;
- > replace the old 'predict and provide' approach to minerals planning with more positive planning policies which use the principles of 'plan, monitor and manage' and environmental capacity assessments to govern where quarrying may be required. Such a change should also promote more sustainable construction techniques which reduce reliance on mineral extraction;
- > ensure appropriate economic signals are sent to quarry operators and consumers which reflect the environmental costs of extraction on the countryside and help to break the link between economic prosperity and the consumption of natural resources; and
- > achieve the more prudent use of natural resources through reuse, recovery and recycling, use of alternative (including non-aggregate) materials and techniques, and closer integration with land use planning. Suppliers would be responsible for providing the right material for the right purpose, and not over-specifying in order to win contracts or meet timeframes.

What can you do?

Decisions about new quarries and minerals policy are made by your county council (or unitary authority).

Further reading

National and Regional Guidelines for Aggregates Provision in England 2001-2016. Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2003.

Extracting the Truth about Quarrying. CPRE, 2004. Available from CPRE Publications.

Wildlife & Countryside Links Ten Principles of Sustainable Minerals Planning. Wildlife & Countryside Link, 2004

Planning for the Supply of Aggregates in England. Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, 2000. Available from the Stationery Office.

Mock Minerals Planning Guidance note 6: Aggregates Minerals. CPRE, 2000. Available from CPRE Publications.

Rocky Logic: the role of aggregates in the UK economy. CPRE, 1999. Available from CPRE Publications.

You can have a say in these decisions by:

- > responding to planning applications for new quarries. You can highlight the need to avoid damage to wildlife and the landscape; reduce the intrusion from heavy lorry movements; establish noise limits; and reduce dust;
- > commenting on draft Minerals Local Development Frameworks. While these are often viewed as technical documents, you can have a say about the proposed location of new quarries and the overarching policies which should emphasise the need to ensure the prudent use of natural resources and recognise environmental limits – as promoted by the Government in its own Sustainable Development Strategy;
- > raising the issue in planning debates more generally. Major new development should aim to be ‘minerals efficient’, by reducing waste in construction and seeking alternative construction materials where appropriate; and
- > asking your local authority about its approach to reviewing old mineral permissions. Encourage it to discontinue permissions (providing compensation to the would-be operators if necessary) and make sure any new conditions meet the highest standards of environmental performance.

Campaigners’ Guide to Minerals. CPRE, 1996. Available from CPRE Publications.

Minerals Planning Guidance note 6: Guidelines for Aggregates Provision in England. Department of Environment, 1994. Available from the Stationery Office.