

Objections by HERITAGE to proposals to consider Sites NFT 040 Leagreen Farm (a), NFT 041 Leagreen Farm (b) and NFT 007 Yeatton Farm for further investigation for mineral extraction and landfill

Background

The three proposed sites, and the two which have recently been withdrawn, are within the Parish of Hordle. According to the most recent Census the Parish, which lies on the edge of the New Forest National Park, has a population of 5095 in 2372 dwellings. Of this population 28.7 percent are over 65 (1462 persons) and 19.3 percent require assistance (983). It is a growing Parish with considerable new development, meeting the national need for increased housing.

The A337, which is at the southernmost side of the Parish, is the main east-west (tourist and local traffic) route along the south coast from Lymington to Bournemouth, passing through towns, villages and built-up areas. It is a single carriageway between Lymington and Highcliffe. The three proposed sites border the road.

As will be seen from the above figures, the parish of Hordle is a major retirement area as well as providing services to the tourist industry (an internationally recognised garden, caravan sites, garden nurseries, etc.) and providing housing for those who work in nearby towns and Southampton. The Parish Council have recently embarked on drafting a Community Plan to outline priorities and needs for the next 10-20 years. It is a growing rural area, to which people move because it has an attractive rural landscape and available amenities in which, on the one hand children can be raised safely, and on the other retired people can live peacefully.

Proximity to Housing and community buildings

Using the 'traffic light' guide, within 250 yards of the boundaries of these sites are a number of scattered dwellings – some 50 or so homes. Apart from these, to the north east of the boundary of 007 Yeatton Farm is a crowded housing area (OL22 SZ27609470) a considerable part of which falls within the 250 yards zone.

Tourist-related businesses, including Apple Court Gardens, a bed & breakfast and a caravan site are also within this area. Within 500 yards of the boundaries of these sites there is significant housing and business premises, as well as a large church and Hordle Primary School. If gravel extraction and subsequent infilling proceed, using the 500 yard guide, these sites will have a direct impact over an area of approximately one square mile, encompassing large parts of the Parish villages (both Hordle and Everton), including homes and businesses on the southern side of the A337.

In addition, we understand that the area directly north of the Yeatton Farm boundary (Coal Yard) has the potential for housing development. This is only one area of potential development in the Parish which will be directly affected if mineral extraction should proceed..

We believe that there is a serious potential conflict between the threat of gravel extraction/landfill on these three sites and a Parish development plan which will include proposals to satisfy the requirements of the national housing targets. It is inconceivable that: a) developers would invest in housing and public amenities in such close proximity to a potential (or actual) gravel extraction/landfill site; or b) if they did, that people would want to live in them.

Health and Environmental Issues

Gravel sites and landfill over an extended area will have a detrimental effect on the health and well-being of residents of both villages. The population includes a high proportion of elderly people and children. Many of these latter attend a primary school within 500 yards of the north-western boundary of 007 Yeatton Farm. A large gravel pit/landfill site will undoubtedly generate huge quantities of dust and air pollution as well as noise, which will result in increased health and medical problems for those most vulnerable in the community, ie the elderly and the very young. We submit that there are studies which have shown increased instances of illnesses, in particular asthma and asthma-related illnesses, for those living in proximity to such sites. In addition landfill sites, apart from the smell and spread of rubbish via wind and lorry spillage, will increase the number of disease-carrying vermin, flies and related insects which will also present a health risk to those living even at a distance from the site, depending on the prevailing wind and its strength.

We have serious concerns as to what will happen to the water table in the event of gravel extraction on these three sites. The water table, where it is known, is only three feet below the surface. We receive considerable amounts of rain and roads and lanes in the area rely heavily on ditches along their edge to remove excess water. Removal of hundreds of square yards of gravel could significantly increase the possibility of excessive flooding in areas not directly affected by the gravel extraction. This in turn could affect the environmental balance of a large part of the Parish. Many of the more isolated houses which will be affected by their close proximity to a gravel extraction site do not have mains sewerage and we have concerns about the contamination of the ground water system. We are aware that no hydrological survey has recently been done but wish to raise our concerns at this stage. We would also point out that in 1995 after a public inquiry on the same issue the sites were rejected. The conclusion included the statement "The site lies near to the Danes Stream and tributaries cross the site. Whilst this is not an overriding constraint, the NRA indicates that extraction and infilling may cause flooding problems downstream and this would be a strong constraint". Whilst this refers to 007 Yeatton Farm we submit that the same applies to 040 and 041 Leagreen Farm (a and b).

Within the radius of 250 yards of the proposed sites are both listed and historic buildings. Renovation of these buildings was undertaken at council tax payers` expense. An internationally acclaimed garden which includes

important national collections of day lilies and hostas, as well as a number of rare plants is situated adjacent to one of the proposed sites, Yeatton Farm .

There is a public footpath crossing 007 Yeatton Farm and an historic byway open to all traffic which runs along the side of 040 Lea Green Farm (a) and which at one point crosses the farm. This byway is reputed to have been used to transfer King Charles 1st from Hurst Castle to London for execution.

At the conclusion of the section on the Environment in the 1995 Public Enquiry the Inspector notes: "In the absence of a demonstrated need for these sites the County Council considers there to be an overriding cumulative impact constraint ..." We submit that this remains the case.

Landscape and Agricultural Land

The three sites are at present arable greenbelt land. It is not possible to obtain planning permission to build on these sites. So, it is somewhat bizarre that they can be destroyed by becoming gravel pits and subsequently landfill sites, which will ensure they are destroyed forever as arable land. The three sites are flat rural landscape with little natural screening. In addition they are the habitat of deer, foxes, birds and a variety of other fauna and flora. Even if screening is put in place it will no doubt result in a totally different landscape with an adverse long term impact on an area that at present supports important trees and land sustaining abundant flora and fauna.

We submit that a change of use of land and landscape so close to human settlement would be intrusive and have a drastic impact on the character of the landscape.

Economic Impact

The Parish of Hordle lies on the southern boundary of the New Forest National Park. The existence of a large gravel extraction area on the three sites will have a devastating economic impact on the villages of Hordle and Everton.

Village development: both villages have seen considerable growth in recent years to meet the demand for housing from those starting out on house purchase, those within the community downsizing and those moving into the area either for employment (locally or in nearby towns and cities) or to retire. This increase is supported by increased amenities in the village and nearby. The NFDC is supporting Hordle Parish Council, through community participation, to formulate a community development plan for the coming years. It is not possible to plan with the threat of gravel extraction/landfill sites threatening the villages for the coming 10-15 years. This prospect will discourage people from moving into the area, will seriously impact on the price of property or the ability of those who wish to move to find buyers for their houses, will have a negative impact on local services and businesses servicing the local community and will seriously discourage businesses from

investing in the Parish. Local shops and services are important to villages such as Everton and Hordle in view of the number of elderly and amongst those the very high number requiring care to continue to live in their own homes.

Tourism: Forming part of the New Forest, which is one of the country's major tourist attractions, and lying on the border of the national park both villages contain tourist amenities (pubs, shops, services) and businesses which are dependent on visitors (local and tourists) – gardens, garden centres, caravan sites, guest houses.

We submit that the negative economic impact on the livelihoods and lives of those who live and/or own businesses in Everton and Hordle would far outweigh the benefits from employment opportunities offered by a major gravel extraction/landfill operation.

Adverse Impact on roads

The A337 is a busy, important, route from Lymington to Christchurch. There is already serious traffic congestion, particularly during peak traffic hours and the tourist season. At the southern end of the three sites, which borders the A337, the road is narrow and the Downton crossroad (used by residents, for access and by vehicles delivering children to the primary school) is already difficult to negotiate. The junction could not cope with a large number of lorries entering and leaving nearby gravel/landfill sites.

The roads and lanes off this part of the A337 are narrow, unlit, have no footpaths, no white line markings, have many tight bends with ditches close to the uneven road edges.

We believe that any increase in traffic and congestion on the A337 will result in side roads and lanes being used as alternative routes and that this would be hazardous to those who live or attend school or businesses on these roads.

We note the argument that because lorries already use this route due to the gravel extraction/landfill site at Pennington and the NMSB operation in New Milton there will be no increase in traffic. We believe that there will be an increased number of lorries using the route, that the possibility of accidents will increase because of the Downton crossroads and the bends in the road between the Downton Crossroads and Everton Road and that these factors will result in additional congestion on this important road.

The argument that road users currently have to tolerate congestion caused by gravel lorries at the Pennington site is perhaps rather spurious. The situation at present is unacceptable and dangerous. Our view is that if this number of lorries were no longer using the route and causing congestion by waiting to turn into or out off the site, benefits both to traffic flow, road safety and road surface conditions would result.

Other Issues

We would like to highlight an issue which requires further investigation as part of the consideration on these sites. There is an electricity sub-station off

Barnes Lane, adjacent to the Eastern Boundary of NFT041 Leagreen Farm (b). It is considered that the location of the sub-station is such that prevailing south-westerly winds would allow dust build up over the insulators which, together with salt laden winds and associated humidity, could cause high voltage tracking over the insulators, thus causing short circuiting conditions leading to a serious malfunction of the sub-station.

Conclusion

Based on the above we submit that development of these three sites for gravel extraction/landfill will destroy our local environment and community, seriously affect the health and wellbeing of those who live here and it will have a tragic impact on the economy and future of the Parish. We do not accept that if these three sites become gravel extraction sites that they will not be used subsequently for landfill sites nor do we believe that Kings and Batchley Farms will be immune from future use for the same. We base this view on a review of other sites where one gravel extraction site leads to others. Given waste disposal needs from urban conurbations we believe that these large holes will inevitably become landfill sites. We do not accept that destroying the villages of Everton and Hordle – either from a human habitation aspect or from an economic point of view – is acceptable or necessary.

We also question whether identification of these sites is necessary – in view of all the negative consequences for the life of our villages – when the Council has identified other sites to meet gravel needs in this part of Hampshire until 2016.