

Our Ref: JWG/AF – C2/8

24 July 2009

**SPECIAL DELIVERY**

Mary Thompson  
Minerals and Waste Planning Officer  
Minerals and Waste Development Control  
Environment, Economy and Land Use  
Oxfordshire County Council  
Speedwell House  
Speedwell Street  
OXFORD  
OX1 1NE

Dear Ms Thompson

**Scoping Opinion:  
Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment)  
Regulations 1999:  
Extension to Caversham Quarry (Phase C)**

**1 Introduction**

1.1 We are acting on behalf of Lafarge Aggregates Limited in respect of a proposed planning application for an extension to the Caversham sand and gravel quarry, as identified on Figure 1. The provisional extent of the application site is identified, although the final boundary may be modified prior to submission of the planning application, following a further detailed environmental appraisal.

1.2 The proposals fall within Schedule 1 of the Town and Country Planning (Assessment of Environmental Effects) Regulations 1999 by virtue of the nature of the development, the size of the application site and the rate of landfilling. Accordingly, we are currently preparing a planning application which will include an environmental statement in accordance with the 1999 Regulations (as modified) and Circular 2/99. Government advice encourages developers proposing a project to have full and early consultation with both the Planning Authority and other bodies which have an interest, and it is recommended that they are invited to participate in defining the terms of reference for the Environmental Assessment. In accordance with such guidance, Lafarge Aggregates Limited seeks a formal **Scoping Opinion** from your Authority, and the summary and information detailed below plus supporting plans is provided within this letter to assist your authority in the formulation of that Opinion, consistent with the requirements of the EIA Regulations.

1.3 The application boundary comprises the existing mineral processing facility at the former Sonning blockworks, the  
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Regulated by

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proposed conveyor route and the area of proposed future mineral extraction lying to the east of Spring Lane as shown on Figure 1. This proposed mineral extraction area currently comprises primarily large arable fields and watercourses generally flowing in an easterly direction (refer Figure 2). The Berry Brook forms the northern most boundary of the mineral extraction area. Figure 3 indicates the extent of the proposed mineral extraction area and the phased sequence of working.

- 1.4 It is envisaged that an estimated 1.8 million tonne mineral reserve can be recovered over a 12 year period, with the land progressively being worked and restored in a phased and sequential manner in 14 years from commencement of operations. The excavated mineral will be transported to the existing plant site to the south of Playhatch Road by way of an overland conveyor (crossing Spring Lane and Playhatch Road). In order to achieve the desired restoration profile to re-establish high quality agricultural land, as well as new wildlife habitats, it is estimated that approximately 800,000 cubic metres of suitable inert restoration material will be need to be imported into the scheme, again in a progressive and phased manner. This material will be brought onto site by road borne vehicles using a spur off the existing roundabout off Playhatch Road. The access road onto the site will include a minimum 80m length of concrete or tarmac road with wheel cleaning facilities to ensure the vehicles are clean when rejoining the public highway. A stone access track will be provided to the infill area and this track will be located adjacent to existing field boundaries. It is envisaged that up to 100,000 cubic metres of fill could be imported on an annual basis.
- 1.5 Mature hedgerows (albeit gappy in parts) traverse the mineral extraction area and the envisaged working method seeks to retain a significant proportion of these hedgerows during working so that they are integrated within the final restoration scheme. In total, circa 1.2 km of mature hedgerows exist within the site, the bulk of which is envisaged to be retained during the proposed development. Furthermore, a small rectangular block of woodland, located within the eastern sector of the site, although of limited ecological value, is to be retained to further minimise potential impact of the development and assist in integrating the restored site into the wider landscape at an earlier stage.
- 1.6 The mineral extraction area consists of approximately 70 % of higher quality agricultural land (grade 2 and 3a) and the proposals seek to retain this valuable resource to re-establish prime agricultural land upon restoration. Notwithstanding this point, the opportunity is taken to establish alternative floodplain habitats, primarily within the northern sector of Phase C. Extensive advance planting was undertaken over 15 years ago,

and this has significantly screened the site from potential key viewpoints. Additional screening by way of further planting or landscaped mounds will be considered as part of the final working scheme design. {Refer Figure 3}.

- 1.7 The Environmental Statement will consider the design of the proposals with reference to a number of issues, including programming and timescales; working method; restoration; aftercare; afteruse and long-term management. The proposals will pay full regard to advice within Planning Policy Statement 9 (PPS9), which sets out the Government's vision for conserving and enhancing biological diversity in England, together with a programme of work to achieve it. PPS9 includes a broad aim that planning, construction, development and regeneration should have minimal impact on bio-diversity and enhance it wherever possible.
- 1.8 The Government's objectives for planning are to promote sustainable development by ensuring that biological diversity is not only conserved, but also enhanced as an integral part of social, environmental and economical development, and additionally to conserve, enhance and restore the diversity of England's wildlife by sustaining and, where possible, improving the quality and extent of the natural habitat.
- 1.9 The proposals form a logical continuation of the existing operation at Caversham, and this application provides the opportunity to use the existing quarry infrastructure to provide a comprehensive working scheme for this site.
- 1.10 The site operations will be designed to ensure sensitive working practices are utilised protecting designated areas from potential impacts arising from the proposals.
- 1.11 The restoration scheme seeks to reinstate high quality agricultural land by using suitable inert waste materials, the placement of which will be strictly controlled by the provisions of an Environmental Permit under the supervision of the Environment Agency. Opportunity for creative conservation as well as the sustainable use of valuable soil resources will be taken. New flood plain habitats and additional species rich hedgerows and broadleaf tree planting which, when combined with a long term management programme, will have the potential to contribute to the long term biodiversity of the site. The restoration proposals are illustrated on Figure 4 enclosed.

## **2 Significant Environmental Issues**

- 2.1 The Environmental Assessment will identify existing baselines, the potential impact of the development and mitigation measures



to overcome or reduce any impact. The potentially significant environmental issues are considered to be:

- ecology;
- soil resources;
- landscape and visibility assessment;
- hydrology and hydrogeology;
- traffic;
- noise; and
- cultural heritage.

#### *Ecology (Flora and Fauna)*

2.2 An independent consultant has been commissioned to undertake an ecological assessment of the site, and its environs. The brief included the following baseline data :

- a Phase 1 Survey (JNCC 1993 Methodology) to include identification of all recognised statutory and non-statutory sites of nature conservation interest within a 1 km radius of the application site;
- observations of any protected species, including the following surveys; bat activity, reptiles, water voles, habitat assessment for white-clawed crayfish, great crested newts and breeding birds;
- an analysis of the importance of the recorded habitats in both a local and national context;
- full species list of vegetation; and
- detailed species list and description of the application site.

2.3 Following an analysis of the above findings, the site has provisionally been designed to minimise impact on those habitats of greatest value, whilst the proposed restoration scheme seeks to enhance existing habitats, and improve upon species diversity wherever possible. The Company will seek to incorporate the aspirations of the Local Planning Authority and County Wildlife Trust within the restoration scheme, consistent with local and national bio-diversity action plans for this area. It is intended that the opportunity will be taken to generate improvements to biodiversity.

2.4 The Environmental Statement will set out the impact of the proposals on ecological interests as identified in the various ecological reports, including:

- an assessment of likely impacts on the various habitats identified in the ecological surveys directly/indirectly disturbed and discussion of the significance of such impacts;

- description of the mitigation measures introduced in the site design to reduce ecological impact;
- details of the ecological enhancement measures being introduced during the operations ; and
- description of how the restoration phases will result in longer-term ecological enhancement through the creation of appropriate new habitats and the introduction of a more species-diverse environment to maximise biodiversity benefits.

2.5 The survey work undertaken to date confirms the limited ecological value of the site in its current use.

#### *Landscape and Visibility Assessment*

2.6 An independent landscape consultant has been commissioned to undertake a landscape and visual impact assessment of the proposed development (during working and post-restoration). The assessment takes account of Government advice, and the latest available guidance on methodology. (*Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment – 2002.*) The survey involved a landscape and visual assessment of the site and the surrounding landscape that contributes to its setting. The final assessment will characterise the landscape in the context of existing landscape character assessment and visually sensitive receptors within the zone of visibility of the site have been identified in order to assess the extent and nature of views.

2.7 The landscape impacts will initially be assessed in relation to the impact of the proposed development on the identified landscape resources (quantified where possible) of the site and its character. In addition, the effects of the scheme on local landscape character, within the area surrounding the site, will be assessed. Viewpoints have been used to indicate the degree of visual impact during site operations, and following restoration. The extent of site visibility from public vantage points will be graded (no view, glimpse, partial view, open view) and the character of the view described.

2.8 The information gained from the landscape and visual assessment will contribute to influencing the scheme design and the baseline data will be ultimately used to visually assess each stage of site operations. The restoration proposals will be designed to enhance the landscape and nature conservation interests of the area in the longer term, wherever possible.

#### *Hydrology and Hydrogeology*

2.9 An assessment of baseline conditions of both hydrology and hydrogeology will be made of the site and surrounding areas by independent consultants. This will include information on:

- geology;
- condition of watercourses on and adjacent to the application site;
- analysis of water quality in watercourses receiving site discharges;
- information regarding existing users, local abstraction and discharge consents;
- extent of any catchment to be affected; and
- assessment of aquifers in the locality.

2.10 The Environmental Statement will describe the impact of the proposed operations on the local surface water network, as well as groundwater, including an assessment of the impacts on the water quality and catchment balance during the operations, and any proposed mitigation measures designed to combat these effects, ie overall drainage management regime. The assessment will also include:

- effects on local drainage channels;
- description of restored landform and impacts on drainage;
- description of mitigation measures included in the scheme to reduce impacts on the local water environment; and
- description of proposed monitoring of groundwater levels and quality and surface water flow measurement.

2.11 The application site is within an indicative floodplain of the River Thames, and any water encountered during the site operations will be discharged in a controlled manner. The applicant's hydrological consultant will undertake a flood risk assessment in accordance with the provisions of PPS25.

2.12 A minimum 10 m stand-off will be provided to the Berry Brook with no mounding or mineral extraction within that zone. Any soil mounds will be orientated parallel with the flood flow direction and any single mound shall be limited to 80 m in length with a minimum 20 m gap between individual mounds.

#### *Traffic*

2.13 All minerals from the extension area will be transported by overland conveyor to the existing plant site area south of Playhatch Road. It is envisaged that the mineral will be processed at an average of 150,000 tonnes per annum of which 40,000 tonnes will be utilised on site, in the manufacture and distribution of ready mixed concrete.

- 2.14 This will mean that there will be 110,000 tonnes per annum exiting the site onto Playhatch Road which equates 20 loads (40 movements) on a daily basis. In addition, there will be 20 loads (40 movements) relating to the manufacture and distribution of ready mixed concrete on to Playhatch Road.
- 2.15 In order to achieve the desired restoration, up to 800,000 cubic metres of suitable material will be required to be imported into the Phase C area. Accordingly, it is envisaged that HGVs will travel along Playhatch Road as far as point X on Figure 2 and then deliver the material to the excavation area. A Traffic Impact Assessment will be undertaken to consider the full implication of such operations, although at this stage it is likely that daily HGV movements associated with importing material will be equivalent to 100,000 cubic metres which equates to a typical average of 30 loads per day (60 movements).
- 2.16 In summary therefore it is anticipated that there will be an average of 140 movements per day associated with the proposed development.
- 2.17 A comprehensive Traffic Impact Assessment will be undertaken to consider the full implications of the continued use of Playhatch Road for exporting processed minerals from the existing plant site area, as well as the importation of suitable material to achieve the desired restoration.

#### Soils

- 2.18 A comprehensive soil survey has been undertaken of the proposed extension confirms that the site consists of Grade 2 3a and 3b agricultural land. The survey area which covers a larger area identified 54% of the land to be Grade 2, 19% Grade 3a, 23% Grade 3b and 4% Grade 4 or non-agricultural. The working scheme will ensure all higher grade quality soils are handled and conserved in accordance with accepted good practice guidance (originally published by MAFF in 2000). All Grade 2 and a majority of Grade 3a land will be reinstated to their original agricultural land quality grade.

#### Cultural Heritage

- 2.19 An archaeological assessment is being carried out for the proposed eastern extension to Caversham Quarry. To date an in-depth desk-based assessment has been prepared and submitted to the archaeological officer of the Oxfordshire County Council. The known archaeological and historic landscape interest of the study area and its surrounds was presented and interpreted and an assessment was made of the archaeological potential of the site.



- 2.20 The assessment identified three recorded sites within the proposed extension area. These are represented by two cropmark concentrations and an Iron Age flint tool. Some of the cropmarks are believed to be prehistoric in date, potentially burial barrows, whilst others are clearly former field boundaries of post-Medieval date. The assessment stated that on the basis of current evidence the application area can be assumed to have a moderate potential for the recovery of archaeological remains. Further evaluation, however, would be required to substantiate this view.
- 2.21 Presently, an aerial photographic survey is being carried out in order to accurately map the cropmarks on the site. This is to be followed by a targeted archaeo-geophysical survey (detailed magnetometer survey). The results from these evaluations will be discussed with the Council Archaeological Office prior to the undertaking of a targeted trial trench evaluation. The results from all surveys will provide the necessary information for the Archaeological Office to make their recommendations on the application.
- 2.22 Lafarge Aggregates Limited acknowledges the potential archaeological interest of the area and will give this aspect of their development proposals appropriate consideration.

#### Noise

- 2.23 An acoustic report will be commissioned to identify potential noise sensitive locations around the application site, measure existing background noise levels at selected locations, predict noise levels from phased site operations, compare predicted levels with measured levels and guidance limits and finally propose mitigation measures to reduce any potential noise impact.
- 2.24 To assess the existing noise climate around the proposed site, noise sensitive locations will be identified where background monitoring will be carried out in free-field conditions, with a microphone being positioned at least 3.5m from any reflecting surface, and 1.5m above ground level. This type of monitoring is in accordance with recommendations made in MPS2 (Annex 2) with representative measurements taken at fifteen minute intervals at different times of the day.
- 2.25 Based upon detailed working information, noise predictions will be undertaken for the proposed site operations at suitable points/noise sensitive locations, taking into account proposed mitigation measures where appropriate, for example, attenuation bunds. A comparison of predicted levels with



background levels will be made, and an assessment of conformity with MPS2 guidelines will be undertaken. This will assess with the determination of significance of impacts, in terms of people affected, magnitude of impact and duration, and may lead to the implementation of additional mitigation measures.

### **3 Other Details to be Included within the Environmental Impact Assessment**

#### *Rights of Way and Informal Recreation*

- 3.1 The Environmental Statement will include a detailed description and plan identifying rights of way in the vicinity of the scoping area, and, should the need arise, footpath diversions. Where appropriate the baseline study will also refer to other access route initiatives in the vicinity of the application site, where appropriate. The site will be designed to have regard to the rights of way network and other amenity areas in the general vicinity. The Assessment will include a description of any likely short-term impact on definitive rights of way. In addition, the temporary impacts of the site operations will be considered in relation to users of the amenity areas in the vicinity of the site.

#### *Air Quality*

- 3.2 In the absence of any agreed standards or guidelines for operational dust levels and their potential to generate a nuisance, the governmental advice document – MPS 2 ("Controlling and Mitigating the Environmental Effects of Minerals Extraction in England") published in March 2005 confirms that the emphasis in the regulation and control of dust should be the adoption and promotion of best practices on site. Careful consideration will be given to the relationship of activities within the site to sensitive areas outside the site. Where possible, all potential dust generating activities will be located away from dust sensitive land uses and receptors, but in any event consistent with MPS2 guidance the Company are promoting a Dust Action Plan which provides a pro-active approach to dust control. The potential for the emission of dust especially during soil stripping and replacement operations can be high, although mitigation techniques substantially reduce the potential.

- 3.3 As far as possible, dust-generating activities will be located away from residential properties/sensitive premises/users and dust management issues reflected within the site design. Where appropriate, the distance between sensitive uses and dust-generating activities will be maximised.

#### *Geology*

- 3.4 A geological assessment has been made of the application site and the surrounding area. The information that will be included in the Environmental Statement comprises:
- the subsurface geology; and
  - any major structural features in the area.

#### *Development Plan*

- 3.5 The Environmental and Supporting Statement will examine the proposals in relation to the County's Development Plan emerging Local Development Framework and current Government advice documents that deal with the relevant issues identified through the environmental assessment process. These will include MPS1, MPS2, MPG7 and PPG16. Planning Policy Statements comprising PPS1, PPS7, PPS9 and PPS25 will also be considered in the context of the submission.

### **4 Conclusion**

- 4.1 In summary, having regard to the application site's location, the following subjects have been identified as being of potential significance in the context of the Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations:
- ecology;
  - soil resources;
  - landscape and visual impact;
  - traffic;
  - noise;
  - hydrology and hydrogeology; and
  - cultural heritage.
- 4.2 We trust the foregoing provides a broad outline of the manner in which Lafarge Aggregates Limited intend to structure the Environmental and Supporting Statements in respect of the proposed development, and look forward to receiving your formal Scoping Response in accordance with the EIA Regulations.
- 4.3 We enclose five copies of each figure to assist in the consultation exercise associated with this request.

Ltr: Ms M Thompson, Oxfordshire CC

Re: Scoping Opinion – Extension to Caversham Quarry (Phase C)

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Yours sincerely

David L Walker  
Limited

JW Gough

**David L Walker Chartered Surveyors**  
**Agent for Lafarge Aggregates Limited**

Encs 5 x Figure 1 - Location Plan  
5 x Figure 2 - Existing Situation  
5 x Figure 3 - Working Proposals  
5 x Figure 4 - Restoration Plan

cc M Pendock, LAL

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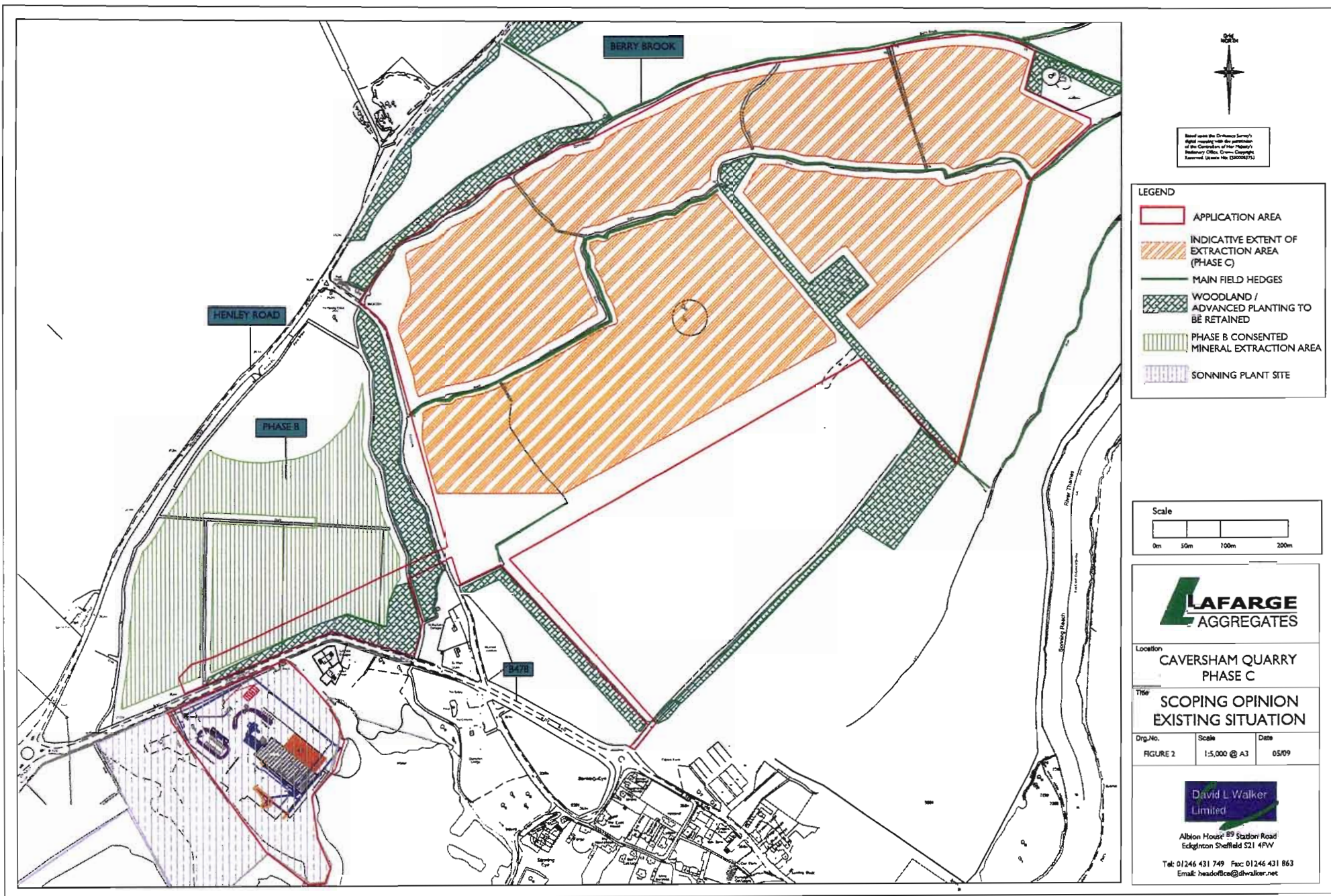
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Ltr: Ms M Thompson, Oxfordshire CC

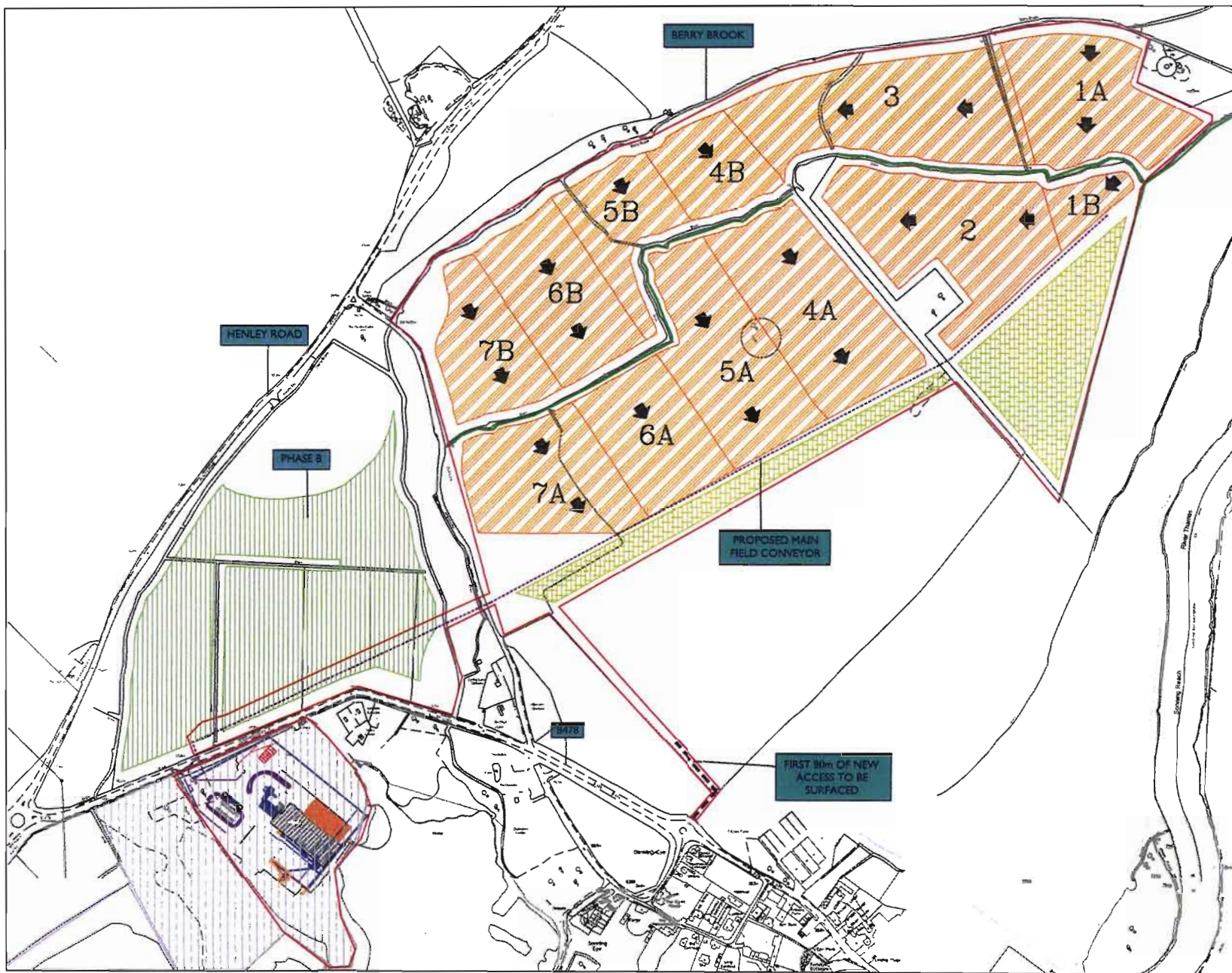
Re: Scoping Opinion – Extension to Caversham Quarry (Phase C)

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




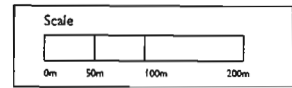





  
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**LEGEND**

-  APPLICATION AREA
-  INDICATIVE EXTENT OF EXTRACTION AREA (PHASE C)
-  PHASE B CONSENTED MINERAL EXTRACTION AREA
-  SONNING PLANT SITE
-  INDICATIVE EXTENT OF SOILS STORAGE OUTSIDE MINERAL EXTRACTION AREA
-  INDICATIVE DIRECTION OF WORKING






Location  
**CAVERSHAM QUARRY  
PHASE C**

Title  
**SCOPING OPINION  
WORKING PLAN**

Drp. No. FIGURE 3	Scale 1:5,000 @ A3	Date 05/09
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