

23rd July 2020

Emma Bolster
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By email only to emma.bolster@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Dear Emma

MW.0063/20 & MW.0064/20 – Rollright Quarry

Thank you for consulting the Cotswolds Conservation Board ('the Board') on the above planning application relating to Rollright Quarry, which is located in the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

From the Board's perspective, there are two key elements to these planning applications:

1. The proposed change to timescales relating for mineral production, restoration and the entrance and access roads (which relate to both planning applications).
2. The proposed restoration scheme (which primarily relates to MW.0063/20).

Timescales

Based on information that you have provided, the Board acknowledges that:

- the proposed change to timescales primarily relates to the fact that the permitted reserves have not been extracted as fast as the applicant originally anticipated;
- there will be no change to the overall amount of mineral to be extracted.

The Board considers that it is not ideal that the local roads will be subject to HGV movements for an extended period of time. However, we recognise that this would be balanced, to some degree, by fewer average HGV movements per day as a result of the same amount of material being extracted over a longer period of time. Presumably, given that the amount of mineral to be extracted remains unchanged, the total number of HGV movement required to transport this mineral would also remain relatively unchanged. We also recognise the valid reasons that have been given for these extended timescales.

On this basis, the Board does not object to the proposed change in timescales.

Restoration Scheme

The Board is pleased to see that the proposed restoration scheme includes some species-rich (conservation) grassland. However, we are disappointed that such a small area of this habitat is being proposed.

As outlined in Annex 1, creating large areas of species-rich grassland (particularly lowland calcareous grassland), is an essential component of halting and reversing declines in biodiversity in the Cotswolds AONB. Quarry restoration provides a unique opportunity to help create this habitat at a landscape scale. This habitat can still be used for – and, indeed, requires – grazing.

Conserving, enhancing, understanding and enjoying the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

For these reasons, we recommend that a much larger proportion of the site is restored to this species-rich grassland habitat. Ideally, this habitat would extend across whole of the site, apart from the native tree and shrub planting around the edge of the site. At the very least, we recommend that the steeper slopes of the site (i.e. above the 234m contour line, apart from the north-east corner of the site) should be restored to this habitat.

The Board is aware that Smiths and Sons are proposing to restore their Broadway Quarry site, within the Worcestershire section of the Cotswolds AONB, to predominantly species-rich / lowland calcareous grassland. We recommend that a similar restoration scheme is developed for their site at Rollright Quarry.

Advice on sourcing species-rich / lowland calcareous grassland seed can be provided by the Board's Glorious Cotswold Grasslands Project¹. The Board understands that these links have already been established at Rollright Quarry, with the project officer having visited the site with the landowner. This is a promising start.

Establishment of good quality, species-rich / lowland calcareous grassland is likely to take considerably longer than the obligatory five year aftercare period. It is important to ensure that, by the end of the aftercare period, ongoing, long term management is in place to ensure the successful establishment of this grassland habitat and to build on the investment made in creating this grassland.

If the area of species-rich grassland is not extended beyond the area demarcated by stock fencing in the proposed restoration scheme, we recommend that this habitat should at least be extended to the remnant quarry face to the north. This is because the tree and shrub planting that is currently proposed between the species-rich grassland and the remnant quarry face could quickly lead to habitat succession and the loss of the grassland habitat. Restricting the proposed tree and shrub planting to the top of the remnant quarry face would help to reduce the risk of this happening and reduce the management required to prevent this from happening.

Ideally, some south-facing, bare earth habitat should be created specifically for invertebrates. Assuming that a larger area of species-rich grassland is provided across the site, an ideal location for this bare earth habitat would be between the foot of the south-facing remnant quarry face, at the north end of the quarry, and the proposed waterbody.

Further information relating to the Board's recommendations is provided in Annex 1, below.

If you have any queries relating to the Board's response, please do get in touch.

Yours sincerely,



John Mills MRTPI
Planning & Landscape Officer

¹ <https://www.cotswoldsaonb.org.uk/looking-after/our-grasslands-projects/glorious-cotswolds-grasslands/>

ANNEX 1. FURTHER COMMENTS FROM THE COTSWOLDS CONSERVATION BOARD RELATING TO PLANNING APPLICATION MW.0063/20

In the 1930's, 40% of the Cotswolds AONB was covered in wildflower-rich grassland. However, agricultural intensification and changing land management practices have led to the loss of almost all of this grassland, with less than 1.5% remaining.

The flower-rich grasslands of the Cotswolds AONB, particularly its lowland calcareous grassland, are one of the AONB's 'special qualities'. In other words, they are one of the aspects of the AONB's natural beauty which make the distinctive and which are valuable, especially at a national scale. As one of the AONB's special qualities, these grasslands are also one of the key attributes on which the priorities for the conservation, management and enhancement of the AONB should be based.

Therefore, in order to halt and significantly reverse declines in this grassland habitat, it is essential that we, collectively, take every opportunity to create and restore this habitat, ideally at a landscape scale.