

**Minutes of the South Wales Regional  
Aggregates Working Party Sub-Group  
Friday 14<sup>th</sup> March 2003**

**Present: -**

Martin Hooker (Chairman) – Bridgend County Borough Council  
Steve Bool (Secretary) – Bridgend County Borough Council  
Chris Morgan – Welsh Assembly Government  
Sue Martin – Welsh Assembly Government  
D Headworth – Environment Agency  
A Wilkes – Environment Agency  
A Attwood – Environment Agency  
M Lucas – Vale of Glamorgan Council  
N R Morgan – Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council  
R Amundson – Caerphilly County Borough Council  
R Crossley – Cardiff City Council  
A Wilcock – Monmouthshire County Council  
D J Pollock – Quarry Products Association  
M Frampton – Quarry Products Association  
A Thomas – City and County of Swansea  
R Brown – Brecon Beacons National Park

**1. Apologies**

R Henderson (Swansea)  
D Jones (Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough Council)

The purpose of the meeting was to continue and extend discussions on the inclusion of safeguarding areas for land based sand and gravel extraction in UDP's with the benefit of the presence of the EA/QPA representatives.

The chairman initiated discussions by referring to the main issues and the lack of understanding of the viability of sand and gravel resources which was causing some MPA's considerable concern. It is evident that some MPA's believe rural development policies are sufficient to safeguard sand and gravel resources already.

Attention was drawn to the mid – long term deficiency in supply from the Severn Estuary as identified in the Symonds report. It was acknowledged that a decision needed to be taken taking into account the following:-

- (i) should industry supply data on resources on a piecemeal or region wide basis, or
- (ii) should approximately 50% of the sites be omitted from detailed site investigation by an initial desk-top sieve, or

(iii) should the WAG, in consultation with the RAWP, secure sufficient data to prove the economic viability of sand and gravel resources. This may be achieved by research or partnership funding.

The chairman stated that any sites identified by MPA's in their UDP's must be robust enough to withstand challenge at a UDP inquiry. It was noted that Neath Port Talbot CBC's stance to include safeguarding areas for sand and gravel could be the subject of strong challenge given the proximity of the Margam site to houses and recreational/historical interests.

AW highlighted the exploration that Tarmac was undertaking but unfortunately Malcolm Lawer was not present to expand on this matter. At present, there are some considerable doubts about the economic viability of some of the resources in the Usk Valley and Monmouthshire CC is therefore reluctant to include these in the development plan. The question of how/who should determine the term economic viability was discussed with particular reference to WAG guidance contained in the Aggregates TAN.

The choice of safeguarding all sites highlighted in the Symonds report irrespective of quality as opposed to selected sites which had few obvious constraints was identified as one of the main issues. QPA take the view that there are no obvious reasons in proceeding with safeguarding areas which are similar to mineral consultation areas. These are accepted as a matter of course in England, but in Wales, peoples perception is different and there is a high degree of scepticism about minerals.

DH confirmed that the Environment Agency (EA) would consider areas safeguarded for sand and gravel extraction on the basis of the information known today, recognising that changes may occur in the future.

The pressure for the exploitation of land based sand and gravel resources was discussed in the light of growing concerns about the continuity of supply from established marine sources such as Helwick/North Middle Ground. These sources could have a very significant influence on the pressure for land based sand and gravel resources to be exploited. It was acknowledged that MPA's could be in a difficult position at public inquiry if all alternative supplies of sand and gravel had not been considered during the process of allocating sites in the UDP.

It was evident that development over the last decade had already sterilised a significant area of sand and gravel resources. Overall, the sand and gravel resources are quite small in area and volume wise, could be used up very quickly over a short time span (less than 50 years).

MF questioned if the quality of reserves needed to be known before sites could be safeguarded. It was his view that this seemed unnecessary and restrictive.

CM confirmed that discussions had been held with the British Geological Society about the possibility of further detailed investigation of the sand and gravel resources. Funding seemed to be no problem but the sensitivity of financing drilling in the Usk Valley with the oncoming elections may prove difficult politically. It was made clear if such research was carried out then the WAG would be asking MPA's for allocations rather than safeguarding areas. This would no doubt generate increased opposition.

EA representatives confirmed there were a number of data gaps in the geological mapping for Wales. Partnership projects have been discussed and the EA are receptive to any approaches. It was acknowledged that the cost of updating geological maps was very significant.

With regard to the monitoring of groundwater levels, a specialist EA hydrogeological team has permitted bids for additional borehole coverage to be submitted identifying main aquifers etc. There are still very significant data gaps and money is being sought but competition from counter bids is strong. The justification for carrying out additional boreholes may be to obtain a better understanding of bedrock i.e. carboniferous limestone.

Reference was made to the Catchment Abstraction Management Strategy (CAMS) which set out a programme of areas with water catchments to drive bids for capital funding. These are strategic issues which drive what type of boreholes are to be drilled. Such issues may require a holistic or environmental focus which not necessarily fits in with sand and gravel resources. If there was an underspend in the EA's budget, there may be an opportunity to consider partnership funding.

The EA highlighted the difficulty of combining an EA programme with a systematic short term drilling programme to confirm land based sand and gravel resources. The EA can provide a CAMS timetable to give a picture of their work programme and how the WAG timetable could integrate with it. AW to forward to SB.

The QPA were unable to confirm if industry were actively looking at land based sand and gravel reserves in Wales. No doubt if they were, there would be strong representations made against the UDP's as they are issued.

MH considered that completion of the critical path programme by WAG would be beneficial to determine the flow of material over the next 5/10

AW

<p>years. Such a programme would give an insight into the need to consider the timescale for the likely flows of sand and gravel from marine and land-based sources. Reference was made to the fact that deeper dredging should not be seen as the panacea when such an option may not be favoured because of ecological interests and distance to markets.</p> <p>WAG asked for the views of those present on the way forward. Did those present want WAG to actively pursue detailed research on reserves before requesting MPA's safeguarding specific areas? There appeared to be an equal split of views and no consensus.</p> <p>The chairman attempted to summarise the views expressed at the meeting. It was evident that all recognised the importance to the industry/society of a continuity of supplies. Nonetheless, many MPA's were still nervous about safeguarding areas because of the likely opposition from politicians and pressure groups. Such opposition is probably founded on a negative view of mineral operations generally and uncertainty over the impact of land based sand and gravel extraction. A strong direction is required from WAG and an appreciation of critical programmes for onshore extraction. CM confirmed that the British Geological Society had the expertise to carry out such work (possibly within 12 months at a nominal cost of £100k (including boreholes)).</p> <p>EA representatives highlighted the long lead-in time period to obtain the necessary data on hydrology/hydrogeological/ecological issues. This was particularly important to inform EIA's.</p>	<p>CM</p>
<p>In conclusion, it was agreed that WAG give an indication to SB when the date of the critical path analysis was completed. This would then trigger the date of the next Sub-Group meeting where this matter could be discussed further. A provisional date was to be set in the month of May to allow WAG elections to be completed.</p>	<p>CM/SM</p>