



Strategic Minerals Planning in Oxfordshire

BBOWT Position Statement August 2010

BBOWT believes that priority should be given to reducing demand for minerals, including through use of recycled aggregates, and that level of need for minerals should be based on thorough assessment.

BBOWT does not have the in-house expertise to comment upon appropriate levels of minerals provision from the County. We do, however, have considerable knowledge of the habitats and species of our three counties. In considering the effect of minerals extraction we take into account the long term effect on wildlife, including both negative and positive impacts. Negative effects can result from direct habitat loss, as well as through indirect impacts on valuable and protected habitats. Whereas restoration of minerals sites to nature conservation uses can be positive if approached in an appropriate way. Oxfordshire County Council are currently considering broad spatial strategy options¹, all of which have the potential to both negatively and positively affect wildlife.

Protecting valuable wildlife sites

In 2007 the County Council consulted on possible minerals sites across the County and we have made a clear representation that any possible minerals sites that would directly impact on a designated nature conservation site should not be taken forward. This includes a possible minerals site which covers part of our Chimney Meadows nature reserve, including a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and a Local Wildlife Site. We will continue to input into the consultation process to help ensure these sites are protected.

A possible indirect impact of minerals extraction is the potential for changes to the hydrology of water-dependant habitats near extraction sites. Noise disturbance and dust are also possible concerns for nearby habitats and species. In particular we are concerned about possible negative impacts on the hydrology of important lowland meadow habitats that occur on gravel terraces in Oxfordshire. These include Oxford Meadows Special Area of Conservation (SAC), Ducklington Mead SSSI, Langley's Lane Meadow SSSI, several lowland meadow Local Wildlife Sites and our own our Chimney Meadows nature reserve part of which is a SSSI and National Nature Reserve.

Creating new habitats through sensitive restoration

Minerals extraction can, in the long term, result in an overall positive impact on wildlife through the sensitive restoration of minerals extraction sites to nature conservation uses. However, this should not be at the expense of existing valuable nature conservation sites. In general, restoration of minerals sites for nature conservation will be most effective for wildlife where large areas of contiguous new

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habitat can be created. We therefore believe that the spatial strategy options suggested by Oxfordshire County Council which concentrate, rather than disperse, mineral extraction offer the greatest potential for achieving a long term enhancement in biodiversity. A concentrated strategy also allows for a range of restoration end uses (including recreation and agriculture) whilst still providing substantial undisturbed areas for wildlife.

Creation of a mosaic of habitats through minerals restoration will usually be of more value to wildlife than large areas of one type of habitat, since this approach will support a greater variety of species. A contiguous area of one type of new habitat, whilst being positive for the success and dispersal of species dependent on that habitat, may represent a barrier to the dispersal of species dependent on other habitats. Any environmentally sensitive minerals policy will therefore need to demonstrate effective mitigation for such barrier effects.

To help achieve long term benefits for wildlife through minerals extraction we have been engaged in a Biodiversity Stakeholder Group, co-ordinated by Oxfordshire County Council, which has been assessing the relative potential for achieving biodiversity gain through restoration of different possible minerals extraction areas.