

STATEMENT BY SOMERSET COUNTY COUNCIL

September 2014




MATTER 7: BUILDING STONE

Background Documents referred to within Statement

- Building Stones Topic Paper (Doc Ref SD8b)
- National Planning Policy Framework (Doc Ref NE3)
- Strategic Stone Study – Building Stone Atlas for Somerset & Exmoor (Doc Ref TD73)
- Mineral Resources Information in Support of National, Regional and Local Planning: Somerset (Doc Ref TD39)
- Building Stones Issue Paper (Doc Refs SD16a and SD16b)
- Options consultation Paper (Doc Refs SD17a-SD17d)
- Schedule of Proposed Changes (Doc Ref SD6b)
- Benefits of Quarrying to the Somerset Economy – Executive Summary (Doc Ref TD58)
- Camel Hill decision notice, no. 12/00198/CPO (Doc Ref TD74)
- County Matter Applications – Mineral Development: Notes for Applicants (Doc Ref RL28)
- British Geological Survey Minerals Safeguarding in England (Doc Ref TD7)
- English Stone Forum (Doc Ref TD12)

Somerset Minerals Plan Examination
Hearing Sessions: September 2014
Statement by Somerset County Council

Document Control Sheet

	<u>Position</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Date</u>
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Reviewed by:	Senior Planning Policy Officer	Guy Robinson	27/08/2014
Approved by:	Service Manager: Planning Policy		04/09/2014

For the forthcoming Hearing, the Inspector has requested that Somerset County Council briefly summarise their position on each discussion topic. The following is a brief summary of Somerset County Council's response to Matter 7: Building Stone, examining the **Issue: Whether sufficient opportunities are provided for the steady and adequate supply of building stone.**

1. The Plan does not appear to include a map of building stone resources. Could such a map be provided for the purposes of the Examination?

SCC Response

- 1.1. A map of building stone resources (identifying all the 'needed' building stone types in Somerset as defined in the **Building Stones Topic Paper, Doc Ref SD8b**) is now available for the purposes of the Examination – see ED11a. The distribution of the building stone types identified on this new map is established from, and entirely coincident with, the GIS database of building stone rock types and lithologies provided by the British Geological Survey (at a scale of 1:100,000).

2. Is the selection of “needed” building stone types in the Table 2 lists the most appropriate and are the lists exhaustive?

SCC Response

- 2.1. The list of ‘needed’ building stone types in Table 2 is drawn from the National Strategic Stone Study (SSS) undertaken by English Heritage in association with the British Geological Survey (BGS) and national/local geological specialists. The SSS is the most comprehensive database of building stones produced to date for England, and includes information (on a county-by-county basis) of all known building stone types, their description, examples of their use in towns, villages and buildings/other structures, and original source quarries. It is freely available on-line and helps local authorities contribute to recommendations made within the **National Planning Policy Framework (Doc Ref NE3)** to safeguard important sources of building stone. The SSS Atlas data for building stones in Somerset (including Exmoor National Park area) was completed in 2011 (**Strategic Stone Study – Building Stone Atlas for Somerset & Exmoor, Doc Ref TD73**).
- 2.2. In addition to utilising data from the SSS, the list of ‘needed’ building stone types in Table 2 is also drawn from a combination of information from other sources, including published geological literature (BGS reports, memoirs and maps, including **Mineral Resources Information in Support of National, Regional and Local Planning: Somerset, Doc Ref TD39**); papers in the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History proceedings and archives; annual outputs of existing active building stone quarries in Somerset, Somerset County Council records and responses to consultations undertaken by the County Council, beginning in 2010 with the **Building Stones Issue Paper (Doc Refs SD16a and SD16b)**, followed by the **Options consultation Paper in 2012 (Doc Refs SD17a-SD17d)**.
- 2.3. Given the data sources identified above, the list of building stones provided in Table 2 is believed to be exhaustive. Further details on the methodology and rationale behind the selection of ‘needed’ building stones from the Somerset entry in the SSS are provided in the response to Q4.

3. Does inclusion of a stone type within these lists create a presumption in favour of planning permission in appropriate locations?

SCC Response

- 3.1. No. Inclusion of a building stone type within these lists does not create a presumption in favour of planning permission in appropriate locations. Consideration of any application for planning permission to extract building stone will be made on a case by case basis, with reference to all relevant policies in the Development Plan. Thus any decision will be taken in accordance with the due planning process.
- 3.2. It is noted that there is a presumption in favour of sustainable development as stated in Plan policy SD1.

- 3.3. It is recognised that planning permissions for certain building stone types can only be made in the geographical areas where the relevant geological formations and/or specific building stone types naturally occur.

4. Briefly explain how “need” has been determined, and whether this determination has been supported by any figures for supply and demand?

SCC Response

- 4.1. It is generally recognised that demand for natural stone has seen considerable growth across the UK over the last 20 years, especially to meet the requirements of new build (response from the English Stone Forum, **Options consultation Paper, English Stone Forum, Doc Ref SD17d – page 175**). However, it is difficult to obtain reliable and quantifiable data at a county level about the true need for specific stone types, and the tonnage amounts of stone per annum that the market requires.
- 4.2. Given the lack of quantifiable and uniform information, the approach taken to identify ‘need’ for individual building stones was based on a combination of data from several sources as listed in answer to question 2 above.
- 4.3. To assist in the assessment of identifying ‘needed’ stones, a categorisation scheme for Somerset building stones was developed (see Table 1 from Doc Ref SD8b) – reproduced below – taking into account the general significance that individual stone types made to local built heritage and character.
- 4.4. All known main types of Somerset building stone were then assigned a category number which facilitated the selection of ‘needed’ building stone types which were historically worked in Somerset, but are not currently quarried. All stones of category 3 or higher (the majority of which were also identified in the consultation response) were selected as ‘needed’.
- 4.5. In the cases of building stones which are currently actively quarried in Somerset, only White Lias and Blue Lias were selected as ‘needed’ on the basis of perceived market need and the emphasis placed on these stone types in consultation responses. Other well known building stones presently worked in Somerset (e.g. Ham Stone, Doultong Stone, Capton Stone, Forest Marble) are deemed to have adequate resources to meet current need, and a number of these are worked from quarries with permissions which extend well beyond the duration of the Somerset Minerals Plan.
- 4.6. Further details and explanatory comments justifying ‘need’ for each of the known main building stones employed in Somerset, and linking these to supply/demand figures, is provided at Appendix 1 of the **Building Stones Topic Paper (Doc Ref SD8b)**.

Somerset Minerals Plan Examination
Hearing Sessions: September 2014
Statement by Somerset County Council

Table 1 – reproduced from the Building Stones Topic Paper Doc Ref SD8b

Category number	Definition of stone types assigned to category	Examples of stone types
7	Building stones which do not occur within Somerset, but which are still used within the county, often in prestigious buildings (as ornate facings, dressings, ashlar, sills etc.) or in public works /civic buildings	Bath Stone, Westleigh Stone
6	Building stones which have a small geographical occurrence in Somerset, but are well know and frequently used extensively within those areas (where they make a major contribution to the built heritage and character) and wider afield, both within Somerset and beyond the county. All are identified in consultation responses	Doultling Stone, Ham Stone
5	Building stones, and their varieties, which have a wide distribution within Somerset and are used extensively within many parts of the County (or beyond) and make a major contribution to the built heritage and character of Somerset. All are identified in consultation responses	Blue Lias, Inferior Oolite
4	Building stones, and their varieties, which have a wider distribution in parts of Somerset than category 3, are frequently used, are key components of, and contribute significantly to the built heritage and character in parts of Somerset. Many stones of this category are well known within the quarrying and stonemason trades, and most have been identified in consultation responses	Otter Sandstone, White Lias, Marlstone
3	Building stones which are confined to relatively small areas of Somerset and are of local use, but where they do occur they are frequently used, well known, distinctive, and contribute significantly to the local built heritage and character. Many stones of this category are well known within the quarrying and stone mason trades, and most have been identified in consultation responses	Draycott Stone, Wedmore Stone, Calcareous Grit
2	Building stones which have a very localised geographical occurrence and are used in very local circumstances, but may contribute significantly to the built heritage within those localised areas. Typically of too specialist or niche use to be identified in consultation responses	Cockercombe Tuff, Devonian limestones
2W	A subcategory of category 2 which relates to stones which typically have a flaggy nature and are utilised mainly for walling, often drystone walling, especially in Southeast Somerset	Combrash
1	Building stones which have an extremely localised geographical occurrence in Somerset, and are used only within the very local area or nearby. Typically utilised in a minor, almost sporadic fashion within a building or structure, usually not constituting the main stone fabric of the construction. Generally of too specialist, or extremely niche use to be identified in consultation responses	Hestercombe Diorite

- 4.7. Since undertaking the assessment of ‘needed’ building stones, further recent research by Somerset County Council (**Benefits of Quarrying to the Somerset Economy – Executive Summary, Doc Ref TD58**) has provided some additional information on supply and demand, in addition to annual permitted tonnages. This research involved liaison with six building stone operators in the county (including the main producers of Capton Stone, White Lias, Blue Lias, Doultling Stone and Forest Marble), and confirmed the former assessment of ‘need’ and the current market for these stone types.

5. Is the selection of stone types in the Table 2 list “for which current supply may be sufficient to meet future demand over the Plan Period”, the most appropriate?

SCC Response

- 5.1. Yes. For the majority of building stone types identified in this part of Table 2 list (namely: Ham Stone, Inferior Oolite (including Hadspen Stone and Doultling Stone), Forest Marble, Cornbrash and Capton Sandstone) the existing levels of supply is considered sufficient to meet future demand.
- 5.2. Existing planning permissions for Forest Marble (including Cornbrash), Capton Stone and Hadspen Stone extend up to a period ranging from June 2027 to December 2028; existing planning permissions for Doultling Stone and the largest Ham Stone operator extend beyond the Plan Period and range from February 2042 to March 2066.
- 5.3. In Somerset, Cornbrash occurs as a thin shelly, flaggy limestone overlying the Forest Marble limestone, and is only worked in conjunction with the latter around Henstridge, in the south-east of the county. Within Somerset Cornbrash only has limited use mainly as a dry walling stone, and was assigned a ‘2W’ category in the research identifying ‘needed’ building stones (see paragraph 4.3 above). Larger resources of Cornbrash occur in Wiltshire and Dorset where the stone is much more commonly employed.

6. Does inclusion within this list create a presumption against planning permission for these stone types?

SCC Response

- 6.1. No. It is appreciated that market demand for certain types of building stone may vary during the Plan Period, and that lithological or colour variations occur within each of the main building stone types. Consequently, operators may seek new (or revisions of) planning permissions to meet changing circumstances and market demand for these stone types, or variants thereof. Each application will be treated on its own merits, on a case-by-case basis.
- 6.2. Evidence for the flexibility of Somerset County Council’s approach to granting permissions for building stone quarries is provided by a recent application made to open a White Lias quarry at Camel Hill, near Queen Camel (**Camel Hill decision notice, no. 12/00198/CPO, Doc Ref TD74**). In this case the applicant demonstrated the need (for conservation and new build purposes) of a creamy-yellow colour and thicker-block variant of White Lias building stone – the more usual White Lias stone quarried at Bowdens Lane, near Langport being a uniform white colour, and more thinly-bedded. Camel Hill quarry is due to start operating in 2015, with planning permission extending to July 2033 with permitted annual output not to exceed 4,000 tonnes of stone (including stone waste returned to site for restoration purposes).

7. Briefly explain how it has been determined that there may be sufficient need for these stone types and has this determination been supported by figures for supply and demand?

SCC Response

7.1. The 'need' for these stone types was determined as part of the same research and analysis undertaken for all the main building stone types that occur in Somerset (please refer to the response to Q4 above).

8. How would planning applications for the extraction of building stone types that are not on any of the lists be considered? How would this differ from stone types on one or other of the lists?

SCC Response

8.1 Only Category 1 or 2 (including 2W) building stone types are not included on the lists. Historically these are building stone types that an extremely localised geographical occurrence in Somerset and have been use as building stones only in very local circumstances, typically being confined to a occasional 'status' building or structure, for example the use of Cockercombe Tuff at Quantock Lodge, Plainswick, or Devonian limestone in Aisholt church.

8.2 In the unlikely event that a planning application for the extraction of these Category 1 or 2 (including 2W) type building stones be made (for example, for conservation or restoration purposes of an existing structure), then the application would be considered in exactly the same manner as that received for a 'needed' building stone, i.e. with reference to policy SMP5 and other relevant policies in the Development Plan.

9. Do these lists allow the Plan sufficient flexibility to respond to changing circumstances?

SCC Response

9.1. Yes. Based on the process and research that has been undertaken to establish the content of these lists (involving the British Geological Survey, English Heritage, national/local specialists and consultation with the local stone industry - see responses to Q2, 4-5 above), Somerset County Council consider the building stone lists to be comprehensive in their coverage of, and establishing 'need' for Somerset's building stones.

9.2. Policy SMP5 (as amended in the **Schedule of Proposed Changes, Doc Ref SD6b**) refers to "an identified need for the specified stone ..." Having identified through research what stone types are needed, thereby providing a clear picture that will help to inform industry strategy and investment, the County Council's planning policy on building stone provides sufficient flexibility to respond to changing circumstances.

10. Should Preferred Areas and/or Areas of Search be designated for some or all of the “needed” stone types?

SCC Response

- 10.1. The natural geological occurrence of the majority of ‘needed’ building stone types is limited to relatively small geographical areas in Somerset. This fact alone is considered to provide highly localised areas where any proposals to extract these building stones would necessarily have to focus, and *de facto* provides natural ‘Preferred Areas’ without the need for such areas to be defined by Somerset County Council. Excluding White Lias and Blue Lias limestones (covered below), the geological occurrence of all other ‘needed’ building stones is consistent with their respective defined MSA.
- 10.2. In the case of White Lias and Blue Lias limestones which have a wide geographical distribution in Somerset, much of the limestone occurs as subcrop beneath extensive clay and peat deposits on the Somerset Levels and Moors. Apart from numerous wildlife and conservation designations (including SAC, SPA and SSSI) over much of these areas, the amount of clay and peat overburden would make any application to extract the limestone in these areas extremely unlikely and economically unviable.
- 10.3. One of the main quarrying areas for Blue Lias in Somerset during the 19th and early 20th century was in and around the town of Street. However, virtually all of the former quarry sites have been sterilised by subsequent ‘post-War’ development, much of which was undertaken during the 1950s and 1960s.
- 10.4. There are other areas of White Lias and Blue Lias in Somerset which historically have yielded better quality stone, and distinctive ‘sub-types’ of these limestones have been employed for building purposes; for example Curry Rivel Stone, Keinton Stone and Thurlbear Stone varieties of Blue Lias, and colour varieties of White Lias limestone from Bowdens Lane and Camel Hill quarries. Again the relatively limited distribution of these limestone sub-types is regarded to act as ‘*de facto*’ areas where future potential applications to extract Blue Lias or White Lias would focus without the need for Somerset County Council to define Preferred Areas and/or Areas of Search. The geological occurrence of all these sub-types is covered with the MSA for White Lias and Blue Lias (defined by circular areas with 2 km radius containing all former quarry sites and unworked areas for these limestone sub-types).
- 10.5. Current planning permits up to 7,000 tonnes of White Lias and 16,200 tonnes of Blue Lias limestone to be extracted per year in Somerset. Neither of these building stones are currently regarded to be in short supply. However, there is a chance that both may become in short supply during the Plan Period. For example, it is recognised that with permissions due to expire at Downslade and Tout quarries in July 2019 and April 2018 respectively (their combined permitted output is 3200 tpa of Blue Lias limestone), there may be a risk of short supply of Blue Lias emerging within the Plan period.

11. In Policy SMP5, should economic considerations be weighed in the balance?

SCC Response

- 11.1 Yes. For consistency with Policy SMP3 (proposals for the extraction of crushed rock), it is accepted that economic considerations should be weighed in the balance for building stones, and SMP5 should be revised accordingly.
- 11.2 The proposed revised wording for SMP5 is shown in the latest version of the **Schedule of Proposed Changes (Doc Ref SD6c)** – see Change No 33a – also reproduced as an Appendix to this statement for ease of reference.

12. In Policy SMP5, is criterion a) too restrictive in requiring “an identified need for stone currently used in Somerset to maintain or enhance the local historic environment”? How, for example, would an application be treated which demonstrated an identified need for new build where local distinctiveness was a consideration?

SCC Response

- 12.1. Yes. It is recognised that the current wording could be improved to ensure that this is not too restrictive. For example, there may be applications for new build made where the use of local building stone (for reasons of maintaining local distinctiveness and/or heritage character) is likely to be a condition of any granted planning permission.
- 12.2. The proposed revised wording for SMP5 in Change No. 33 in the **Schedule of Proposed Changes (Doc Ref SD6b)** deals with this point.

13. Does the policy discourage planning applications that might be made to satisfy need outside of the County, hence discouraging the export of building stone? If so, is this justified?

SCC Response

- 13.1. No. The policy is not considered to neither discourage planning applications to satisfy the need for Somerset building stone outside of the county nor to discourage the export of building stone.
- 13.2. Although Somerset County Council would wish to ensure that the conservation of the local built heritage is maintained or enhanced (Policy SMP5), it also recognises that there is a market outside of the county for quality Somerset building stone. For example, **Building Stones Topic Paper (Doc Ref SD8b)** states in paragraph 1.4 that “*Focusing on buildings stone, the County Council perceives a need for building stone policy that supports local stone for local demand and that also takes account of markets supplied outside of the county.*”

**Somerset Minerals Plan Examination
Hearing Sessions: September 2014
Statement by Somerset County Council**

- 13.3. Some building stone types are unique to Somerset (e.g. Doulling Stone, Ham Stone); other building stone types (e.g. White Lias, Blue Lias) also occur outside of the county but Somerset is acknowledged within the stone trade as a source of the best quality building stone of these particular types.
- 13.4. Recent investigation into the economics of stone quarrying within Somerset (**Benefits of Quarrying to the Somerset Economy – Executive Summary (Doc Ref TD58)**) established some data relating to the use and export of Somerset derived building stone outside of the county. The quarries listed in the following table exported up to between 20-30% of their permitted output out of the county in 2013:

Supplier	Building stone type	Annual permitted extraction (tonnes)	Regional (SW) and National markets
Bowdens Lane Quarry, near Langport	White Lias	3,000	20% to regional and national markets (combined)
Caption Sandstone Quarry	Permo-Triassic red sandstone	1,500	30% to regional markets (mainly Devon)
Doulling Stone Quarry, Chelynych	Doulling Stone	6,000	30% to regional markets, 10% to national markets
Grove Farm (Hadspen) Quarry	Hadspen Stone	2,500	20% to national markets
Quarry Farm (Stalbridge), Henstridge	Forest Marble	2,500	20% to regional and national markets (combined)

14. Are all the criteria in Table 3 “supporting new permitted reserves for building stone extraction” justified? Please respond to each criterion giving very brief reasons and specifically include the following within your response:

SCC Response

- 14.1. The **Schedule of Proposed Changes (Doc Ref SD6b)** replaces the Table 3 checklist and criteria with Figure 2, which provides a tool to help applicants prepare a planning application and facilitates links to relevant policies.
- 14.2. Applicants are now advised to enter into initial discussions regarding their proposals with the County Council’s planning officers and to refer to documentation (**County Matter Applications – Mineral Development: Notes for Applicants, Doc Ref RL28**) which helps ensure applicants submit sufficient information to enable a full and considered judgement of their application.

15. With respect to the “Location” - criterion 1 - is it justified to always require a building stone site to be located within a Minerals Safeguarding Area (MSA) for “needed stones”?

SCC Response

- 15.1 Consideration of any application for planning permission to extract building stone will be made on a case by case basis, with reference to all relevant policies in the Development Plan. Thus any decision will be taken in accordance with the due planning process.
- 15.2 Applications for certain building stone types can only be made in the geographical areas where the relevant geological formations and/or specific building stone types naturally occur. As the majority of ‘needed’ building stone MSAs match the geological extent of the known resource of these stone types (conforming to national guidance provided in **British Geological Survey Minerals Safeguarding in England, Doc Ref TD7**), it can be reasonably expected that the majority of applications for ‘needed’ building stones would be located within MSAs. Possible exceptions to this, namely for White Lias and Blue Lias limestones, are covered in paragraphs 10.2-10.4 above.

16. Does this requirement mean that, if a suitable building stone resource was identified outside a MSA for “needed stones”, an application for its extraction would be refused?

SCC Response

- 16.1 No, every application would be considered on its own merits on a case-by-case basis. However, the geographical extent of ‘needed’ building stones is well known and viable applications can only be made where the specific building stone type naturally occurs (please refer to the answer provided in paragraph 15.3).
- 16.2 Speculative applications or those arising from ‘new discovered’ building stone types would be considered on their own merits on a case-by-case basis.

17. How are the MSAs for “needed stones” distinguished from other building stone resources on Map 9: Mineral safeguarding areas?

SCC Response

- 17.1. The areas coloured orange (identified as ‘Building stone safeguarding areas’) denote the MSAs for all the building stone types listed in Table 2; this includes:
- The five building stone types worked in Somerset for which current supply may be sufficient to meet future demand over the Plan Period (Ham Stone to Capton Stone);

- The two building stone types that are presently worked in Somerset and are identified as 'needed' (Blue Lias, White Lias); and
 - The 15 building stone types that were formerly quarried in Somerset and are identified as 'needed' (Chert/Flint to Hangman Sandstones).
- 17.2. The MSA for individual building stone types are provided in maps 2-9 of the **Building Stones Topic Paper (Doc Ref SD8b)**.
- 17.3. A map of building stone resources (identifying all the 'needed' building stone types in Somerset as defined within the **Building Stones Topic Paper, Doc Ref SD8b**) is now available for the purposes of the Examination (see response to Q1).

18. With respect to criterion 3 - does the requirement for information of any benefits a proposed site has over others impose a sequential test for an applicant? What exactly is it envisaged an applicant should demonstrate? Briefly explain the justification for this.

SCC Response

- 18.1. Point 6 in Figure 2 as shown in the Schedule of Proposed Changes (Doc Ref SD6b) asks the applicant whether the same building stone is available at other locations and what would be the benefits delivered through its provision at the proposed location. It is not making a direct comparison relative to the current source of the material and is therefore not considered to impose a sequential test for an applicant.
- 18.2. It is envisaged that as part of their application, an applicant should be able to provide evidence to the planning officers regarding the geology and presence of the specified building stone at the proposal site, and demonstrate there are proven adequate reserves of the stone.
- 18.3. Additional information regarding the historical use of the stone, and data supporting the current and projected market demand for the stone would further support the application.

19. With respect to "Buildings and settlements" - criterion 4 - is it justified to require consideration of "any possible" direct or indirect impacts on the identified receptors?

SCC Response

- 19.1. Figure 2 and associated wording (which replaces Table 3) no longer refers to "*any possible direct or indirect impacts*". The applicant is required to provide information on the nature, scale, intensity and duration of the operations at the proposed location. This includes consideration of the proximity of existing settlements to the proposal, adequate and fit-for-purpose access to the proposal site and impacts on the local amenity. This approach links with and is consistent with Chapters 19 and 20 of the Plan.

20. Overall, do the criteria strike the right balance between encouraging production of needed building stone and protecting communities and the environment?

SCC Response

- 20.1. Yes, the approach taken in the Minerals Plan does strike the right balance. The reworking of Table 3 as Figure 2, as outlined above, reflects the underlying intention to provide a tool for applicants, helping them (in particular new potential operators in Somerset) to engage with the Mineral Planning Authority and work together to meet identified need.
- 20.2. It is noted that that aspects listed in Figure 2 cross-refer to relevant planning policy and do not represent policy criteria in their own right.
- 20.3. The key strategic criteria for building stone in policy terms are listed in policy SMP5 and, noting the Plan must be read as a whole, relevant Development Management policies help to ensure adequate measures are put in place to protect communities and the environment.

21. Is it envisaged that buffer widths might be established around stone quarries and, if so, would this be determined on a site by site basis? Should the Plan refer to its policy on buffer widths for building stone?

SCC Response

- 21.1. In accordance with analysis provided by the **English Stone Forum (Doc Ref TD12)**, the majority of building stone quarry applications nationally are small scale operations, and do not normally exceed approximately 2000m³ per annum. It is considered more appropriate that the use of buffer widths is regarded on a site-by-site basis, depending on local conditions, hydrology, ecology etc.

END

**APPENDIX – PROPOSED FURTHER CHANGES ON BUILDING STONE
(integrated within Doc Ref SD6c)**

Policy SMP5

Planning permission for the extraction of building stone will be granted subject to the applicant demonstrating that:

a) the proposal will deliver clear economic and other benefits to the local and/or wider communities;

a) b) there is an identified need for the specified stone ~~currently used in Somerset~~ to maintain or enhance the local historic environment; and

b) c) the nature, scale, intensity and duration of the operation are appropriate to the character of the local area; and

e) d) the proposal includes measures to mitigate to acceptable levels adverse impacts on the environment and local communities.”

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END