

Somerset Minerals Plan: Hearings - September 2014

Somerset County Council's Opening Statement

On behalf of Somerset County Council, I'm delighted to welcome the Inspector – Elizabeth Ord and all to these hearings.

To provide some context for the forthcoming hearing sessions, Somerset County Council (SCC) has a statutory duty to produce a Somerset Minerals Development Plan Document. The current Minerals Local Plan was adopted in 2004. It conformed to government advice at that time and covered the period up to 2011.

There is now a pressing need to review and update this adopted Minerals Local Plan. Many pressures stem from the publication of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in 2012. This replaced a suite of general and minerals-specific Planning Policy Statements and also introduced new requirements and policy areas.

In line with Regulations set out in law, this process of plan review commenced in 2009/10 with publication of three Issues papers for consultation, followed in December 2011 when SCC undertook a "Minerals Options" consultation and subsequently a Preferred Options consultation in January 2013. Consultation on the pre-submission Minerals Plan took place between 3rd March and 14th April 2014. During this period, in addition to feedback from SCC officers, 91 external responses were received.

It has been a challenging time in which to develop, review and update the Somerset Minerals Plan. The need for a robust approach has been clear. Underpinning the Minerals Local Plan is an evidence base which we developed in an iterative way, working with partners and peer reviewers where appropriate. Forming the central spine of this evidence base is a series of Topic Papers, shaped to be as accessible as possible for a broad audience.

In developing the Somerset Minerals Local Plan, it should be noted that I and the Planning Policy team have benefited from a rewarding collaboration with Elected Members – in particular of a Planning Policy Task and Finish Group – and colleagues in Planning Control, as well as

other teams in the County Council. Furthermore, we have been able to add extra depth and detail to the contents of the Plan by working well with other local authorities in research projects and through day-to-day discussions on strategic cross boundary matters.

My thanks also goes out to all stakeholders who have offered their views in person via workshops, drop-in sessions and other meetings or in writing via during periods of formal consultation.

In the lead in to these hearings, we are encouraged by the indications of broad support we have received from a range of stakeholders: including the Environment Agency, environmental organisations and neighbouring Minerals Planning Authorities, including Bath & NE Somerset Council.

Finally I would like to thank the Inspector for her pragmatic approach during the initial stages of this Hearing process, and our Programme Officer, Ian Kemp, who has been a valuable source of information for my colleagues and I.

The County Council has confirmed to the Inspector that we wish any main modifications to be recommended by the Inspector in order to resolve any unsoundness in the Local Plan or to overcome any problems of legal compliance.

In closing, I therefore believe that we are well placed to take the things forward. Given the document's importance in guiding minerals development within Somerset we look forward to what we hope will be a positive discussion on the Somerset Minerals Local Plan.

End

Paul Browning
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