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Our ref: 406531
Your ref: LCC/2021/0007



Robert Hope
Lancashire County Council

Customer Services
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BY EMAIL ONLY

Dear Robert Hope,

Planning consultation: PRIOR EXTRACTION OF SAND / GRAVEL AND SUBSEQUENT RESTORATION WITH INERT ENGINEERING FILL TO FACILITATE A PLATFORM FOR EMPLOYMENT DEVELOPMENT, OR AGRICULTURE, WITH PERIPHERAL LANDSCAPING

Location: LAND NORTH OF A674 MILLENNIUM WAY, NORTHEAST OF M61 JUNCTION 8.

Thank you for your consultation on the above, dated and received by Natural England on 08 September 2022

Natural England is a non-departmental public body. Our statutory purpose is to ensure that the natural environment is conserved, enhanced, and managed for the benefit of present and future generations, thereby contributing to sustainable development.

SUMMARY OF NATURAL ENGLAND'S ADVICE

FURTHER INFORMATION REQUIRED TO DETERMINE IMPACTS ON BEST AND MOST VERSATILE AGRICULTURAL LAND

As submitted, the application could have potential significant effects on agricultural and soil (including peat) resources. Natural England requires further information in order to determine the significance of these impacts and the scope for mitigation.

The following information is required:

- Information on the Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) and soil resources (including peat) present on the site.
- A detailed soil management plan.

Without this information, Natural England may need to object to the proposal.

Please re-consult Natural England once this information has been obtained.

Natural England's further advice is set out below.

Additional Information required

Based on the information provided in support of the planning application, we note that the proposed development would extend to approximately 9.9 ha and sets out prior extraction of sand/gravel and subsequent restoration with inert engineering fill to facilitate a platform for employment

development, **or agriculture with peripheral landscaping**. Part of the Site (6.9 ha) is allocated for employment development in Policy EP1.3 of the Chorley Local Plan, which has been approved for B2 industrial development (outline 17/00713/OUTMAJ). This application is therefore has been reviewed as a minerals application with agricultural restoration.

The potential impact on agricultural and soil (including peat) resources has not been identified by the applicant. As the site is greater than 5 ha, further information is required to enable assessment of the proposal and impact it may have on the agricultural land and soil resources, and inform restoration criteria.

In order to facilitate appropriate restoration of the agricultural land and surrounding landscaping, the applicant will be required to provide site specific information on the Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) and soil resources (including peat) present on the proposal site.

In addition, a detailed soil management plan based on a soil survey will be necessary to demonstrate and ensure that the site working and reclamation proposals meet the requirements for sustainable minerals development. The proposals should be carefully considered against current [Minerals Planning Practice Guidance](#) particularly section 6 on restoration and aftercare of minerals sites; and the Gov.uk guidance; [Guide to reclaiming mineral extraction and landfill sites to agriculture - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#) and [Planning and aftercare advice for reclaiming land to agricultural use - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#).

The site specific soils and peat information can then also be used to inform future biodiversity enhancement and for site design and landscaping if the built development was to proceed (in line with the [Defra Construction Code](#))

Once this information has been provided, please re-consult Natural England and we will then consider this proposal in the light of our statutory duties under Schedule 5 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) and the Government's policy for the sustainable use of soil as set out in paragraphs 170 and 171 of the [National Planning Policy Framework](#).

Peat Concerns

The submitted reports do not recognise the value of peat as a precious and irreplaceable resource. Peat plays an important role in a range of ecosystem services, including climate change mitigation. We find this unacceptable in light of The Environment Act 2021 and the publication of the England Peat Action Plan.

England's peatlands are our largest terrestrial carbon store and are vital for capturing and storing carbon. They provide a range of other valuable benefits including biodiversity rich ecosystems, improved water quality and natural flood management, the protection of historic environment features and connect people with nature. The vast carbon storage potential of lowland peat can be secured by restoring the natural hydrological and ecological function of the peat. This requires the conversion to more sustainable practices that allow the peat layer to stabilise and re-accumulate. A healthy peat bog would provide multiple natural capital benefits such as carbon sequestration, flood risk mitigation, enhanced air quality and biodiversity.

From England Peat Action Plan: *We want our peatland to meet the needs of wildlife, people, and the planet. All uses of peatland should keep the peat wet and in the ground. We will work to ensure all our peatlands, not just deep or protected peat, are responsibly managed, or, in good hydrological condition or under restoration management.* Natural England's advice is that peat can be very difficult to restore, recreate or replace once destroyed.

Biodiversity Net Gain

We would strongly encourage a development of this scale to seek opportunities to deliver wetland retention and enhancement plan in order to achieve biodiversity net gain. Natural England recommends that mitigation design for mineral extraction and the separate biodiversity net gain measures are tailored to be site specific. This can include bogland, marsh, fen and other related wetland habitat measures.

Should the applicant wish to discuss the further information required and scope for mitigation with Natural England, we would be happy to provide advice through our [Discretionary Advice Service](#).

Please consult us again once the information requested above, has been provided.

Yours sincerely

Jacob Desmond
Planning and Development Adviser
Cheshire, Greater Manchester, Merseyside & Lancashire Area Team