

# Minerals Options Paper Summary

Somerset Minerals & Waste Development Framework Minerals Core Strategy





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To view and download this and other related documents, and to respond to the minerals consultation online, please visit:

**[www.somersetconsults.org.uk](http://www.somersetconsults.org.uk)**

For further details of the Somerset Minerals and Waste Development Framework please visit our website.

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The consultation is open until 12 February 2012.

**Please note** that responses will be treated as in the public domain. If there is a concern relating to confidential supporting information for example, please get in touch with us.

# 1 Introduction

- 1.1 Minerals planning ensures that the need for minerals is balanced against the impacts of minerals extraction on local communities and the environment. It also helps to ensure that benefits that can be provided by quarrying are delivered.
- 1.2 This document presents a summary of the issues and potential options relating to future minerals development in Somerset together with consultation questions. It summarises a more detailed Minerals Options Paper. More information, in particular the reasons for selecting the options presented and the pros and cons of each option, is found in the Options Paper. Feedback from this consultation will guide the preparation of the Minerals Core Strategy.
- 1.3 The Minerals Core Strategy will set out the vision and policy governing minerals development in Somerset until 2028. It will address the need to contribute towards national, regional and local requirements for minerals together with social, environmental and economic considerations. It will present a clear picture of what minerals activity is acceptable to enable decisions about investment to be made by industry and to provide certainty for local communities about minerals development in their area. It will replace the existing Minerals Local Plan<sup>1</sup>. It will be the basis on which a decision is made to approve or refuse a mineral planning application.
- 1.4 There are several stages which must be adhered to in producing a Core Strategy. There is an opportunity to comment at each stage, but it will be more difficult to influence the Strategy in later stages. It is therefore very important that you respond to this consultation now if you are keen to influence local minerals policy.

## How to get involved?

- 1.5 You can respond to the consultation:
  - Online at **[www.somersetconsults.org.uk](http://www.somersetconsults.org.uk)**
  - By email – **[mineralsandwaste@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:mineralsandwaste@somerset.gov.uk)**
  - By post - Minerals and Waste Policy Team, PP C601c, Environment Directorate, County Hall, Taunton, TA1 4DY.
- 1.6 A copy of the questions can be downloaded from our website, or contact us by email (as above) or call 0845 345 9188 to request a paper copy.
- 1.7 The consultation is open until 12 February 2012. Please note that responses will be treated as in the public domain. If there is a concern relating to confidential supporting information for example, please get in touch with us.
- 1.8 The document covers a wide range of matters, not all of which will be of interest or relevant to all respondents. Even if you respond to a single question only, that response will be a valued contribution.

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<sup>1</sup> Somerset County Council. Somerset Minerals Local Plan 1997-2011. Adopted April 2004.

## 2 National minerals policy

- 2.1 The government sets out policies and guidance that mineral planning authorities must have regard to in preparing their local planning policy. National policy for minerals is set out in Minerals Policy Statement 1<sup>2</sup> and its supporting guidance notes. The twelve national objectives for minerals planning are listed in Appendix A.
- 2.2 National planning policy and guidance is currently under review. The government intends to replace a suite of national planning documents with a single slimmed-down National Planning Policy Framework<sup>3</sup>. The draft National Planning Policy Framework has been published and has been taken into account in developing this options paper where relevant.

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<sup>2</sup> Communities and Local Government. MPS1: Planning and Minerals. November 2006.

<sup>3</sup> Communities and Local Government. Draft National Planning Policy Framework, July 2011.



The questions can be found at [www.somersetconsults.org.uk](http://www.somersetconsults.org.uk)  
If you would like an electronic or paper copy of these questions please email [mineralsandwaste@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:mineralsandwaste@somerset.gov.uk) or call 0845 345 9188.

## 3 Somerset's mineral resources

- 3.1 Somerset County Council is the Minerals Planning Authority for the whole of Somerset, excluding Exmoor National Park.
- 3.2 Somerset produces 3 main mineral types at present:
- Aggregates – Sales of aggregates extracted in Somerset have totalled around 10 to 12 million tonnes per year recently. The majority is extracted from quarries in the East Mendip Hills. Quarries are also located in the Mendip Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and close to Bridgwater. Relatively minor quantities of sand and gravel are worked on the Devon border.
  - Building stone - Variety of stones and stone products to meet local need. Quarries tend to be quite small and are spread across the county.
  - Peat – Incorporated into horticultural products with varying proportions of imported peats and non-peat alternatives. Takes place in an area to the west of Glastonbury on the Levels and Moors.
- 3.3 The location of Somerset's minerals activity is shown in Figure 1 in Appendix B.
- 3.4 Aggregates production in the Mendip Hills provided direct and indirect employment to approximately 1,400 people in 2009<sup>4</sup>. The building stone and peat operations are much smaller scale, but are nevertheless of importance locally, particularly because of their rural location.
- 3.5 Transport of minerals is probably the most noticeable of impacts on local communities. All building stones and peat products are transported by road. Around 50% of crushed rock aggregate is transported by rail from two rail-linked quarries in the East Mendips, largely to serve the South East and London construction market.

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<sup>4</sup> Brian Perry, MQP. Employment and Financial Benefits of Quarrying in the Mendips. 25/01/2011.

# 4 Vision and objectives

## Vision for mineral extraction in Somerset

To ensure sustainable supply and use of minerals to meet society's needs without unacceptable detriment to Somerset's environment or communities.

## Plan objectives

**Objective A:** To ensure that Somerset is able to provide an adequate and steady supply of minerals in accordance with government guidance in order to contribute to national, regional and local requirements within the limits set by the environment.

**Objective B:** To protect Somerset's residents from impacts on human health associated with minerals extraction and transportation whilst recognising the benefits of the minerals industry, including provision of jobs.

**Objective C:** To protect the natural and historic environment of Somerset from impacts associated with minerals extraction and transportation recognising the potential for increased conflicts of interest due to climate change, particularly on the water environment, and opportunities for positive land use change in the long term.

**Objective D:** To promote the efficient production and use of primary minerals, together with the minimisation of waste, increased substitution of alternative materials, and appropriate timing of release of reserves thereby reducing the impact of mineral production on climate change and protecting finite resources.

**Objective E:** To reduce the impacts from minerals transportation on local communities and the climate by maximising opportunity for mineral movement by rail or water.

**Objective F:** To seek a positive contribution from the minerals industry whilst sites are operational in terms of improved carbon management and ongoing and final site restoration incorporating environmental and community enhancements such as, biodiversity, geo-diversity, landscape, recreation and access.

**Objective G:** To bring together the minerals industry and local communities to identify and implement suitable reclamation schemes at dormant or abandoned mineral workings that are problematic and unlikely to work again, for the benefit of local communities or the environment.

**Objective H:** To avoid the unnecessary sterilisation of valuable mineral resources by other types of development.

**Question 1: Do you agree with the vision and objectives?**

# 5 Aggregates

- 5.1 Aggregates are the most commonly extracted and used construction materials in the UK and are an essential part of the economy, critical for both on-going maintenance of infrastructure and new development including houses, schools, flood defences and roads.
- 5.2 Minerals can only be worked where they occur. There is a mismatch between where aggregates are worked and where they are needed, therefore large quantities of aggregates are moved by road, rail and water locally and around the country.
- 5.3 Somerset is the second largest aggregate producing county in the country. It contains two rail-linked sites which supply the South East and London. The Carboniferous limestone of the Mendip Hills is recognised as a strategic resource of aggregates of national importance.

## Managed aggregate supply

- 5.4 For the last 30 years or so supply has been managed by predicting national need for primary land-won aggregates after taking into account supply of alternative aggregates, such as recycled demolition waste, and marine dredged supplies. The land-won need is split into regional supply blocks and further separated into individual mineral planning authority areas. The current aggregate apportionment for the South West for the period 2005-2020 is 498 million tonnes.
- 5.5 Somerset's crushed rock contribution to the South West total amounts to 215 million tonnes which equates to a provision of 13.4 million tonnes each year (known as the sub-regional apportionment). This is slightly less than Somerset's apportionment in the existing Minerals Local Plan.
- 5.6 Somerset's sand and gravel apportionment is included with that of Devon and Cornwall. The shared total for 2005 to 2020 is 15 million tonnes.



Further information on the managed aggregate supply and the South West apportionments can be found in Chapter 5 and Table 1 of the Minerals Options Paper.

## Landbank

- 5.7 Because aggregates are so fundamental to our economy and quality of life, national policy requires mineral planning authorities to ensure there are enough reserves to meet the needs of the construction industry. A minimum landbank of 7 years supply for sand and gravel and 10 years for crushed rock is recommended in Minerals Policy Statement 1 which reflects the time it takes to develop new areas of working. The landbank is the total reserves with planning permission that can be worked now.

# 5 Aggregates

## Crushed rock landbank – how big should it be?

- 5.8 Somerset's landbank of permitted reserves for crushed rock is sizeable; 350 million tonnes which is sufficient for around 25 to 30 years. It is much bigger than the 10 years minimum required by national policy. There are concerns about over-supply leading to wasteful use of a finite resource, and potential environmental impacts of granting permission for reserves to be worked over many decades.
- 5.9 The landbank is a tool to help protect against insufficient supplies. Preventing additions to the landbank can have consequences for individual sites and supply to particular markets, even when there seems to be more than enough. Many factors need to be borne in mind when considering how large the landbank should be and under what circumstances additional reserves should be permitted or resisted.
- 5.10 The size of the landbank issue was raised through the Aggregates Issues Paper. Consultation responses varied from 10 years, i.e. the minimum, to 20 years throughout the plan period, i.e. a total of 35 years worth of reserves (15 year plan period plus 20 still in hand at the end). It was generally accepted that given the importance of Somerset for national supply, a landbank larger than the minimum of 10 years could be reasonable.
- 5.11 To address need for additional crushed-rock reserves during the Minerals Core Strategy plan period, preferred sites could be identified based on minerals industry proposals for new reserves. However, several sites are known to have the potential to extend through deepening or lateral extensions. If the additional reserves required during this plan period are limited, applications could be determined in accordance with national policy and policies in the Core Strategy without identifying preferred sites now.

### Issue A1: How big should the crushed rock landbank be?

**Option a:** Additional reserves should be identified now to ensure sufficient reserves remain at the end of the plan period to supply a further 15 years\*.

**Option b:** Additional reserves should not be identified now. Policy will be included in the plan to allow further reserves to be secured, if necessary, towards the end of the plan period to ensure 15 years\* supply is maintained.

\* 15 years is used as an example. You may think 10 or 20 years or more is more appropriate.

**Question 2: Which option do you support for Issue A1?**

**Question 3: What are the advantages and disadvantages of identifying preferred areas for future permissions in the Core Strategy?**

# 5 Aggregates

## Additions to the aggregates landbank

- 5.12 The landbank is an indicator of when new permissions are likely to be needed and is a tool used to give confidence in future supply. However, unforeseen circumstances can affect the overall landbank provision or production capacity and ability of the industry to respond to market demands including major projects.
- 5.13 National policy requires consideration to be given to the need for minerals that can't be provided by existing permitted reserves. Even if the landbank is excessive proposals must be considered if they can supply that need. National policy does not define what is excessive although the term is included in national Minerals Policy Guidance 1.
- 5.14 At a local level policy is written to enable planning officers to decide when a minerals extraction proposal is acceptable and planning permission should be granted. Consultation identified that guidance on how much additional reserve should be permitted in a single proposal over and above an excessive landbank would be helpful.

### **Issue A2: If additional reserves are needed for a demand that cannot be met from existing reserves, how much more should be permitted?**

**Option a:** The quantity of additional reserves is irrelevant as long as the environmental and local community impacts can be mitigated or are not significant. A proposal should be considered on its own merits.

**Option b:** When the landbank is already sufficient any addition under exceptional circumstances should be limited, for example to 25 years supply, to meet the identified need only.

**Question 4: Which option do you support for Issue A2?**

**Question 5: How should an excessive landbank be defined?**



N.B. Further information explaining this issue can be found in Chapter 5 of the Options Paper.

# 5 Aggregates

## Maintaining local supply

- 5.15 The Minerals Local Plan includes policy which enables small additions to be made to the landbank where there is a significant benefit to the environment or local community. Without continuation of such a policy there is less opportunity to seek benefit for the local community or environment through quarry development, such as creation of an alternative access route, improved restoration schemes or revocation of dormant sites. It could also result in restricted local competition by disadvantaging the smaller supply sites.
- 5.16 Three quarries have been identified as strategic in an independent report commissioned by the Council; two rail-linked sites and one site supplying high quality surface road stone. These sites will find it easier to prove additional reserves are needed since there are limited suppliers of rail-linked aggregates and surface road-stone. It is possible that these sites could gain a market advantage for more general local aggregate supply because of additional reserves granted for strategic markets.
- 5.17 There is a risk that a landbank tied up in just a few sites can stifle competition. This is certainly a possibility in Somerset where the two rail linked quarries have a combined permitted equivalent annual output of 14 million tonnes which exceeds the permitted output of all the other aggregates quarries combined.
- 5.18 Reducing supply to only a very few sites can result in adverse environmental and social impacts including loss of jobs when smaller sites close, sterilising viable future reserves, and focusing impacts at a few sites. Additionally a lack of competition is likely to increase prices to consumers, in particular in the local market. However, it may also deliver benefits by concentrating supplies at sites with better access to the main roads and rail-links and completing and restoring sites more promptly.
- 5.19 Option a in Issue A3 fixes a limit on how much can be added to the landbank. A similar policy in the Local Plan sets the cap at no more than the most recent annual sales total. This is a variable figure but is around 10 to 12 million tonnes and is a very small addition for Somerset's largest quarries which could produce this much stone in less than two years. It is adequate for other sites in the county and typically represents 15 to 20 years supply.
- 5.20 Option b in Issue A3 still sets a limit but it accommodates the largest sites. Additions could be sizeable but could be fixed to ensure sites do not hold more than 25 years worth of supply for example. It provides the industry with flexibility to manage their business without having regard to the landbank and reserves at other sites. In the longer term it could result in a smaller but more flexible landbank.

# 5 Aggregates

## Issue A3: Maintaining local supply

**Option a:** Proposals will only be permitted if they result in significant benefits to local communities or the environment and do not significantly increase the size of the landbank.

**Option b:** Proposals will only be permitted if they result in significant benefits to the local community or the environment and are proportionate to the output at the relevant site.

**Option c:** There is no need to make provision for additions to the landbank when the landbank is excessive.

### Question 6: Which option do you support for Issue A3?



N.B. Further information explaining this issue can be found in Chapter 5 of the Options Paper.

## Dormant and abandoned sites

5.21 Dormant quarries have a planning permission but can't work until modern working conditions have been agreed. Responses to the Aggregate Issues Paper consultation highlighted the need for the Minerals Planning Authority to take a more proactive role in addressing the issue of dormant sites. It is also recognised that where a site owner is resistant to giving up a dormant permission it is difficult to make any progress in this regard.

5.22 The Minerals Planning Authority will work with the minerals industry, land owners, and other interested groups to find ways to resolving issues at problem sites identified by local communities.

5.23 The following dormant sites are considered unlikely to work again:

- Chelmscombe
- Emborough
- Lime Kiln Hill (West)
- Tadhill
- West Quantoxhead
- Cookswood
- Highcroft
- Stoke Lane
- Tor Hill



Further information and a list of dormant sites, considered unlikely to work again can be found in Table 3 and Chapter 5 of the Options Paper.

# 5 Aggregates

**Question 7:** Are there other sites that are unlikely to be worked again, or sites listed above which should be considered as viable for future working?

**Question 8:** Which former quarry sites (dormant or abandoned) are particularly problematic and why?

**Question 9:** For the sites that you are familiar with, what outcome would you like to see for each? Eg. Remove the risk of reopening, or restore for amenity or wildlife, or development such as housing?

## Sand and gravel

5.24 Somerset County Council's sand and gravel apportionment is included with Devon and Cornwall County Councils. To date Devon has supplied the bulk of the sand and gravel apportionment for the three counties. From 2019 Devon's Minerals Planning Authority has identified a shortfall. Devon has identified sites that will help to make up the shortfall and retain a spread of sites to reduce transport distances of sand and gravel. The sand and gravel site at Whiteball straddles the Somerset - Devon border and supplies aggregate into both counties.

5.25 Areas around Whiteball were identified in Somerset's Minerals Local Plan as having the potential for future minerals extraction. There may be other sites which should also be considered to help meet the shortfall. Three options are presented below to address the predicted shortfall in sand and gravel. You may support any combination or none of these options.

### Issue A4: How should we manage the shortfall in sand and gravel reserves?

**Option a:** Retain the Areas of Search and Preferred Areas around Whiteball to help meet the apportionment in conjunction with Devon.

**Option b:** Review potential Areas of Search or Preferred Areas through a call for sites from the minerals industry.

**Option c:** Criteria based policy approach for new sand and gravel reserves.

**Question 10: Which of the options do you support for Issue A4?**



N.B. Further information explaining this issue can be found in Chapter 5 of the Options Paper.

# 5 Aggregates

## Restoration of sites

- 5.26 Minerals development inevitably results in changes to the landscape. Careful site management, restoration and after-use has the potential to deliver social, environmental and economic benefits.
- 5.27 The delivery of habitat focused restoration schemes can play an important role in ecological network reconnection. Creating better and connected habitat is given support in the draft National Planning Policy Framework<sup>3</sup> enabling planning to contribute to the delivery of these aims. To contribute to this, conservation work and biodiversity need to be extended off site, beyond planning permission boundaries, as wildlife do not recognise these boundaries as well as development of habitat on formerly quarried land that compliments the environment beyond.
- 5.28 Clear prioritisation of ecologically focused mineral site restoration may be unreasonable as the framework of minerals planning policy allows Minerals Development Frameworks to support a broad range of potential after uses: amenity, geodiversity, industrial and other development. Guidance will be provided on preferred after-uses of individual sites isolated from other quarry operations. Depending on a site's scale and location a variety of after-uses may be suitable.
- 5.29 Within the East Mendips the intensity of quarrying, rural nature of the area and presence of a European nature designated site suggests it could be ideal for a landscape scale restoration strategy. Local landowners, conservation organisations and the minerals industry could work towards a single vision to maximise benefits of land-use change in the area.

### Issue A5: Restoration and after-use in the East Mendips

**Option a:** Restoration and after-use of quarry sites should be determined on a site by site basis.

**Option b:** Restoration should be determined by meeting criteria defined in an agreed long term strategic landscape scale restoration strategy for the East Mendips.

**Question 11: Which of the option do you support for Issue A5?**

**Question 12: What land uses do you think are particularly suitable for quarry after use?**

N.B: Consultation with the local community will form part of any new restoration proposals and/or strategies. Further information explaining this issue can be found in Chapter 5 of the Options Paper.

<sup>3</sup> Communities and Local Government. Draft National Planning Policy Framework. July 2011.

# 5 Aggregates

## Managing energy impacts

5.30 Aggregate quarrying is energy intensive and consequently reducing energy consumption and the industry's overall carbon footprint are important matters. Quarry operations should aim to be as energy efficient as possible and seek measures to offset or reduce the size of their carbon footprint. Renewable energy generation at quarry sites may be able to contribute to a reduction in carbon output.

### Issue A6: Renewable energy

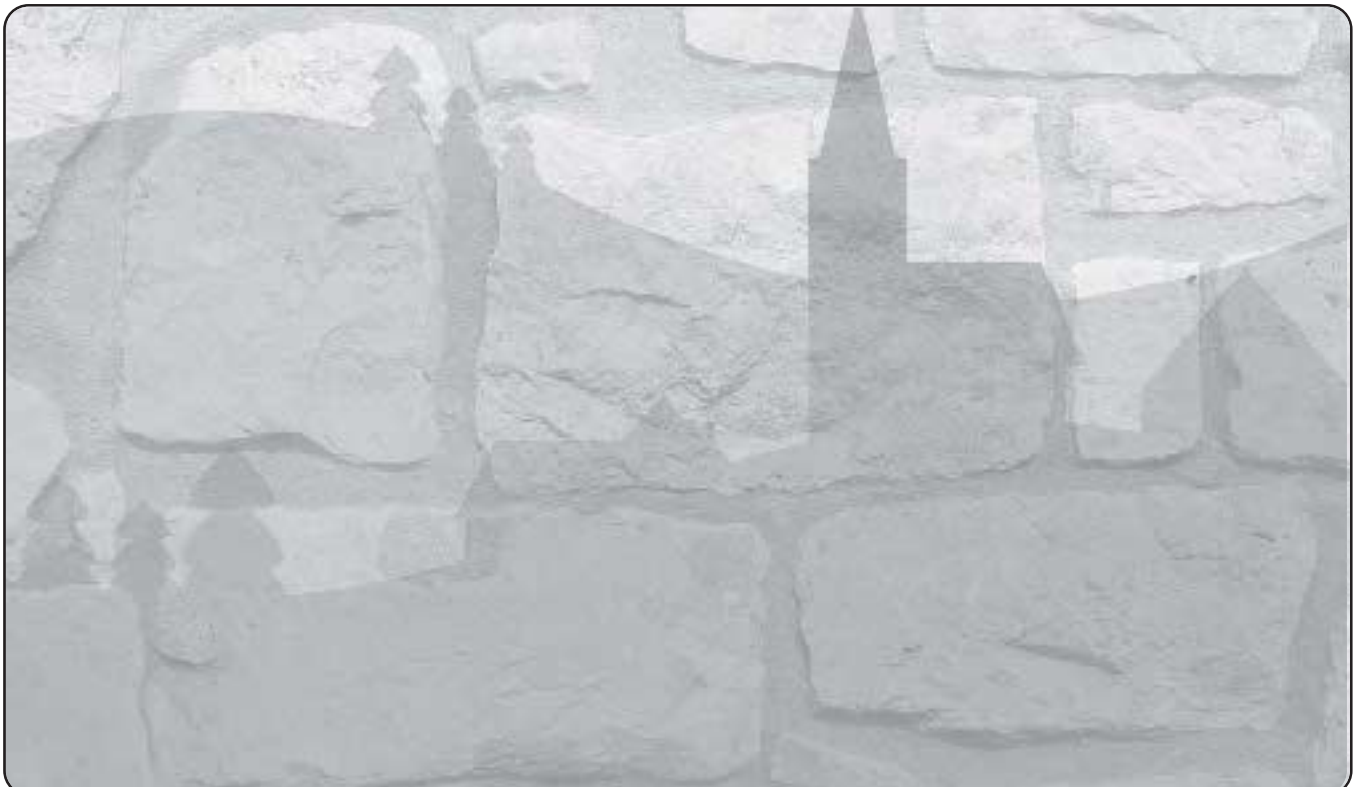
**Option a:** Renewable energy schemes should be encouraged where in conjunction with minerals operations to support carbon reduction.

**Option b:** Renewable energy schemes should be considered separately from a mineral application.

**Question 13:** Which option do you support for Issue A6?

**Question 14:** Are there any forms of renewable energy generation that you do not think should be supported?

**Question 15:** Are there any forms of renewable energy generation that are particularly suited to minerals working areas that should be supported?



# 6 Peat

## What is peat?

- 6.1 Peat is an organic material formed from the remains of vegetation growing in wet conditions. Dead vegetation accumulates and is compressed over thousands of years. Deposits of peat can gradually build up to depths of several metres.
- 6.2 Following extraction and processing peat is used primarily as a growing medium in horticulture and amateur gardening.

## Where is it worked?

- 6.3 The peat industry in Somerset has historically been based in the central Brue valley to the west of Glastonbury. This area has significant ecological value and contains a variety of environmental designations ranging from local to national and even international importance. The area also has substantial archaeological importance.
- 6.4 Somerset's peat workings have been concentrated into two areas, called Peat Production Zones, to constrain the impacts of peat extraction both on the environment and local communities. They are currently defined in the Minerals Local Plan and are shown in Figure 2 in Appendix B.

## National supply and demand for peat

- 6.5 Peat is used in growing media in two main markets; amateur gardeners and professional growers. Peat makes up around 73% of growing media products. Of this peat approximately 40% is English while 60% is imported, the majority from the Republic of Ireland. The remaining 27% is peat-alternatives including bark, composted green waste, coir, wood shavings and paper waste.
- 6.6 The government and various environmental organisations have been encouraging the development of reduced-peat and peat-free products and providing information to the growing media users on the damaging effects of peat extraction, with the aim of achieving a reduction on a voluntary rather than legislative basis.
- 6.7 The recently published Natural Environment White Paper<sup>6</sup> contains two peat-related targets:
  - Amateur gardening peat-free by 2020
  - Professional horticulture peat-free by 2030.
- 6.8 These targets are to be met through voluntary means with the support of a government task force. The peat-free aims are further reinforced in the draft National Planning Policy Framework which includes policy preventing planning authorities from permitting any new peat extraction. This policy is still draft but very clearly shows the government's direction of travel.

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<sup>6</sup> HM Government. The Natural Choice: securing the value of nature, June 2011.

# 6 Peat

## **Somerset peat sales and reserves**

- 6.9 We have not received data on sales, imports, and reserves from the industry to date. Consequently we will rely on data from the Office for National Statistics which indicate that there has been a fall in sales of Somerset extracted peat between 2000 and 2009. This does not necessarily mean the sales of growing media from Somerset factories has declined. The fall in Somerset extracted peat may have been offset by a rise in imported peat and alternatives.
- 6.10 The number of peat producers in Somerset reduced substantially from over 30 producers 20 years ago to the majority of peat extraction being carried out by four companies today.
- 6.11 The County Council as the Minerals Planning Authority has estimated reserves using geographical and geological data together with assumptions about the way sites are worked. Reserves are estimated to be well over 1 million cubic metres of saleable peat. This includes 415,000 cubic metres (m<sup>3</sup>) of peat reserves contained in the recently permitted Cradlebridge site.

## **Landbank policy for peat**

- 6.12 Current national policy requires appropriate levels of permitted reserves of minerals to be maintained, including peat. Whilst maintaining an adequate and steady supply of minerals is important, conversely over-supply is recognised as potentially harming to sustainability objectives; in particular prudent use of natural resources and maximising the use of alternatives before considering the extraction of primary materials should be considered. Excessive permissions may also risk legacy sites of unrestored peat workings should the demand for the mineral drop rapidly, a particular risk for peat given the government's peat-free stance.
- 6.13 A landbank policy in effect would mean that acceptable applications for peat extraction are permitted only when the landbank has fallen below agreed limits. Assuming the government's peat free targets are successful there will be a need for around 700,000 m<sup>3</sup> of peat during this plan period. Currently there is sufficient peat to meet anticipated demand and there will be no need to permit more.
- 6.14 If the government's peat-free target is not successful and demand continues, a landbank policy provides the flexibility to permit more reserves. If peat demand continues but English peat reserves are unable to meet the demand, peat imports may rise with negative impacts:
- on local communities with rising traffic;
  - on the climate with increases in carbon for the same product; and
  - exported environmental damage.
- 6.15 If the draft National Planning Policy Framework is adopted with policy preventing extensions to peat sites or new peat sites, a landbank policy for peat will not be an option in the Core Strategy.

## 6 Peat

### Issue P1: Establishing a landbank for peat

**Option a:** A suitably sized landbank will be maintained to ensure adequate provision of peat whilst avoiding over supply.

**Option b:** No further peat permissions should be granted.

**Question 16: Which option do you support for Issue P1?**

**Question 17: If a landbank policy is developed what should we consider in calculating the size of the landbank?**



N.B. Further information explaining this issue can be found in Chapter 6 of the Options Paper.

### Peat Production Zones

- 6.16 Via the peat issues paper we asked whether removing the Peat Production Zones could provide benefits. The consensus was that they have been effective in constraining the impacts of peat extraction.
- 6.17 Areas with potential for future peat workings were identified in the Minerals Local Plan both within and adjacent to the two Peat Production Zones (see Figure 2, Appendix B). Some respondents to the issues paper suggested it would be simpler to include all these areas within the Peat Production Zones to avoid confusion.
- 6.18 Based on available data there are sufficient peat reserves to meet anticipated demand for this plan period. However, if a landbank policy is included in the Core Strategy it may be appropriate to identify further areas for future extraction depending on current reserves. If areas for future extraction are to be identified this will be through consultation with local communities and the peat industry. Sites with potential to harm European designated wildlife sites
- 6.19 A number of sites with permission for peat extraction have been identified as having the potential to negatively impact on the Somerset Levels and Moors Special Protection Area, a European nature designation. Policy for peat could be developed that would enable the peat industry to voluntarily revoke these permissions. In return there would be a presumption in favour of new permissions in less sensitive areas. In order for this option to be financially viable there may be pressure to grant permission for greater volumes of peat in the replacement site that is lost through modification or revocation of the existing permission.

## 6 Peat

- 6.20 There is a legal obligation on the County Council to modify or revoke permissions that will negatively impact on European designated nature sites. Modification or revocation that results in a loss of asset value is liable for compensation. Compensation would be paid from the public purse. Option a for Issue P2 provides a solution that will reduce the cost to tax payers of protecting high quality nature areas although some of the environmental impact is transferred to an alternative site and there may be an increase in carbon output.

### **Issue P2: Sites with potential to impact on the Somerset Levels and Moors Special Protection Area.**

**Option a:** Permissions that will have a detrimental effect on the Somerset Levels and Moors Special Protection Area can be voluntarily revoked and offset by grant of permission at an alternative less sensitive site. The replacement site will still have to be acceptable in planning terms.

**Option b:** Peat permissions that will have a detrimental effect on the Somerset Levels and Moors Special Protection Areas should be reviewed and permissions modified or revoked as appropriate. Loss of asset will have to be compensated from the public purse.

### **Question 18: Which option do you support for Issue P2?**



N.B. Further information explaining this issue can be found in Chapter 5 of the Options Paper.

### **Transport**

- 6.21 Large lorries are used by the growing media industry in Somerset for importing materials to incorporate with Somerset's peat, and exporting the final products. The roads in the vicinity of the peat processing factories are small and not suited to use by HGVs.
- 6.22 To reduce impacts a transport plan will be required to accompany any planning applications which will identify vehicle routes, the frequency of vehicle movements, vehicle types and also demonstrate how any harmful effects will be avoided on the local highway network. Transport impacts will also be considered through a process of review of old minerals permissions which brings working practices up to modern standards and takes place every 15-years. Planning conditions or obligations will be used where possible to control escalation of impacts that could arise from increased extraction rates of Somerset dug peat. Planning conditions are already commonly applied to permissions for extraction of building stone or aggregates.

# 6 Peat

## Reclamation

- 6.23 The reclamation of former peat extraction sites has previously been a concern due to relatively little restoration having been carried out historically. Reclamation of sites has improved since the introduction of environmental legislation to raise standards at sites with old minerals permissions. Extensive reclamation to nature conservation has occurred with large areas of former peat extraction by nature conservation organisations following the withdrawal of a major peat producer from Somerset.
- 6.24 Three potential options for site restoration and after-use following peat extraction are provided in the Minerals Local Plan. These options are:
- Activities that promote nature conservation and enhance wildlife conservation.
  - Agriculture or forestry use that does not conflict with the maintenance and promotion of the wildlife interest.
  - Areas for land and water based activities which do not conflict with the wildlife interest and quiet nature of the area.
- 6.25 These restoration options were included in a framework map within the Minerals Local Plan that identified broad areas where restoration types would be most suitable. By locating similar restoration types in particular areas it was thought that a greater potential benefit could be achieved and impacts controlled.
- 6.26 Water management in terms of flood protection, flood defence and water storage are issues which have increased in importance in recent years because of concerns around climate change and resource depletion. There may be forms of restoration which could be effective in addressing some of these issues.



## 6 Peat

### Issue P3: Reclamation Framework

**Option a:** The framework for reclamation included in the Minerals Local Plan is still relevant and should continue to guide the type of restoration and after-use of sites

**Option b:** A framework for reclamation allows the industry and community to work towards a positive landscape and range of after-uses in the area, but the Framework in the Local Plan needs to be revised to reflect changes in the industry and opportunities such as biodiversity ambitions of the Natural Environment White Paper

**Option c:** Restoration options should not be prescriptive and should allow for a variety of beneficial land uses. It should be the responsibility of the developer to demonstrate the benefits of the restoration and after-use scheme.

**Question 19: Which option do you support for Issue P3**

**Question 20: Which after uses should be included within a restoration framework and why?**



N.B. Further information explaining this issue can be found in Chapter 5 of the Options Paper.

### Carbon

- 6.27 Peatlands cover a small proportion of the Earth's surface but they comprise a large accumulation of organic matter and are important carbon stores. Carbon is released from peatlands by a variety of mechanisms including erosion, drainage and peat extraction. The protection and preservation of peatlands reduces potential carbon loss and helps mitigate against the effects of climate change.
- 6.28 Certain types of site restoration, such as reed beds, have the potential to provide new carbon storage and could lessen the industry's carbon footprint.
- 6.29 The peat industry also produces carbon emissions through other activities including in energy and fuel used in peat extraction, processing and transportation. Measures to reduce carbon emissions include transport improvements and reduction in energy consumption.
- 6.30 Certain types of site restoration, such as reed beds depending on their end use, have the potential to provide new carbon storage and could lessen the industry's carbon footprint. This would be a topic for consultation during the development of a revised framework for reclamation should a revised framework be the preferred option under Issue P3.

# 7 Building stone

- 7.1 The use of the term building stone in this paper refers to all natural stone products (as detailed in MPS1 and the MPS1 practice guide), including products such as architectural masonry (dimension stone), walling stone, roofing stone, paving etc.
- 7.2 Building stones are a key part of the economic minerals sector in Somerset and their use is reflected in the distinctive character and the built heritage of the County.
- 7.3 Building stones are used on existing buildings for restoration, conservation and extensions as well as for new building work. The use of appropriate natural building stone is a material factor in maintaining the local character of buildings in the County. It is therefore important to ensure that an adequate supply of building stones continues to be available so that the character of the County is maintained. Many building stone types are no longer quarried within the County. However, there may be a need for a supply of these materials in the future for repair and conservation of historic buildings and monuments.
- 7.4 Building stones are usually extracted in small scale quarries with outputs amounting to only a few thousand tonnes per year and without the requirement for blasting, unlike crushed rock aggregate production. As such the associated impacts are more easily managed with appropriate planning conditions.

## **Current planning policy on building stone**

- 7.5 As demonstrated through current national policy (see Options Paper, Chapter 7) there is a clear need to ensure that local distinctiveness remains a strong aspect of the built and historic environment in Somerset.

## **Demand for and supply of building stones**

- 7.6 The future level of demand for building stones is difficult to quantify with any certainty due to the small scale and unpredictable nature of individual building projects. It is not possible to determine whether conservation works or new building works constitute the greatest area of demand. It is clear however that there is an ongoing demand for a wide variety of building stones for conservation and new building works.
- 7.7 The ability to supply local stone to meet local demand would contribute greatly to the delivery of policy guidance (see Chapter 7 in the Minerals Options Paper). There was strong support from respondents to the Building Stones Issues consultation for the provision of local stone to meet local demand.
- 7.8 Without a continuing supply of natural building materials it is impossible to ensure that the built heritage of the County is maintained and enhanced to a high standard. Imported building stone, reconstituted stone or the wrong type of local stone may become increasingly used in building works unless there is a suitable source of supply within Somerset.

# 7 Building stone

## **Quarrying of building stones**

- 7.9 The quarrying of building stones from acceptable locations is supported to ensure that material is available to maintain the built heritage and character of Somerset. Quarrying of building stones can be undertaken as extensions to existing sites, the reopening of old sites or the opening of new sites.
- 7.10 Respondents from the Building Stones Issues consultation generally agreed that site proposals for building stone quarries should be viewed on their merits and assessed against alternatives, and that policy should give no form of preference to particular proposals (e.g. extensions – lateral or deepening, old sites or new sites).
- 7.11 In order to increase the number of building stone quarries, albeit small ones, there has to be new workings permitted, either at greenfield sites or at former sites. There may, however, be economic factors that mean that – even with the support of the Core Strategy for new supplies of building stone in areas currently lacking – applications for new sites are not received.

## **Increasing supply of building stone for local need**

- 7.12 The cost and time involved in the preparation of a planning application for building stone extraction, in comparison to the level of extraction that takes place upon approval, can be substantial. This is considered to be a factor in the decline in the number of building stone quarries operating within the County.
- 7.13 Guiding applicants with regards to building stone quarry proposals so that they can have confidence to develop and proposals and invest time and money in gaining permission may help to increase the diversity of building stone supply. Increasing the range of activities that can take place as part of a building stone operation may tip the balance from an uneconomic operation to a viable one. Other activities that could be considered include small scale aggregate production for ornamental use, supply of surplus waste materials for agricultural tracks, reconstituted stone products, storage and reworking of salvaged natural stone, and products developed for sale beyond the local market, such as kitchen worktops or fireplaces. It will be critical to develop policy that continues to place a high level of protection on the materials that are required to maintain Somerset's local character and ensures high quality materials are reserved for high quality uses. Additional output must not result in poor quality restoration or unacceptable impact on the local community or environment.

## 7 Building stone

### Issue BS1: Local stone for local demand

**Option a:** Affirm the importance of building stone for maintaining local character and develop policy in support of new building stone quarries where a need for the stone can be demonstrated.

**Option b:** Consider activities and new products that could be developed at building stone quarries to enhance economic viability.

**Question 21:** Which options do you support for Issue BS1?

**Question 22:** Which building stone types are in short supply or unavailable in Somerset? Please provide specific examples, if known, of inappropriate stone use in sensitive locations.

**Question 23:** What additional activity do you think could provide additional revenue and could be compatible with a building stone quarry?

**Question 24:** Which factors should be considered by the Minerals Planning Authority in determining whether additional activities are appropriate?



See Chapter 7 of the Options paper for further information on the options posed for Issue BS1.

# 8 Energy Minerals

## Coal

8.1 Somerset's geology includes Coal Measures. In the past coal has been locally mined. We do not expect to see coal mining or shallow coal workings reactivated in Somerset in the foreseeable future. It is nevertheless important to conserve energy minerals for future generations since energy provision is so important to quality of life. This is covered in the next section on Minerals Safeguarding.

## Oil and gas

8.2 Off-shore oil and gas production is expected to decline significantly over the next few years and so there has been a greater emphasis on developing on-land supplies, in addition to encouraging non-fossil fuel based energy technologies.

8.3 The Department for Energy and Climate Change (DECC) manages the release of licences which give exclusive rights for exploration and extraction of oil and gas resources within a defined area. The licence does not provide an exemption from other legal/regulatory requirements, such as any need to gain access rights from landowners, health and safety regulations, or planning permission from relevant local authorities. A total of three licences have been issued which are located entirely or partially in Somerset.

8.4 There are three distinct phases of development (as follows). Communication with the Minerals Planning Authority will be encouraged at all stages, including when activities that don't need planning permission are to be carried out.

- Exploration: In the first instance this may mean seismic surveys which may not need planning permission, subject to certain conditions. All borehole drilling associated with exploration for petroleum must have planning permission. Liaison with the Environment Agency will also be required to agree methods to protect water supplies from pollution and to ensure safe disposal of drilling mud and cuttings.
- Appraisal: If exploration indicates there are resources present, further testing is carried out to establish their extent and viability of exploitation. At this stage proposals for wells will be considered for their long-term suitability and potential environmental effects since these wells may be used for production.
- Production: Development of gathering stations where petroleum products are separated, purified and treated, and any pipelines, will need careful planning to minimise impacts on communities and the environment.

8.5 The Core Strategy will include policies that distinguish between these three phases of development. Environmental and other constraints on production and processing sites within areas licensed for oil and gas exploration and production will be identified. Policies will identify the range of impacts that could result from oil and gas exploration and production, such as noise, traffic, timing and method of flaring of gas, and will highlight the need for conditions to be imposed on planning permissions to manage such impacts.

# 9 Mineral Safeguarding Areas

- 9.1 Mineral resources are finite and can only be worked where they naturally occur. Sustainable minerals policy requires that we manage these natural resources carefully to ensure there are sufficient supplies for future generations.
- 9.2 One of the purposes of the planning system is to balance the various competing demands on land use. Safeguarding mineral resources simply means that the presence of mineral resources is flagged up when an application for development that could prevent minerals extraction is received. All the usual planning considerations are taken into account, plus the importance of the mineral resource, when deciding whether to grant permission and under what conditions. This does not mean that non-mineral development will not be permitted.
- 9.3 Mineral planning authorities are required to define Mineral Safeguarding Areas in local development documents. The Mineral Safeguarding Areas should contain resources that are of sufficient economic or conservation value to warrant protection for future generations. It is very important to note there is no presumption that resources defined in Mineral Safeguarding Areas will be worked.
- 9.4 MPS1 also requires the safeguarding of existing and potential sites for mineral transport and storage such as wharves and railheads and for production facilities for concrete, asphalt and for alternative materials.

### Which minerals are to be safeguarded?

- 9.5 Consideration needs to be given to which mineral resources may be of economic importance in the future. A variety of minerals have been extracted in Somerset in the past, however a relatively limited range is currently worked. It is proposed that for the purposes of safeguarding all minerals currently worked should be safeguarded for the future.

Currently worked minerals proposed to be safeguarded	
Carboniferous limestone (consider separately aggregate and industrial-grade resources)	Forest Marble
Silurian andesite	Cornbrash
Blue Lias	Ham Hill Stone
White Lias	Sand and gravel (recent and Permo-Triassic)
Budleigh Salterton Pebble Beds	Peat
Inferior Oolite	

## 9 Mineral Safeguarding Areas

- 9.6 In addition it is proposed that certain minerals that have not been worked for a while, but that may become economic again will also be safeguarded, for example shallow coal and brick clay.

**Question 25: Do you agree with the mineral types listed for safeguarding? Are there any others you would include?**



See Chapter 9 of the Options paper for further information on the above minerals.

### Defining the boundary for each mineral to be safeguarded

- 9.7 A good starting point is the British Geological Survey resource map for Somerset. The Mineral Safeguarding Areas should be refined where better geological data are available. Additionally, the minerals industry will be consulted independently of this consultation paper to work on the final resource boundaries for safeguarding since they may have additional information relating to resource and their economic viability that can help to refine the boundaries.
- 9.8 Aspects to be considered include whether to exclude urban areas and areas with designations that are not generally compatible with mineral working, such as conservation or landscape designations.
- 9.9 It may be necessary to add a buffer to a Minerals Safeguarding Area to protect both mineral resources from sterilisation and future residents from unwanted impacts. The buffer will depend on the mineral type and therefore extraction method. Current policy in the Minerals Local Plan allows minimum buffers around existing minerals workings, as follows:

<b>Mineral Working</b>	<b>Minimum Buffer</b>
Peat sites and building stone quarries	100m
Low-output aggregate quarries	200m
Higher-output aggregate quarries	400m

**Question 26: Are the buffers listed above appropriate?**

If no, please propose alternative buffer distances with justification.

# 9 Mineral Safeguarding Areas

## How does safeguarding work?

- 9.10 Mineral Consultation Areas which match the Mineral Safeguarding Area boundaries are included within the Minerals Core Strategy and district councils' local development frameworks, together with at least one appropriate policy in the core strategy requiring the Minerals Planning Authority to be consulted granting permission for development that could sterilise mineral resource.
- 9.11 In addition Mineral Consultation Areas are also to be used to protect non-mineral activities such as wharves, railheads and production facilities.

## Wharves, railheads, production facilities and alternative materials

- 9.12 Within Somerset there are currently two railheads, one at Torr Works and one at Whatley Quarry in the Mendips. Also Dunball Wharf, north of Bridgwater, is used to land marine sand for construction uses and imported peat. Dunball Wharf is safeguarded in the existing Minerals Local Plan.
- 9.13 Production facilities for concrete products and reprocessing alternative materials such as construction and demolition waste may take place alongside minerals extraction as part of a minerals permission. These sites will be safeguarded through the safeguarding minerals process. Where such sites are located independently of a minerals permission they will be safeguarded.
- 9.14 It is proposed to safeguard the two railheads and the wharf in the Minerals Core Strategy. Proposals for additional wharves or railheads that come to light via this options consultation will also be considered for protection.

### Issue MSA1: Safeguarding minerals for future use

Previous consultation on safeguarding via the Aggregates Issues Consultation Paper highlighted the technical nature of safeguarding minerals and associated facilities.

The Minerals Planning Authority will define the mineral safeguarding areas and mineral consultation areas based on the requirements of MPS1, the accompanying guide and best practice (BGS, 2007) and discussions with the minerals industry. Areas identified for safeguarding will be included in the pre-submission Core Strategy and will be consulted on in detail at that stage.

### Question 27: Do you have concerns about the Minerals Planning Authority identifying areas for safeguarding?



See Chapter 9 of the Options paper for further information on Minerals Safeguarding Areas.

# 10 Development management policies

- 10.1 The Minerals Core Strategy should not repeat national policy and should be locally distinctive. The recent draft National Planning Policy Framework proposes to replace a raft of national planning policy with a very brief document. The draft supports sustainable development and continues to highlight key aspects of minerals policy set out in MPS1 presently. However, more detailed policy will be required at a local level to assist planning officers in determining planning applications and what is sustainable following the removal of the existing detailed national policy.
- 10.2 The following list outlines the topics that Somerset County Council feel requires local policy guidance for minerals in Somerset in light of the draft National Planning Policy Framework:
- Minerals operations and potential impacts located in or neighbouring to AONBs.
  - Minerals operations affecting Sites of Special Scientific Interest or National Nature Reserves.
  - Mineral operations in local designations for example: County Wildlife Sites, Regionally Important Geological or Geomorphological Sites.
  - Mineral operations and potential impacts on biodiversity/geodiversity.
  - Minerals operations and potential impacts in areas of important landscape character, namely areas outside of World, European and National designations.
  - Protecting the Historic Environment, including, Listed Buildings, areas of known and proven archaeology, Conservation Areas, Historic Parks, Gardens and Battlefields. and Scheduled Ancient Monuments.
  - Mineral operations in areas of best and most versatile agricultural land.
  - Protection of Public Rights of Way.
  - Restoration and after use of minerals sites.
  - Mineral operations and traffic – transport assessments.
  - Mineral operations and effects on the stability of neighbouring land and properties.
  - Protection of water resources.
  - Sites for the disposal of minerals wastes.
  - Cumulative impact of mineral operations.

**Question 28: Do you agree or disagree with the above list? Please state why?**

# Appendices

# Appendix A – National minerals planning objectives

Overarching national policy for minerals is set out in Minerals Policy Statement 1 (MPS1) and its supporting guidance notes. The Minerals Core Strategy must be in conformity with MPS1 and reflect the objectives in this national guidance. The twelve national objectives for minerals planning are listed below as they appear in MPS1 :

- 1 to ensure, so far as practicable, the prudent, efficient and sustainable use of minerals and recycling of suitable materials, thereby minimising the requirement for new primary extraction;
- 2 to conserve mineral resources through appropriate domestic provision and timing of supply;
- 3 to safeguard mineral resources as far as possible;
- 4 to prevent or minimise production of mineral waste;
- 5 to secure working practices which prevent or reduce as far as possible, impacts on the environment and human health arising from the extraction, processing, management or transportation of minerals;
- 6 to protect internationally and nationally designated areas of landscape value and nature conservation importance from minerals development, other than in exceptional circumstances;
- 7 to secure adequate and steady supplies of minerals needed by society and the economy within the limits set by the environment, assessed through sustainability appraisal, without irreversible damage;
- 8 to maximise the benefits and minimise the impacts of minerals operations over their full life cycle;
- 9 to promote the sustainable transport of minerals by rail, sea or inland waterways;
- 10 to protect and seek to enhance the overall quality of the environment once extraction has ceased, through high standards of restoration, and to safeguard the long-term potential of land for a wide range of after-uses;
- 11 to secure closer integration of minerals planning policy with national policy on sustainable construction and waste management and other applicable environmental protection legislation; and
- 12 to encourage the use of high quality materials for the purposes for which they are most suitable.



# Appendix B - Figures

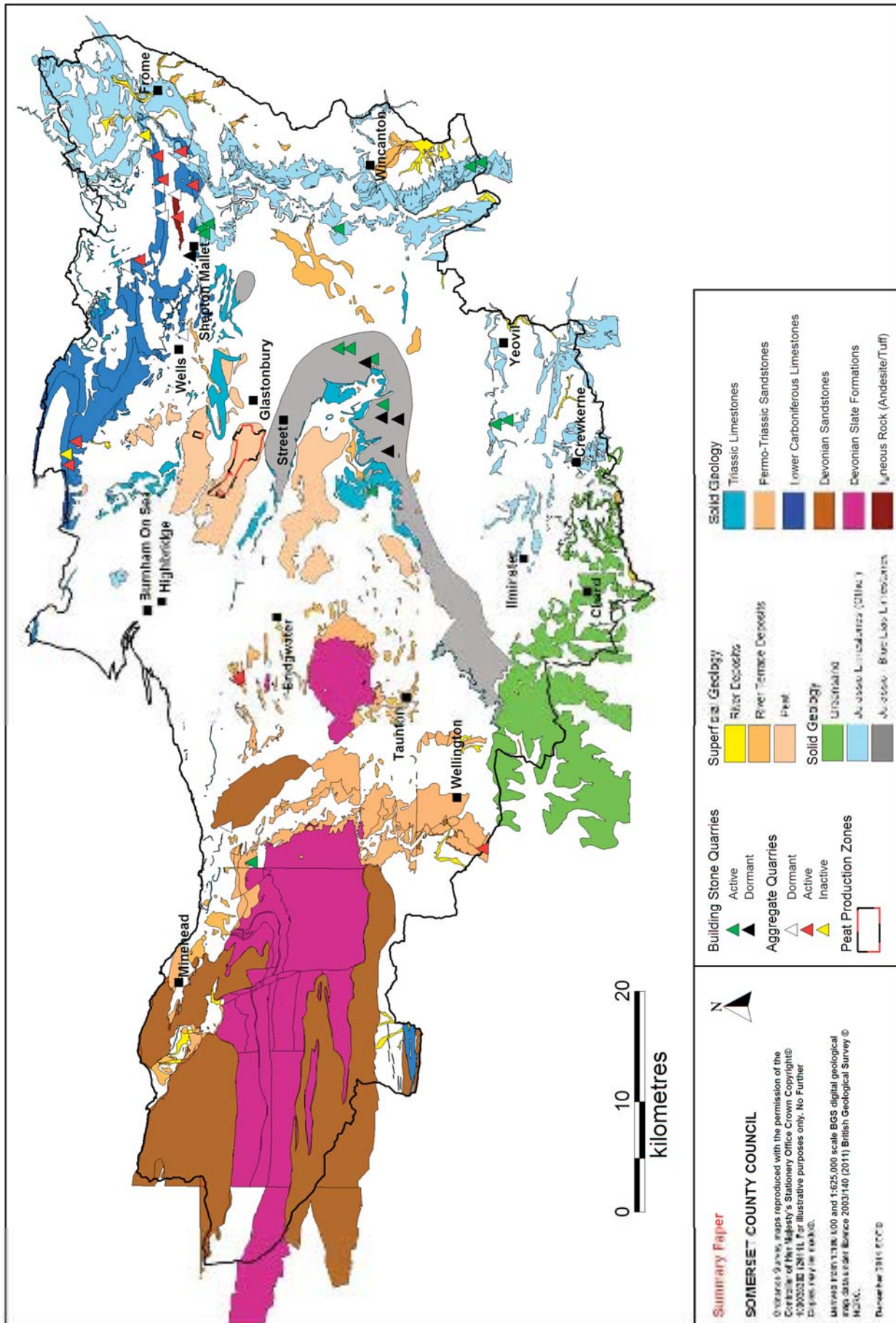


Figure 1. Location of Somerset's mineral activity.



# Appendix B - Figures

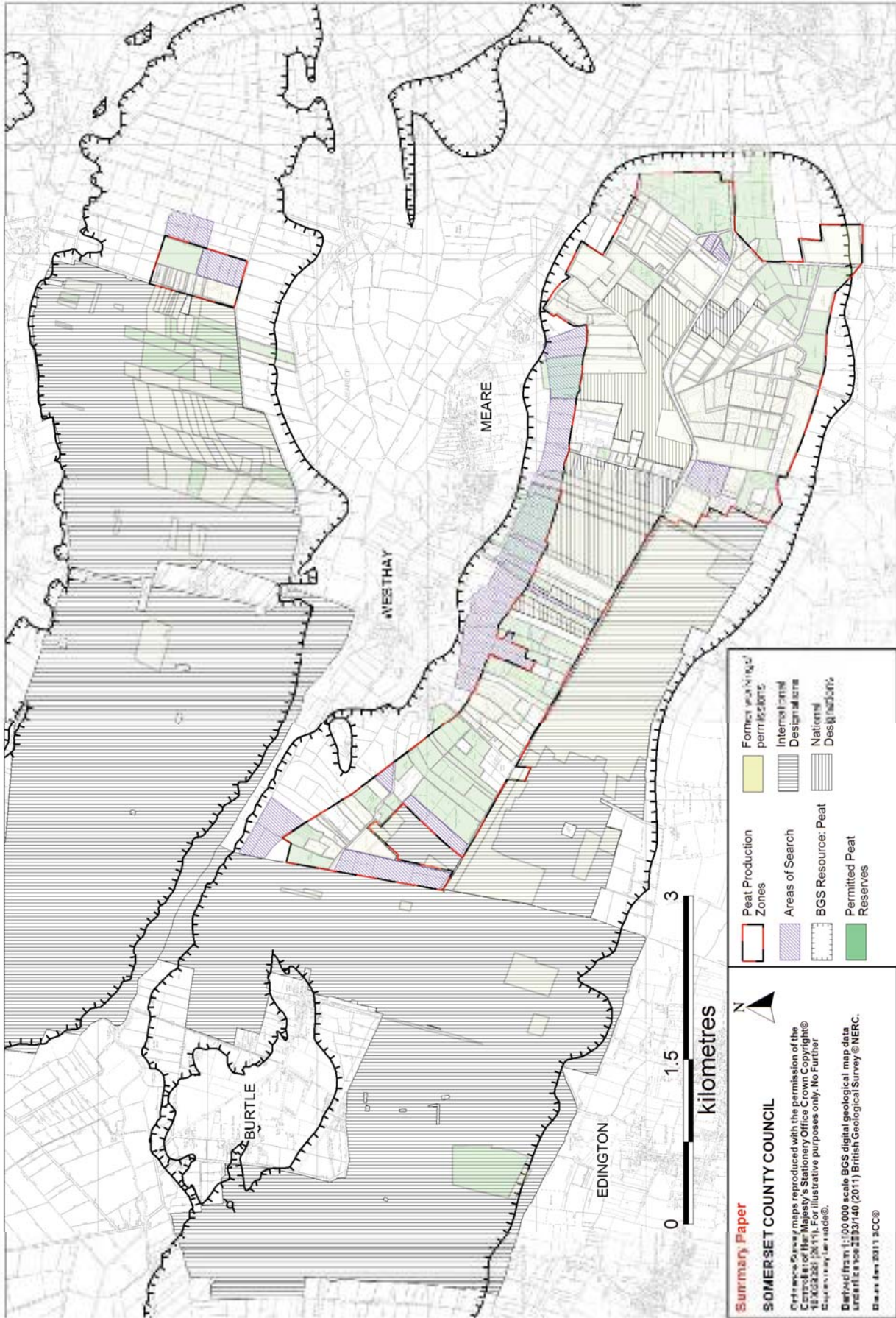


Figure 2. Permitted peat reserves and environmental designations in Somerset.



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