

# Information

for County Councillors

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From:	Paul Browning, Service Manager – Planning Policy
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Date:	20 June 2014
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To:	All County Councillors
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## Pre-submission Somerset Minerals Plan: update June 2014

Following endorsement from Cabinet and Full Council on 05 and 19 February respectively, the pre-submission Somerset Minerals Plan was published for consultation from **03 March to 14 April 2014**. During this period, in addition to feedback from SCC officers, 91 external responses were received generating 617 representations (issues). This reflects a good level of continued engagement from a variety of stakeholders in the plan-making process.

Overall there was broad support for the Plan from a range of stakeholders including Environment Agency, environmental organisations such as Somerset Wildlife Trust (excluding the issue of peat – see below) and neighbouring Minerals Planning Authorities, including Bath & NE Somerset Council. Responses from residents (30 in total) mostly focused on concerns about fracking.

Feedback from the quarrying industry focused largely on relatively minor wording suggestions (for example) on alternative aggregates and some of the Development Management policies. Crushed rock operators supported the approach to landbank and crushed rock supply (notwithstanding the issue of Andesite – see below). Feedback from building stone operators sought maximum flexibility in operations, looking beyond simple extraction of stone and concerned by an apparent cap on the scale of operations.

With regard to issues raised, arguably the most significant areas of concern – linked with soundness and/or legal compliance – focused on:

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- The Plan should maintain a landbank for Silurian Andesite and Carboniferous Limestone i.e. two types of crushed rock landbank, acknowledging their separate markets. This issue depends on the evidence available; and there are confidentiality issues in maintaining a landbank to which only a small number of quarries contribute.
- Objections to the Plan's peat policy – most strongly from RSPB and the Somerset Wildlife Trust who do not believe that any form of planning permission for peat extraction accords with national policy in the NPPF. Overall this is the area of the Minerals Plan with the most detailed level of comments during consultation. Natural England raises concerns that the Plan does not adequately protect sites outside designated areas which support the integrity of those areas, and also that the approach on peat refers to spatial extensions as being permissible.
- A relatively large number of comments objecting to fracking in principle though a few did focus on the contents in our Plan. Comments in particular highlight the complex geology in the Mendip Hills, where areas are currently licensed in the 13<sup>th</sup> round of Petroleum Exploration and Development Licences (PEDLs).
- Concerns were raised by some representors that the policy approach does not give adequate protection to areas protected for their landscape and visual amenity and that the relevant chapter and policy needed to be cross-checked against the National Planning Policy Framework.
- Whilst support is given for the Plan's emphasis on ecological networks, concerns were raised by some that biodiversity offsetting could be seen as way to legitimise all developments, unless this issue is carefully worded in the Plan.

### **How have SCC responded?**

A summary of the representations made accompanied by a proposed officer response, and a schedule of proposed changes to the Plan have been produced. The planning policy team have addressed the above comments and others submitted in the pre-submission consultation, as well as identifying additional minor tweaks or updates that strengthen and/or clarify the Plan. For more detail on the proposed changes, please contact the author (see below).

### **What happens next?**

Following the authority delegated by Full Council on 19<sup>th</sup> February 2014, the proposed changes have been approved by the Lead Commissioner for Economic and Community Infrastructure in consultation with Group Leaders and the Cabinet Member for Business, Inward Investment and Policy.

Following this decision, the Plan has been submitted to the Planning Inspectorate, which will precipitate the formal appointment of a Planning Inspector to lead the independent examination of the Plan. Costs associated with this process will be met from "carry forward" of monies of £104,000 that originated from a government Planning Delivery Grant.

For more information please contact:	<div> <div>Name:</div> <div>Paul Browning</div> </div> <div> <div>Email:</div> <div>PvBrowning@somerset.gov.uk</div> </div> <div> <div>Tel No.:</div> <div>01823 355434</div> </div>
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