

**SOUTH EAST ENGLAND REGIONAL ASSEMBLY
REGIONAL PLANNING COMMITTEE**

Date: 23 May 2001

Subject: **Regional Minerals Planning**

Report of: Director of Planning and Transport, and
Chairman of South East England Regional Aggregates Working Party

Recommendations:

1. That the Committee receive the report and note the important role of the Regional Aggregates Working Party in assisting the Assembly's monitoring and review of minerals policy.
 2. That the Committee urge the DETR to bring forward the review of MPG6 and their research on other minerals as quickly as possible.
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1. Introduction

1.1 The Assembly region has a wide range of minerals extracted for construction and industrial purposes – sand and gravel, limestone, ragstone (all of which are aggregates), chalk, silica sand, clay, brickearth, fullers earth, and hydrocarbons. Several of these are of regional and national significance, and will need to figure in the review of the Minerals Chapter in RPG9. This report is to inform the Committee of the present situation in respect of these minerals, and to advise on arrangements for future monitoring and review.

2. AGGREGATES

2.1 Some 200 million tonnes of primary (mainly hard rock and sand and gravel) and secondary aggregates are used in construction nationally each year (Figure 1). Most aggregates are quarried, but some sand and gravel is dredged from the sea bed. A proportion of the supply is met by recycling (eg demolition material) and the use of secondary materials (eg PFA from power stations).

2.2 This consumption of aggregate has been some 20% lower than the demand forecast in 1994 government guidance (*Minerals Planning Guidance: Guidelines for Aggregates Provision in England – MPG6*). The national guidance is under review. After much delay, a consultation paper by DETR was issued last October, and a revised draft MPG6 is anticipated in late Autumn. The draft guidance will include new forecasts of national demand, and consider the most sustainable way of

delivering the necessary supply. Secondary and recycled aggregate will be given greater prominence, and their use maximised, but this source can only supply a portion of the total quantity needed. The majority of the supply has to be from primary aggregate extraction. The national figure will be broken down into an indicative tonnage for each of the nine English Regions to supply, looking forward some 15 to 20 years. The indicative tonnage will be different for each region, reflecting their diverse geological and economic characteristics.

- 2.3 It will be for the Assembly as Regional Planning Body to assess the indicative tonnage in the light of the circumstances and prospects in the region, and taking into account aggregate imports and exports to/from other regions or from overseas. The agreed figure will then be included in Regional Planning Guidance, as part of review of the mineral section of the guidance. The total will then need to be allocated between the constituent mineral planning authorities (MPAs). The MPAs will complete the process by identifying from where the aggregate is to be obtained in their Mineral Plans, and determine applications for extraction, recycling plant etc.
- 2.4 The South East Region produces nearly 20 million tonnes (Mt) of sand and gravel a year, and is largely self sufficient in its needs thanks to an extensive coast line at which sea dredged material is landed. Over 13 Mt is supplied from land won workings in the region, and over 6Mt (1/3rd) from landings of sea dredged material at the regions ports.
- 2.5 The situation is quite different in respect of hard rock. The South East has virtually no hard rock. Limestone deposits exist at the edge of the region on the western boundary of Oxfordshire, and ragstone is extracted in Kent. Ragstone is not a hard rock suitable for high quality concrete, and is generally put to lower quality uses. Accordingly the South East is a major importer of hard rock, some 3 Mt from other regions (mainly from the East Midlands (2Mt) and the South West (1Mt), and some 2.5 Mt from overseas (including Scotland, Ireland and Norway).
- 2.6 Demand for sand and gravel extraction in the region has shown little change in recent years, despite strong economic growth and in contrast to Government forecasts (Figure 2). Land-won reserves in the South East are very limited compared with those in all but one other region, and do not compare favourably with consumption (Figure 3). Reserves also vary widely across the region (Figure 4), with some counties having substantial reserves and others, such as East Sussex, having very little.

3.0 SEERAWP

- 3.1 A key advisory body to both DETR and SERPLAN, has been the South East Regional Aggregates Working Party (SERAWP) covering the old SERPLAN area. The working party comprises an equal number of representatives from the aggregates industry and the local authorities, together with representatives from

recycling, agriculture, the Port of London Authority, English Welsh & Scottish Railway, DETR and GOSE. The RAWP has been reformed to accord with the Regional Assembly boundary, and at the same time the contract to provide secretariat services to SEERAWP has now been transferred to the Assembly, and the Director for Planning and Transport is a member of the working party.

- 3.2 The role of the RAWP is to monitor the supply and demand for aggregate - including assessing the potential for supply of secondary and recycled materials, marine dredged and other imports, and assessing the reserves, including permitted reserves (land bank) of primary aggregate. Based on these assessments the RAWP is able to propose options for the pattern of future supply. It is clear from the consultation paper issued last October that the RAWPs continue to have DETR support for this technical role, and in that capacity SEERAWP will advise the Assembly on most aspects (though not all) of the review of the Minerals Chapter in RPG9.

4.0 Current Issues in the South East

- 4.1 There are several issues on which greater clarity is needed if SEERAWP advice to the Assembly is to be soundly based. These can be identified as follows:-

For the use of secondary materials and recycling to be maximised to fulfil sustainability objectives and give some relief to demand on primary aggregates, steps are needed to establish:-

- i) a better knowledge of potential secondary supplies
- ii) an effective monitoring of recycled material
- iii) additional permissions for recycling plant and storage
- iv) greater insistence on requirements or conditions for the use of secondary and recycled materials when determining planning applications for major developments

For imported supplies of hard rock:-

- i) can the supplies from the East Midlands (including the Peak National Park) and South West (including The Mendips) continue to be relied upon at the same level?
- ii) can the supplies from other countries eg Scotland similarly be relied upon?
- iii) will the rail depots and wharves in the south east continue to have adequate capacity to receive these materials, bearing in mind the constraints upon a number of them?

For supplies of sea dredged sand and gravel:-

- i) are there sufficient reserves to maintain or possibly increase supplies?
- ii) will the wharves at ports in the south east continue to have adequate capacity to handle the volumes concerned?

For land won workings:-

- i) some Minerals Local Plans have substantial permitted reserves which meet guidelines, others do not;
- ii) the apportionment between MPAs needs revision. The figures are too high, being based on the 1994 forecasts. The revision needs to reflect the distribution of resources available to MPAs. The apportionment between counties needs sub-division where Unitary Authorities are to prepare separate Minerals Local Plans.

4.2 Analysis of most of these issues is currently being pursued by SEERAWP, eg a re-appraisal of rail depot and wharf capacity, or DETR, eg effective monitoring of recycled material. The results of these initiatives will be assessed by SEERAWP, and options on the course of action to follow proposed to the Assembly. The Assembly will however need to incorporate the following actions into its work programme from late 2001:-

- responding to draft MPG6 later this year, including
- assessing the regional indicative supply figures for aggregates
- apportioning the regional figure amongst the MPAs
- establishing performance indicators for aggregates to meet sustainability objectives, and
- redrafting the aggregates section of the Minerals Chapter of RPG9 to fulfil the requirement in RPG for an early review.

5.0 **CHALK, SILICA SAND and FULLERS EARTH**

5.1 Apart from aggregates, the other commercially significant minerals in the South East are described below.

5.2 Chalk is widely present in the region, but usually coincides with landscapes designated for their outstanding natural beauty. Chalk is quarried for both use in cement production and for agricultural lime. It is the former which is of regional and national significance, and which has the greatest impact on the landscape. The wider South East supplied some 25% of national requirements in 1994. This was the date of the last guidance issued by DETR, *Provision of Raw Material for the Cement Industry - MPG10*. It is also occasionally used for bulk fill, and as such is classed as an aggregate mineral.

5.3 A planning application for a major new works in the Medway Valley in Kent remains outstanding. The proposal is to replace the current works at Northfleet in Kent where chalk quarrying resources are running out, and the sites are identified for major redevelopment as part of Thames Gateway. The application is to be the subject of a reopened inquiry.

5.4 Silica sand is an essential raw material for many industrial processes including the manufacture of glass, production of foundry castings and ceramics. It is geologically and geographically sparsely distributed such that each significant site is a valuable resource. Some 3.5 Mt of silica sand was produced nationally in

1994, of which some 0.75 Mt was produced in the wider south east from a limited number of sites. At that time permitted reserves nationally for glass manufacture would last some 23 years, and for foundry purposes some 48 years.. These figures come from the guidance issued in 1996, *Provision of Silica Sand in England – MPG 15*. Recycling has also grown, both in re-use of the sand, and recycling glass cullet. It may appear therefore that there is no urgency for a review. However, the figures obscure the reserves for different ranges of silica sands required, the limited reserves at some sites, and in some locations.

- 5.5 Fullers earth is a relatively scarce material which has nevertheless been of commercial importance since mediaeval times. Once used extensively for fulling English cloth, it nowadays fulfils an important role in assisting a wide range of industrial purposes. One of the few workable deposits in the country occurs in Surrey, and is of national importance.
- 5.6 DETR has confirmed that a research project is to commence later this year to examine the planning issues for minerals that have not been considered in recent years, including silica sand, raw material for cement and fullers earth. This could result in updated guidance. DETR has been asked to accelerate the research to assist the Assembly review mineral policy in the south east by the autumn of 2002.

6.0 Environment

- 6.1 This report does not deal with the environmental issues associated with mineral extraction, although it is recognised that limiting the impact of workings or depots and wharves, and other objectives such as encouraging the use of rail and water rather than road for transport, are essential components of sustainability targets.
- 6.2.1 The current Sustainable Development Framework for the South East however gives inadequate attention to minerals and the recycling of materials, and this dimension will need to be addressed in the further development of the SDF.

7.0 Conclusion

- 7.1 The Committee should therefore note the importance of SEERAWP for the Assembly's monitoring and review of minerals policy. It also needs to press the DETR to accelerate its research programme in order to meet the necessary programme for review of regional mineral policy.

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