Eryri Local Development Plan Review

Background Paper 9

Minerals

July 2016
1. Background

1.1 It has been long standing national policy that major development, which would include large-scale mineral working, should not be permitted in national parks and that any proposal for such working should be examined rigorously (the Silkin Test) and permitted only if there was no way of meeting the need from outside the national park. This policy is set out in the ELDP (Strategic Policy B: Major Development). There is however recognition that in order to conserve the characteristic local building tradition small quarries to provide building stone may be permitted along with the limited removal of slate waste from existing closed quarries (Strategic Policy E)

1.2 North Wales Joint Minerals and Waste Planning Service
In 1996 the SNPA became a free standing authority with responsibility for planning, including minerals and waste planning, within its boundary. The Authority was successful in serving Prohibition Orders on 3 hard rock quarries and a lead mine preventing their re-activation without a new grant of permission. Whilst there are other dormant minerals working sites in Snowdonia these are generally very small and have not been active for a considerable amount of time. There is however a requirement to monitor activity at both working quarries and dormant sites and this has resource implications.

1.3 In the mid 2000’s the local planning authorities in north Wales began investigating the possibility of setting up a joint, regional minerals and waste planning service as it was considered that this is a specialist service and that suitably qualified and experienced officers were spread rather thinly across the seven authorities The collaboration originally involved the six local planning authorities and the Snowdonia National Park Authority. Subsequently minerals and waste planning in the northern part of Powys has been bought under the aegis of the joint service.

1.4 The service began in April 2011. The team of seven specialist waste and minerals planners, employed on behalf of the participating authorities by Flintshire Council, is based in Mold and Bangor. It assess and writes reports on planning applications for mineral and waste developments; carries out site monitoring; helps develop policy and undertakes compliance and enforcement work. Decisions on planning applications are still taken by the relevant planning committees in each council.

2. Minerals Issues

2.1 Regional Technical Statement (RTS) – First Review
Minerals Technical Advice Note 1: Aggregates (2004) (MTAN 1) requires the preparation of Regional Technical Statements (RTS) for the areas covered by both the North Wales and South Wales Regional Aggregates Working Parties (RAWPs). Whereas MTAN1 develops the national policy set out in Minerals Planning Policy Wales (MPPW), the Regional Technical Statements provide the supporting detail which allows this to be implemented. There is also a requirement to review the RTS at regular intervals

2.2 The First Review of the RTS comprises a main document and two Regional Appendices for North Wales or South Wales respectively. Together the documents provide a strategy for the future supply of construction aggregates within the two regions, taking account of the latest available information regarding the balance of supply and demand, and current notions of sustainability, including the proximity
principle and environmental capacity. The RTS documents and the recommendations within them are of a **strategic** nature. They are not intended to provide site-specific information or guidance.

### 2.3 Apportionment for the future provision of land-won primary aggregates in Conwy and the Snowdonia National Park.

Because of the small number of operators in the National Park production figures and other data has been aggregated with those of quarry operators in Conwy County Borough in order to protect confidentiality.

2.4 The RTS Review requires the two authorities to make future provision for land-won primary aggregates within their Local Development Plans on the basis of the following annualised apportionments:

- **Land-won sand & gravel provision**: **Nil**
- **Crushed rock aggregates provision**: **1.23 million tonnes per year until the end of the Plan period and for 10 years thereafter.**

The majority if not all of this provision is expected to be supplied from Conwy.

2.5 It should be emphasised that the annualised apportionments noted above are given only as a guide to the calculation of the total apportionment required over the duration of the LDPs. In practice, sales will vary from year to year and there is no requirement for the authority to maintain or limit these in line with either the annualised apportionment or the historical sales averages.

2.6 The need for provision to extend beyond the Plan period is based on the requirement in MTAN1 for maintaining landbanks of 7 years for sand & gravel and 10 years for crushed rock, throughout the full duration of the LDP. Subject to this requirement being met, the overall provision at any given time may comprise both landbanks of permitted reserves and allocations for future working, where these are required.

### 2.7 Comparison with existing landbanks

The total apportionments for Conwy and the Snowdonia National Park over the 25-year horizon covered by the First Review of the RTS are zero for land-won sand & gravel and 30.75 million tonnes for crushed rock. These compare with existing (combined) landbanks of zero for sand & gravel and 67.43 million tonnes for crushed rock (as at 31st December 2010).

2.8 In view of this surplus in existing permitted crushed rock reserves (these are all in Conwy) no further allocations for crushed rock are required to be identified within either Snowdonia or Conwy.

2.9 Paragraph 49 of MTAN 1 notes that landbanks are not required to be maintained within National Parks or Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. For this reason, land allocation for aggregate production are not required within the National Park and efforts should continue to be made to gradually transfer the very small amount of production which currently takes place to Conwy and/or to other neighbouring authorities.
3. Safeguarding of primary aggregate resources
Minerals Planning Policy Wales requires resources of both crushed rock aggregates and land-based sand & gravel to be safeguarded within LDPs in accordance with the British Geological Survey’s safeguarding maps, or such other geological information as may be available and suitable for this purpose.

3.1 Safeguarding of primary aggregate resources
Relevant resources aggregate rock will be safeguarded within the LDP, in accordance with British Geological Survey safeguarding maps. In Snowdonia this will be only those resources defined as:-

“Category 1” These are resources deemed to be of national significance at the Wales level (some resources may be of UK significance). They may be resources with limited occurrence, and therefore susceptible to sterilisation, or those which are economically important due to their high quality/purity and/or scarcity.

“Category 2” resources have also been mapped by the BGS, these are those of less than national significance but which may be important at a regional or local level.

“Category 3” which have not been mapped by BGS are low grade aggregates used at a local scale (e.g. for use on farms etc.) when no better quality aggregates are available.

3.2 It is recommended therefore that the Minerals Safeguarding Areas shown in the current ELDP Proposals Map are revised to reflect the BGS Category 1 resources in Snowdonia.

4. Vein minerals
4.1 Although there is also a wealth of metallic vein minerals to be found in the National Park, including gold, copper, manganese, lead and zinc it is not considered necessary to identify those areas where they occur, or safeguard them as their extraction would be, in the main, by underground mining methods and more scope exists as to where shafts and adits for accessing the resource can be located.

4.2 Given the extensive controversy surrounding Riofinex’s copper exploration programme in Coed y Brenin during the late 1960’s and early 1970’s it is very difficult to envisage any circumstances in the foreseeable future where it would be considered acceptable to excavate the extremely large-scale open cast pit that would be required to remove the porphyry copper body (200 million tonnes at 0.3% Cu) that was discovered.

4.3 For this reason this vein minerals will not be safeguarded in the ELDP.

5. Shale Gas in Snowdonia
5.1 The Welsh Government considers that the technologies employed for the recovery of shale gas, known as “hydraulic fracturing”, are unproven and have therefore adopted a precautionary policy framework in respect of proposals involving “fracking”. In February 2015 the Minister for Natural resources issued the Town and Country Planning (Notification) (Unconventional Oil and Gas) (Wales) Direction 2015) accompanied by a letter from the Chief Planner which sets out the requirements on local planning authorities to notify him of any planning application involving hydraulic fracturing which they are minded to approve.
5.2 Research by the British Geological Survey (BGS) indicates that the Cambrian/Tremadoc strata of Snowdonia include potential gas shales. These outcrop in an arc around the Harlech Dome, running to the north of the Mawddach estuary, up through Coed y Brenin before turning west towards Tremadog.

5.3 However, these Lower Palaeozoic carbonaceous shales have been the focus of only very limited research. Whilst the initial indications are that there may be potential for hydrocarbons, they are however considered to be a very high exploration risk in terms of chance of success, requiring a large investment in subsurface investigations to quantify any resource potential.

5.4 It is anticipated therefore that, for the foreseeable future, extraction of shale gas by “fracking” will be concentrated in areas of greatest potential, which lie outside Snowdonia.

6. Implications for Review of Plan
6.1 Whilst the ELDP contains policies referring to mineral working and aggregate safeguarding, there are no specific references to shale gas extraction. It is likely that exploratory drilling within the National Park would be classified as “major development” to that end, in line with Strategic Policy B: Major Development, it will not be permitted in the National Park other than in exceptional circumstances and only after being subjected to a rigorous examination (Silkin Test).
Fig. 1: Outcrop of main black shale formations in UK and selected oil and gas wells and gas (BGS)