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Development Consultation Response

Proposal

Consolidating application for the extension of winning and working of limestone, importation of inert waste and restoration to amenity land

Location

Graig Quarry, Graig Road, Denbigh

Application Reference

01/2022/0523

Comments

Introduction

In accordance with the Scoping Report the planning application is supported by a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (January 2021) and BS5837 Tree Report (December 2019) prepared by PleydellSmithyman. Additionally the application is supported by a Heritage Statement (Andrew Josephs Associates) carried out to address Cadw's concerns regarding the potential effects on designated or registered historical assets.

The application proposes a 5ha extension to the west of the existing operational quarry onto grazing land. The extension site is situated to the south of Crest Mawr Woodland, designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest and Ancient Woodland. The woodland compartment nearest to the proposed quarry extension area is classed as Restored Ancient Woodland.

The unnamed woodland to the south east of the proposed extension is bisected by the existing quarry boundary. The southern part of this unnamed woodland, on the lower slopes and outside the quarry boundary, is subject to Tree Preservation Order Borough of Denbigh TPO 9 (W9). Parts of the woodland are also classed as Ancient Semi Natural Woodland or Plantation on Ancient Woodland.

The proposed quarry extension area will not impact directly on any of these designated woodlands.

Proposed method of working

Paragraph 8.7.1 of the Environment Statement (Volume 2) states that the planting of trees will be undertaken pre-commencement of the development to allow for a period of maturation. However, as stated in the application, to obtain material to create the bund on which tree planting is proposed, it will be initially necessary to remove the overburden in the extension area. The Phase 1 Drawing (M18.155.D.024) shows these two operations combined and it is queried how they will be timed to

achieve effective screening over a period of years leading up to the extraction of mineral in later phases.

Phase 1 would also include the removal trees on the existing screening bund G3, the field trees (T6 to T31) and the hedges H2 and H4. The group G3, in combination with H4, has the appearance of a dense, wide and over height hedge and will have been planted to act as screen between the existing quarry and the footpath. The group comprises of a varied mix of broadleaved tree and shrub species that performs effective screening but is of limited arboricultural merit.

The Tree Protection Detail Plan 2 in the Tree Survey shows that apart from T6 and T7 all the field trees would be removed, along with H2. One of the field trees proposed for felling, an oak (T29), is a Category A specimen, another is an ash (T16) and a Category B. The nature of development means that it is not expedient to amend the development to retain one Category A oak and one Category B ash. A number of the field trees have structural defects such as splits or cavities that will be of ecological significance and the supporting information includes a bat survey. Where trees are unaffected by the proposed quarry extension but are recommended for removal due to poor condition they should be carefully risk assessed to determine if felling is necessary.

On balance within the context of the rural landscape, where there are other scattered trees and additionally woodlands, the quarry extension would result in the loss of relatively few field trees.

The details for the bund are not particularly comprehensive and dispersed across documents that make assessment difficult. The Environment Statement (Volume 2) Paragraph 2.2.5 refers to the external toe of the screening/attenuation bunds being at a distance of 30m from the boundary of Crest Mawr SSSI. The following paragraph (2.2.6) refers to a peripheral bund approximately 3m in height on the southern boundary seeded with grass and planted. Paragraph 7.24 of the LVIA refers to a 1:3 gradient for the outer slope. Due to the scale of the site plans the precise extent of the bund in relation to the adjacent woodlands and quarry excavation is difficult to assess.

It is noted that in their response of 24 August 2022 NRW query the standoff from Crest Mawr Woodland, referring to a 30m standoff in Environmental Statement (Volume 2) and pointing out that it is unclear if the standoff includes the bund. Scaling from the site plans the distance between the boundary of Crest Mawr Woodland and the northern site boundary is estimated to be 15m at its narrowest point. A 30m standoff would therefore appear to include the bund situated on the inside of the boundary. As far as BS5837:2012 is concerned, a 15m standoff to the site boundary fence would be acceptable in terms of safeguarding tree roots because it would meet the Root Protection Area requirements for the woodland edge trees. However there may be other factors that make NRW require the stated 30m standoff. To address the above concerns more details on the bund's design, extent and timing of construction in relation to the proposed development should be required and shared with NRW for comment.

The second phase (M18.155.D.025) would result in the removal of a triangular piece of woodland comprising of H3, G4, G5 and G6. The groups comprise of mixed broadleaves planted to screen the quarry with one of the main component species a small stand of ash adjacent to the top edge of the quarry face. This stand of ash has severe ash dieback (Class 3 and 4) and would be removed. The triangular woodland has not been maintained in recent years and has been grazed by livestock. This has led to a sparse ground flora, trees with poor form and poor spacing.

The southern parts of G4, G5 and G6 are shown for removal, even though the woodland is outside the area of extraction, and replanted as part of Phase 2. The wooded area does not appear to be coincident with the worst area of ash dieback either. As an alternative to complete removal and replanting consideration should be given to retaining and managing the southern parts of G4, G5 and G6 as a buffer to the more sensitive woodland further south.

Phase 3 (M18.155.D.026) proposes restoration on the northern most part of the site to trees and woodland. Phase 4 and Phase 5 would not result in the loss or planting of trees, although the screening and restoration planting will be growing and having an increasingly important role. The concept restoration plan M18.188.007 shows additional block planting in a worked area of the quarry, regeneration on the benches and planting of trees along the current access route in the south east of the site.

Ash dieback is endemic in the landscape surrounding the proposed quarry extension area however the disease's effect on reducing screening will be negligible because common ash is a minor component species.

Landscape and visual impact

The Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment has been carried out in accordance with the industry's guidelines (GLVIA 3rd Edition) and examines the anticipated effect on the landscape and visual amenity of proposed development.

It is my opinion the assessment of Viewpoints in Table 6 of the LVIA have been undertaken objectively. The application includes a specialist Heritage Statement which assesses the effect on cultural assets within the town. Inevitably the Close Range Viewpoints 1 to 5 on footpaths will experience a greater magnitude of change than more distant viewpoints. According to application documents the degree of adverse change will be reduced or mitigated by the bund and planting.

In terms of nationally significant landscapes NRW have agreed that due to the distance between the quarry and Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB the proposed quarrying workings would not be expected to visually harm views from the AONB.

The LVIA concludes that, due to the mitigation design the impact of the operational phase of the Proposed Development upon landscape and visual receptors would be minimised and no 'Significant' effects are predicted.

Conclusion

The impact of the quarry extension on the landscape, and more specifically on trees and woodlands, has been minimised by firstly limiting the quarry extension area to the higher grazing land and secondly proposing a bund and tree planting. These factors have reduced the anticipated impacts to an acceptable level and I therefore do not object to the application.

Notwithstanding details for the bund and planting lack detail and these should be provided as the proposal is heavily reliant on these elements to screen views from Denbigh and from the proposed diverted footpath.

If permission is granted these details could be secured by a planning condition requiring the submission of a Landscape and Ecological Management Plan. The details should not only include a landscape maintenance scheme but monitoring and reporting back to the Local Authority on a scheduled basis.

Officer	SB	Date	13 October 2022
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