Central Bedfordshire Council
and Bedford Borough Council
working together

Mineral Safeguarding Areas – Technical Note on the production of Mineral Resource Assessments

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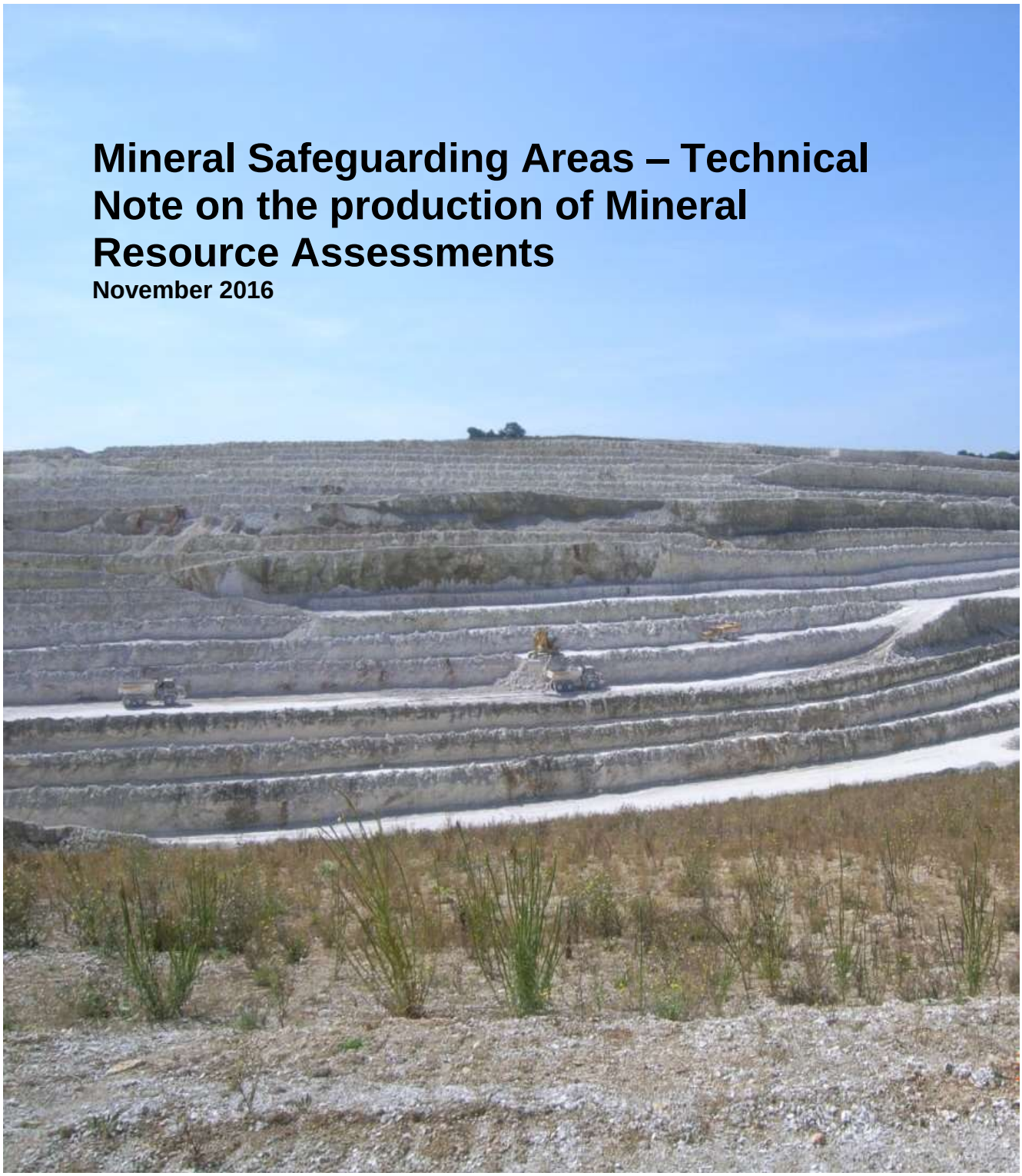

Central Bedfordshire Council Mineral Safeguarding Areas and Resource Assessments (Technical Advice Note)

1. It is important to protect mineral resources from needless sterilisation by surface developments. In accordance with policies 142 and 143 of the National Planning Policy Framework, the Adopted Minerals and Waste Local Plan 2014 (MWLP) identifies the presence of a number of important minerals within the area, whether they are economically worked at present or not. The presence of a significant mineral deposit will be a material consideration in determining proposals for surface development in the areas designated as Mineral Safeguarding Areas (MSA).

2. Non-minerals development can 'sterilise' mineral resources (making them inaccessible for potential extraction) as well as prejudicing the operation of existing or proposed minerals sites. This can be either directly, by building over land that contains minerals; or indirectly, through the introduction of sensitive land uses in close proximity to these resources or sites. The Planning Authority will therefore expect a Minerals Resource Assessment (MRA) to consider not only the minerals immediately beneath the site, but also the effect of the development on mineral resources beyond that, given the need for a stand-off area (buffer zone) between any non-minerals development and any potential future mineral working. Minerals and waste safeguarding is the process through which these various potential issues are avoided.

3. Since the adoption of the MWLP, the Bedfordshire Authorities have received a number of requests for information or views on minerals safeguarding issues. Some of these requests have arrived at an advanced stage of the planning process for non-minerals developments, making it difficult to address any safeguarding issues in a positive and sustainable manner. This has shown that there is a need to provide more advice to those that work with non-minerals developments, to ensure the issue of minerals safeguarding is appropriately addressed, particularly during the early planning stages.

4. Policies MSP 11 and 12 of the Adopted Plan provide the policy framework for mineral resource safeguarding in the Plan area. However it is important to note that safeguarding relates to the long term conservation of resources, necessary to secure a steady and adequate supply of minerals for future generations, and is therefore relevant beyond the end of the Plan period (2028).

5. The areas designated as Mineral Safeguarding Areas (MSA) are shown on the plans in the Policies Map Local Development Plan Document. These were identified using information published by the British Geological Society (BGS) and after consultation with the

minerals industry. On receipt of a MRA the Planning Authority can decide on the most appropriate course of action. Having regard to the results of this assessment in relation to the quality and quantity of mineral that could be recovered, the practicability of extraction, and the environmental impacts of mineral extraction, there are three possible outcomes:

- The application could be refused on the basis that the loss of an important mineral deposit is considered unacceptable;
- All/some of the mineral resource present could be utilised/extracted before the surface development takes place, or
- The development could be allowed leaving the mineral to be sterilised in situ.

6. Where prior extraction is deemed appropriate a separate planning application will be required for the extraction of the mineral. Whilst the potential impacts of these options should be explored within a MRA, the consideration of the planning merits and planning policies of pursuing any of these options should take place in the wider context of the development as a whole and be included as part of the general planning statement.

7. Alternatively, a Minerals Recovery Plan (MRP) could be produced. The MRP would assess areas of construction where minerals would be potentially recoverable, such as from groundworks, sustainable drainage systems, landscaping areas etc. The aim of the MRP should be, as a minimum, to balance as far as possible the mineral recovered from these operations with site construction activity which would consume aggregate, such as road sub-bases, granular fill, bunding required, and mortar etc. The MRP should consider the extent to which mineral available on site would meet the specifications required for construction. While there is the potential that significant amounts of mineral recovered could be used on site, there is likely to be a need for some grades of mineral from traditional sources. Mineral recovered from the site which is ‘Out of Grade’ for onsite use could be sent to the supplier of aggregate as a return run, where it could be processed and used.

8. There are benefits in terms of sustainability which could accrue from the use of onsite materials. Additionally, a reduction in the amount of mineral being brought to the site may result in cost savings, and export of ‘out of grade’ materials may generate some revenue.

9. On some sites where more general extraction takes place, there may be opportunities for a net export of material, this would be encouraged subject to no unacceptable impacts after appropriate mitigation measures are taken into account.

10. While the MSA is based on the best available knowledge, the extent or viability of mineral resources cannot be known for certain. For example,

the BGS data is provided with certain limitations. Therefore the MSA is a guide as to where the Planning Authority expects that issues of sterilisation of mineral resources are likely to arise. However, it does not guarantee either that the extent it covers will contain mineral resources. This is one of the reasons why a mineral assessment may be necessary in order for sufficient information on the specific circumstances to be gathered. This is also why the Planning Authority will decide each case on its own merits, based on the best information available at the time any development proposal is being considered.

11. The MSA excludes major areas which are already developed as it is likely that the mineral resource in these areas is already sterilised. However, every existing single structure or piece of infrastructure has not been excluded due to the difficulty of carrying out this mapping exercise across the plan area.

12. In order to assess the quality and quantity of the mineral resource that is potentially impacted by a development proposal, it is likely that a developer will need to undertake mineral exploratory work. This could be undertaken as part of the initial ground investigation works and should include boreholes and/or trial pits.

13. The MSA and MWCA layers are based on BGS data, most of which can be found on their website, including scans of borehole information that the BGS holds. This data is meant to be used at a 1:50,000 scale which means it can only give an indication that mineral is likely to be present. Therefore, the developer may need to undertake exploratory work to locally test the extent of the mineral. This work should be undertaken by appropriately qualified experts who are able to advise on the type and extent of any work required.

14. The Planning Authority recommend that the information should be prepared by a geologist experienced in mineral developments and that laboratory analysis of the site investigation results is conducted, including testing the material to accepted mineral specifications.

15. Applicants may find it useful as part of their discussions with the Mineral Planning Authority to provide a draft trial pit/borehole location plan which can be agreed with the Mineral Planning Authority at an early stage. This will ensure that the subsequent investigations and assessment are derived from an appropriate distribution of trial pits/boreholes. This would help in preventing additional work later in the application process as the result of an objection from the Mineral Planning Authority.

16. Additional information (e.g. drilling or environmental information) may also be available from the mineral industry and it is recommended that the developer contacts mineral companies that have operations in the area of the development. The Planning Authority will be able to provide contact details where appropriate.

17. A suggested brief for a MRA is included in Appendix 1. It is recommended that anyone preparing a MRA contacts the Minerals and Waste Planning Team to discuss the parameters of any report and any assumptions being applied before the report is submitted. This should help to ensure that the local knowledge and experience that exists within the team is fully utilised.

APPENDIX 1

Possible brief for a Minerals Resource Assessment

Introduction
Summarises the purpose of a MRA.

Mineral Investigations
Sets out the investigations made to establish the quantity and quality of the mineral resource in the national and local market.

Assessment
Sets out the viability of the deposit and explores the three potential options for development:

- The planning application is refused and the mineral resource is not sterilised.
- All/some of the mineral resource is extracted prior to surface development taking place.
- The planning application is approved and the mineral resource is sterilised.