

Replacement Local Development Plan 2018-2033
Background Paper

BP37: Minerals



Deposit Plan
January 2025



Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg hefyd.

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Contents

1. Introduction	4
2. Policy Context	4
3. Findings of AMR (Annual Monitoring Review)	5
4. Contextual Changes	5
5. Safeguarding	5
6. Mineral Supply	7
7. Buffer Zones	8
8. Monitoring	8
9. Cross Border Issues	8

1. Introduction

1.1 This background paper has been prepared to support the development of the Replacement Local Development Plan (RLDP) 2018-2033. The purpose of this paper is to review the evidence base upon which the LDP was / is developed and to provide any additional evidence. Minerals are an important component / play an important role in the of the Conwy economy with a number of strategically important sites located within the County Borough. Minerals of economic value in Conwy are predominantly crushed rock aggregates. These Minerals are essential to the construction industry, therefore their continued supply is fundamental to the delivery of the RLDP's goals / objectives to meet sustainable development and manage resources to support growth, social and economic aspirations. Minerals are a finite resource which can only be extracted where they naturally occur, and increasing pressure for non-mineral development presents a particular challenge.

2. Policy Context

2.1 Minerals Planning Policy Wales has been incorporated within Planning Policy Wales; however, its content remains the unchanged. Minerals Technical Advice Note 1 and 2 also remain in place. MTAN 1 advises that where landbanks already provide for more than 20 years of aggregates extraction, new allocations will not be necessary. However, Clarification Letter CL-05-14 has since advised that this does not reflect the Local Development Plan period of 15 years. The implication is that it may not be sufficient to conclude that having a 20 year or more landbank is acceptable and it would only be prudent to come to this conclusion if there was a landbank of 25 years or more.

2.2 The Regional Technical Statement (RTS) has been reviewed twice since the adoption of the LDP, with the most recent review in 2020. However, the conclusion for Conwy has not changed and no allocations for sand and gravel or crushed rock are identified as required over the life of the LDP. Given the extensive landbank of crushed rock this is considered unlikely to change. Notwithstanding, the RTS is undergoing a second review, which is expected to be published during the Review period. It is possible that an allocation requirement may be required to meet any shortfall in a sub-regional grouping if other local authorities are unable to make the required provision. This matter will be kept under review, and may require collaboration with neighbouring local authorities.

2.3 The British Geological Survey published a National Aggregate Safeguarding Map (NASM) in November 2012 prior to the adoption of the LDP which the Council dealt with during the examination process. As a consequence of the publication of the Map / NASM the extent of areas identified under the safeguarding policy was increased and buffers applied around the areas to be safeguarded.

2.4 The RLDP is required to contribute to the circular economy through the sustainable supply of regional and local minerals to meet society's needs for construction and potentially energy generation purposes. This should be undertaken with minimal environmental impacts as advocated within Strategic Objective 11 (SO11) Minerals and Waste. Additionally, enhanced environmental protection will be a requirement within Strategic Objective 15 (SO15) Water, Air, Soundscape and Light.

3. Findings of AMR (Annual Monitoring Review)

- 3.1. The AMR has shown that several developments have been caught by the safeguarding policy but are acceptable because the resource is either already sterilised or would never / unlikely be worked on a commercial scale because of its limited distribution. Part of the issue in Conwy is the extensive distribution of isolated or very narrow deposits exposed at the surface, particularly lower quality sand and gravel. These deposits are highly unlikely to be worked on a commercial basis given its/their distribution and issues with accessibility.
- 3.2. Monitoring has demonstrated there are extensive permitted reserves within the County Borough which meet the need identified by the emergent RTS Second Review over the Plan Period and beyond. There are a small number of sites, (3 operational) which collectively have permitted reserves of over 62 million tonnes.

4. Contextual Changes

- 4.1. The mineral industry has been affected by the economic crash of 2008. Regional monitoring confirmed that sales across the region by 2018, had still not fully recovered and remained below pre-2007 levels. The active sites within Conwy supply minerals for a range of uses, such as general fill, road sub-base, asphaltic road surfacing, agricultural limestone, pipe beddings, concrete, rail-ballast and rock armour. Demand for minerals naturally fluctuates over time in response to the location of significant building and infrastructure projects. However, the general decline in construction due to a weaker economy has impacted these sites similarly to others across the country. Over the last two decades, there has been significant consolidation within the minerals industry, resulting in a smaller number of operators controlling a number of different quarries within a region. In North Wales, this has led to several quarries being mothballed whilst extraction is concentrated at a smaller number of sites leaving uncertainty for the affected communities.
- 4.2. The Welsh Government published Planning Policy Wales 12 in 2024. The most significant changes are to the approach to energy minerals. Conwy has no coal resources and is therefore irrelevant to the County Borough. Exploitation of gas at depth is also considered unlikely due to the presence of more easily accessible coal bed methane in the Denbighshire, Wrexham and Flintshire Coalfields, though the current Welsh Government position is a complete shift away from the exploitation of all hydrocarbon fossil fuels.

5. Safeguarding

Current policy approach

- 5.1. Policy MWS/1 Minerals and Waste safeguards certain minerals, including hard rock and sand and gravel. Policy MWS/3 provides more detailed policy guidance clarifying that infrastructure including jetties and rail heads are also safeguarded. The LDP safeguards sandstone with potential for high specification aggregate, identified as a Category 1 mineral within the Aggregate Safeguarding Maps. The distribution of this type of mineral near the surface is very limited in North Wales compared with South Wales, which has extensive deposits. Deposits within the

County Borough are small, isolated, and located in areas where development pressure is likely to be limited to agriculture and wind farm developments. The application of a 200m buffer zone has resulted in relatively large areas being safeguarded, which is unnecessary and disproportionate. Given the above, it is recommended that this mineral is no longer safeguarded through the LDP.

- 5.2. Category 1 and 2 sand and gravels have been safeguarded within the LDP. These deposits are generally poorer quality, narrow and follow rivers within the flood plain. A study published in 2004 considered the potential sand and gravel resources of North West Wales. Two resource blocks in the Conwy Valley, from south of Llanrwst to a little short of Conwy, were identified as having potential, though three quarters of the block in Llanrwst is already sterilised. Very little is known geologically about the sand and gravel elsewhere, but the BGS mapping indicates it is generally poorly sorted and locally clayey. There has been no pressure to work the sand and gravels within Conwy to date. Similarly, there has been no pressure to work high quality sand and gravels within Denbighshire, despite a positive policy framework supporting extraction. In light of this, it is recommended that only Category 1 sand and gravels are safeguarded within the County Borough. There are numerous small, isolated deposits within the County Borough which would not be viable to work on a commercial basis. Applying a buffer results in a much larger area being safeguarded which is disproportionate and unnecessary. It is therefore also recommended that small, isolated deposits of less than 100m at the widest point are not safeguarded.
- 5.3 Category 1 and 2 hard rock (or crushed rock) are safeguarded through the LDP, including limestone. High purity limestone outcrops on the Great Orme have been historically exploited. Lower quality limestone has been worked historically at Llanddulas, and is still worked within the County Borough at Raynes Quarry and St George. The same outcrop is also worked at Denbigh Quarry, Denbighshire. Igneous rocks are identified as Category 2 and are worked at Penmaenmawr. Penmaenmawr is a diorite quarry which has recently recommenced exporting rail ballast to England by rail. This material has limited distribution in Conwy outside of the National Park, and given the commercial interest in working it, it should be safeguarded within the LDP. Hanson / Heidelberg Cement who are the current operators of the site have secured national rail ballast contracts served by Penmaenmawr. With limited numbers of quarries in the UK capable of providing rail ballast quality stone there are plans in advancing Penmaenmawr as a supplier of suitable rail ballast stone.
- 5.4 In addition, there are a number of Welsh and UK national infrastructure projects likely to be developed during the Conwy RLDP period notwithstanding / despite the current economic and political situation, and it is conceivable that the uptake of aggregates from quarries elsewhere will exceed productive capacity, making it more likely that remote quarries, such as those in Conwy are more likely to be reactivated or have their production increased to maintain supply to their regular customers. In light of Brexit, there may also be a greater reliance on home produced aggregates due to the possibility of import tariffs increasing the prices of commodities sourced from outside Wales and the UK.

- 5.6 The ongoing appetite / demand for windfarms and the possibility/potential for new flood defence works, driven by the frequency of adverse weather and rising sea levels, may result in an uptake of aggregates towards the end of the plan period, and beyond.
- 5.7 A final point relates to Slate. Conwy has a number of historic slate tips, mainly in the Penmachno area leading towards Blaenau Ffestiniog, with some located in the Eryri National Park, which are not included in the RLDP for Conwy. There is unlikely to be a sudden demand to rework slate waste tips given the vast quantities located in Gwynedd. However, local roadbuilding, river flooding defence works, and windturbine development could potentially utilise this material held in historic pits, akin to the borrow pit philosophy. Further to this, local gritstones can be used for track haulage access for wind turbine developments.
- 5.8 In summary, the policy wording within Policy MWS/3 is appropriate to ensure that the presence of economically important minerals is given adequate consideration as part of the planning application process for non-mineral development. The recommended changes above have resulted in amendments to the LDP proposals maps, particularly the aggregate safeguarding areas.

Proposed Allocations

- 5.9 As part of the LDP, the impact of allocating land is considered against the loss of mineral in areas underlain by mineral of economic importance. This exercise has been undertaken for the new sites proposed through the Review. Generally, because the allocations were small in scale, and / or adjacent to existing sensitive developments, it was concluded that their allocation would not result in the loss of important mineral. Regarding the employment allocation at Llanddulas quarry, the mineral has already been worked out and the site is being restored. Development pressure within the County Borough is particularly significant along the coast, in areas underlain by limestone, and will need careful consideration through the LDP Review process to ensure that important minerals are not sterilised.

6 Mineral Supply

- 6.1 Crushed rock is extracted at three sites within the County Borough: Limestone is extracted at Raynes and St George and Diorite, an igneous rock, is extracted at Penmaenmawr. The planning permissions are time limited and extraction is required to cease by 2028, 2030 and 2042 respectively. There are extensive reserves remaining at these consented quarries and, notwithstanding the time limits attached to the different planning permissions, at current rates of production, they would enable the County Borough to meet identified needs over the Review Plan Period and beyond.
- 6.2 Policy MWS/2 states that the existing quarries at Penmaenmawr, Raynes and St George will provide the County's contribution to the regional supply of hard rock and this is considered to remain an appropriate position over the Review period. Both Raynes and St George would need an extension of time during the Review period, though this would not involve any additional land-take and would therefore not require an allocation in the LDP Review. The Policy provides a degree of flexibility to enable applications to come forwards where there is an identified need. This is

also considered to remain appropriate since need and provision may change over the Review period. Therefore, it is considered likely that the existing sites will continue to be worked and that applications to extend the lives of the quarries would, in principle, be acceptable.

6.3 In addition, there are facilities and resources required for processing, handling, and distribution of minerals, including wharves, railheads, batching and coating plants. In the County borough, there is a marine loading facility at Raynes Quarry, and a rail loading facility at Penmaenmawr. Ready mixed concrete and coated roadstone plants are present at a number of the existing quarries, but plant of this nature may also be located in a number of industrial estates close to the local markets. Policies should ensure that provision is made for such facilities, or where prudent, afford protection for potential future use.

7 Buffer Zones

7.1 There are buffers around each of the quarries which helps minimise conflict between sensitive development and quarrying operations. These buffer zones vary in extent due to the proximity of existing sensitive development but are generally 200m for hard rock, in line with MTAN 1. It is considered that these buffers are an appropriate means of not only protecting sensitive development but also protecting strategically important quarries and they should remain in place.

8 Monitoring

8.1 The monitoring indicators and triggers will need to be considered as part of the Review. The Welsh Government has indicated its intention to publish a Development Plans Manual which may update the Core Indicators contained within the existing Development Plans Manual. In relation to minerals, the Core Indicator is: The extent of primary land-won aggregates permitted in accordance with the Regional Technical Statement for Aggregates, expressed as a percentage of the total capacity required as identified in the Regional Technical Statement. It is considered unlikely that this Indicator will change given the policy framework contained within Planning Policy Wales and MTAN 1. Nevertheless, this matter will need to be kept under review and the monitoring amended if necessary.

9 Cross Border Issues

9.1 The Regional Technical Statement (RTS) ensures a collaborative approach in meeting mineral needs. The RTS does not require Conwy to allocate sites for sand and gravel extraction because, although there are deposits present within the County Borough, it is generally lower quality and located in remote areas with no commercial interest in extraction. Conversely, the County Borough is a significant producer of crushed rock, helping balance the need for other authorities to make allocations within their LDPs. This regional approach helps ensure that allocations are genuinely necessary and located in less environmentally constrained areas.

9.2 The approach to safeguarding has differed between local authorities in North Wales, mainly due to the timing of the publication of the Aggregates Safeguarding Maps. However, differences in geology across the different / various authority areas also justify different approaches. In Gwynedd, for example, there is evidence that good quality sand and gravel deposits occur outside the areas identified on the Minerals Resource Maps and Aggregate Safeguarding Maps. However, evidence in Conwy reaffirms the conclusion that there is very little sand and gravel of good quality which is not already constrained.

9.3 It should be noted that the technical statement is currently under review and is due to be published in 2025. The consultation on this review has been completed and the documentation is pending publication. The revised RTS makes recommendations for apportionments necessary to ensure an adequate supply of crushed rock and sand & gravel aggregates, including the nationally recommended minimum provision of 7 years sand & gravel and 10 years crushed rock as set out in Paragraph 49 of MTAN. These provisions should be available for the entire duration of any given LDP, recognising the spatial availability of suitable minerals resources across each local authority area. It is conceivable that sub-regional apportionments of minerals for crushed rock and sand & gravel are made. If a given authority is unable to make provision, there is an expectation of collaborative working between authorities to make necessary allocations within their respective LDPs. This may require a statement of common ground to be produced and agreed between the respective local authorities.

9.4 At this time, there remains a significant landbank of permitted hard rock reserves in Conwy, which is predicted to last the full RLDP period plus the required 10 years landbank. Is considered unlikely that there will be any significant requirement to make additional provision. The apportionment recommended by the RTS for Conwy and the level of permitted reserves means that there is no requirement to make a site specific allocation for the duration of the RLDP. The absence of commercially viable and unconstrained sand & gravel resources, mainly due to their location in flood risk areas of the coastal strip and Vale of Conwy river plains, or narrow upland stream deposits, means that any provision potentially required of Conwy for sand & gravel is more likely to be met by an apportionment by Gwynedd. There is no requirement in the RTS for an allocation of sand & gravel.