



TECHNICAL NOTE 1

DATE:	06 October 2023	CONFIDENTIALITY:	Public
SUBJECT:	Westdown Quarry: Report to Inform Habitats Regulations Assessment – Update for Revised Scheme of Working		
PROJECT:	62280202	AUTHOR:	Andy Brooks
CHECKED:		APPROVED:	Nienke Pengelly

WESTDOWN QUARRY: REPORT TO INFORM HABITATS REGULATIONS ASSESSMENT – UPDATE FOR REVISED SCHEME OF WORKING

Introduction

A consolidated planning submission and supporting Environmental Statement was submitted to Somerset County Council, now Somerset Council in January 2021 and remains with the Council for determination. The submission was for the reopening of Westdown Quarry near Frome in Somerset, extend operations into adjacent farmland, and restore the adjacent Asham Quarry Void using materials from the farmland extension.

A Report to Inform Habitats Regulations Assessment (RIHRA) was prepared to accompany the submission. Following provision of additional information pertinent to the HRA through a Regulation 25 submission, following advice received from Natural England, an RIHRA Update Report was prepared in November 2022 to ensure the complete HRA was contained in a single document.

However, a revised scheme of working is now proposed.

Key scheme details

The main change is that the revised scheme of working concentrates all mineral working and associated works within Westdown Quarry and farmland extension and does not use the Asham Quarry Void.

Therefore, the revised scheme is within the area that was previously assessed but covers a much smaller area. The quarry activities, retention of important landscape features, proposed approach to progressive restoration, and the proposed habitat types are identical to the 2021 scheme, although the mix of terrestrial habitats in the Westdown area includes more woodland than in the 2021 proposals.

An extensive suite of general measures providing incidental mitigation for ecological features and receptor-based measures providing mitigation for ecological features was presented in the 2022 RIHRA. The measures implemented with the revised scheme are identical where they still apply to the worked areas, although any measures planned for the Asham Quarry void (specifically the provision of additional bat roosting opportunities through provision of concrete tunnels to be buried in tipped material in Asham Quarry Void) will not be pursued as this area is now outside of the application boundary.

This Note

This Note presents a review of the conclusions of the previous HRA, following consideration of the revised scheme of working and its potential for effects on European Sites.



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REVIEW OF RIHRA CONCLUSIONS

As the revised scheme of working comprises the same activities but in a much reduced area, there is no change to the European sites previously assessed: Mells Valley SAC and Mendip Woodlands SAC.

Mells Valley SAC

The conclusions from the 2022 RIHRA Mells Valley SAC assessment were that there is **‘no potential for adverse effects on the integrity of Mells Valley SAC, as the site’s conservation objectives will not be challenged by the proposed scheme’**, and read as follows:

The undesignated habitat on the Westdown and Asham Quarry sites only support a low level of greater horseshoe bat activity, and a single small transitional/day roost. Surveys confirmed that bats using the site were part of the SAC breeding population, however, there was no evidence that the on-site habitats provide an important foraging or roosting resource for the maintenance of the population. The most valuable feature on the site for greater horseshoe bats was the Fordbury Water corridor, which was used for commuting, albeit still at a relatively low level. The corridor provides an important link to connect habitats in the context of the wider landscape.

*Given the status of greater horseshoe bats on the site and as a result of the availability of other suitable and comparable habitat in the wider area, and the measures that have been built into the scheme design to retain important features and minimise potential for adverse effects on the species, none of the assessed effects are predicted to result in an adverse effect on the conservation status of the Mells Valley SAC bat population. Therefore, it is concluded that there is **no potential for adverse effects on the integrity of Mells Valley SAC, as the site’s conservation objectives will not be challenged by the proposed scheme.***

Given the reduced scheme extent such that there is now no need to cross the Fordbury Water corridor, or potentially disturb the habitats in and surrounding the Asham Quarry Void, predicted effects on the bats are reduced, and it is therefore concluded that the 2022 conclusion of **‘no potential for adverse effects the integrity of Mells Valley SAC, as the site’s conservation objectives will not be challenged by the proposed scheme’** remains valid.

Mendip Woodlands SAC

The conclusions from the 2022 RIHRA Mendip Woodlands SAC assessment were that there was **‘no potential for adverse effects the integrity of Mendip Woodlands SAC, as the site’s conservation objectives will not be challenged by the proposed scheme’**, and read as follows:

*Survey work in 2019 identified ancient semi-natural woodland on the plateau and slopes, representing *Fraxinus excelsior*-*Acer campestre*-*Mercurialis perennis* woodland (W8), which is a*

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characteristic woodland community over the Carboniferous Limestone in the Mendip Hills, and the designated feature of the SAC. A high species and soil diversity were recorded, with abundant growth of mosses, liverworts and epiphytic species, including saxicolous (i.e. grow on rocks) species which are able to behave as epiphytes. Structural degradation as a result of off-road motorcyclists creating paths was recorded.

*As a result of the proposed measures and careful management and monitoring of activities on the site to minimise potential for adverse effects on habitat within the Mendip Woodlands SAC, none are predicted to result in an adverse effect on the conservation status of the Mendip Woodland SAC woodland habitat. Therefore, it is concluded that there is **no potential for adverse effects the integrity of Mendip Woodlands SAC, as the site’s conservation objectives will not be challenged by the proposed scheme.***

*Based on the additional clarification provided in the Regulation 25 Additional Information (Wood, 2022) in respect of the potential for hydrological effects on Asham Wood SAC and the provision of a sizeable area of habitat for foraging bats to be implemented as soon as the required planning approvals and legal agreements are in place, prior to any habitat losses, as indicated in **Section 1.1** and **Table 2.1**, Natural England concurred with the conclusion of this RIHRA Update.*

Given the reduced scheme extent and the resulting increased separation distance of the scheme from the SAC, such that there is now no potential for direct effects on the SAC, predicted effects are reduced, and it is therefore concluded that the 2022 conclusion of ‘**no potential for adverse effects the integrity of Mendip Woodlands SAC, as the site’s conservation objectives will not be challenged by the proposed scheme**’ remains valid.