

## **FOR ATTENTION OF THE INSPECTOR, MR WOOLCOCK**

Dear Sir

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to speak on Friday 8th. I set out below an updated copy of the objections and concerns I spoke about.

When I heard that the decision reached by Mr. Normington last year had been quashed at Judicial review, on the grounds of an "error in law", I was devastated. As were hundreds of others. As a community, we have been fighting this proposal for 5 years now. So it was a blow.

I struggled to know what more we could do, what more I could say. Having submitted numerous objections, written many letters and spoken at length at the first Inquiry, it felt like all our efforts and hard work had been for nothing. But we are a strong and united community passionately opposed to a proposal that we believe will adversely affect so many, people's lives.

Whilst I endorse every single objection raised to date, I'm not going to repeat my objections or go over the same ground again. It's a waste of time. But my understanding is they still stand and I trust the Inspector will have the time to read them and the hundreds of others submitted by residents of this community.

The success of NRS in getting the original decision overturned has given them the time and opportunity to attempt to come up with an "improved version" of their original proposal. Nothing I have heard during the first week of the Inquiry or have read in their documents has in any way changed my mind, in fact the opposite is true.

Firstly, The Public Consultation, was a complete sham. No attempt made to offer information, questionnaires not readily in sight, no engagement whatsoever on the part of the NRS representative sat in the corner of the room. Rather than seeking to keep members of this community up to date with the changes they were proposing to make, NRS appear to have been very reluctant to do so. It appears they employed tactics to make it extremely difficult for us. No signage anywhere on the proposed site, which they know is well used by the community. No signage in any of the villages. A small piece in a free newspaper that is only circulated in the main town of Kidderminster, not in surrounding villages. A fact I feel certain they were well aware of. If not, they should have checked! Holding the meeting in August, school holidays, when they knew many would be away on holiday appears to have been another way to ensure not many would attend. There are hundreds of people not on Facebook in this community, who had no idea whatsoever that a public consultation was being held. DISGRACEFUL!

I feel that these tactics put members of the public at a disadvantage. How can we object to a revised proposal if we are not fully informed of it? The public consultation in my mind was nothing more than a tick box exercise. The fact that NRS then used the "poor attendance numbers" to imply that residents do not object to the revised scheme is also disgraceful, and obviously not true! .

I did attend the NRS public consultation at Wolverley Memorial Hall, as a member of the STQ Facebook group, we were informed by our committee members. I had hoped to get some information about the changes, I was disappointed.

I therefore started looking at the numerous on line documents.

I found document number CD15 - Revised Plans & Supporting Information dated July 2024. There are 24 sections in this document and section 1 (document CD15.1 - Environmental Statements Addendum) seemed to give some information on the changes made to the Environmental Statements in this revised plan. This document is 102 pages long. I'm not going to lie or purport to have understood it all. A lot of it is way over my level of education.

However, I think I got the gist of it, and I believe I understood enough. Enough to say that there is absolutely nothing in those documents that I have seen that caused me to change my mind, reduced my fears or altered any of my objections.

In fact, after listening to the Appellant's evidence, and claims that this is an improved scheme, over the course of the Inquiry this week, I have more concerns than before!

The documents I read are completely one-sided. Filled with positive claims, trying to convince everyone that they have come up with a wonderful new scheme! Thousand of words, hundreds of documents, filled with data and diagrams. With very few changes (that I could see) and none of them sound like improvements to me. No attempt appears to have been made to address any of our concerns.

The changes I noted were:

- \*Proposed mineral plant to be reduced in size, with reduced operational acoustic volume .

- \*Reduced footprint

- \*Some bunds reduced in height, some removed (due to quieter plant).

Why, I wonder did they not reduce the size of mineral plant 12 months ago in the first Inquiry? Apparently plant infrastructure has evolved during the last 5/6 years. Why wait till now to tell us that there is smaller and quieter plant available? No details have been given other than they have confirmed it will be quieter. How will this be checked/monitored? Once they get planning permission, who or what is to stop them from using whatever machinery suits their purpose?

BUNDS to be reduced in height from 6m to 3m and some bunds will not be required at all (they say this is due to the quieter plant).

(Bit confused about the bund directly in front of the McDonald's window though. In the text it says bund 7 will only be reduced to 4m, but in the table below it states 3m, both referring to Phase 1. Which is it? Either way, that "improvement" will make no difference

to the view from the McDonald's ground floor front windows. All they will see is a bund directly outside their window and a bit of sky if they're lucky).

I completely fail to see how reducing the height of bunds is an improvement!

DEFINITION OF BUND: *"to prevent pollution of the receiving environment"*

That presumably includes NOISE pollution as well as DUST pollution. ie a BUND provides a barrier to mitigate the risk of pollution (whatever that may be) of spreading!

So although the plant will now be "reduced in size with reduced operational acoustic volume", the BUND (Barrier to keep the noise in) has been reduced to half the height of the original bunds. So in reality how much of an improvement in the amount of noise spreading has been achieved? I suspect it will make little difference. We will still hear it.

During the first Public Inquiry, an NRS Expert witness stated CLEARLY, that the BUNDS (the size, quantity and positioning detailed in their original scheme), " would help prevent the spread" of dust.! This was stated in response to a question concerning the potential spread of dust, when the prevailing wind was blowing down the hill, in the direction of the new housing development at Lea Castle.

If therefore, an expert witness relied on the height and number of bunds proposed last year, as a means of mitigating the risk of dust spreading, how can the Appellant now claim 12 months later that reducing the bund heights by half is an improvement?? Won't that increase the risk of dust spreading?

Perhaps NRS believe that by reducing the size of bunds, this will add to the effect of "openness" across the site, would have us feel less concerned about our loss of beautiful views? Persuade us this is an improvement, and hope we forget about the dust? A bund, whatever its size is a blot on the landscape, 3m or 6m makes little difference to the overall visual impact of an industrial plant right in the middle of beautiful green belt land.

NRS also talk about "monitoring" and "complaint logs" in terms of noise (and dust too) and its effects on residents, in the revised documents. Is this supposed to be an improvement too? Who will monitor? NRS or outside professional bodies?. Who do we complain to? Will complaints have any effect? I doubt it. Complaints about other quarries in the past have gone unanswered, nothing gets done, people are left to suffer. Being able to log a complaint goes nowhere near alleviating my fears. In fact it's difficult not to laugh.

So in terms of NOISE. NRS conclude (in the revised proposal), that with the changes proposed, the development would not result in "significant adverse" impacts with regard to normal and temporary operations.

Whose definition of significant is this measured against?

“Significant adverse impact” is subjective.

It is not always about the level of noise, it is often the continuous noise, that you cant get away from that causes stress. Who will judge what is significant? NRS? Noise level measurements, in real life are irrelevant if the constant sound, however loud, is causing you stress.

What is still very concerning to me is the close proximity of so many vulnerable children and elderly residents. What might not have a significant adverse impact on one person, may cause a great deal of harm to others. Our elderly residents with health issues who are housebound and children in school all day, will be subjected to it day in day out. So, I do not believe that any improvements in terms of NOISE mitigation have been made, in the revised scheme, in reality. In fact in my opinion it is just a revised jumble of words and slight adjustments to persuade us that improvements have been made.

My other main concern relates to DUST and air quality. So I looked at that section next. However I did not read the section on greenhouse gases and climate change. The Appellant states “It remains concluded that, with the implementation of standard dust mitigation and control measures, the proposed development would not result in significant adverse impacts and effects due to dust on local receptors”.

What has been proposed that is different to the original scheme? What new real evidence have they got that they can guarantee WOULD NOT. This is just their opinion, conjecture. They have reduced the height of the BUNDS and REMOVED some. The barriers they claimed last year would mitigate the risk of dust impact.

One of the major concerns for most people, myself included is the risk of Silica dust and its potential for harm when breathed in over a number of years. The fact that our children, from as young as 3 months, will be exposed to it for years. Young lungs, breathing in dust that has potential to harm, throughout their entire school life and beyond.

Authorities, laws, policies continue to state that dust particulates in quarry sand are not hazardous to the health of people living/working nearby. NRS provide numerous pages of reports and assessments in Appendices attached to these documents to attempt to "prove" this.

It is true that data, on the link between silica dust and respiratory disease, has not been collected, on people living close to a quarry, only quarry workers themselves. So no "official " statistics exist. Yet.

So we are unable to PROVE that silica dust particles from quarries is harmful to the health of people living or working nearby a quarry. The Appellant's Barrister spent some considerable time on this fact, when cross examining a rule 6 witness.

If there is no data or statistics available, how then can the Appellant claim that the quarry WOULD NOT result in significant adverse impact on Receptors? How can they

prove that, where is their evidence? They agree there are no official statistics! If you can't prove it IS harmful, then by the same lack of evidence, you can't prove it IS NOT!

The whole document is "de-humanised". We are referred to as Receptors. Nothing has been said or done to allay people's fears, or to even recognise them. These concerns have been completely ignored, and as far as I can see, no meaningful improvements have been made.

BUT concerns are already emerging! Stories have been appearing in the press for a number of years, claiming a sharp rise in patients with respiratory illness who live close to a quarry.

The possibility that these dust particles might be harmful should be taken into account when considering the suitability of location. The proximity and number of homes near a proposed site should be taken into account. Decision makers should err on the side of caution. There is surely a moral obligation to do so??

The government web site HSE.GOV.UK - gives guidance on the duties & responsibilities of quarry operators, in the Quarries Regulations 1999. I know this is mainly guidance for employers relating to quarry workers. But it also says "The regulations aim to protect those working at a quarry and *others who may be affected by quarrying activities, eg those living, passing or working nearby.* " It also describes risks when exposed to even small amounts of airborne dust particles over a long period of time. The real possibility that this dust could be harmful is beginning to be understood.

Lea Castle Farm is surrounded by homes, schools, nurseries, parks, pubs, tea rooms, sports fields and other recreational outdoor facilities. People are terrified for the health of their kids, from babies right through their formative years. Elderly residents with existing health conditions are scared that what years they have left are going to be shortened.

Even if we could be convinced there is no risk from silica dust, everyone knows, despite what measures the Appellant proposes to put in, quarries are DUSTY! On a breezy day, parked cars, roads, windows of nearby properties will be covered in dust. Kids playing, in playgrounds that will be covered in dust. Breathing in ANY dust is harmful, particularly if you are doing so every day for years!

I don't want myself, my Daughter, my friends, neighbors or any children ending up as a statistic in years to come, when authorities and lawmakers finally accept that living so close to a quarry is hazardous and the laws are changed. The first documented death in the UK, caused by asbestos was in 1903. It took till 1999 before ALL types of asbestos were banned. 93 years. How many deaths were allowed to happen before something was done? How many people will have to get sick from silica dust before something is done.

**\* The Stop The Quarry Group has just received an email from a lady who has recently learned about this proposal. This lady has Silicosis. She was not a quarry**

**worker, she worked nearby. She was so appalled that consideration was even being given to this proposal, due to the close proximity of the site to schools, homes, etc. that she has sent a very powerful email to the Inspector.**

In addition to my original objections, I would like to comment on the proposed change to the bridleway. Although not as expert as Miss Hatch on the subject.

I have been absolutely appalled whilst listening to claims by the Appellant on the "improvement" to the bridleway. We owned a horse for over 20 years. 15 years of which she was stabled very near Cookley. We bought her for our Daughter, who has autism. She enjoyed many years of riding in and around Cookley and particularly across Lea Castle farm.

The claim that the new bridleway will be suitable for horses and riders is nothing short of disgraceful. The proposed changes will render the bridleway not fit for purpose. I would never allow my Daughter to ride her horse along a track hemmed in by Bunds with quarry activity and noise going on around her. The very notion that it is acceptable for horse riders to have to cross an underground conveyor belt is a disgrace. How dare the NRS Expert witness for NOISE state that "the noise would only get louder as the horse approached the conveyor belt and that the noise would reduce after the horse crossed it and walked on past it"! The expression "you cannot be serious" springs to mind. She had no right to be offering an opinion on a subject she clearly knows nothing about. ANYONE who has ever owned a horse for leisure purposes will swear on oath, that to attempt to persuade a highly unpredictable animal to cross over a vibrating noise in a restricted area is not only asking for trouble, but is virtually guaranteeing it! Horses will spook at the slightest thing. The fact that the NRS expert on NOISE claims to "understand horses have different hearing to humans" is ridiculous! How can it be right that this type of evidence is allowed?

During the course of last week, the Appellant raised the issue of Large Built Up Areas, stating that the residents homes around the proposed quarry site did NOT constitute a large built up area, so it was therefore an acceptable site for the location of a quarry.

The greenbelt area of the proposed site is surrounded on all sides by houses, schools, businesses and recreational facilities. Planning permission has now also been applied for, for a further 800 homes to be built on the Lea Castle estate. (Residents in the area have received letters from WCC advising them of this application). These new homes will be in an even closer proximity to the site than some in Cookley, directly opposite the quarry site, separated by the busy A449. It sounds built up enough to me to make it a bad location for a quarry, but I don't understand what the definition of a "built up area" is.

The Appellant has also tried to claim, that it could be many years before these additional homes are built, and should not be taken into consideration. But with Planning Permission applied for, the fact that houses have already been built on that site, the likelihood is that Planning permission is a given and I'm sure the builders will be

keen to get them built sooner rather than later. They are not going to hang around until the site is restored!

The Barrister for the Appellant then tried to claim that the site is "countryside". Stating that the proposed quarry at Lea Castle Farm is "no more alien than any other quarry in the countryside". We might not be a "built up" area, but neither are we "countryside" in the true meaning of the word. In my opinion that statement is preposterous!

A quarry built in the "countryside" is not surrounded by 7000 homes. How do I know its 7,000. Because last year volunteers from this community (approximately 50 of us) walked the pavements for weeks, distributing STQ flyers to residential properties. 5000 of those leaflets were printed free of charge for us by a local business, who is strongly opposed to the quarry, as are many other businesses in the vicinity. The other 2000 were printed by volunteers on their own printers. We also placed banners, again provided free of charge in a number of hospitality businesses in close proximity of the site.

Quarries that are built in the "countryside" usually have minimal number of properties close by and a great deal more space between them, than a quarry on Lea Castle Farm. That is surely the very reason why a countryside location is far more suited to the location of a quarry.

I was also concerned about the comments about urban sprawl and the suggestion that the quarry would provide a barrier between our villages and the urban sprawl of the large built up area of Kidderminster town. Inferring that putting a quarry on that site would be beneficial because it would prevent urban sprawl. Now, I might have got this wrong, and apologies if I have, but doesn't greenbelt land already provide a barrier to urban sprawl? Is it not in itself a barrier already? If so, then the appellant must be aware of that so to suggest that a quarry would prevent urban sprawl seems rather ridiculous.

Lea Castle Farm is located in a semi rural area, (our villages are described as such by Estate Agents). It is in a beautiful green belt site, that is now surrounded by almost 7000 homes, 5 schools and numerous business including leisure and tourism ( evidenced by the success of a Camping & Caravan Club site which has been in the area for years). It is neither a large built up area nor open countryside. It is somewhere in between. If anything it is going to become even more built up once the 800 houses on Lea Castle Estate are built. It is a haven of open space, wildlife, peace and tranquility, so valuable in these difficult times of stress related illnesses.

Our local businesses will suffer and jobs will be lost if a quarry is allowed on this location. There is real danger that a wonderful old school will be forced to close, as evidenced by the concerns of at least 3 families and their clear intention to remove their children from the school if the quarry goes ahead. Prospective families in the future will certainly not choose Heathfield Knoll school if there is a quarry operating across the road. Would you?

I consider myself an expert camper (40 years and counting). I can almost guarantee that campers, who enjoy the experience of living outdoors in fresh air and a peaceful environment, will without a shadow of doubt, decide to go elsewhere. Campers will not pick a site next door to a quarry. The Caravan & Camping Club, a huge nationwide organisation, will not keep a site open that is not making a profit. This would have a serious impact on The Lock Pub and the Old Smithy tea rooms, who get a great deal of trade from the camp site. This would have an adverse impact on our local economy that far outweighs any "benefits" the quarry would bring. NRS continue to refuse to acknowledge the impact of "perception" and human behavior, and take no account of this possibility in their Economic statements, which in my opinion are not worth the paper they are written on.

It is an extremely unsuitable location for a quarry and will have a devastating effect on hundreds of people, including vulnerable children, elderly residents and people with existing health conditions both physical and mental. For many of us our lives will never be the same. For some, we will have to endure it for the rest of our lives. I won't be around to see the end of it, to see the restoration completed, the return of flora and fauna. I will never again enjoy the space and beauty of it with my Daughter. Mine, and hundreds of others, retirement ruined. Parents having to live with the constant worry about their children and not being able to do anything to protect them. Years of worry! Hundreds of people already struggling to pay their mortgages in the current economic climate, will be pushed into negative equity as our house prices fall. Who wants to move to a village with a quarry in its back garden? Its happening already, buyers pulling out as they become aware of the possibility that they might have to live next door to a quarry.

I would just like to finish by saying, that I know we are back in this position due to an error in law. That's what its officially called. The reality is that its a mistake in one small paragraph amongst 201 other paragraphs, numerous tables and a total of 58 pages. One small paragraph. I understand the judge had no choice but to refer it back to the Secretary of State. The law is the law. But it will be a complete travesty, and an utter disgrace, if the Appellant now gets the decision overturned after so many years of fighting, numerous battles won, so many decisions to Reject. Lea Castle Farm is a totally unsuitable location for a quarry. Please do the right thing.

Thank you for your time.

Karen Anderson  
Cookley Resident