

APPENDIX 1

ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE MINERALS OPTIONS PAPER FOR BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET

This section considers the individual chapters of the Minerals Options Paper and their implications for the Council.

1. Chapter 1 – Introduction

- 1.1 This section refers to sustainability appraisal (SA) which identifies the key issues associated with mineral extraction in Somerset. It will be necessary to ensure that the SA includes the potential for extraction to impact on the Bath Hot Springs as part of the appraisal process.

2. Chapter 2 – Policy Context

- 2.1 No implications for the Council

3. Chapter 3 - Minerals in Somerset

- 3.1 This section should also reference groundwater as one of the key issues for minerals in Somerset.

4. Chapter 4 – Vision and Plan Objectives

- 4.1 The vision and plan objectives need to recognise that the potential impacts of mineral extraction in Somerset have implications that extend beyond the County boundary.

5. Chapter 5 – Aggregates

- 5.1 This chapter recognises at paragraph 5.27:

“In recognition of the particularly sensitive groundwater situation in the Mendips, due to the geology and combined pressure of quarry dewatering and abstraction for drinking water supply, the Minerals Local Plan takes a precautionary approach to protecting water interests.”

- 5.2 And at paragraphs 5.61 and 5.62 on Water Resources:

“There is potential for quarrying to impact significantly on groundwater resources and as proposals for quarrying become deeper and deeper the risks are increased. The Minerals Core Strategy will continue to place a very high importance on the protection of the water regime.

- 5.3 The water resources in the Mendips are particularly pressured because they are important for public water supply, local agricultural supply and are within an area of particularly deep quarrying activity. The Mendip Hills groundwater system is complex and predicting the effects of drawdown to access minerals is also complex. The Minerals Local Plan policy advocated a precautionary approach regarding water impacts. There is no reason to alter this approach in the Core Strategy.”

- 5.4 The continuation of a precautionary approach to future deep quarrying in the Mendips is welcomed, however the recognition of the sensitivity of the Mendips needs to be expanded to acknowledge the potential for impacts on the Bath Hot Springs to ensure that this is acknowledged within the Core Strategy and that future applications take this into account.
- 5.5 The existing Somerset Minerals Plan confirms at paragraph 6.5.9 that: "Somerset County Council will continue to work with the mineral operators, the Environment Agency and adjoining authorities to identify means for protecting hydrogeological interests in the Mendips."
- 5.6 This approach should be continued and the Minerals Core Strategy should set out clearly what measures will be put in place to ensure that the interests of adjoining authorities are properly considered.

6. Chapter 6 – Peat

- 6.1 No implications for the Council

7. Chapter 7 – Building Stone

- 7.1 No implications for the Council

8. Chapter 8 – Energy Minerals

- 8.1 This chapter provides no consideration of the potential impacts on future energy exploration and extraction proposals on hydrogeological issues, in particular the Bath Hot Springs.
- 8.2 It is confirmed that 3 licences have been granted by the Department of Energy and Climate Change which are located entirely or partially within Somerset. It is therefore to be expected that proposals for the exploration and extraction of gas will come forward over the plan period.
- 8.3 Hydro Fracturing – commonly known as “fracking” - is the process for extracting natural gas (methane) from differing depths and rock layers underground. This is done by drilling boreholes vertically and laterally and then injecting water, sand and chemicals in at very high pressure to induce fracturing in the rock layer. This then holds open the fractures and allows the gas to escape and be collected at the surface.
- 8.4 There are a number of potential risks to the Bath Hot Springs from fracking operations in the region. These events may be relatively minor in nature at the surface but how they might affect the fracture based delivery system of the Hot Springs to Bath is very uncertain.
- 8.5 The Core Strategy therefore needs to recognise the potential for impacts on groundwater from these activities over an area wider than Somerset and ensure that this is properly considered through the planning process, particularly with regard to potential effects on the Bath Hot Springs.

9. Chapter 9 – Mineral Safeguarding Areas

9.1 No implications for the Council.

10. Chapter 10 – Development Control Policies

10.1 Need to ensure that they acknowledge and cover the potential impacts on the Bath Hot Springs.

11. Key Findings

- 11.1 The key findings on the Minerals Options Paper are that whilst it acknowledges the potential for quarrying to significantly impact on water resources in the Mendips it does not yet fully consider the implications of this and the potential for this activity to impact on interests outside of Somerset, in particular the Bath Hot Springs.
- 11.2 The Council should therefore seek to ensure that the Somerset Minerals Core Strategy is developed to continue the precautionary approach to deep quarrying activity and to extend the precautionary approach to cover energy exploration and extraction proposals in the Mendips. In addition there should be explicit reference to the international importance of the Bath Hot Springs and the need for deep quarrying and energy proposals in the Mendips to specifically consider potential impacts on them.
- 11.3 The Council should also seek to work with Somerset CC, mineral operators and the Environment Agency to identify means for protecting hydrogeological interests in the Mendips.