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PLANS:

- 1022/L** - Location Plan (on front cover)
- 1022/A** - Application Plan
- 1022/SC/2** - Site Context
- 1022/O/1c** - Illustrative Operations Plan
- 1022/R/1a** - Illustrative Restoration Plan

LAND AT PYNESFIELD MAPLE CROSS, HERTS

Application for mineral extraction, processing and importation of sand and gravel and reclamation materials from Denham Park Farm with restoration to agriculture and a small wetland area

NON TECHNICAL SUMMARY

1. EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW

1.1 The sand and gravel deposit at Pynesfield is uneconomic to develop in its own right due to the small size of the reserve combined with the capital investment required for the infrastructure.

1.2 The development of the site in association with the permitted Denham Park Farm Quarry allows the cost of infrastructure to be shared. In addition there are sustainable benefits as a processing plant can be established at Pynesfield that makes use of the availability of water and by blending the two deposits will ensure that high quality aggregates are produced.

1.3 There is also the benefit of being able to source reclamation material from Denham Park Farm to ensure high quality restoration back to agriculture with a small area of wetland on the Pynesfield site. The relationship between the two sites is shown on the attached Site Context plan.

1.4 The overall timescale for the development of Pynesfield is approximately 10 years.

2. THE APPLICATION

2.1 The application is for mineral extraction, processing and the importation of sand and gravel and reclamation material from Denham Park Farm with restoration to agriculture and a small wetland area, the application area being shown on the attached plan.

2.2 The approved access for Denham Park Farm requires a short section of Tilehouse Lane to be realigned and a new bellmouth entrance will be constructed to gain access to Pynesfield. This is shown on the attached plan as well as a cross-over entrance which will be used when materials from Denham Park Farm are delivered.

2.3 The application area extends to some 17 hectares although minerals are only extracted from about 8 - 9 with the reserve being 350,000 - 400,000 tonnes.

2.4 The overall life of the Pynesfield development is anticipated to be 10 years with the site being restored to good quality agricultural land together with a small area of wetland to ensure greenfield runoff rates for future drainage.

3. JUSTIFICATION/NEED

3.1 The principal justification for the application is that the reserve at Pynesfield would become sterilised if not worked in association with Denham Park Farm. This is due to the small size of the reserve combined with the high cost of development. There is also the further risk of sterilisation as a result of the HS2 proposals.

3.2 By working the two sites together results in considerable synergies as establishing a low profile processing plant at Pynesfield with an adequate water supply enables the deposit at Denham Park Farm and Pynesfield to be blended to produce high quality aggregates.

3.3 The third aspect of the justification is that Pynesfield needs to be restored back to high quality agricultural land as it cannot be left as a water body due to aircraft safety issues. As it is in a Groundwater Protection Zone only naturally occurring materials are suitable to enable restoration and these can be sourced from the adjoining Denham Park Farm site.

4. ALTERNATIVES

4.1 Apart from the current use of the site for agriculture, the size and location of the site is unsuitable for other 'countryside' uses that would be acceptable within the Green Belt (e.g. golf course, equestrian, etc.).

4.2 Regarding the supply of minerals, Hertfordshire are required to maintain a landbank of permitted reserves that will contribute towards meeting the need. It is recognised there are alternative sites but if this site does not come forward now it will be sterilised in future. Further, the size of reserve is modest and will not have an impact upon the development of the other identified sites in Hertfordshire.

5. PLANNING POLICY

5.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out the Government policy towards development. The golden thread that runs through the policy is that sustainable development should be permitted without delay.

5.2 In relation to minerals the NPPF notes that mineral extraction is not inappropriate within the Green Belt, that minerals are essential to support economic growth, to ensure high quality restoration takes place at the earliest opportunity, to safeguard the long-term potential of best and most versatile land and to ensure when granting permission for mineral development there are no unacceptable adverse impacts. The NPPF also notes that authorities should ensure that the mineral landbank does not stifle competition and that planning authorities should approach decision making in a positive way to deliver sustainable development.

5.3 At a local level the Hertfordshire Minerals Local Plan Review is the relevant document. The policies seek to ensure that there is an adequate landbank and have identified three preferred sites to achieve this, Pynesfield is not an identified site.

5.4 In terms of the landbank the level is currently above the minimum of 7 years and therefore the policies have a presumption against new planning permissions being refused. However, one of the clear exceptions is that mineral permissions will be granted in order to avoid the mineral becoming sterilised which is the case at Pynesfield.

5.5 Regarding the impacts of development, the design of the mineral working and more importantly the shared use of the access ensures there are no unacceptable impacts demonstrating compliance with the policies.

6. DESCRIPTION OF DEVELOPMENT

6.1 Alternatives

6.1.1 In preparing the working design the alternatives of using a field conveyor or vehicles was considered. For a conveyor to be successful the material it carries has to be free-flowing which is the case for excavated sand and gravel but does not apply to the materials required for restoration.

6.1.2 As a result there will need to be vehicle movements on site to achieve restoration so there will need to be good internal roads which can be used for both reclamation materials and minerals. Therefore a conveyor system is not warranted as there need to be good internal roads.

6.1.3 Regarding the location of the processing plant, it makes good economic sense to locate it at the north of the site as this is closer to the source of the Denham Park Farm material for processing as well as being near the access. It is also further removed from properties.

6.1.4 In terms of restoration because of the high quality of the existing agricultural soils policy encourages restoration back to agriculture. To do this requires reclamation material which can only be naturally occurring material in view of the location of the site in a Groundwater Protection Zone. This dictates that reclamation material needs to be sourced from Denham Park Farm.

6.2 Overview

6.2.1 The development of Pynesfield needs to be considered with that of Denham Park Farm. To make best use of both deposits there needs to be a processing plant and associated activities, an acceptable access onto the A412 and a working programme that allows blending of the minerals as well as importation of reclamation material from Denham Park Farm.

6.2.2 The recoverable reserve at Pynesfield is 0.350 - 0.400 Million tonnes and that at Denham Park Farm is 0.500 Million tonnes making a total of 0.900 Million tonnes. This will be worked over an 8 to 10 year period. When the sand and gravel is worked out the area at Pynesfield will be fully restored to good quality farmland and a small area of wetland while the operations at Denham Park Farm continue to their completion.

6.3 Access

6.3.1 The access into the site will be from the short section of realigned and improved Tilehouse Lane as shown on the plans. The location of the bellmouth provides adequate sight lines in both directions that meet criteria for safe use.

6.3.2 There will be a second 'internal' access for material from Denham Park Farm to be delivered to Pynesfield. This is shown as a straight 'cross over' of Tilehouse Lane. It is likely that this material will be delivered on a 'campaign' basis which means there will be active concentrated activity over short periods between which there will be no cross over movements.

6.3.3 The internal arrangements at Pynesfield are to keep the incoming Denham Park Farm vehicles separate from those vehicles delivering the processed product. This is designed to separate the 'clean' activities from the 'dirty' activities.

6.3.4 The internal road leading to Tilehouse Lane will be concreted for the last 50 metres and there will be an internal wheel washing facility. This is designed to ensure that no mud or debris is carried onto the public highway. In addition, road cleaners will be used to ensure that the highway in the vicinity of the site is kept clean.

6.4 Traffic

6.4.1 The Denham Park Farm permission anticipated that the sand and gravel reserve would be removed at approximately 100,000 tonnes p.a. The output from Pynesfield will be of a similar order (possibly less) so in overall terms there is no change to the traffic movements at the permitted Tilehouse Lane/A412 junction.

6.4.2 The traffic movements associated with the output from Pynesfield needs to be assessed in the overall context of the usage of the Tilehouse Lane/A412 junction. This has been the subject of a traffic statement based on 80 movements (40 in, 40 out) a day with the maximum being in the order of 124 movements (62 in, 62 out). The conclusion of the traffic statement is that there will be no adverse impact.

6.4.3 It should be noted that the Denham Park Farm proposal (if developed in isolation to Pynesfield) would have delivered all the sand and gravel to the quarry at Harefield thereby resulting in a very large number of lorry movements at the traffic lights in Denham Green. The combination of the two sites noticeably reduces movements through Denham Green.

6.5 Hours of Operation

6.5.1 The hours of operation will be

0700 - 1800 Monday to Friday

0700 - 1300 Saturday

with no operation on Sundays or Bank Holidays.

6.6 Site Development/Soil Handling

6.6.1 All soils will be handled when in a suitably dry and friable condition and when weather and ground conditions are dry. The Good Practice Guides for Soil Handling produced by DEFRA will be followed throughout the operation to ensure that minimal harm is done to the soil resource.

6.6.2 The topsoil will be stripped separately from the subsoil. The topsoil will be used to create a perimeter screening bund around the site with the subsoil being stored separately adjacent to each of the phases as shown on plan 1022/O/1c attached. The topsoil bunds will be 3.0 metres high and the subsoil bunds will be between 3.0 metres and 5.0 metres high.

6.7 Plant & Operations

6.7.1 The processing plant will be of modular low profile design with the height being kept below 7.5 metres. Because of the nature of the deposit there needs to be a crusher in closed circuit which is located on the far side of the plant to the A412. The ancillary operations will include a surface mounted weighbridge and a site office, a container security store/workshop as well as bunded fuel tanks within a securely fenced area. In addition, there will be a small car park for site personnel.

6.7.2 The operations will be worked on a phased basis, starting to the south of the plant site and progressing southwards as shown on the plans. The plant site itself will be excavated as the final phase during which time the processing plant (being modular) will be located on part of the reclaimed land.

6.8 Lighting

6.8.1 Mineral working is mainly a daylight activity so artificial lighting is only required for limited periods within the operating hours. Generally this is for the first hour in the morning during Winter and occasionally the last hour although generally processing activity stops when it gets too dark for safety reasons.

6.8.2 Floodlights will be mounted on short poles on the top of the processing plant with the light directed downwards towards the stockpiles to avoid any spillage. There will be a floodlight on the office to light up the weighbridge, again pointing downwards together with a floodlight within the security store. The floodlight on the office and security store will be intruder linked.

6.8.3 The design will ensure this no risk of any light spillage outside the plant and operations area to avoid any impact on ecology or residential properties.

6.9 Water Management

6.9.1 Because the site is in a Groundwater Protection Zone it is not proposed to carry out any dewatering. The mineral will be worked using a long reach excavator.

6.9.2 In order to protect the underlying chalk aquifer the basal layer of sand and gravel will be left undug. This layer contains a higher proportion of chalk and is generally of a distinctly paler colour to the main deposit.

6.9.3 Water for processing will come from the excavated area. Processing recirculates water through a series of small settlement ponds which will be regularly cleaned out.

6.9.4 The water retained within the product stockpiles will drain through the surface of the operations area thereby recharging back into the gravel groundwater.

6.9.5 The placing of reclamation material will be done of a controlled basis to ensure that the water level within the excavation does not 'spill out'. This will be managed by regular visual inspection with the water level naturally balancing itself through the unlined faces of the excavation.

6.9.6 The design of the working demonstrates that there is no requirement for any controlled discharge of water with all the water being managed within the site.

6.10 Mobile Plant

6.10.1 The mobile plant employed at the quarry will comprise wheeled loaders, hydraulic excavators and articulated dump trucks as well as the normal road lorries.

6.10.2 The wheeled loaders will be responsible for feeding the plant and managing the stockpiles with the hydraulic excavator digging the mineral and loading it to articulated dump trucks for delivery to the plant.

6.10.3 The delivery of the materials (minerals and reclamation) from Denham Park Farm will be done by articulated dump trucks or road lorries.

6.11 Restoration

6.11.1 The reclamation of the site is viewed as the placing of the material delivered from Denham Park Farm up to the basal level of the soil profile.

6.11.2 The investigation showed that the topsoil and subsoil on average is 1.1 metres, and as referred to above all of this is stripped and stored on site for reuse.

6.11.3 At completion of the reclamation 'platform' the surface will be ripped to ensure no compaction as this will be the lower subsoil layer. The restored soil profile will then be built up with 0.8 metres of subsoil followed by 0.3 metres of topsoil following the Good Practice Guides for Soil Placement. This will ensure the land is restored to a high quality for future farming.

6.11.4 In the south of the site an area will be restored to slightly lower levels to produce a wetland area which forms part of the drainage scheme for the site to ensure that runoff rates into the future meet greenfield standards. The restoration is shown on the attached plan.

6.12 Aftercare

6.12.1 The objective of the aftercare scheme is to bring the land back to good heart and the work will be carried out in association with the farming of the undisturbed part of the site which will be consolidated with the restored land to make one field. The scheme will include,

- soil sampling to establish fertilizer/nutrient requirements,
- applying fertilizer/nutrient as specified,
- carrying out the necessary cultivations to provide a good tilth for seeding,
- agreeing a cropping programme,
- reviewing drainage and carrying out remedial works or installing drainage,
- preparing an annual report detailing cultivations, fertilizer application, works and cropping details,
- meeting with the MPA annually,
- the scheme will be for a period of 5 years.

7. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

7.1 Landscape and Visual

7.1.1 The application site forms the lower part of a large rectangular field which is located between the A412 and Tilehouse Lane. The lower lying land is at around 40 metres a.o.d. with Tilehouse Lane being some 15 - 20 metres higher.

7.1.2 The site is located within the wider landscape setting of the Colne Valley and is seen as open agricultural landscape with large arable fields and some linked woodlands.

7.1.3 The Mid Colne Valley SSSI is located approximately 0.25 kilometre to the east (see Site Context plan). The site is also located within the Green Belt and in the landscape character area of Maple Cross slopes.

7.1.4 In terms of the impacts the landscape report notes that it is a small part of a very large and wide landscape. The visual impacts are limited due to the sunken nature of Tilehouse Lane, the tree belt along the A412 and the woodland along the southern boundary. This results in views being glimpsed both in relation to properties and to public rights of way. There is no landscape or visual impact on the Mid Colne SSSI owing to it being separated from the site by the A412 and the distance.

7.1.5 In order to mitigate any impacts the site will be surrounded by grassed perimeter bunds which reduce the visual impact but which in themselves are an impact on the landscape. However, this landscape impact is considered modest due to the small size of the site combined with its location on the edge of the rising ground so there is no impact on the key characteristics of the Maple Cross slopes.

7.1.6 Regarding views into the site, these are currently filtered by the woodland belt along the A412 and along the southern boundaries but there are views across the area from the higher ground. However, to reduce the visual impact a new hedge is proposed along the A412 to strengthen the visual filter. In addition a new hedge and trees is proposed along Tilehouse Lane which is considered to support the reconstruction objectives. It should be noted that Tilehouse Lane is due to be severely affected by the HS2 proposals.

7.1.7 The completed site returns the area to broadly the same level and landform as existing other than the area of wetland in the southern part of the site. Therefore there is no residual impact on completion.

7.2 Ecology

7.2.1 The area to be disturbed is all in arable use and therefore has a low ecological value. The boundary trees and hedgerows are of greater interest.

7.2.2 Regarding the presence of protected species the report noted the following,

- no evidence of any badgers
- there is no suitable habitat for dormouse,
- the mature tree along the northern margin and adjacent to Tilehouse Lane may have potential for roosting bats,
- the site as a whole provides poor habitat for breeding birds although the marginal trees and hedgerows offer better habitat,
- there is an absence of habitat and the site has low potential for any reptiles,
- the site lacks any water bodies and suitable terrestrial use for Great Crested Newts.

7.2.3 Regarding the impacts of the development as there will be no dewatering there will be no risk of impact on the Mid Colne Valley SSSI. Whilst areas of ancient woodland have been identified they are too distant and far away to be affected.

7.2.4 In order to ensure there is no impact on the adjacent vegetation a 10 metre undisturbed margin will be maintained to the woodland to the south of the site as well as the woodland strip along the A412 with 5.0 metres being left to hedgerows.

7.2.5 There will be a very minor impact to the field margin against Tilehouse Lane as a result of the new access.

7.2.6 In overall terms the site development will have little impact on any of the protected species and no trees are to be felled or hedgerows removed. The undisturbed margins will also provide adequate mitigation on the temporary impacts of the development to birds and any bats

which may forage or use the margin. There is a small temporary benefit through the creation of the grass perimeter bunds which are of interest to ground nesting birds.

7.2.7 As referred to under the section on lighting this is all confined within the active plant and operations area so there will be no adverse impact.

7.2.8 At completion the site will be fully restored back to agriculture so there will be no residual impact on the ecology. The small area of seasonal wetland will provide additional wildlife habitat that is well linked to the existing framework of trees, woodlands and hedgerows. This will provide a permanent benefit.

7.3 Water

7.3.1 The surface and groundwater baseline position has been assessed by consultants. In terms of surface water the site lies in the catchment of the River Colne much of which has been worked and is now left as a series of water bodies.

7.3.2 The site itself has no water body or any surface drainage which is considered due to the nature of the underlying gravels.

7.3.3 The gravels rest on the chalk which is seen to outcrop on the rising western flank of the field.

7.3.4 The underlying chalk is classified as a major aquifer and there are a number of public water supply boreholes located within the main valley of the River Colne.

7.3.5 The absence of any surface water drainage on the site means that there will be very limited impact as a result of the development. The main area of impact will be on the groundwater in terms of levels, flows and quality during the operations.

7.3.6 Recognising the sensitive nature of the site being in the Groundwater Protection Zone it is proposed that all operations take place without dewatering. This noticeably reduces the risk of any adverse impact on the groundwater resource.

7.3.7 In terms of quality, there is a small impact that water discoloured by suspended silts could be carried via pathways within the chalk to the abstraction points within the Colne Valley, the nearest being 0.4 kilometres to the east. In order to ensure this does not happen the basal layer of sand and gravel would be left undisturbed to act as a natural filter.

7.3.8 In terms of the silt settled out from the washing, this will be done by ponds excavated into the upper part of the sand and gravel seam so that any recycled water reaching the excavation will have settled first.

7.3.9 In terms of restoration, the use of naturally occurring materials from a single source (Denham Park Farm) will ensure that there is no risk to the water quality. There is evidence that there may have been some old 'landfilling' of a canal in the centre of the site. Should this be excavated and any of the material is retained for use in restoration it will be subject to an appropriate testing regime to ensure that it does not pose a risk and if it does it will be removed from site.

7.3.10 In terms of accidental risk from fuel spillage it is no different to most other mineral/construction sites and good practice will be followed through the use of fuel clean-up kits.

7.3.11 At completion there will be a small residual impact on the storage capacity as the infill materials will not be porous. This impact is considered negligible in relation to the overall size of the aquifer which supplies the abstraction boreholes.

7.3.12 The infill material will have a different characteristic to the sand and gravel and is likely to have a slightly higher run-off rate even though the soil profile will be the same. In order to balance any changes a linear ditch will be constructed along the eastern margin to act as balancing/soakaway feature. This ditch will feed to the wetland area which provides further capacity for balancing to ensure greenfield runoff rates.

7.4 Flood Risk Assessment

7.4.1 A flood risk assessment has been carried out and in view of the lack of any dewatering or water discharges required as part of the development there will be no change to the flood risk locally.

7.4.2 There is a slight change to the drainage characteristics on completion and the management proposals of a linear balancing soakaway ditch combined with the wetland area in the south of the site provides sufficient storage capacity that can handle the rainfall runoff for a one in a hundred rainfall event. These measures will ensure that there is no impact on the risk of flooding as a result of the development.

7.5 Transport

7.5.1 The site is located adjacent to the A412 which is part of the strategic highway network and prior to the construction of the M25 formed part of the northern orbital route for London. It is constructed to a high standard being over 9.0 metres in width, it is lit and is subject to a 50 mph speed limit.

7.5.2 As explained earlier, the development at Pynesfield does not increase any traffic movements to those already permitted for Denham Park Farm. What it does is extends the period of removal of sand and gravel due to the Pynesfield reserve. Therefore there is no impact in terms of traffic capacity and the safe use of the Tilehouse Lane/A412 junction.

7.5.3 In order for the materials from Denham Park Farm to be safely delivered to Pynesfield a separate 'crossing' is required to Tilehouse Lane. This has been designed to meet current criteria and when in use (noting it will be used on a campaign basis) the road will be kept clean through the use of a road sweeper.

7.5.4 The access into Pynesfield itself is from the realigned Tilehouse Lane and no traffic associated with the development will use Tilehouse Lane beyond the junction, i.e. to the west. Again, measures are in place to ensure that the road is kept clean.

7.5.5 At the completion of the Pynesfield development the access onto Tilehouse Lane will be removed and the verge reinstated and planted as will the bellmouth and access to the north. It should be noted that Denham Park Farm will continue to operate for a further 10 or so years.

7.6 Archaeology

7.6.1 A desktop study was carried out to establish the likelihood that archaeological features of more than local significance would be present. The conclusion was that only features of local interest may be present and recommended that a further field evaluation was carried out comprising a geophysical survey followed by a series of field trenches.

7.6.2 Some 81 trenches were excavated of which the majority did not find any archaeological features. Where features were found they comprised of isolated tiny amounts of pottery with the conclusion that the archaeological potential of the site is low to moderate.

7.6.3 Mineral extraction will destroy any archaeological features that may be present. Whilst the work to date found nothing of significance further mitigation is proposed by carrying out an archaeological watching brief when the soils are removed, the details being agreed with the County Archaeologist prior to development commencing. This should ensure that an appropriate level of investigation and recording can be undertaken of any features that may be found.

7.7 Agriculture

7.7.1 An agricultural soil survey has been carried out of the site which shows that it comprised mainly best and most versatile quality soils.

7.7.2 In order to ensure that this resource is not lost the full thickness of the top and subsoils will be removed and stored on site (as referred to earlier). Because of the high quality of the land the area will be restored back to agriculture following the Good Practice Guides for Soil Handling. The working design enables soils and subsoils from each of the individual phases to be replaced on the same phase from which they have been extracted, thereby ensuring no inadvertent mixing of materials.

7.7.3 At completion there will be a small loss of agricultural land due to the creation of the low wetland area in the south of the site. This equates to approximately 10% of the overall area but will add biodiversity to the agricultural landscape.

7.8 Noise

7.8.1 A noise survey has been carried out which shows a range of background levels at the nearest properties all of which are affected by traffic noise from the A412 and the M25. In order to assess the impacts modelling has been carried out based on actual noise measurement from other similar excavation and processing activities.

7.8.2 The impacts have been assessed against the guidelines set out in the technical annex to the NPPF and at the five nearest properties (groups of properties) are seen to comply.

7.8.3 In order to ensure that the modelling is robust monitoring will be carried out once the site is developed to ensure that levels remain in the guidance. Should they be found to fail then the cause will be investigated and additional mitigation will be agreed.

7.8.4 At completion of the development the area will return to agricultural use and there will be no additional noise impacts.

7.9 Dust

7.9.1 Currently the site does not generate any dust other than through the agricultural operations. This is normally associated with harvesting which is 1 - 2 days in any year.

7.9.2 In terms of the development dust is unlikely to be generated as the excavation and treatment is a wet process and the stockpiles of material will have a natural background moisture content. Similar comments apply to the reclamation of the mineral void.

7.9.3 However it is acknowledged that dust can be generated by the movement of vehicles over unsurfaced roads. Widespread practice within the sand and gravel industry (and at construction sites) is to use a water bowser and spray to dampen these areas to ensure dust is not generated and this will be carried out as part of the management at the quarry. It should also be noted that dust particles will be coarse in size and so do not travel more than 100 metres so will be contained within the site both by distance and the perimeter bunds.

8. COMMUNITY CONSULTATION

8.1 Unfortunately Maple Cross does not have an active Parish or Community Council. In order to inform the nearby residents of the application a leaflet explaining the development was hand delivered to the houses within a reasonable distance of the site.

8.2 In addition a Liaison Committee has been established for Denham Park Farm and it is proposed that a representative of the local community is appointed to the committee. There will be a specified site contact (expected to be the Quarry Manager) whose contact details will be made available to all nearby occupiers as well as the Liaison Committee. This is to ensure there is a direct line of contact if and when needed.

9. CONCLUSIONS

9.1 The small deposit of high quality sand and gravel at Pynesfield is uneconomic to be developed on its own and unless worked in conjunction with the adjoining Denham Park Farm, would be sterilised.

9.2 Working the two sites together results in a number of benefits which include making best use of the mineral deposit in both sites, ensuring restoration back to agriculture using acceptable naturally occurring materials, utilising the same access, etc. These benefits demonstrate a sustainable approach.

9.3 The development is located away from any residential properties and has been designed to ensure there are no unacceptable impacts both during the period of development and at completion.

9.4 In summary, the proposals are in accordance with the development plan and represent a very sustainable approach to developing this otherwise uneconomic deposit of sand and gravel.

PLANS