



deunyddiau hanfodel
atebion cynaliadwy

essential materials
sustainable solutions

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Dear Chair

Petitions Committee debate on buffer zones

Following the debate in the Senedd on 16 October last year, on proposals for a 1,000m buffer zone for quarries, and subsequent correspondence between the Petitions Committee and one of our members, we would like to address some of the general policy issues raised. MPA Wales represents the bulk of an industry that operates around 200 sites across Wales providing around 4,000 jobs. Very few quarries would not be affected by the proposed limit.

Members of the Senedd raised a range of concerns, including biodiversity, dust and silica, blasting impact and vehicular traffic. These are issues which are all regulated and controlled either through the planning system, through planning permissions and respective planning conditions, or through separate permits issued by Natural Resources Wales.

We welcome the recognition by some Members of the Senedd of the importance of the materials supplied by our members. Most aggregates quarries supply local or regional demand, so restrictions on quarrying in Wales would have serious impacts throughout the country affecting any aspirations for new housing, schools, hospitals, transport or green energy infrastructure and wider economic growth.

Biodiversity

The quarrying industry's biodiversity track record is outstanding and should be seen as a template for other industries. The MPA's Biodiversity Strategy¹ sets out the industry's commitments going forward, while our Fifty-Year celebration document showcases some of the best restorations done to date.² MPA members across Great Britain have created 83 square kilometres of priority habitat, with a further 110 square kilometres planned.

¹ https://mineralproducts.org/MPA/media/root/Publications/2020/MPA_Biodiversity_Strategy_2020.pdf

² https://mineralproducts.org/Publications/Natural-Environment/Quarries_and_Nature_50_Year_Success_Story.aspx

The progressive restoration of quarries for nature creates incredible habitat, as part of the business-as-usual planning and permitting process. This is overseen by local authorities and Natural Resources Wales. MPA members work closely with environmental NGOs including the Wildlife Trusts and RSPB to restore and manage sites post extraction.

Dust and Silica

Silica dust is tightly controlled and is strictly a workplace hazard affecting those working closely with the cutting and processing of extracted materials. To quote the UK Health and Safety Executive:

“Silicosis is a disease that has only been seen in workers from industries where there is a significant exposure to silica dust, such as in quarries, foundries, the potteries etc. No cases of silicosis have been documented among members of the general public in Great Britain, indicating that environmental exposures to silica dust are not sufficiently high to cause this occupational disease.” (Our underlining)³

We would hope that the debate in Wales on quarrying would reflect both the type of extraction done here, and the regulatory and planning systems in place. The debate cited the Environmental Working Group’s advocacy and research into open sand mines as operated in Wisconsin and Minnesota. These represent very different operations to the majority of quarries under consideration in Wales, comprising large scale extraction of shallow industrial sand deposits. It is further worth noting that an independent Health impact Assessment conducted by the Institute for Wisconsin’s Health concluded that:

“Health effects from the impact of industrial sand mining on community-level air quality related to PM10 are unlikely. In addition, it is unlikely that community members will be exposed to respirable crystalline silica from industrial sand mining as currently regulated; therefore, health effects from exposure are unlikely.”⁴

We would further add that both the environmental conditions and the regulatory and legal controls on operations in the UK are completely different.

Blasting

Blasting is controlled through the planning system, following long-established principles. The levels of permitted ground vibration routinely stipulated in planning conditions are significantly below what would cause structural damage at a distance. The air pressure associated with blasting can rattle windows, depending upon the climatic conditions at the time of the blast, but at a strength similar to a strong wind. These planning conditions are also regularly reviewed through the statutory Mineral Review process. We would be happy to try to arrange a briefing for Senedd Members, as this is a highly technical area.

Vehicle movement and community engagement

Vehicle movements to and from quarries are essential but their effects can be an issue for local communities. Again, where concerns have been raised vehicle movements are managed through the planning process, with the industry applying controls such as wheel washing to reduce inconvenience. We expect a high level of safety standards from the industry working with a range of partners including

³ <https://www.hse.gov.uk/quarries/silica.htm>

⁴ <https://www.pewtrusts.org/-/media/assets/external-sites/health-impact-project/iwhi-2016-sand-mining-report.pdf>

Construction Logistics and Community Safety (CLOCS) and standards including FORS. MPA supports the work of the Mineral Products Qualification Council to ensure appropriate standards in the industry and publishes the Driver Handbook.

We expect local quarry operators, the local authorities and community representatives to liaise closely to minimise the impact of traffic movements. This usually works well where each side works openly and transparently, however, we are aware of a very small number of instances, where despite the quarrying company's best efforts, some communities or their local representatives will not engage in local community liaison groups. The industry works hard to use rail and water options where possible and would welcome the Senedd's support for growing our use of rail freight to reduce lorry movements where this is feasible.

Evidence and essentiality

It was disappointing to see elected representatives allege health impacts and examples of structural damage without substantiating evidence. We are aware that fears may be whipped up in communities to oppose planning applications that are unpopular for other reasons, but this is not a basis for national policy formulation. The minerals industry invests millions of pounds in Wales providing essential materials for roads, houses, public services, transport, water and energy infrastructure, and provides thousands of well-paid, high-productivity jobs. Without local supplies of aggregates Wales would be reliant on external supplies, with higher carbon emissions from transport.

Great Britain as a whole is not replenishing its supplies of construction aggregates fully; over the last decade, for every 100 tonnes of crushed rock sold permission was granted for only 33 tonnes.⁵ A functioning planning and permitting system is needed to make sure that the demand for construction aggregates for homes, infrastructure, public services, commercial and industrial uses can continue to be met in the long term.

Yours sincerely

David Harding
Secretary
MPA Wales

⁵ Mineral Products Association: Annual Mineral Planning Survey 2023;
https://mineralproducts.org/MPA/media/root/News/2024/AMPS_Report_2023.pdf