

**WRITTEN REPRESENTATION BY BLABY DISTRICT COUNCIL ON THE
LEICESTERSHIRE MINERALS CORE STRATEGY AND DEVELOPMENT CONTROL
POLICIES**

1.0 Background

1.1 Blaby District Council (BDC) submitted comments on the Leicestershire Minerals Core Strategy and Development Control Policies (submission draft) up to 2021 to Leicestershire County Council (LCC) in July 2008. Notwithstanding the fact that the comments were largely positive in nature BDC considers it necessary to submit more detailed written evidence to substantiate its concern regarding Policy CS 1: Supply of Minerals and its potential adverse impact upon Croft Hill.

2.0 The District Council's Case

2.1 The comments submitted to LCC in July 2008 by this Council regarding Policy CS1: Supply of Minerals can be seen in Appendix A. The evidence below expands on the points made and substantiates this Council's request for changes to the above Policy.

3.0 Blaby District Local Plan 1999 (BDLP)

3.1 Croft Hill is identified in the 'saved' BDLP (1999) Policy CE23 as an Area of Local Landscape Value. The area of Croft Hill is shown in Appendix B to this representation. Policies CE18 (SSSI's) and CE19 deal with Nature Conservation Site Protection. Appendix 5 of the BDLP contains the Ecological Appraisal conducted by the Ecology Unit of the Leicestershire Museums, Arts and Records Service. Croft Hill is both a SSSI and an area of County level significance under the evaluation system used at the time. Appendix 5 of the BDLP states:

3.2 "One of the most important sites in the District includes the remnants of acid grassland still to be found at Croft Hill. The thin soils overlying the outcrop of granite at Croft Hill provide fine displays of wild thyme and harebells in the summer, together with providing an ideal habitat for rare and interesting lichen species."

4.0 Local Development Framework (LDF) Evidence Base

4.1 Research documents commissioned by this Council as part of the evidence base for its LDF have recently confirmed Croft Hill's importance within the District of Blaby in terms of its landscape, ecological and amenity value.

4.2 Landscape

4.3 The Blaby District Character Assessment (May 2008) carried out by landscape experts TEP, forms part of the evidence base for the LDF, aids development control decisions and guides landscape enhancement. The following summarises its findings in relation to Croft Hill:

4.4 “Croft Hill is an important landscape feature (and designated a SSSI) located within the central part of the District of Blaby adjacent to the settlements of Huncote and Croft. The landform varies from 66m AOD to a high point of 128m AOD at Croft Hill. The prominence of Croft Hill is emphasised by the surrounding relatively flat topography extending across the majority of the District with land use strongly influenced by the presence of quarrying activities, associated buildings and spoil mounding. Expansive panoramic views are possible across the whole District from Croft Hill due to its elevated position and lack vegetation on its summit. Mature woodland blocks tend to be small in size and almost totally restricted to the slopes of Croft Hill. Footpaths are fairly limited within this area with the majority concentrated around the edge of the Hill. Farming practices whilst common are often fragmented and interrupted by quarrying activities which contributes to the relatively chaotic character within the area.” The study gives Landscape Guidelines for Croft Hill, one of which is to preserve the open unobstructed views across the District afforded by the open character of the summit and protect the natural character of Croft Hill.

4.5 Ecology

4.6 The Blaby District Phase 1 Habitat and Vegetation Survey (December 2008) conducted by ecology experts White Young Green Environmental, also forms part of the evidence base for the LDF. The document acknowledges that Croft Hill is an ecologically designated SSSI and summarises the reason for this designation:

4.7 “Croft Hill supports a nationally rare vegetation type of a predominantly southern distribution and which is rare in the Midlands. The nutrient poor soil derived from the granitic soil has produced open grassland of acidic character supporting short grasses with ephemeral spring growing annual plants including several species on the county Rare Plant Register. Mosses and lichens are characteristic of open areas where rocks are close to the surface and the site contains several notable species. The site is currently in “favourable” condition as defined by Natural England.”

4.8 Amenity

4.9 Public Rights of Way are fairly limited in number within the Croft Hill area but are nevertheless important. The majority are concentrated around the edge of Croft Hill along Croft Hill Road as indicated by the thick brown line on the plan in Appendix B. However, there are a series of very well used informal footpaths highlighted yellow in Appendix B which are of significant amenity value to the residents of the District of Blaby. These provide access to the summit and the dramatic views into the quarry and across the District.

5.0 Tests of Soundness

5.1 Policy CS1: Supply of Minerals and Policy CS2: Aggregate Minerals gives “Priority to the extension of existing sites”. Indeed the policy appears to ‘assume’ that extensions to existing minerals development is more sustainable than in other

locations and as such, have the least detrimental impact on the environment. However, the policy is not “justified” in the context of PPS12 and fails this test of soundness as the policy has not been founded on a robust and credible evidence base. The evidence above demonstrates that an extension of mineral extraction at Croft Quarry into Croft Hill would have a significant detrimental impact on the landscape, ecology and amenity value of the area resulting in the loss of a nationally and regionally rare ecosystem. Policy CS1 and CS2 are not “the most appropriate strategy when considered against all reasonable alternatives” as other locations/alternatives away from existing minerals sites which may be more sustainable are not considered.

6.0 **Changes Sought by BDC**

- 6.1 The policy in CS1 bullet 2 and CS2 bullet 4 should be amended to read “Give priority to the extension of existing sites only where there are no overriding adverse impacts on landscape character, areas of ecological importance and amenity value as evidenced at Croft Hill”.

APPENDIX A

Policy CS 1: Supply of Minerals

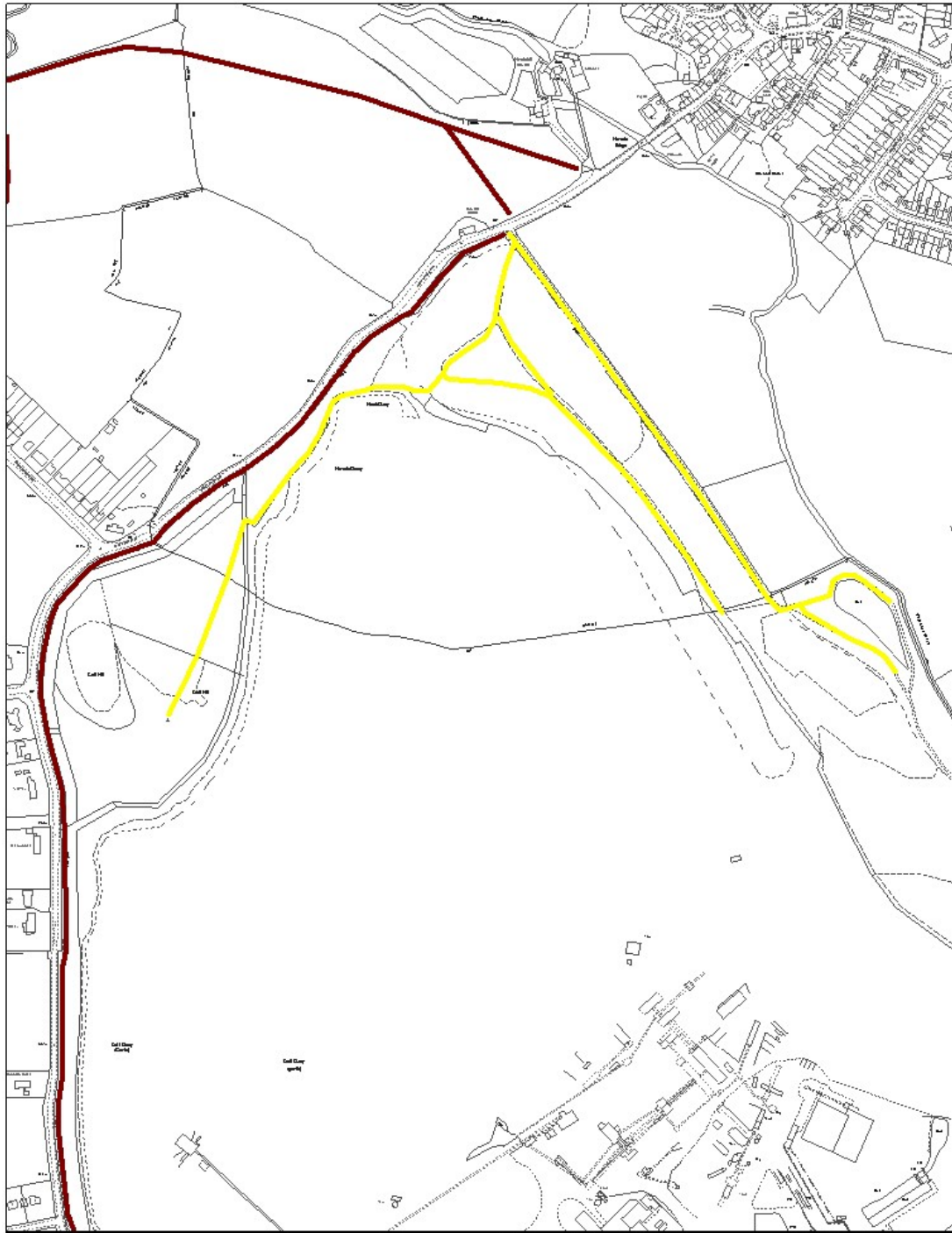
The above policy gives priority the extension of existing Minerals sites. Whilst this Council acknowledges that in some cases, this may be a more efficient and sustainable method of extraction, BDC is concerned that the priority given to extending existing mineral workings will have significant adverse effects on the Biodiversity, Amenity and the Environment in the area of Croft Hill. There is a strong possibility that the mineral supply at Croft Quarry will run out before the end of the plan period and an application to extend the works may be made.

BDC is particularly concerned about an extension that could involve extraction at Croft Hill which is situated adjacent to Croft Quarry. This area is a site of national significance and is designated as a SSSI for its ecological value. It is also designated as an Area of Local Landscape Value in the adopted Blaby District Local Plan (Policy CE23) and is the dominant landscape feature in the Soar Valley (South), which is enjoyed by many residents from the District of Blaby.

Recommended comments

BDC considers that the combination of the above qualities merit Croft Hill having specific protection from Minerals Development in the MDF. It is considered essential that it is made clear that the “priority to the extension of existing sites”, contained in Policy CS 1, specifically excludes extraction at Croft Hill.

APPENDIX B



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Croft Hill Footpaths

Date :- 22 December 2008

O. S. Map Ref. :- SP5196

Scale :- 1:5000

