

26 May 2010

Nadhim Zahawi MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Dear Mr Zahawi

RE: CEMEX Marsh Farm Quarry

Thank you for your recent letter on the subject of Marsh Farm Quarry and our application for an extension on land to the north of Broom Lane in your constituency.

Firstly may I first take this opportunity of congratulating you on your success in securing the Stratford seat at the recent General Election.

As you may be aware, and in addition to the operations you refer to that lie in your constituency, CEMEX is one of the world's largest building materials manufacturers and in the UK the company generates annual sales of over £1 billion, and employs nearly 4,000 people across 450 sites nationwide.

As you may now also be aware, Warwickshire County Council's Regulatory Committee has approved by a large majority the application to extend Marsh Farm Quarry on land to the north of Broom Lane. A number of residents and parish councils spoke against the application but the members were confident that, with officer recommendation, and the necessary conditions in place, the scheme would be beneficial.

In your letter you pose a number of questions which relate primarily to the restoration of the existing Marsh Farm site and I will now endeavour to address these.

Every modern planning permission for the extraction of minerals such as sand and gravel includes a detailed plan and programme of restoration. As with all other aspects of any permission from a Mineral Planning Authority (MPA) such as Warwickshire County Council, the plan and programme have to be agreed by the authority and there is a responsibility to ensure that the required restoration and subsequent after-care programme are implemented.

In almost every case, restoration is progressive. In simple terms this means that as one area is prepared for the extraction of the mineral through the removal of top-soils, another area will see the actual extraction of the mineral and a third will be subject to the restoration process. In this way the preparation, extraction and restoration process moves progressively around the site.

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For sand and gravel excavations, such programmes are generally short-term (as compared with hard rock quarrying) and at any one time, only a relatively small area is actually being excavated for the mineral.

At Marsh Farm, the original agreed programme was to restore the site at a lower level to agriculture. The nature of such low level restoration means that the final form of the restored land would only become apparent on completion of the restoration rather than on a progressive basis. During the late 1990s, it was agreed with the MPA that the restoration was best achieved at the original level and this would be effected by the importation of inert material such as soils and construction and demolition waste. The final use of the land would remain a return to agriculture. This change came about because of the construction of the A46 bypass which impacted upon the gravity drainage proposals of the original low level restoration proposal.

At present we estimate that over half the site has been filled with inert material arising from the quarry operations or imported to the site. However, due to the progressive nature of this element of the restoration, less than 50% of the site has actually been restored i.e. the original top-soils stored on site placed over the imported material.

The programme is behind schedule in this respect and the company accepts that this is the case. However, the principal reason for this slippage is the current severe decline in construction activity throughout Warwickshire, the West Midlands and indeed the UK. In 2009 construction output declined by a further 12% - the worst annual fall since these records began in 1955. A further decline of 3% is forecast for 2010. This unprecedented low-level of construction activity has meant that the availability of the required inert material to achieve the restoration has been severely restricted.

In addition, and following discussion with the local community, the actual phasing of the restoration programme has been amended. These changes will mean that the area to the south of Broom Lane will be restored in a southerly direction which will see an earlier improvement of the view from Broom Lane. Nevertheless, the required earthworks to achieve this have resulted in a delay in the programme.

Marsh Farm produces a particularly high quality concreting sand which is much in demand by the construction industry in Warwickshire. It should also be remembered that without aggregates such as sand and gravel, the built environment we all enjoy - our homes, schools, offices, hospitals and roads - can neither be constructed nor maintained. It, of course, goes without saying that minerals such as sand and gravel can only be worked where they occur.

Marsh Farm Quarry began producing these essential materials in 1991 and during the intervening time, relationships with the local community have been excellent. A local liaison group meets regularly and provides a forum for the consideration of any issues and to provide information on activities and operations. Complaints from the community have been very few during this time. Nevertheless, there is an impression that local liaison has not been as effective as it might and therefore we plan to address this as soon as possible. The need for meaningful liaison with the local community is recognised by the company and, indeed, was the subject of discussion at the Regulatory Committee meeting.

