

Statement on behalf of the **Mineral Products Association (MPA)**.

Independent Examination of the Herefordshire Minerals & Waste Local Plan.

Main Matter 5 - Minerals other than aggregates

**Issue:** Whether the Plan makes adequate provision for sandstone and whether the policy is sound.

**Policy M5: Winning and working of sandstone**

80 *Should the supporting text provide guidance as to what is meant by ‘small scale’ and ‘micro-scale’?*

This policy is not sound in that it does not follow national policy and is not positively prepared. As raised in our response to the Plan draft there is no policy basis in national policy to limit building stone operations to be *small scale*. In fact, the latest iteration of the NPPF has removed *small scale* from what is now paragraph 211 f) referring to building stone operations. It is our view that reference to *small scale* should be totally removed from the policy, and we have previously suggested an adjusted policy which is set out below for ease of reference.

Proposed Changes (deletions in ~~strikethrough~~; new text in **bold**)

~~1. In order to maintain an adequate supply of sandstone to preserve local distinctiveness within Herefordshire, p~~ **Proposals for sandstone extraction will be permitted for:**

*a. the extension of time for completion of extraction at permitted sandstone extraction sites;*

*b. the lateral extension and/or deepening of workings at the following permitted sandstone extraction sites., ~~subject to the key development criteria set out at Annex A:~~*

- *Black Hill Delve; and/or*
- *Llandraw Delve; and/or*
- *Westonhill Wood Delves;*

*c. the opening of new sites for sandstone extraction at appropriate locations, including micro-scale extraction on or adjacent to existing historic buildings or structures and new build developments., ~~where the extracted materials will only be used in connection with the identified project~~*

**2. Such proposals will be permitted where they are in accordance with other policies in the Local Plan.**

~~*a. the need for the material for the preservation of local distinctiveness, particularly features of local historic or architectural interest, listed and vernacular buildings or*~~

~~archaeological sites, outweighs any material harm extraction might cause to matters of acknowledged importance.~~  
~~b. the proposed workings are small scale; and~~  
~~c. the proposal is limited to the production of non-aggregate materials, with any overburden and spoils retained on-site and used for its reclamation.~~

The MPA believes that at drafted the policy has misinterpreted the NPPF. Any policies in respect of building stone should encourage building stone quarries, and plan positively for these and reflect the economic, social, and environmental importance of supply of building stone. The NPPF requires that the ‘*small scale nature and impact*’ of such quarries is considered. ‘*Small-scale*’ is not defined, and so should reflect local circumstances, including the market for the material which may be wider than ‘*local*’ and should not be restricted to a planning authority area which would make no sense in terms of commercial or planning considerations. Indeed, many small sites simply will not be commercially viable if they are only able to supply the ‘*local*’ market that exists within the planning authority area, which is likely to be too small, and too infrequent. The demands for such products are just as likely to arise outside the planning authority area as within it.

It is important that dimension stone extraction is not limited to local markets or the heritage sector. You should note that building stone is not only reserved for ‘historic’ purposes (repairs and Conservation Areas) and operators should be free to develop new-build markets like any other entrepreneur. That being so, repairs may be a very small part of production. So, we should be pleased to see recognition that higher production will not be resisted if it contributes to economic development. However, it is important that the authority does not artificially seek to impose restrictions but allows any expansion of the operation (subject to environmental safeguards) without decreeing maximum production levels or prohibitions on aggregates production or limits to reserves, for example. All these restrictions are commonly met by our members in their businesses on the mistaken assumption by local government that building stone operations must be small and confined in order to be acceptable.

An emphasis of policy on local markets or small-scale working is likely to discourage applications. Our members report problems because they are being limited to ‘local markets’ which reflects the historic circumstances of the industry and the emphasis on heritage end uses. A ‘local market’ means restricted outlets, low volumes and low turnover/operating profit. This scenario does not allow the operator to invest in the technology and training which is increasingly being required of him. This is a serious threat to continuity of security of supply. Conversely, serving wider markets makes it easier to guarantee that stone will also be available to serve the local market. Emphasising local markets and small-scale operations like this is merely descriptive of the traditional character of the industry. We should prefer policy to omit implications that dimension stone production needs to be controlled or curtailed, which we believe is against the spirit and purpose of NPPF.

It is perverse that policy should discriminate against one part of the construction material extraction sector in this way and there is clearly no basis to do so in national policy.

Furthermore, the policy does not support the rural economy as required by para 84 of the NPPF.

**M E North**  
**Mineral Products Association - 26 September 2022**