

Purpose of the Study

The Study provides up-to-date information about the Black Country's mineral resources and current and future demand for minerals and mineral products, so that we can plan for this effectively in the new Black Country Plan.

Scope of the Study

What the Study does

Estimates the current demand for minerals and mineral products in the Black Country

The tonnages of sand and gravel, crushed rock and brick clay used each year in the Black Country in construction and engineering projects and in the manufacture of bricks, tiles and other 'intermediate' mineral products such as cement and concrete.

Predicts how demand for minerals and mineral products is likely to change over the plan period and beyond

The effects of meeting our identified housing and employment needs up to 2039 and beyond, and other factors that could affect the amount of minerals and mineral products consumed each year in the Black Country.

Reviews the capacity and vulnerability of existing mineral production sites and processing facilities in the Black Country

Whether our existing permitted minerals sites will be able to produce enough sand and gravel, brick clay and mineral products (such as cement, concrete and roadstone) to meet our current and future needs, and whether they could be threatened by pressure for other types of development.

Analyses where our mineral supplies are coming from at the moment and whether this is having a significant effect on other areas

The extent to which the Black Country relies on other areas to meet its needs for minerals and mineral products and whether those areas will be able to continue to provide the same level of supplies throughout the plan period.

Reviews the extent of unworked mineral resources in the Black Country and resource areas that should be safeguarded

The workable mineral resources that remain in the Black Country, and the resource areas that should be safeguarded from other types of development that could prevent the minerals from being worked in the future.

What the Study does not do

Allocate sites for mineral extraction

The study is part of the evidence being gathered to help us prepare the Black Country Plan and identifies areas with potential for mineral extraction. However, it doesn't recommend any new mineral extraction areas not already identified in the existing Black Country Core Strategy and Walsall Site Allocation Document (SAD), because the areas identified in the Walsall SAD are considered sufficient to meet our needs over the plan period. The study recommends deleting the Areas of Search for brick clay in Dudley in the existing Core Strategy because these areas are now fully worked out and there are no resources remaining in them. However, the Black Country Authorities will decide which areas should be identified for future mineral extraction, taking into account the study's recommendations and other evidence such as existing mineral permissions. The views of the public are also important, and everyone will be able to have their say on any sites we are proposing to allocate for specific land uses, including minerals, when the Draft Plan is published for public consultation in summer 2021.

Prevent other development in the proposed 'minerals safeguarding areas' (MSAs)

The MSAs for sand and gravel, brick clay and fireclay recommended in the study are similar to those identified in the Walsall SAD. They cover a significant proportion of Walsall's Green Belt, where a large number of sites has been put forward in response to the 'Call for Sites.' Including land within a MSA does not mean no other development can take place, but it does mean that difficult choices may have to be made about the areas that should be allocated for development and the areas that should be safeguarded for future mineral extraction. The study recommends that there should be a safeguarding policy similar to the one in the existing Core Strategy, so that if other development is proposed within a MSA, developers are required to consider extracting some or all of the minerals in advance, preventing them from being needlessly wasted.

Allocate sites for new mineral infrastructure

The study does not recommend allocating any new sites, The Black Country Authorities will decide whether it is appropriate to safeguard all of the existing sites and the best approach towards safeguarding them, taking into account the study's recommendations and other evidence.

Key Findings of the Study

- Minerals are essential to the UK economy, providing the raw materials needed for building and for industry, and contributing significantly to tax revenues.
- The Black Country has a uniquely varied range of mineral resources which have been extensively worked in the past, but because of urbanisation the only minerals that still have potential for future working are sand and gravel, brick clay and fireclay.
- The only area of the Black Country where mineral working is currently taking place is at Stubbers Green, Aldridge in Walsall, where there are two clay pits supplying three brickworks in the same location.
- There are also a number of sites in Walsall that have planning permission for sand and gravel, brick clay and fireclay extraction where mineral working has not started.
- As there is no sand and gravel or crushed rock extraction taking place in the Black Country, the area is entirely reliant on supplies of construction aggregates from other areas, in particular, Staffordshire, Shropshire and the East Midlands.
- The Black Country's brickworks also rely on brick clay imported from other areas to an extent, because local resources are either no longer available or insufficient, or they require types of clay that are not currently being produced in the Black Country.
- The study recommends replacing the minerals safeguarding area (MSA) in the existing Core Strategy with more tightly drawn MSAs for sand and gravel, brick clay and fireclay in Walsall, where there is realistic potential to mineral extraction to take place over the plan period.
- The study also recommends that the plan should identify 'buffer zones' around the Black Country's existing and planned infrastructure to safeguard them from encroachment by other development that could compromise existing operations or the scope for future expansion.

Implications for the Black Country Plan

There is a need to update and simplify the minerals policies in the existing Black Country Core Strategy to reflect the findings of the study. The new policies will need to:

- Identify the Black Country's supply requirements for construction aggregates, brick clay and fireclay between now and 2039 and how they are expected to be met, including reliance on other areas to contribute towards these requirements;
- Identify minerals safeguarding areas (MSAs) around sand and gravel, brick clay and fireclay resources in Walsall that could be worked during the plan period to help meet the Black Country's mineral supply requirements;
- Identify the areas where mineral extraction is expected to take place during the plan period, including sites with planning permission and other areas already identified in the Walsall SAD;
- Safeguard the Black Country's existing mineral infrastructure by discouraging any development near to them which could prevent them from continuing to operate;
- Encourage new developments to be resource efficient, making maximum possible use of recycled mineral products in construction to reduce reliance on quarried products and help maintain existing supplies for longer; and
- Identify what new mineral developments will be required to ensure they do not have unacceptable effects on local people, health and the environment.



HOUSING ENVIRONMENT EMPLOYMENT TRANSPORT

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