



Sent by email

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Date: 24 July 2020

Dear Tom

**RE: BLAISE FARM QUARRY, KINGS HILL, WEST MALLING, KENT –
CONCERNS ABOUT THE IMPACT OF BLASTING ON LOCAL RESIDENTS**

Thank you for your letter dated 23 June 2020 regarding the above.

As you have been correctly advised, Kent County Council (KCC) is responsible for mineral planning matters in the County as the Mineral Planning Authority. It is similarly responsible for waste planning matters as the Waste Planning Authority. These roles extend to preparing the Minerals and Waste Local Plan, determining planning applications for minerals and waste development and regulating minerals and waste operations through the monitoring and enforcement of planning permissions and any unauthorised minerals and waste development. Planning issues relating to the operations at Blaise Farm Quarry (including the blasting) are therefore a matter for KCC, although Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council may also have a role in respect of the potential for statutory nuisance under its Environmental Health function.

The relevant planning permission at Blaise Farm Quarry allows blasting to take place as an essential part of the quarrying operation. It is one of two Ragstone quarries in Kent where blasting takes place (the other being at Hermitage Quarry, Barming). Both of these quarries are operated by Gallagher Aggregates Ltd and play an important role in providing aggregates in the County and wider region.

The planning permission at Blaise Farm Quarry (TM/88/1002) was granted in January 1994 and includes two conditions specifically related to blasting (conditions 17 and 18). Condition 17 required that a schedule of blasting setting out how the effects of blasting would be minimised (e.g. in terms of ground vibration and air overpressure) must be submitted to and approved by KCC before blasting could commence. Condition 18 sets out the times that

blasting may take place (i.e. 09:00 to 09:30 Monday to Saturday, 12:00 to 14:00 Monday to Friday and 12:00 to 13:00 Saturdays) and limits the maximum charge weight per delay of any one blast to no more than 10kg.

KCC approved a schedule (scheme) of blasting in October 2002. The scheme set out those measures designed to minimise impacts and which were consistent with relevant regulation and guidance. The approval was conditional on a number of things, including that ground vibration associated with blasting should not exceed a peak particle velocity of 6 millimetres per second (mm/s) in 95% of all blasts at any sensitive property (such as residential properties) and 12mm/s for any blast. The effective ground vibration limit is therefore 6mm/s as recommended in relevant regulations and guidance. The approval also required the operator to notify KCC in advance of each blast. KCC approved a revised scheme of blasting in April 2004. This left the 2002 scheme broadly intact but additionally required more detailed arrangements for the monitoring and reporting of each blast (including provision for the Borough and Parish Councils to be notified of each blast, a complaints procedure and for blast monitoring results to be submitted to KCC in a specified format). It also included provision for the operator to pay KCC's reasonable expenses in undertaking independent blast monitoring at no more than one location up to four times a year.

As we have previously informed the local Parish Councils, the results of the blast monitoring that is undertaken by the operator and submitted to KCC have always demonstrated that the 6mm/s limit is being complied with (indeed, the results are significantly below this level). It has also clearly indicated that the air overpressure associated with the blasts (although not explicitly limited by condition) is not exceeding the 120dB blast design parameter set out in the approved scheme of blasting. Although KCC has rarely undertaken independent blast monitoring, on those occasions when it has the results have confirmed compliance. As a result, KCC has no reason to believe that the results provided by the operator are incorrect or being manipulated in any way. Please note that all recent blast monitoring results for Blaise Farm Quarry are available for public viewing on the KCC website: <https://www.kentplanningapplications.co.uk/Planning/Display/BLAST%20MONITORING%20RESULTS%20BLAISE%20FARM%20QUARRY>

It should be noted that the 6mm/s ground vibration limit for 95% of all blasts and 120dB air overpressure blast design parameter also apply at Hermitage Quarry and that very similar monitoring and reporting arrangements also apply at that site. These requirements were imposed as part of the most recent major mineral permission at Hermitage Quarry (TM/10/2029) which was granted in July 2013 after having been called in by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government and subject to an independent public local inquiry.

The planning permission at Blaise Farm Quarry also requires regular reviews of the schemes of working, restoration and aftercare to be submitted for KCC's approval. The most recent (4th) 5-year schemes have very recently been submitted and are currently subject to consultation. The schemes are accompanied on this occasion by updated schemes of blasting and blast monitoring. Those consulted include Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council (including its Environmental Health Team), the local Parish Councils and KCC's Noise and Vibration Consultant. KCC will clearly need to have particular regard to any technical advice that is received on the schemes prior to making any decisions. Whilst any decision is very unlikely to lead to blasting ceasing at Blaise Farm Quarry (since it is an integral part of the planning permission), it could potentially result in different arrangements or parameters being established. I am sure that you will appreciate that I am unable to pre-judge the outcome of this exercise.

I am advised by Sharon Thompson (KCC's Head of Planning Applications) that she is aware of the recent increase in local concerns and intends making arrangements for further independent blast monitoring to take place. Whilst this is unlikely to overcome local residents' concerns about, and objections to, blasting at the site, it may assist in demonstrating that KCC is taking the matter seriously and hopefully provide some further reassurance that the requirements of the planning permission are being met.

Although probably not the only reason for the recent increase in local concerns, the fact that a greater number of people are likely to have been at home during the day when the blasts take place in recent months as a result of constraints associated with the Covid-19 pandemic may have contributed to this.

I hope that this response assists. If you wish to discuss these and related issues further please contact Sharon Thompson (Head of Planning Applications) on 03000 413468 or by email on sharon.thompson@kent.gov.uk

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Susan Carey". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish underneath.

Susan Carey
Cabinet Member for Environment