

**North Wales Regional Aggregates Working Party.
Regional Technical Statement – Aggregate Minerals.**

Final Issues Paper

1. Introduction.

1.1 In the 1970s the Government established ten Regional Aggregates Working Parties [RAWPs], eight in England and two in Wales, to monitor and assess the supply and distribution of aggregate minerals. RAWPs are technical fora, and membership is restricted principally to representatives of the minerals industry, mineral planning authorities and central government.

1.2 Each RAWP is government funded, with a senior local government officer as Chairman and the services of a Secretary. A National Co-ordinating Group of Chairmen oversees their activities, technical issues are dealt with by a Technical Sub-Group and there are regular national meetings of the 10 RAWP Secretaries.

1.3 With devolution, the responsibility for the running of the North and South Wales RAWPs became the responsibility of the Welsh Assembly Government.

1.4 The Assembly's Minerals Technical Advice Note [TAN] 1 [February 2004] sets out government aims and objectives in the field of mineral planning. TAN 1 includes "detailed advice on the mechanisms for delivering the policy for aggregates extraction by mineral planning authorities and the aggregates industry". One of its key proposals is the preparation and adoption of Regional Technical Statements for North and South Wales.

1.5 TAN 1 should be read in conjunction with Mineral Planning Policy Wales which sets out the general policies for all mineral development.

2. Background.

2.1 Annex A of TAN 1 sets out the Assembly's revised view on the future role of the two Regional Aggregates Working Parties in Wales, summarised as follows;

2.1.1 the monitoring of;

- Primary and secondary aggregates production, their distribution and reserves
- Mineral wastes and construction and demolition wastes with potential for aggregates use
- Major aggregates-consuming development programmes and development plans

2.1.2. the assessment of;

- Environmental capacity
- Primary Aggregates reserves
- The use of secondary aggregates
- Provision / capacity to improve recycling / re-use
- Construction and demolition waste arisings

- 2.1.3. the production of a Regional Technical Statement for Aggregates, “to set out;
- The results of the regional assessment of the environmental capacity of each MPA to contribute to an adequate supply of primary aggregates;
 - To provide a strategy for the provision of aggregates in the region in accord with that regional assessment, with allocations of future aggregates provision for each mineral planning authority area to provide a strategic basis for future development plans;
 - To assess the current and future imports and exports of aggregates;
 - To assess the current and future contribution of marine aggregates;
 - To advise the Assembly on the potential in each region in Wales for increasing the use of alternative materials to replace primary aggregates.”

2.1.4. through a RAWP Technical Secretariat to administer joint voluntary arrangements of local authorities to assess the Regional Technical Statement in the context of UDP mineral aggregates land use issues, and to include the appropriate parts of the Regional Technical Statement in their UDPs.

3. The North Wales Regional Aggregates Working Party

3.1 The North Wales RAWP includes the mineral planning authorities of;
Anglesey
Conwy
Flintshire
Denbighshire
Gwynedd
Snowdonia National Park
Wrexham.

3.2 As at November 2005, Gwynedd Council is the lead authority with both the Chair and Secretary.

3.3 Very briefly, the N. Wales RAWP area;

- has widespread resources of sand and gravel, and hard rock, principally in the form of limestone, granite and slate
- has the largest primary and secondary slate waste resources in the UK
- produced approximately 6.3 million tonnes [mt] of aggregates [including sand and gravel] in 2003
- is a net exporter of aggregates, principally in the form of limestone from Flintshire and Denbighshire, to the North West of England
- supports a minerals industry employing 1077 personnel*
- has a marine aggregates landing facility at Bangor, Gwynedd.

* National Statistics 2001 Census.

4. The Regional Technical Statement.

4.1 Future decisions are to be made on the long-term provision of aggregates at a strategic level in N Wales by the Regional Aggregates Working Party itself.

4.2 The mechanism through which decisions are to be made is the Regional Technical Statement [RTS], and the means by which its policies are to be implemented is through each constituent mineral planning authority's Development Plan.

The Minerals Technical Advice Note 1 envisaged completion of the RTS for both Wales RAWPs within 18 months of its publication, ie. September 2006. this deadline now appears unachievable by either RAWP, and completion may more realistically be anticipated in 2007.

4.3 The RTS is of the nature of a Regional Aggregate Minerals Plan. As such it will follow accepted planning policy procedures relating to timetabling, consultation amendment and adoption by the RAWP. However it will be developed with the Minerals Industry through the RAWP. Strategic guidance and apportionment will be subject to approval by authority representatives on the RTS Members Forum and thereby transferred to each mineral planning authority's own Planning Policy Framework.

4.4 The RTS will cover a five year period and will be subject to regular review at five yearly intervals.

4.5 In 2004 a Technical Sub-Group of the RAWP was set up to steer the technical content of the Regional Technical Statement. The sub-group met twice but subsequent administration problems resulted in some loss of momentum. Membership has been reviewed and the Group re-established.

4.6 The political decision-making of the RAWP will be undertaken by a group of elected members, one from each mineral planning authority, to be advised [through the Chair and Secretary] by the Technical Sub-Group. The inaugural meeting of the RTS Members Forum was held on 9 November 2005.

4.7 Environmental capacity.

4.7.1 With the specific aim of providing a sound environmental basis for the development of Wales-wide aggregate minerals spatial planning policy, in 2002 the Assembly commissioned a study by the Arup Consultancy to Establish a Methodology for Assessing Aggregates Demand and Supply ['EMAADS' Study]. The methodology thus established was subsequently developed by the ENVIROS consultancy into a report on 'Environmental Capacity' in Wales [Implementing the Methodology for Assessing the Environmental Capacity for Primary Aggregates, or 'IMAECA' Study]. The report was published in March 2005.

4.7.2 The acknowledgement of spatial environmental capacity is intended to provide a basis for "nationally consistent and sustainable strategic decisions on aggregates provision" to be made throughout Wales.

4.7.3 The IMAECA tool will within areas of known geological resource identify establish a balance between those resources and the capacity of the surrounding area to absorb or accommodate further mineral working.

5. RTS Issues

The Regional Technical Statement deals specifically with aggregate minerals. The strategic issues to be addressed are wide-ranging, inter-related and some are technically complex.

5.1. The IMAECA study

This used twelve acknowledged national environmental indicators to provide a spatial guide and visual assessment as to the environmental 'condition' of every Km. grid square in N. Wales.

The RAWP will look at the areas indicating apparent over-capacity as a first stage and will be applying additional GIS layers such as the existing quarries and supply patterns to identify existing unsustainable practices

5.2. Inter-regional flows

North East Wales in particular is a net exporter of aggregates, principally to the North West of England. Concerns have been expressed by the North West and West Midlands RAWPs that the use of environmental capacity indicators in the Regional Technical Statement may significantly reduce the role of Wales as a supplier of aggregates to England. There is no equivalent environmental capacity exercise being carried out in England, and the N. Wales RAWP anticipates a constructive dialogue with adjacent England RAWPs on the sustainability of inter-regional imports/exports, how they see the future role of N. Wales as a supplier bearing in mind the extent that adjacent RAWPs might be expected to provide for their own 'demand' for aggregates through the application of the 'proximity principle', as applied in the field of waste planning.

5.3. Resources

The IMAECA study includes current geological information available from the BGS and provides a basis for determining the potential marketability of different rock types.

Factors such as the presence of overlying drift material, faulting, landslip, and local factors may make it difficult to determine realistic commercial alternatives without detailed site investigations being carried out. Assumptions may have to be made in the consideration of different supply options

5.4. Reserves [mineral resources with planning permission]

All N. Wales authorities have existing reserves some of which may be in areas with negative environmental capacity. The RTS will seek to establish the real extent of the reserves considered 'dormant', 'inactive', or 'active'.

Projected demand for aggregates such as proposed housing/industrial allocations/highway schemes/major projects will be identified through liaison with individual mineral planning authorities.

5.5. Marine sand and gravel / dredgings

Marine aggregates are landed both in N Wales and the N West of England. Joint Ireland / England Wales studies of the marine sand and gravel resource in the Irish Sea are underway. [IMAGIN] these may take some years to complete.

The RTS will include for the monitoring of changes in the provision of marine-derived aggregates and dredgings, timescale and likely inter, regional and intra-regional effects.

5.6. Slate and other sources of secondary aggregate

The sustainable use of secondary aggregates in the place of primary aggregates is one of the key objectives of MTAN1.

Resources, principally of slate waste, are huge but in a regional perspective, relatively localised in N. West of the RAWP area. They are subject to their own planning constraints. The RTS will examine all resources / reserves of secondary aggregates distributed through N Wales and assess realistically their quality and potential for production and distribution to local and regional points of demand.

5.7. Construction and demolition wastes

The Welsh Assembly Government has published [October 2005] a report on construction/demolition/quarry wastes revealing that;

The amount of recycled construction, demolition and excavation waste has increased and exceeds the Assembly's [all Wales] target of at least 40% by 2005.

55% of construction, demolition and excavation wastes remain incapable of being utilised without further processing with associated costs.

The RTS will address the issue.

5.8. Crushed Rock Fines (including sandstone quarry sands)

There is a small market for these products in N. Wales where they are sold as a by-product of aggregate processing. The RTS will address their potential market penetration and end-uses.

5.9. Quarry output capacity

The RTS will have regard to the full working capacity of quarries as a part of future consideration of options and will continue to rely on the industry to supply accurate and up-to-date output and reserve data.

5.10. Changes in construction methods/use of alternative materials

Higher thermal efficiency of buildings is increasing the rate of change in the type and specifications of building materials. Research is on-going into alternative uses for aggregate materials, ie. glassphalt, on a potentially large scale.

The Regional Technical Statement will consider the potential influence of such materials.

5.11. Fiscal influences.

The RTS will have regard to any changes in the future of the Landfill Tax/Aggregates Levy and assess what further influences are they likely to have on the use of primary aggregates.

5.12. Intra-regional flows.

There are intra-regional flows of aggregates between N. Wales authorities, e.g. Gwynedd supplies sand and gravel to Anglesey and Conwy which have no reserves of their own. It is not anticipated that the RTS will introduce any significant change to what is essentially a local supply characteristic, but the issue of the geographical relationship between supply and end-user based on the proximity principle will be acknowledged.

5.13. Public consultation

Few are conversant with the extent to which aggregate production sustains their everyday lifestyles and some negative attitudes prevail against mineral extraction in general. The Freedom of Information Act demands that the process be transparent and an audit or similar record kept of the process as it develops.

It is intended to ensure that the process of producing the Regional Technical Statement is open and transparent and a consultation strategy will be developed for this purpose, which will specify the consultation exercise to be undertaken.

5.14. Major development / Infrastructure Projects

mineral planning authority staff resources will be required to identify regional construction / development projects with a significant draw on aggregate supply, but will be subject to minimum threshold values to be decided by the Technical Sub-Group. It will be expected that the Welsh Assembly Government and mineral planning authorities will advise the RAWP of development projects in the pipeline. It is considered that tenderers for 'major' infrastructure projects should be required to identify and/or secure [alternative] aggregates sources at design / tender stage

5.15. Health Impact Assessment [HIA] / Strategic Environmental Assessment [SEA]. Both assessments will be required for the Regional Technical Statement and both have implications in terms of the administrative capacity and financing of the RAWP Secretariat.

6. Conclusion

Further examination of the issues raised in this paper and any other relevant issues, in liaison with the Regional Aggregates Working Party, the Technical Sub Group, the Regional Members Forum and through feedback received from the consultation exercise, will assist in the production of the first ever Regional Technical Statement for North Wales.