

PROTEST: Villagers fear noise from extraction

Viscount in row over gravel plan

One of the region's senior aristocrats is at the centre of a row over a proposed gravel pit on his land.

Residents of villages near Earl Ferrers' Ditchingham Hall estate in South Norfolk have banded together to fight plans to turn 57 hectares of parkland into a 16m-deep gravel and sand extraction pit.

The master of Ditchingham Hall, near Bungay, is not behind the move himself.

When asked by the EDP if he would comment on local disquiet over the project, he said he was not involved.

"I'm not the man you need for this.

"You want to speak to my son, Viscount Tamworth, about it," he said.

But the heir to the estate would say only that he had "no comment to make".

Aggregates firm Lafarge has filed its planning application with Norfolk County Council, but a pressure group has been set up and appointed transport and environment experts to fight the plan.

By MIKE SHERBURN

More than 150 residents, including members of Enraged (Norfolk Residents Against Gravel Extraction at Ditchingham), held a protest meeting at the village hall in neighbouring Broome on Wednesday night.

People from Ditchingham and neighbouring villages are voicing concerns about noise and safety, with dozens more cars and lorries expected to go in and out of the site.

And further concerns have been raised about the pit being near a Site of Special Scientific Interest at Tindall Wood and also destroying an ancient hedgerow and oak tree.

The proposed pit, off Norwich Road, would produce more than a million tons of sand and gravel, though work on the scheme will not begin until 2007, even if permission is granted.

In the meantime Lafarge has begun masking the site by planting more than 2000 trees along the eastern boundary.

Jonathan Chadd, who lives at Ditchingham, said he hoped the site, sandwiched between the Broads National Park and Grade II-listed parkland, would never be developed.

"There are many other existing gravel quarries in the area serving the same market, which have adequate mineral reserves and plans for extended extraction," he said.

"This calls into question the need for an additional new quarry such as this."

Julian Green, chairman of Enraged, said: "The Lafarge proposals will result in an additional 70-90 HGV movements each day, with an estimated further 40 movements from other commercial traffic, including builders' vehicles with trailers."

The group has also contacted a range of environmental groups, including English Nature and the Norfolk Wildlife Trust, in search of support.