

Quarry may threaten future of convent

By **ROY STROWGER**
roy.strowger@archant.co.uk

A SAND and gravel quarry at Ditchingham could throw into doubt the whole future of the nearby All Hallows' convent and community.

That's the warning from a strongly worded statement issued by the quarry protest group ENRAGED yesterday.

It says: "The Rev Mother Elizabeth is concerned that the desecration of this landscape could mean an end to the peaceful and contemplative existence that the community and visitors have enjoyed for so long.

"There is also a real worry that this threat could turn many people away who come from busy and

stressful lives in search of peace. This could lead to job losses and an uncertain future for the convent."

The statement says the Anglican Community of All Hallows is alarmed by the news of the planning application filed last week by Lafarge Aggregates, to extract sand and gravel from fields on the Ditchingham Estate opposite the B1332 junction with the Belsey Bridge Road which leads to the convent.

If this application was to be passed, the company has an option to extend its quarry to a field alongside the cemetery and within 500 metres of the All Hallows' chapel and houses.

The Rev Mother Elizabeth and her fellow nuns live out their calling in a life of prayer and the

community welcomes many others who come for conferences, private retreats and groups such as Macmillan nurses, sixth formers and the clergy. There are 46 staff employed there who dedicate themselves to providing hospitality to the many guests who come to conferences or for retreats.

The 13 nuns are dismayed that the community could be irrevocably damaged by at least 20 years of quarrying. The noise would be intrusive for people on retreat and affect chapel services which are held throughout the day.

Several Sisters are frail and have asthmatic problems and are worried about the prevailing wind blowing dust in their direction. They are concerned about extra

heavy traffic on the very narrow lane and on the B1332 Norwich to Bungay Road. There are also two children's nursery schools on the site with up to 80 pupils who would be similarly affected.

And the group of sisters feel particularly anxious about the proximity of any work to the cemetery which belongs to St Mary's, Ditchingham.

David Patey, recently appointed administrator, said: "Literally hundreds of people come here every year to enjoy the peaceful atmosphere at the convent and we have plans now to make All Hallows extend into the wider community in Norfolk so that others can share in a special way of life. The proposed quarry poses a very real threat to those plans."