

QUARRYING: Campaigners commission expert reports

Powerful voice joins protesters

Opponents of a Norfolk quarry are celebrating after the plans received a major setback.

The Environment Agency says that extracting sand and gravel at Ditchingham, near Bungay, would damage the landscape – and has added its voice to 186 letters of objection.

Although Lafarge Aggregates, which is making the application, says this latest development is not a serious blow to its plans, protesters are delighted to have powerful backing.

The agency wants to see more information on flood risk and over-draining of the surrounding land. And it says: "The proposed sand and gravel extraction would have negative impacts on the landscape character, in particular it would lead to the loss of mature trees."

The letter adds that Norfolk Minerals Local Plan says that quarrying should not take place if it will damage broadleaved woodland or the appearance of a river valley.

And the agency complains that Lafarge has not set out any justification for quarrying at a site not in a designated investigation area, nor considered other sites.

By SARAH BREALEY

But the letter does concede that restoration after quarrying has finished will improve biodiversity.

Lafarge spokesman Ruth Roll said that the company would be able to address the agency's concerns about water.

"A holding objection has been registered, but that is perfectly standard procedure where more information is required."

She said that the other points made were outside the agency's remit, but that the company disagreed.

"We would not have submitted the application if we didn't think that there was a need for the material locally; and that the site could be operated and restored in a way that would have no adverse effect either on the community or the local environment.

"We identify even before we submit the application whether it is viable."

The campaign group set up to oppose the quarry, Norfolk Residents Against Gravel Extraction at Ditchingham (Enraged), has commissioned expert reports on the impact of the proposal.

One, from Tom Williamson of the University of East Anglia, concludes: "The application ... would have a very serious negative impact on the historic landscape, both of the Grade II listed park around Ditchingham Hall and of the wider working countryside."

Another, from Chris Stratton of consultants The Landscape Partnership, says: "The proposals will result in profound long-term and irreversible adverse change to the landscape of the outer park at Ditchingham."

Seething, Woodton, Hedenham and Ditchingham parish councils have also objected to the scheme, with particular concerns about extra lorries on the B1332 Bungay-Norwich road.

Julian Green, chairman of Enraged, said: "The simple fact is that there is no proven need for this quarry."

The plans will be discussed by South Norfolk Council on February 23 before going to Norfolk County Council for a decision. Lafarge has been asked to make a fuller environmental impact statement, so no decision is expected until March 31 at the earliest.