

## Independent Expert Panel Visits Holcim in Belgium (January 2009)

Two panel members, Dave Richards and Marc Stalmans, visited Holcim Belgium to learn about the new Obesco2 project and visit the active quarries in Obourg to further learn about quarry rehabilitation activities and biodiversity considerations. The Obesco2 project consists of a new limestone quarry near Antoing and a new modern cement plant at the same location as the existing plant in Obourg.

### Sites Visited

- Proposed Obesco2 site (Antoing), which is currently agricultural land
- Closed 5 Rocs site (Antoing), which has been largely become rehabilitated through a long natural succession (> 50 years).
- A Natura 2000 site, the former Milieu quarry (Antoing) that has a mixture of natural and active rehabilitation
- Old Quarries at Antoing (Requiem, Vicaire, Bruyelle and Californie), which have naturally rehabilitated over time
- Currently active Obourg quarry
- Jardin Géologique and La Maison de la Biodiversité facilities at Obourg supported by Holcim



*The existing quarry at Obourg*

### Visit Summary

- The visit of the Obesco2 project allowed the panel to learn about the planning and implementation of this greenfield project and how biodiversity conservation is considered in this early stage.
- This represents a very interesting case study due to the highly interwoven pattern of areas of high and low biodiversity values that mostly reflect past and current land uses as well as the effect of time on rehabilitation processes.
- Within the local regulatory environment, the development of the new quarry will require re-zoning of the land. The loss of agricultural land will be offset by gains in land zoned for other non-development classifications such as biodiversity conservation. These offsets will be required in order to prevent a further densification of the landscape in terms of human development.
- The proposed quarry site is currently low in biodiversity value and, with a landscape approach there is an opportunity to increase the overall biodiversity value in the area. The old quarries in Antoing represent an opportunity for this compensation.
- Holcim Belgium is currently preparing the scope of the Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) for the Obesco2 project. The panel members met with the consultant who will prepare the assessment to understand the local regulatory requirements.
- In addition to meeting the local requirements, the assessment can also be used to measure biodiversity for the offsets calculations. The ESIA process will also provide the opportunity to learn from the experience of applying the corporate recommendations at the operational level.

- The biodiversity at the old quarries sites could be further enhanced, for example, with the control of invasive plant species.
- The Jardin Géologique and La Maison de la Biodiversité are great platforms for education within the local community. In particular, La Maison de la Biodiversité provides a venue to raise awareness of biodiversity and its relevance to us all.
- Holcim Belgium has a long history of voluntary quarry rehabilitation research and implementation, using external expertise. The experience gained will be very useful in maximising the opportunities offered by Obesco2.