

Members of the Independent Expert Panel Visit Aggregate Industries (UK)

Panel members Christoph Imboden, David Richards, and Marc Stalmans visited 3 sites over 5 days in June 2009. Aggregate Industries operates more than 80 quarries in the UK and has implemented a company wide Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP): This visit presented an opportunity to learn about developing and implementing BAPs for relevant sites.

Sites Visited

- Bardon Hill. A hard rock quarry in operation for over 150 years.
- Holme Park. A limestone quarry adjacent to and containing nationally protected areas.
- Ripon. A sand and gravel site with rival biodiversity opinions regarding restoration

People met

- Aggregate Industries staff, both at corporate and site level, including the participation of the company CEO at opening and closing meeting.
- Wildlife Trust, both at national and local levels
- Local NGOs and community groups
- Biodiversity consultants at both Holme Park and Ripon
- IUCN UK National Committee chair



Panel plants a tree at each site visited

Visit Summary

- There is a high level of biodiversity awareness in the UK which influences the regulatory framework and society's attitudes towards mining of natural resources. A high number of civil society groups are concerned about and watching over a wide range of nature issues. Both NGO's and authorities monitor closely the activities of natural resources companies. The public has a strong sense of ownership of the countryside even if the land is owned privately. This allows for a multitude of opinions and ideas how the country side should be managed.
- The panel noted a clear understanding of the "business case" for biodiversity: as a direct benefit good biodiversity management will help to get licences approved, but the long-term indirect benefits of the company's environmental and ethical reputation are also recognised. At all 3 sites, biodiversity management is well integrated into the operations, including in the planning stages, site landscape planning, active invasive species control, and linking rehabilitation with local conservation planning activities.
- Since 2005, Aggregate Industries has operated a company-wide Biodiversity Policy, In 2007, an integrated Environment and Community Policy was adopted in which biodiversity is at the heart of its commitment to environmental management and community engagement. 36 Aggregate Industries quarries have formal Biodiversity

Action Plans, with 20 more working towards establishing objectives. This experience will be useful for other Holcim group companies.

- Aggregate Industries work with conservation partners, such as the Wildlife Trusts both at the strategic corporate level as well as site level. At all 3 sites, local conservation experts are involved in the restoration activities and development of site level BAPs. The Panel was impressed with the competence and expertise of the contracted (local) experts, NGO partners and collaborating authorities.
- The visit to Ripon highlighted several interesting issues: the new permit requiring 50 years of aftercare in return for 7 years of extraction, being exposed to rival biodiversity opinions and interests championed by different experts, inadvertently becoming caught up in local conservation politics. From a biodiversity standpoint, sand and gravel extraction in an area such as Ripon can be seen as a means of converting biodiversity-poor agricultural land into a much more diverse alluvial flood plain habitat within a relatively short time span – as has been demonstrated by Aggregate Industries in several places.
- The Bardon Hill area includes an active extraction site, offices, agricultural land and nature reserve areas. The panel highlighted “the advance planning of the landscaping is exemplary, with the work – in the case of Bardon Hill extension – being commenced several years ahead of the onset of mining operations”. However there may be an opportunity to develop one integrated management plan for the entire area.
- The Holme Park site contains a protected area of limestone pavement within the quarry and is adjacent to a protected area as well as a local nature preserve. This site shows all the tensions that can arise in society over differing views on today’s use of natural resources and the management of landscape of high conservation, recreational and aesthetical values: excellent opportunities for mining basic raw materials required by every part of society stand opposite the preservation of a unique landscape with distinct uncommon biodiversity elements harbouring many species of conservation concern. Ultimately, this is a good example how these interests can be quite successfully integrated with each other and led to the development of 3 BAPs for the area. Here again, there may be an opportunity to integrate into 1 BAP.