

The logo features a stylized graphic of two overlapping, curved shapes in shades of blue and teal, resembling a swoosh or a stylized 'P'.

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Awards for Planning Excellence Case Study

**The Minerals Local Plan for Gloucestershire
(2018 – 2032)**

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Award criteria

1. Background

Please outline the background to the project:

- context
- timeline (including phase in project, e.g. in recognition that some planning work may have been done earlier)

The Minerals Local Plan for Gloucestershire (MLP) is a comprehensive resource-focused, forward thinking development plan document that is core to the achievement of sustainable growth over the coming decade for the county.

The MLP was adopted in March 2020 and has been prepared by public-sector, planning professionals and other technical specialists from the County Council in its capacity as the local mineral planning local authority. The plan is the successfully culmination of a five + year work programme dating back to mid-2014 that has engaged the general public and minerals planning experts in a range of broad awareness building campaigns, formal consultations and tight, targeted technical workshops. It has brought together mineral operators, local representatives of 'host' communities, other environmentally-orientated interested parties and statutory bodies to help shape and bring in play a fresh, up-to-date local planning policy framework for the management of Gloucestershire's mineral resources into the future.

The MLP tackles a vitally important resource challenge – ensuring a readily available supply of construction minerals to realise wider growth ambitions for the county throughout the 2020's and early 2030's. These include a significant uplift in the building of new homes (30,000 +) and premises for commercial enterprise (to support 40,000 + new jobs); and the continued effectiveness of public infrastructure to keep a growing, but also aging, population mobile, safe and healthy.

The MLP sets out a suite of strategic, countywide policies and seven local allocations that together act as a robust framework for facilitating the prudent supply of Gloucestershire's mineral resources of coal, clay, limestone, sand & gravel and sandstone. The framework demands that sustainability takes centre stage in decision-making. It requires: -

- high standards of amenity for host communities;
- protection of the integrity of prized local assets, some of which are of international and national significance;
- safeguards to avoid the pollution of air, water and land; and
- the means by which to capture maximum local benefits and opportunities to achieve long-term environmental enhancements, particularly with post-mineral site restoration and after-use.

In addition, the MLP fully grasps the need for transformative change in responding to the climate emergency. It will steer the local mineral industry down a path towards increased decarbonisation of its operations, greater resource efficiency and support for a much wider application of alternative, recycled materials. The plan is committed to shrinking the carbon footprint of extractive industries throughout Gloucestershire and unlocking their potential as a force for good to advance the county's ambition to effectively adapt and be more resilient to evolving climate change impacts.

Timeline

Site Options and framework consultation – June 2014 and Feb 2015; Draft MLP consultation – Sept 2016; Publication MLP consultation – May 2018; Submission of MLP – Dec 2018; Examination hearing sessions – June 2019; Inspector's report – Dec 2019; MLP adoption – March 2020

Word count (including headings) = 463

2. Outcomes

Please outline what positive impacts the project has provided for:

- the local community
- the economy
- the environment

The local community

It is simply not good enough for resource-focused plans such as the MLP, to engage solely in protecting the status-quo of 'host' local communities from mineral developments. Consequently, the plan requires applicants to consider the lasting legacy of their proposals once working has ceased and sites have been restored. For example, when assessing transport impacts and considering active travel mitigation, such efforts should align with wider community-based initiatives to upgrade and develop cycling and walking infrastructure and expand public access for recreation. Furthermore, in devising solutions for flood risk mitigation, applicants are signposted to the planning advantages of choosing betterment and enhancement that will transcend site boundaries and improve protection for the wider community.

The economy

The MLP has adopted a strategy for ensuring the provision of steady and adequate supplies of minerals from the county over the long-term – up to 2042 in the case of construction aggregates. These conditions are conducive to enduring inward investment by operators that will help sustain existing local jobs and support the future expansion and diversification of the employment market. Employment opportunities will undoubtedly be boosted in supportive sectors such as freight transport; repair and maintenance; and retail and leisure. From a strategic perspective, the difficult decisions that have been taken in preparing a responsible, long-lasting plan will be hugely positive to delivering growth by the construction industry. It will help facilitate its easy and cost-competitive access to materials needed to build new homes, businesses and infrastructure.

The environment

The MLP is 'Building with Nature' accredited in recognition of the prominence given to securing positive environmental outcomes with mineral developments. At the countywide level, the plan routinely challenges applicants to show how their proposals will meaningfully contribute towards: -

- improving the connectivity and safeguarding and / or enhancing the environmental integrity of the county's multi-functional green infrastructure networks;
- protecting or enhancing designated nature sites, geological conservation interests and soil resources;
- delivering biodiversity gains with a preference towards effective integration with locally-orientated priorities;
- ensuring any altered landforms are sympathetic to the local landscape character; and
- upgrading water quality status, where water bodies may be affected;

At a local-level, all seven MLP allocations focus the attention on the numerous opportunities to make a valuable contribution towards environmental benefits. All proposals within allocations must demonstrate how site preparation, mineral working and restoration phases will take account of, integrate with and / or compliment: -

- water quality-related improvements as set out in relevant River Basin Management Plans and Catchment Flood Management Plans;
- local projects and actions aligned to delivering specific Nature Improvement Areas;
- the maintenance and improvement of access to Regionally Important Geological and Geomorphological Sites; and
- environmental initiatives laid down in relevant local actions plans such as those directed by the county's AONB Management Plans (e.g. Cotswolds, Malvern Hills and Wye Valley).

Word count (including headings) = 468

3. Planning contribution

Please outline how the project has benefitted from the involvement of a planner or planners:

- providing strong and effective leadership and vision
- working in partnership with others
- managing implementation and delivery

Providing strong and effective leadership and vision

The County Council's minerals and waste policy team took ownership of plan preparation from the outset and provided strong leadership in steering the MLP from its inception through to adoption. Preparing a forward thinking, countywide resource-focused plan brings considerable challenges – managing various competing interests and ambitions, marshalling strong and forceful views; responding to evolving practice, guidance and policy; and working with the inevitable uncertainty that arises with planning for the future. Team members both individually and collectively were diligent in keeping all parties on track and focused on the importance and value to all of ensuring an up-to-date local policy framework for managing the county's mineral resources was put in place. The team worked tirelessly to: -

- build trust and confidence within and across different participating groups;
- keep lines of communication open and genuinely two-way where appropriate;
- take an active role in developing understanding of difficult and often multi-layered issues and
- deliver workable solutions without harmful delay to the overall plan making progress.

Working in partnership with others

Successfully adopting the Minerals Local Plan for Gloucestershire has been made possible through cultivating effective partnerships by the County Council's minerals and waste policy team. Throughout the plan's preparation the team worked determinedly to ensure interested and influential partners meaningfully contributed and added value to the plan: -

- Elected councillors and officers from Gloucestershire's districts and the County Council; parish council members; and representatives of local community and environmental action groups provided vital local intelligence and also acted as a helpful conduit in which to share feedback widely and spread the word about plan-making information within local communities;
- In-house environmental specialists (e.g. ecology, archaeology, flood risk management) supported by external consultants; and critiqued by statutory bodies (e.g. Environment Agency, Natural England etc..) helped to establish, expand and validate the evidence base from which effective policy solutions could be shaped; and
- Mineral operators, trade association representatives and industry-supporting planning agents' responses and views offered much needed scrutiny and challenge to support the plan's deliverability.

Managing implementation and delivery

Whilst the primary objective of the County Council's minerals and waste policy team was to achieve the adoption of a plan for mineral developments throughout Gloucestershire, it remains committed to ensuring the plan's long-term implementation by supporting decision-makers through the development management process. From adoption 'day-one', the team has provided technical guidance on a case-by-case basis to help ensure accurate and consistency with policy interpretation. Going forward it will be looking at different ways to assist efficiently and effectively as core policy work and priorities for the team move away from mineral matters. Technical guidance notes are under consideration as well as a suite of short online audio and visual presentation for broadcast as webinars or as a downloadable virtual resource for planning officers and elected members.

Word count (including headings) = 469

4. Sustainable development

Please outline how the project has supported:

- positive short, medium and long term public benefit
- a balance of economic, social and environmental objectives
- the UN's Sustainable Development Goals
- aimed to prevent or mitigate climate change

Short, medium and long term public benefit

Short-term / medium-term | greater awareness of new standards, expectations, limitations and opportunities for the mineral industry operating throughout Gloucestershire; an enhanced evidence base, particularly of local minerals-related matters; the fostering of new relationships between the minerals industry and others to develop better legacy outcomes from mineral developments; and swifter and smarter mineral planning decisions.

Longer-term | a more responsive and greener local construction industry able to access to 'right' building materials (of primary and recycled origins) to deliver clean growth; a decarbonised local minerals industry with a much reduced carbon foot print; enhanced and increasingly accessible multi-functional green infrastructure networks across former mineral working areas; safe and expanded active transport networks; and effective and resilient flood risk management with wider coverage for local communities;

UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The MLP policies will help to realise 2030 targets for the UN SDG's – in particular SDGs. 9, 11, 12, 13 and 15. The plan's support of steady and adequate, long-term supplies of minerals will be vital in proving resources to deliver sustainable growth in the case of services, housing and transport (SDGs 9 and 11) The same case is made for protecting heritage assets that are reliant on finite, natural building stone resources, such as those found within Gloucestershire (SDG 11). To compliment primary mineral supplies, the plan promotes expanded use of recycled and secondary alternatives and sets a unique local challenge (for a resource-focused plan) to achieve an uplift in material re-use and recycling across new local development (SDGs 9 and 12). From an environmental perspective, the MLP expects proposals not to: - pollute air, water and land; to respect natural systems; ensure the quality of life, health and well-being of 'host' local communities; and seize enhancement opportunities in a coordinated fashion so as maximise the delivery of biodiversity net gain (SDGs 9, 11 and 15). In response to the climate change emergency, the MLP promotes decarbonisation measures within the local mineral industry and the incorporation of adaptation and resilience into the means of mitigating adverse impacts and delivering post-mineral restoration and aftercare solutions (SDG 13).

Prevent or mitigate climate change

It is inescapable that mineral working generates carbon emissions. This is not lost on the MLP. Consequently, a key focus of the plan is to secure reductions in the local mineral industry's carbon footprint. To do this, applicants must prove the prudent and efficient use of mineral resources; show how the availability of alternative (lower-carbon) recycled materials will be increased and that increasingly low carbon-emission transport choices will be made. To complement the decarbonisation agenda, the MLP recognises the opportunity of mineral developments to de-risk adverse climate change-related impacts. It demands that account be given to forecast climate changes in preparing proposals, particularly in devising flood risk mitigation. It also supports 'climate change aware' site restoration such as those accommodating local habitat shifts, which will act as a refuge for species that are vulnerable to and / or may be displaced by climate change.

Word count (including headings) = 503

5. Community benefit

Please outline how the project has provided:

- positive and constructive engagement and dialogue with local people and businesses
- a better quality of life for people, especially for disadvantaged communities
- tangible benefits for communities such as facilities, infrastructure, jobs, training etc

Positive and constructive engagement and dialogue with local people and businesses

Securing community buy-in and understanding of the MLP's purpose and ambitions was key during the plan's preparation. Great emphasis was placed on host resident and business communities most likely to be impacted by future mineral developments. Addressees nearby to all candidate allocations received targeted notifications of events and activities with each plan-making stage; a series of roadshows with open drop-in sessions were taken out into community settings; and presentations and officer updates were offered items to parish and other community representative meetings. Whilst all aspects of the evolving MLP policy framework were made open to scrutiny and comment at local libraries, council offices and online, communities were specifically encouraged to pass on invaluable local, 'on-the-ground' intelligence to highlight key concerns. This was to ensure that the right safeguards and amenity protections would be in place and to weave in existing local improvement initiatives with site restoration.

Going forward, and in recognition of prolonged timeframes and complex, evolving issues associated with many mineral workings, the MLP has made provision for the setting up and sustained operation of community liaison groups. These groups can help establish good lines of communication and secure meaningful dialogue between local communities, regulators and mineral operators. The MLP encourages applicants to assess the value of local community liaison taking account of the appetite of local people and the scale and significance of their proposals.

A better quality of life for people, especially for disadvantaged communities

The MLP's effect upon the quality of life of host local communities will be multifaceted. It addresses the need for robust amenity protections by demanding applicants to implement high standards in the operation of their sites and to deliver effective mitigation and monitoring. In achieving this, the plan challenges applicants to show how careful consideration has been given to the health and well-being of host communities and signposts the value of using Health Impact Assessment (HIA) tools. Specific attention is drawn to scrutinising the sensitivity of nearby receptors: - schools, hospitals and older person's care facilities and those in communities already experiencing disadvantage or vulnerable health characteristics. The MLP also headlines the potential effect upon communities from positive and negative influences on the local economy resulting from mineral developments. Applicants are required therefore to undertake Economic Impact Assessments (EclA) to demonstrate how mineral and non-mineral jobs may be affected. The MLP uniquely encourages the use of local apprenticeship initiatives as a way of 'locking-in' local employment benefits.

Tangible benefits for communities such as facilities, infrastructure, jobs, training etc.

Community benefits resulting from adherence to the MLP policy framework include: - sustained and expanded local employment – possibly through the use of local apprenticeships; environmental and recreation betterment from effective co-ordination with locally-orientated site restoration activities; and improved connectivity and accessibility – from inherited highway capacity and safety improvements; and the expansion of active travel that will allow more safe cycling and walking.

Word count (including headings) = 489

6. Leading practice

Please outline how the project:

- is creative and innovative
- is an exemplar that is transferable across the UK
- promotes equality and diversity

Creative and innovative

The MLP brings forward unique local policy features and adapts others in pursuit of sustainable minerals development throughout Gloucestershire. It has introduced the use of health impact assessments (HIA) with mineral planning applications to ensure the characteristics and circumstances of local communities is properly scrutinised, understood and acted upon. HIA is a tool that to date has seldom been employed in minerals planning. The plan has facilitated the means by which local employment initiatives can be meaningfully aligned and secured through local mineral industry ambitions – by championing local apprenticeships. It also opens the opportunity to instigate community liaison groups to foster good, enduring and effective local relationships between mineral operators, regulators and communities. From an environmental perspective, the MLP has challenged itself by pursuing and succeeding to meet Building with Nature accreditation standards – the first minerals plan in the country to do so. It is also, one of only a handful of resource-focused plans that go beyond conventional practice of simply acknowledging the role of recycled and secondary aggregates in the future supply of minerals. The MLP sets out clear policy that engages with general land-use planning, requiring development projects throughout Gloucestershire to use recycled materials specifically in construction as an alternative to primary minerals.

An exemplar that is transferable across the UK

As concluded by Building with Nature accreditors, *'The Minerals Local Plan for Gloucestershire is an exemplar policy document....and [we] recommend colleagues from the planning policy discipline to review its policies for reference to best practice.'* The MLP shows how new and progressive planning evolved in mainstream policy settings can be adapted to resource planning for minerals. It offers a deliverable solution to maintaining, much needed steady and adequate supplies of minerals over the long-term, whilst promoting a transition to an increasingly low-carbon economy and securing the health and well-being of host local communities. Baked into the plan is the importance of coordination and alignment in realising locally-orientated benefits where opportunities exist. This could include building on or expanding existing supported initiatives such as active travel (walking and cycling) infrastructure; multi-functional green infrastructure networks; nature recovery networks and improvement areas; and delivery of biodiversity net gain.

Promotes equality and diversity

The MLP has sought to ensure all sections the community and their needs will be carefully considered through future mineral development proposals. To achieve this, the use of health impact assessments has been encouraged with the purpose of enhancing understanding and awareness of different community requirements (e.g. groups already suffering from disadvantage or experiencing vulnerable health characteristics). In addition, the plan adopts a flexible, responsive and locally-reflective approach towards restoration and post-mineral after-uses. This creates sufficient 'space' for future opportunities to be grasped, including tackling inequality. Opening-up and increasing access to land through restoration and aftercare and supporting informal recreation forms part of armoury in the battle against health inequality.

Word count (including headings) = 482