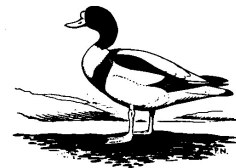

HART QUARRY EXTENSION

COMMENTS BY TEESMOUTH BIRD CLUB ON A PLANNING APPLICATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL STATEMENT BY HART AGGREGATES LIMITED



JUVENILE PEREGRINE, CLEVELAND (2007)

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TBC/RPT027/ECP

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Teemouth Bird Club

- 1.1 The Teemouth Bird Club (TBC) was formed in 1960 and is one of the longest standing nature conservation bodies in North East England. We produce the annual '*Cleveland Bird Report*', which is composed of vetted records of birds seen in the Cleveland sub-region during each year. Our membership now stands at over 450. We published '*The Breeding Birds of Cleveland*' in November 2008, the first breeding birds atlas ever produced for Cleveland. This is an invaluable aid to biodiversity planning and will act as a benchmark against which all future population changes can be measured. It also provides data to inform EIAs carried out in the Cleveland area and for assessing the environmental impacts of developments on specific sites. We possess a detailed knowledge of the birds of the Cleveland area, with our records spanning over 60 years.

2.0 PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

- 2.1 The purpose of this report is to present the TBC's response to the Planning Application and Environmental Statement (ES) submitted by Hart Aggregates Limited for an extension to the Hart Quarry and extended timescale for extraction (Application ref: H/2009/0482).
- 2.2 TBC provided breeding birds and other data to Barrett Environmental Limited during the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and we note that this has been used in the preparation of the ES. Our data report highlighted the importance of Hart Quarry and surrounding area for birds, notably:
- breeding Peregrine Falcons since 2002;
 - breeding Little Owl and Kestrel;
 - one of the largest Jackdaw colonies in Cleveland; and
 - wintering Corn Buntings and other species in the surrounding stubble fields.

3.0 BASIS OF THE REPORT

- 3.1 The Planning Application and ES have been considered by the Club's Conservation Sub-Committee and the comments contained in this report reflect the official response of TBC.

4.0 HART QUARRY – SITE CONTEXT

- 4.1 Hart Quarry is located in a gently rolling, largely agricultural landscape on the urban-rural fringe of northwest Hartlepool, on the South Durham Magnesian Limestone Plateau. It forms part of an extrusive band of magnesian limestone, which extends

westwards inland and outcrops at the sea to the east at Hartlepool Headland. The site is bordered to the south by a golf course and to the east by Hart Reservoirs, which are under-watched but form a generally unproductive site ornithologically.

- 4.2 The main ornithological value of the Hart Quarry is for its assemblage of breeding birds, particularly Peregrine (*Falco peregrinus*), Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*), Little Owl (*Athene noctua*) and Jackdaw (*Corvus monedula*). As a result of its bird and botanical interest, it is a designated 'Local Wildlife Site' in the *Hartlepool Local Plan* (soon to become the *Local Development Framework*). The stubble fields immediately around the site have traditionally been important wintering areas for Corn Bunting (*Miliaria calandra*), Skylark (*Alauda arvensis*), Tree Sparrow (*Passer montanus*) and various species of finch. Corn Bunting is on the verge of extinction as a breeding species in Cleveland, so any residual wintering sites must be protected at all costs and new breeding habitat created wherever possible.

5.0 TBC'S RESPONSE TO THE PLANNING APPLICATION AND ES

- 5.1 Our response is confined solely to ornithological issues: we assume that impacts associated with visual, noise, transportation and hydrology will be dealt with by others.
- 5.2 From an ornithological standpoint, we consider that the ES has adequately identified and addressed the key environmental effects and how these may impact on the birds of Hart Quarry. We understand that phased quarrying is to continue for the next 30 years in tandem with a phased restoration scheme (yet to be finalised). The current restoration scheme involves infilling the quarry with imported waste and overburden, totalling 75,000 cubic metres, commencing in 2015, to create a "*new sustainable landscape that will both protect and enhance the ecological interest of the site and also provide a leisure facility compatible with the ecological interest*". It is proposed that a significant part of the "*sustainable landscape*" be given over to golfing activity.
- 5.3 It is not the TBC's intention to lodge an objection to the Planning Application, however, we do have some concerns, particularly concerning restoration, and these are set out below under key headings.

Breeding Birds

- 5.4 As the ES acknowledges, the Peregrine is a Schedule 1 species under the *Wildlife and Countryside Act ' 1981* and an Amber List species of medium conservation concern. It is a rare breeding bird in the Cleveland sub-region, which contained only 4 pairs in 2008, with most of these concentrated on the cliffs of East Cleveland. In 2009, this total dropped to 3 when one of the coastal sites was abandoned. The Hart Quarry pair has been the most consistent since 2002, having bred every year since and produced an excellent total of 22 young birds. This underlines the importance of this site in a regional context, which, as the ES states, is due to its "*secluded nature and inaccessibility*".
- 5.5 We believe that additional abstraction will have little effect on the breeding Peregrines, provided that it is properly managed and the measures identified in the ES are implemented and monitored. There is to be no further quarrying in the

northern area used by Peregrine and Kestrel and the quarry faces are to be retained here. It is a fact that the former species probably wouldn't be breeding at all in Hartlepool District if it were not for the presence of Hart Quarry and their success has undoubtedly been due to the private nature of the site and, to his great credit, sympathetic management by the quarry owner.

- 5.6 Similarly, the Hart Quarry also supports breeding Little Owl (*Athene noctua*), Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*), an Amber List species, and Jackdaw (*Corvus monedula*), the latter being one of the largest colonies in Cleveland. The breeding bird survey conducted during the EIA found 19 species of bird present in the quarry, 11 of which were breeding.
- 5.7 The biggest threat to the long-term survival of these breeding species is not through the quarrying activities but the nature and extent of site restoration (see our comments below).

Mitigation and Restoration

- 5.8 We consider that the proposed **Mitigation** will ensure the continued success of Peregrines and other birds at Hart Quarry while the extended extraction takes place, ie:
- no further quarrying in the northern area used by Peregrines and Kestrels;
 - the retention of the quarry faces in this area;
 - avoidance of the nesting season for the removal of vegetation;
 - the monitoring of cliff-nesting birds during future quarrying and blasting operations, and
 - the creation of a "buffer zone" to protect the nesting sites.
- 5.9 We are concerned, however, about the proposed **restoration** scheme and after-use of the site as a golfing facility. Away from the coast, exposed rock faces constitute rare habitats, particularly in the north of Cleveland and, where they exist as at Hart Quarry, birds that otherwise wouldn't be present quickly colonise them. The Peregrine is a prime example. We believe that phased quarrying should produce more such habitat. The use of the quarry as a waste disposal facility, followed by clinical soiling and seeding, will greatly reduce its ecological value by diminishing the amount of cliff-face available. The introduction of recreational activity so close to a Schedule 1 breeding species is also inadvisable and contravenes Policy WL8 of the current *Hartlepool Local Plan*, which seeks to protect biodiversity. As the ES concludes, the success of Hart Quarry as a breeding site for Peregrines lies in its "*secluded nature and inaccessibility*" and goes on to say that the implementation of the restoration scheme in its present form will have a "*moderate/major negative impact*". We consider that it will be far more damaging than the quarrying phase. We therefore request a radical reappraisal of the proposed restoration scheme, as shown on drawing number NT10480/Figure 3.7. Should Hartlepool Borough Council approve the Application, we recommend that a Condition be imposed to ensure the long-term retention of the entire quarry face, without recourse to infilling.

Enhancement

- 5.10 The replacement of vegetation removed during quarrying should form part of the restoration scheme, with planting being confined to native species already growing in the quarry. Where possible, vegetation cover should be extended to increase the amount of cover for breeding birds, such as Dunnock, Whitethroat and Blackbird. The use of quarried overburden and topsoil could also be used to recreate Magnesian Limestone Grassland on the elevated parts of the quarry.
- 5.11 Further smaller scale, low cost, but effective, enhancements should include:
- The provision of ledges, recesses and overhangs in the residual quarry face to attract breeding Kestrels, Little Owls and House Martins.
 - The erection of owl boxes around the periphery of the site.
 - A nest box scheme for smaller birds, such as Tree Sparrow.
 - A winter feeding programme for Corn Buntings, Skylarks and finch species off site, with the co-operation of adjacent landowners.

Long-term Management of the Site

- 5.12 The ES states that "*after care*" will be carried out for a five-year period after completion of the restoration scheme. This should be made a Condition if Planning approval is given, including the preparation of a detailed Management Plan identifying the works required and those responsible for implementing them. We recommend that a commuted sum for the future management of the site be provided by the site owners, Hart Aggregates Limited.

Future Consultation

- 5.13 TBC would welcome the opportunity to be involved in any future consultations in view of the significant ornithological value of Hart Quarry. We would particularly like to be consulted on the restoration scheme.