Report for
Mr David Atkinson
Estates Manager North & Scotland Region
Tarmac
Southfield Lane
Whitwell
Worksop
Nottinghamshire
S80 3LJ

Main contributors
Claire Brown
Chris Prydderch

Issued by

Chris Prydderch

Approved by

Claire Brown

Wood
Canon Court
Abbey Lawn
Abbey Foregate
Shrewsbury SY2 5DE
United Kingdom
Tel +44 (0) 1743 342 000

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Details</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01</td>
<td>Final Report</td>
<td>12/12/18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Contents

1. **Non-Technical Summary**  
   1.1 Description of the existing environment  
   1.2 The development  
   1.3 The Environmental Impact Assessment process  
   1.4 Potential environmental effects  
      - Noise  
      - Blasting vibration  
      - Air quality  
      - Traffic and transport  
      - Water environment  
      - Biodiversity  
      - Landscape and Visual  
      - Historic environment  
      - Socio-economics  
      - Cumulative effects  
   1.5 Conclusions  
   1.6 What Happens Next?  
   1.7 Obtaining Copies of the Environmental Statement  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1</td>
<td>Site location</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2</td>
<td>Cornforth Quarry at Phase 4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3</td>
<td>Public Rights of Way network within and adjacent to Cornforth Quarry</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. Non-Technical Summary

Cornforth Quarry has the benefit of planning permission for mineral extraction and has been unworked for several years. The operator, Tarmac, is considering the reopening of the quarry in the near future. To achieve this, a Review of Old Mineral Permissions (ROMP) submission for new replacement planning conditions accompanied by an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), the results of which are reported in an Environmental Statement (ES), is being made to Durham County Council (Durham CC), the mineral planning authority. This document presents, in non-technical language, the findings of the ES.

1.1 Description of the existing environment

Cornforth Quarry is located to the east of West Cornforth village. The quarry is bordered to the south by Stobb Cross Lane and to the north by the line of a former (disused) railway. The quarry site is split into two parts by the A1(M), with the eastern part bordered to the east by the A177, and the western part by agricultural fields on the eastern outskirts of West Cornforth village. In total the site measures ~121 hectares (ha). The location of the quarry is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1 Site location
1.2 The development

Cornforth Quarry is an inactive quarry site, split into two parts by the A1(M) – Cornforth East and Cornforth West. Wide scale extraction has already occurred in both the West and East Quarries. The site contains approximately (~) 10.5 million tonnes (mt) of limestone remaining in the west and ~20.0 mt in the east, which Tarmac have permission to extract. At present, part of the site is used by Caterpillar UK Limited for training and testing of their construction vehicles. Other areas of the quarry where no extraction has taken place are under agricultural tenancy.

The proposals at the quarry include the following key elements:

- Restart extraction operations at the site;
- Extract the remaining 10.5 mt of limestone from the western site area (during phases 1 and 2) and 20 mt in the east (during phases 3 – 6);
- A change to where extraction is undertaken in the western site area to allow a greater stand-off distance from residential properties in West Cornforth village;
- Cap mineral extraction at the currently approved rate of 600,000 tonnes per year;
- A revised progressive and final restoration scheme for the site.

The anticipated situation at the quarry in Phase 4 is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2 Cornforth Quarry at Phase 4
1.3 The Environmental Impact Assessment process

Due to the scale and nature of the development, an EIA has been undertaken in respect of the recommencement of mineral extraction at Cornforth Quarry. The purpose of the EIA is to identify how people and environmental resources (collectively known as receptors) could be affected by the proposals and to put forward measures (often referred to as mitigation) that would avoid, minimise or offset any negative effects. To achieve this, an ES has been prepared. The ES is impartial and the results are therefore presented objectively.

Experts in a wide range of disciplines carried out the environmental assessments which make up the EIA, and the findings are summarised below. The EIA also considers the potential cumulative effects arising from the development, including in combination with other similar sites.

1.4 Potential environmental effects

The following sections provide a brief summary of the main findings of the EIA as set out in the technical chapters of the ES. As required by The Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2011, the ES sets out whether effects on these receptors would be ‘significant’ or not. Effects which are considered ‘significant’ are deemed important enough to influence the decision to be taken by the Minerals Planning Authority in coming to a view about whether or not and how the development should proceed.

Noise

An assessment of the effects of the recommencement of mineral extraction on noise levels in the local area has been undertaken. Given the fact that no changes to approved quarry traffic numbers are proposed, traffic noise effects from the proposals will not be significant.

The assessment has therefore focused on noise effects from quarry operations, and particularly on residential receptors in the immediate vicinity of the site. Baseline noise monitoring was carried out at six locations between 30 November 2017 and 07 December 2017 at the following locations. The purpose of the monitoring was to establish existing (baseline) noise levels at the nearest noise sensitive receptors in the vicinity of the quarry.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Receptor</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Nearby receptors baseline noise levels considered representative for</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Green</td>
<td>West Cornforth village to the west of the quarry</td>
<td>Properties on the north-east fringe of West Cornforth including Middleham Road and Bridge Road</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garmondsway Road</td>
<td>West Cornforth village to the south-west of the quarry</td>
<td>Properties on the south-east fringe of West Cornforth including Lichfield Road and Stobb Cross Lane/Garmondsway Road</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West House Farm</td>
<td>East of the quarry beyond A177</td>
<td>Properties on eastern side of the A1(M)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College House Farm</td>
<td>South-east of the quarry beyond Thrislington Quarry East</td>
<td>Isolated properties to the south east of Cornforth Quarry near this property</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highland Cottages</td>
<td>South of the quarry beyond Thrislington Quarry East</td>
<td>Isolated property, representative of Highland House and Highland Farm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Coach House</td>
<td>South-east of the quarry</td>
<td>Isolated properties to the south of this property</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Noise predictions have been carried out for each working phase (1-6) of the proposals and these have been based on worst case assumptions in respect of machine location, actual operating time and weather
Predictions of noise resulting from mineral extraction, haulage and processing have shown that noise levels have shown that these operations will not exceed the established noise limits for quarry operations at any of the individual receptors in any phase during normal quarrying operations (55 decibel\(^1\) (dB)(A) during the daytime and 42dB(A) during the night-time). To meet these limits certain restrictions are proposed for operations, including:

- No drilling of the uppermost parts of the quarry nearest to West Cornforth (phases 1 and 2) before 08:00
- No other mineral extraction or haulage from the site before 06:30
- No processing of materials before 07:00

Soil mounds will also be constructed in certain areas around the site perimeter to reduce disturbance due to noise from quarry activities. The removal of topsoil and construction of soil mounds would be undertaken as ‘temporary operations’ which are classified as works which will only occur over a period of 8 weeks within a given year and have a noise limit of 70dB(A).

It has therefore been assessed that there will be no significant noise effects as a result of the recommencement of mineral extraction at Cornforth Quarry.

**Blasting vibration**

The purpose of quarry blasting is to fracture the rock and pile it up on the quarry floor to enable it to be loaded for transport to the processing plant. It is important to understand that for any given blast it is very much in the operator’s interest to always reduce vibration, both ground and airborne, to the minimum possible. This is because a well-designed, and carefully executed blast with the optimum weight of correctly placed explosive will result in maximum benefit to the operator with minimum effect on neighbours.

Vibration criteria for restricting vibration levels from blasting operations at the adjacent Thrislington Quarry East, also operated by Tarmac, are provided in the 2011 planning consent for the site. These are considered to be an example of current good practice applied by the mineral planning authority and can be directly applicable to the proposals at Cornforth Quarry. It has been predicted that vibration levels at all receptors would comply with these criteria, assuming some ‘charges’ for blasting are restricted, particularly to infrastructure receptors to the east such as the A1(M). It is therefore considered that no significant effects from blasting will occur as a result of the recommencement of mineral extraction at Cornforth Quarry provided the recommended charges are used.

**Air quality**

The method of operation at Cornforth Quarry will involve a number of dust-generating activities, which have the potential to cause annoyance at receptors in the vicinity of the site. The assessment of dust has considered meteorological conditions, distance between the site and each receptor and the frequency and duration of the dust generating activities.

In theory, receptors can potentially be affected by dust up to 1km from the source, although any dust emissions are more likely to be deposited much closer to the dust sources, generally within 100m.

Dust effects on a number of receptors around the site have been considered, including:

- Simonside Farm
- Veolia Recycling Centre

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\(^1\) Sound is measured in units called decibels (dB). The higher the decibel level, the louder the noise. On the decibel scale, the level increase of ten means that a sound is actually ten times more intense, or powerful.
No significant effects from dust emissions are expected as a result of the proposals. Emissions will be suitably controlled by a dust management plan, including measures such as covering or dampening down material stockpiles and locating such stockpiles away from residential properties, as well as installing wheel washing facilities so that vehicles leaving the site do not spread dust onto local roads. A dust deposition monitoring scheme will also be put in place to check on the effectiveness of the management measures.

Traffic and transport
The traffic-related environmental effects arising from the scheme have been evaluated. Severance, driver delay, pedestrian delay, pedestrian amenity, fear and intimidation and accidents and safety have all been assessed.

The traffic from Cornforth Quarry will be directed via Stobb Cross Lane using an existing (but improved) access west of the A1(M). The staffing levels would not exceed those presently employed at the neighbouring Thrislington East Quarry, as those staff currently employed at Thrislington would be deployed to work at Cornforth once works at Thrislington East Quarry cease. HGV movements would not exceed those in the current planning permission for Thrislington East Quarry.

No significant effects have been concluded in the traffic assessment.

Water environment
Cornforth Quarry is underlain by Magnesian limestone and Marl Slate. The EA’s Groundwater Vulnerability Map categorises these materials as Principal aquifers (formerly known as Major aquifers), i.e. ‘highly permeable formations usually with a known or probable presence of significant fracturing’. This indicates that they can be highly productive in terms of water yield, and can support large abstractions for public supply and other purposes.

The site is also underlain by coal measures, which are identified by the EA as a Secondary A Aquifer (formerly known as a Minor aquifer). These are described as fractured or potentially fractured rocks that can be important both for local water supplies and in supplying base flow to rivers.

There are only two abstraction licences within 3km of Cornforth Quarry. These are both groundwater abstractions i.e. there are no surface water abstractions within the vicinity of the site. There are however, 42 active discharge consent outlets within 3km of the site.

The Environment Agency surface water flood risk map indicates that 80% of the site is at a very low risk of surface water flooding. The remaining 20% comprises areas of low to high risk, associated with low points including the ponds within Cornforth Quarry and the site access road (beneath the A1(M).

The EA has also identified Source Protection Zones (SPZs), which are used to show the risk of contamination from activities which could cause pollution to groundwater in the area. Typically, there are three zones
identified – Zone 1 being the most vulnerable to change from any abstraction / contamination, through to Zone 3, which is the least vulnerable. Cornforth Quarry entirely within SPZ 3 for the Butterwick public water supply source (with the abstraction itself located ~6.5km to the southeast).

A number of activities associated with the suggested quarry working have been identified as having a potential effect on the water environment, the main ones being the loss of groundwater from the underlying aquifers and the contamination of groundwater and surface water (ponds, streams and rivers).

As part of the development proposals, Tarmac are proposing to return waters collected in the base of the quarry back into the underlying aquifer through adoption of a suitable flexible water management strategy. Several measures designed to minimise the risk of pollution to water resources will also be implemented as part of the proposals including pollution prevention, accident response protocols and water monitoring.

The nature and design of the proposed continuation of extraction at Cornforth Quarry and the control measures proposed will ensure that all effects on all ground and surface water receptors are not significant.

**Biodiversity**

There are two internationally important Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) within 10km of Cornforth Quarry (Thrislington SAC, located ~0.8km to the south east and Castle Eden Dene SAC, ~9.1km to the north east).

The Thrislington SAC is also a designated Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and National Nature Reserve (NNR). There are a further nine statutory nature conservation sites of national importance located within 2km of the site. Finally, there are 12 sites of local importance within 2km of the site. No sites of international, national or local importance have been predicted to be significantly affected by the recommencement of mineral extraction at Cornforth Quarry.

Considerable data gathering and a range of surveys were undertaken to assess how the Cornforth Quarry site is used by plants (flora) and animals (fauna), including an overall survey, known as an Extended Phase 1 Habitat Survey, to classify the habitats and potential for use of the site by fauna. This was followed by detailed botanical, tree, hedgerow, bat, bird, invertebrate and great crested newt surveys. These surveys have been used to describe the existing situation within the site and to identify the potentially sensitive biodiversity receptors.

Specifically, on-site surveys found that:

- There was very little evidence that badgers use the site to pass through and no badger setts have been found at Cornforth Quarry;
- Bat activity within the site was largely noted as common pipistrelle, with other species recorded in low or very low numbers. Key foraging areas and commuting routes appear to be associated with woodland blocks, scrub, tree lines and hedgerows. No roosting bats were recorded during the surveys.
- No great crested newts were found on the site. The nearest ponds where great crested newts were recorded were ~135m and 335m to the northeast of the site boundary, but ~440m and 500m respectively from the areas proposed to be worked in the quarry.
- Overall, 17 species of butterfly and five species of moth were recorded on site, with slightly more recorded to the west of the A1(M) than to the east.
- Habitats identified on site include calcareous and limestone grassland and open mosaic habitat which have developed throughout various vegetated areas of the site and on disturbed ground.

In order to minimise potential effects on flora and fauna, the following measures will be undertaken:
- Hedgerows would be retained as part of the development as far as possible. Hedgerows proposed for removal would be replaced on at least a like for like basis during restoration and existing hedgerows would be gapped up with appropriate native species.

- ‘Transitional veteran’ trees recognised for their biodiversity value to be lost due to quarry activities would be moved as standing deadwood into a new area of wood pasture priority habitat to be created within existing agricultural land. This would maintain as far as possible the micro-habitats within them.

- A number of small ponds would be created in areas next to existing or new terrestrial habitat which is suitable for amphibians including great crested newts.

- Areas of calcareous/limestone grassland, favoured by many invertebrates found at the site, would be retained as far as possible. Where areas are proposed for removal they would be recreated through improving existing grassland areas. New areas of calcareous/limestone grassland would also be created during restoration works resulting a net gain of this habitat.

- Restoration will be undertaken in phases to minimise large-scale habitat change.

- Existing good practice measures will ensure that potential harm to on-site species is minimised.

- A programme of advanced habitat creation will be undertaken during restoration phases to enhance habitats for badgers, bats, foraging and breeding birds, invertebrates and great crested newt.

With these measures in place, no significant effects on flora or fauna are predicted as a result of the proposals.

**Landscape and Visual**

The Magnesian limestone plateau landscape in which Cornforth Quarry is located has seen widespread quarrying activity since the eighteenth century and this has had an extensive impact upon the plateau’s landscape. Landscape elements resulting from or influenced by such activities include quarry voids, locations where voids have been used for landfill, dismantled railway corridors and former workings that have been subject to restoration works or left to regenerate naturally, such as Rough Furze Quarry to the south of the site beyond Thrislington Quarry.

Beyond the main communities and quarries, the land use is mainly agricultural (arable) with predominantly large fields. Tree cover includes some plantations or regeneration woodlands.

The visibility and landscape influence of Cornforth Quarry is governed by the surrounding topography and screening elements, mainly mature blocks of woodland such as those along Stobb Cross Lane and the A177, whilst the ridges and slopes of the area provide further screening.

The extraction operations would result in the loss of landscape elements such as vegetation and arable land within the site boundary and therefore a significant effect. Progressive restoration during the works would however reintroduce a landscape pattern, land use and colours/textures which are comparable to those found within the local landscape.

Any disturbance is likely to reflect a continuation, although perhaps a slight intensification, of those associated with the adjacent Thrislington and Thrislington East quarries, as well as other quarries in the wider landscape, and the noise and movement associated with the busy A1(M) which bisects the site rather than introducing a new characteristic within the landscape. The level of disturbance would continue to be limited by the topography, retained tree belts and presence of the A1(M) and therefore the development would have limited influence beyond the site boundary and immediate setting of the site.
The restoration would introduce a mixture of land uses, textures and colours within the site boundary, many of which are present and associated with the long established quarries within the local. Landscape colours and patterns would be replicated with field boundaries that follow a north-south alignment.

In consideration of these factors, the assessment has concluded that all landscape effects outside the site itself would be not significant.

The assessment of effects on people’s views of mineral extraction at Cornforth Quarry has considered the extent to which the development can be viewed and the degree to which views would change. This includes views from residents, Public Rights of Way (PRoW), public open space and the local road network.

Residents on the eastern edge of West Cornforth are likely to retain middle and long distance views across the top of the quarry excavations from first floor windows, despite the introduction of a 4m high hedgerow on the western edge of the quarry. This hedgerow would however help to screen views of processing activities within the quarry void. Views of the quarry operations from Coxhoe would be limited to those on the far south-western edge of the village and would be filtered through intervening vegetation. Views would also be available from properties along Station Road. As the development phases progress, the woodland belt planted to the north of the eastern quarry would mature and screen the majority of views of works to the east of the A1(M) (during Phases 3-6), apart from a narrow section of the uppermost quarry face which would be potentially visible from some properties.

Views from Kelloe are likely to be restricted to those of quarry works to the east of the A1(M) from properties along the southern and western edges of the village. The upper southern quarry faces would be visible above the maturing woodland planted during Phase 1. Restoration of the quarry would gradually green and soften the quarry faces as works progress.

In all cases, including from other communities surrounding the site such as Cassop, Old Quarrington and Hett, the magnitude in the change to views has been considered to be either ‘negligible, or ‘low’, with no significant effects concluded for residents.

In terms of PRoWs, significant effects have been concluded for users of footpath (FP) 1/3a on the eastern outskirts of West Cornforth, FP1a and 1b to the east of the A1(M), and FP2 at the bottom of the eastern bank of the A1(M). These are as a result of the substantial change of views for walkers using these routes, or in the case of FP1a and 1b due to the need to divert these PRoWs to make way for the quarry works. Both PRoWS would maintain their diverted routes post extraction.

PRoW totally some 600 m will also be directly affected by the mineral extraction activities. Specifically, at the beginning of Phase 4, there will be a need to divert a length of footpath that presently comprises footpaths 1a 1b and 17 and which passes through the eastern part of the quarry (see Figure 3). This will be permanently diverted to run along Stobb Cross Lane and then in a north-westerly direction to the west of the A177 and outside the quarry bund to the former railway line running east to west at the developments northern extent. By way of further mitigation and enhancement, Tarmac is also proposing to create an additional length of (permissive) footpath by linking footpath 2in the west with footpath 1a in the east – this is also shown on Figure 3.

This diversion will necessitate users of the existing length of footpath within the eastern part of Cornforth to navigate an additional ~750 m of pathway to access the same parts of the local area that the current network affords. However, importantly, it will retain connectivity throughout the locality and through the provision of a new 600 m permissive footpath to link footpath 2 with footpath 1a, connectivity within the local network will be strengthened. Longer term, through the restoration plan for Cornforth Quarry, it is proposed to retain the diverted route and the additional length of permissive footpath, and enhance it through the planting of further trees and woodland.
Historic environment

Quarrying operations can affect the historic environment, including listed buildings, scheduled monuments and archaeology below the surface.

There are no designated features within Cornforth Quarry. The nearest scheduled monument is the Coxhoe medieval settlement, approximately 875m to the northeast. The nearest listed buildings are in West Cornforth village, including the Walls, Piers, Gates And Railings East Of Church Of The Holy Trinity, Church Of The Holy Trinity, 53 The Green and West Cornforth War Memorial (all Grade II listed and within 350m of Cornforth Quarry). Other listed buildings considered in the assessment include a Grade II listed pigeon cote circa 50m north west of Brandon House Farmhouse (north-west of Cornforth Quarry) and The Grade I listed Church of St Helen at Kelloe. The historic centres of Bishop Middleham, Mainsforth and Cornforth are also noted as Conservation Areas.

The ES found that there would be no significant effects on designated sites or their settings.

The areas that would be affected quarrying may contain archaeological remains of unknown value, including a potential Roman Road. A programme of evaluation and recording of any archaeological features discovered during the works will ensure no significant effects on such features arise.

Socio-economics

Tarmac is a well-established company who currently employ over 6 600 people across the UK. The company’s existing operations in the immediate locality of Cornforth Quarry i.e. Thrislington Quarry, mean that Tarmac is already an important local employer in its own right, currently directly supporting some 35 full time jobs.
Although it is not envisaged that the recommencement of working at Cornforth Quarry would result in the creation of significant additional employment opportunities, it will ensure the long term security of the wider site, and allow a site that has been un-worked for many years, to be economically active again, with the workforce from Thrislington Quarry moving to Cornforth Quarry and phased operations move forwards.

In addition to securing direct employment opportunities at the site, it is envisaged that a number of indirect and induced jobs will continue to be supported, because of the need to service the site. Typically, these relate to the provision of a wide variety of goods and services, including specialist engineering assistance for plant maintenance and contractors for services such as fencing, provision of mobile plant etc.

It has been calculated that an additional 28 indirect/induced jobs may continue to be supported by the recommencement of working at Cornforth. The development would thus provide beneficial, although not significant, socio-economic effects through the supporting of existing levels of local employment and economic activity.

**Cumulative effects**

Consideration has been given to whether any of the individual effects of the recommencement of mineral extraction at Cornforth Quarry would combine to create a cumulative effect that is greater than the sum of the individual effects. The potential effects of the development in-combination with other similar sites have also been considered. Such sites including the following quarries in the area:

- Thrislington Quarry West & East;
- Bishop Middleham Quarry (including Western Extension);
- Coxhoe (Raisby) Quarry; and
- Old Quarrington/Cold Knuckles Quarry.

Each of the above sites are currently in operation. Operations associated with these operational sites have therefore already been considered in the assessments of the ES, where significant effects have only been identified on landscape elements and PRoW within or immediately next to the site boundary.

Although Coxhoe (Raisby) Quarry is currently in operation, its operators have an open planning application to extend the operational life of the quarry, and subsequent restoration.

The operators of Thrislington Quarry East are the same as those for Cornforth Quarry (Tarmac). It is proposed, should both receive approval, that working of minerals at Thrislington Quarry East would be completed before works at Cornforth Quarry commencing. There would therefore not be any cumulative effects as there would be no simultaneous operations. The assessment therefore concentrates on potential cumulative effects from the operation of Cornforth Quarry and the extended operations at Coxhoe (Raisby) Quarry.

A Durham County Council committee report for Raisby Quarry states that the relative remoteness of Raisby Quarry “limits the cumulative effect of quarrying so that the impacts are localised and can be mitigated through measures on site” and that there is “limited intervisibility” between the Raisby site and others in the local area. The separation distance between Cornforth Quarry and Raisby Quarry is approximately 1km, which supports this. Effects from Raisby Quarry are therefore considered unlikely to combine with those from Cornforth Quarry to result in significant cumulative effects.

As mentioned previously, Cornforth Quarry has the benefit of planning permission for mineral extraction but has been unworked for several years. The Review of Old Minerals Permission submission, which this NTS accompanies, will result in a set of planning conditions which will ensure that environmental effects from the operation of Cornforth Quarry are suitably controlled as far as is possible, taking into account current and future environmental conditions coincident with the suggested working scheme.
With regards to the potential for the effects from the recommencement of mineral extraction at Cornforth Quarry to combine to cause cumulative adverse (negative) effects, receptors that have been considered in the amenity topics (specifically visual, blasting, noise, air quality and traffic) have been considered. The assessment has concluded that no significant cumulative effects will arise from the development.

1.5 Conclusions

None of the assessments contained in this ES have concluded that the recommencement of mineral extraction operations at Cornforth Quarry, in the manner suggested by Tarmac would result in effects considered to be significant in terms of *Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations 2011*.

1.6 What Happens Next?

Prior to making a decision about the planning submission and the suggested scheme of conditions, Durham County Council will consult the Environmental Agency, Natural England and other key organisations.

The Environmental Statement will be available for examination by members of the public on the Council’s website and at an appropriate location(s).

Members of the public will also be able to comment on the planning submission. The normal period for determining a submission such as this is 16 weeks.

1.7 Obtaining Copies of the Environmental Statement

The Environmental Statement may be viewed on the planning authority’s website. CD copies may be purchased from the applicant’s agent at a cost of £25 at the following address:

Mrs C Brown  
Wood Environment & Infrastructure Solutions UK Ltd  
Canon Court North  
Abbey Lawn  
Abbey Foregate  
Shrewsbury  
Shropshire  
SY2 5DE  
01743 342000