Barrington Cement Works – A Brief History

The cement works and attendant quarry at Barrington was established in 1918 as a replacement for a closed plant to the west of the village; prior to this the land was either in agricultural use or part of Barrington Hill Fruit Farm (see adjacent Ordnance Survey map extract). The works, known as 'The Dreadnought Portland Cement Company', were bought by Eastwoods Cement in the 1920’s. The Barrington Light Railway was opened in 1927 to link the works to the London – Cambridge mainline railway, allowing coal, used in the manufacture of cement, to be imported by train. Barrington quarry provided the chalk and clay, also major ingredients in the manufacture of cement.

The first planning permission for the quarrying of chalk was granted in 1948, with the advent of the Town and Country Planning system. Further permissions were granted in 1950 and 1957 and the cement plant was substantially extended in 1962. As part of the extension, an internal railway system was established to haul chalk and clay from the quarry faces, which were moving away from the plant as the quarry expanded. At this time Eastwoods was absorbed into the Rugby Cement Group.

The planning permissions relating to the quarrying element of the site were reviewed by the County Council in 1993 and 1997, resulting in new conditions requiring the restoration of the quarry. During this time an area within the quarry was restored to an agricultural field using overburden stripped from elsewhere within the site.

Rugby Cement became part of the RMC Group in 2000. By 2005 the internal railway system was decommissioned as this approach was no longer economically viable. At the time of closure, it is believed that it was the last mineral railway in the UK. 2005 also saw the RMC Group taken over by CEMEX, who continued to operate the plant and quarry until 2008, at which stage the site was mothballed due to adverse economic conditions. Subsequently, the site was closed and partly decommissioned in 2012. The quarrying planning permissions lapsed in January 2014, apart from restoration requirements.

Barrington Today

In 2010 CEMEX submitted a planning application to restore the western half of the now disused quarry through the landscaping of North Pit, and importing inert restoration material by train via the refurbished branch line, to partly fill the quarried void. This application was approved, and the first loads of restoration material were received in 2015. This permission requires the restoration of the western part of the quarry to be complete by the end of 2018. The eastern half of the quarry is subject to an unfulfilled restoration obligation. Outline planning permission has been granted from the District Council for up to 220 new homes and new public open space on the footprint of the former works itself.

Introduction to the Development Proposal

The company needs a permanent and sustainable solution to the restoration of the quarry, but recognises that such a solution must be one that respects the site’s status as a geological Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI – see Panel 5).

Simply ceasing to pump water out of the quarry would lead over time to the formation of a large and deep lake which would submerge much of the quarry’s scientific value and potentially be an incongruous landscape feature. Furthermore, permanently pumping a quarry of this size to keep it dry would not be a sustainable approach.

The most appropriate solution is considered to be a continuation of the current partial restoration project for the quarry through the importation of restoration material by rail. The proposal would be to restore the majority of the quarry void back to adjacent ground level, whilst retaining a 200m length of full height quarry face to retain the geological interest; this restoration proposal is illustrated on Panel 6.

It is proposed to continue to accept three trains per day as a monthly average, which means that that it will take approximately fifteen years to achieve the proposed landform, with up to an additional two years to complete restoration works. On completion, an aftercare period of a further five years will commence. No more than four trains per day would be accepted on any one day, but as a monthly average there would continue to be no more than three per weekday.

Although the restoration of the quarry would take place as one ongoing project, it has been broken down into six phases for ease of understanding. These are an initial development phase, four operational phases and a final restoration phase. These are described in more detail over the following two panels.