

Nature Now or Never – The Immediate Threat

Sixty-years ago Shawell sat in open Leicestershire countryside. Within that single lifetime, our village has been encircled by major motorways, quarries, landfills, factories, never-ending logistics parks, windfarms, solar farms and many other developments transforming our rural environment.

But there has been one beacon of hope.

The Shawell Quarry, that was first permitted in 1958 and has been worked continuously for over 60 years, is now coming to the end of its life. Despite many extensions, it has always been designated as a temporary operation. The businesses that have commercially exploited the land around Shawell over the decades have only been temporary custodians of the land. National and Local Planning policies together with their specific planning permissions, have always made it very clear that the land will be restored to its greenfield, agricultural character – at the earliest opportunity. The policies require additional features that promote biodiversity and amenities for residents and visitors.

But how keen are Tarmac, BMI Redland and Beauparc to honour those obligations?

In the last two years, BMI Redland's temporary Tile Factory (started in 1961) has been the subject of FOUR significant development proposals. As each one fails, they simply try a new tactic:

- An application in 2020 to extend operations until 2030, despite the imminent quarry closure, was advised as failing sustainability criteria.
- A second application for a questionable two-year "wind-down period" after the quarry closure, was also rejected due to it again failing sustainability and policy criteria – not least, due to the 30,000 annual HGV movements that this operation would generate.
- Despite claiming to be at the mercy of the uncertainty around Tarmac's quarry closure proposals, Tarmac included a permanent BMI Redland Tile Factory in their proposal to Harborough District Council's (HDC) Strategic Land Assessment (SHELAA).
- BMI Redland are now appealing Leicestershire County Council's planning refusal, which will be heard by HM Inspector in November.

Beauparc acquired New Earth Solutions (NES) – the failed owners of the composting plant, and with it the mothballed facility on Gibbet Lane. NES had twice previously applied to increase the capacity of the plant. On both occasions, permission was refused, confirming the original purpose of the plant and its interdependency with the adjacent landfill.

In April 2020, Beauparc applied for a change of use from composting to general waste processing and plastic recycling, which included:

- A three-fold increase in throughput (although the building is big enough for further increases many more times the current permitted tonnage)
- Waste streams that would be transported over long distances by HGV. Depending on whose story was to be believed, these could come from all over the Midlands, north of London, M62 corridor – even Ireland! To comply with HGV restrictions, the average size of HGVs would need to increase to transport the additional tonnage
- The ongoing purpose of the building would be disconnected from the landfill – it would effectively become a permanent facility when the landfill permission expires in 2044

That application was unanimously rejected by the Local Planning Authority in September 2020. That didn't stop Beauparc. Press releases continued to talk of a major Beauparc recycling plant near

Rugby. Government ministers were given virtual tours of facilities, and new equipment was installed.

Now, New Earth Solutions are claiming that they don't need planning permission. They are arguing that a general industrial facility should be allowed at the composting plant, based on a contrived story that the plant operators have never complied with the original planning permission, ever since it started operating in 2010!

And lastly, Tarmac, the major landowners at the site, and the operators of the quarry and landfill, are under very clear obligations under the Leicestershire Mineral & Waste Plan policies, and their planning conditions, to restore the site back to its agricultural character, with increased biodiversity and public access.

But they are asking that they should be let off the hook for this obligation, and instead be allowed to develop 25% of the 520 acre site into a major industrial estate – on greenfield land! They argue that this would fund restoration of the remainder of the site.

But they are already required to restore the whole site – funded from the decades of commercial exploitation.

The restoration of the site would be compromised by this massive industrial estate. Tarmac propose to hide it away behind “pocket parks”, “ecological buffer zones”, “linear woodlands”. We just want it to simply return to the beautiful Leicestershire countryside. This is what the planning policies currently require Tarmac to deliver – progressively, at the earliest opportunity.

Our message to Tarmac, BMI Redland and Beauparc is very simple:

You and your predecessors have exploited our countryside for the last six decades.

It is time to go.

Please leave our rural parish in a better state than you found it.

Let nature have it back.