

[Back to Contents](#)

CHAPTER 12

BUILDING AND DIMENSION STONE

Introduction

12.1 Building and dimension stone is worked from five quarries in the Staffordshire Moorlands in north Staffordshire. Building stone is used in blocks for construction of buildings/walls etc. whilst dimension stone is of suitable quality for ornamental stone work. Its particular importance is in the repair of historic buildings both locally, e.g. Lichfield Cathedral, and nationally e.g. The Market, Covent Garden.

12.2 The use of stone in restoration and minor construction work means that demand is relatively very low compared to other construction materials such as bricks. This factor and the basic extractive methods used generally mean that stone quarries are not intensive operations. However, all the stone quarries lie within Special Landscape Areas and past operations have left their mark on the landscape. These relict quarries have in some cases developed into features of nature conservation and historic interest.

Planning Policy Context

12.3 There is little national guidance on the production and use of building stone. Only MPG1 makes the following reference to the mineral: *each type of dimension stone has to fulfil specific physical characteristics. It is important to recognise that in some cases it is quarried from geological formations which are very restricted in occurrence. In order for a source of stone to be commercially workable a number of physical parameters have to be satisfied, including colour, texture, hardness and homogeneity. There is often a large proportion of waste that may be utilised as a construction aggregate and production can be intermittent. It should be borne in mind that long-life quarries are often crucial to providing suitable stone for restoration of historic buildings and ancient monuments and for that reason, small operations may be needed in very specific locations* (Para. B8 and B9).

12.4 The Staffordshire Structure Plan does not have any specific policies relating to building and dimension stone. However Structure Plan Policy 124 is relevant, in the absence of national or regional guidelines on building stone production and restricts the total landbank to a level of approximately 20 years.

The Building and Dimension Stone Resource

12.5 There are two types of sandstone worked for building and dimension stone in the Staffordshire, the Hollington Stone and the Minn Sandstone. The Hollington Stone is the most notable. It forms part of the Hollington Formation at the top of the Sherwood Sandstone Group. Hollington Stone comes in red, mottled and cream (referred to as "white") varieties depending on the amount of iron staining. The Minn Sandstone, a horizon

of the Namurian Series, is only worked from one site (Cliff Quarry) and is light brown in colour. Both stones are fine to medium grained and durable to weathering. The outcrop of the Hollington Stone, which has been worked, is centred around the Hollington and Alton area but further geological outcrops exist further north east. The Minn Sandstone outcrops in two areas, one north of Leek (currently worked from Hollins Farm Quarry) and the other east of Biddulph Moor.

Building and Dimension Stone Production

12.6 There have been many small stone quarries operated in the past throughout Staffordshire to supply particular building projects. An interesting example is the Beech Caves which were worked by underground methods for stone to build Trentham Hall in the 17th Century. With a change of building methods and materials the use of stone declined but over the last 10 to 15 years there has been a "resurgence" in its use nationally. To illustrate this point nationally in 1987 142,000 tonnes were extracted compared to 373,000 tonnes in 1990. At the same time the export of stone has also increased from 97 tonnes in 1988 to 853 tonnes in 1991 (source: Business Monitor PA1007 1980-1991).

12.7 Staffordshire produces about half of the region's building and dimension stone (Business Monitor). In Staffordshire production in the early 1980s was around 1,000 tonnes per annum. 1987 appears to be a peak year when production doubled to 2,000 tonnes but average production for 1991 to 1993 shows a notable fall in production to 541 tonnes due to the recent recession.

12.8 Current production in Staffordshire takes place from five quarries. The stone from the Hollington Quarries has a local and national market. In addition significant quantities of stone (such as York Stone and Portland Limestone) are imported for dressing and resale as part of the stonemason's industry in Hollington village. The dressing of stone involves both mechanical cutting and hand sculpture. This primarily takes place at the Groundhollow works in Hollington but there are other stone masons too. The stone worked at Hollins Farm, near Leek, has a more local market meeting demand for building repair and stone fireplaces and walling.

12.9 The market for stone requires particular characteristics such as colour and texture to find the best match for restoring existing buildings. As nature does not make stone uniform (it can be affected by black spots, pebbles and bedding planes) and because processing results in many offcuts, there is a high degree of wastage of up to 50% of the stone extracted. Some of this stone is "re-used" and used for crazy paving and rockeries but most of it is returned to the quarry and used for restoration. One operator did look at crushing the stone for use as aggregate but because of low production levels this proved uneconomic.

Provision for Future Building and Dimension Stone Production

12.10 With regard to the current supply of building and dimension stone there are some 870,000 tonnes of permitted stone and, using historic and projected production figures of between 1,000 and 2,000 tonnes per annum, the landbank is between 400 and 860 years.

12.11 In principle it is considered that the appropriate size of landbank for building and dimension stone is 15 years as set out in the Policy below.

MLP Policy 58:

The landbank for building and dimension stone will be 15 years.

12.12 The current landbank of permitted reserves is clearly well in excess of 15 years and as such there is no provision made in the Minerals Local Plan for the further release of building and dimension stone. It is however recognised that there may be exceptional circumstances when a particular character of stone may be needed for the repair of historic buildings of local or national significance, for example the "Hollington White". Planning applications for the extraction of such stone will be considered in the context of MLP Policy 38.

[Back to Contents](#)