

Highbarns chalk mine remediation works

Questions and answers, January 2013

The following questions and answers are based on the notes of a meeting between the Highbarns Residents Group and representatives of Dacorum Borough Council, Herts Highways, Hyder Consulting and the appointed engineering contractor BAM Ritchies, held at the Council's offices on 19 December 2012.

1. Why have BAM Ritchies been appointed and what have they been appointed to do?

BAM Ritchies is an engineering firm which specialises in ground stabilisation. They were responsible for the treatment of a chalk mine in Briars Lane in Welwyn Hatfield and have considerable experience of similar works in many areas. Their tender submission was very strong and included very clear proposals for treating the mine and working with residents to minimise the disruption involved. The treatment will involve filling open cavities with bulk material (similar to concrete) and securing collapsed parts of the mine with a compacting material (grouting) to solidify the ground.

2. Have the contractors visited the site and are they aware of the nature of the properties and gardens in the area?

Yes. BAM Ritchies visited the site prior to submitting their proposal and took the local circumstances into account. Consequently they have agreed an off-site compound for mixing materials and will use the Nash Mills village hall site for contractor parking. This will reduce considerably the disruption caused by site traffic and noise nuisance. It was not possible for BAM Ritchies to view residents back gardens during the tender period but this will be addressed as part of personal visits to be arranged with the affected residents. The experience at Briars Lane has shown what equipment will be needed to work at buildings with the least impact on gardens, hedges, fences and external features.

3. When will work start and what approach will the contractors take?

The work will commence from 14 January and will continue to the end of June. The work may take longer if currently unforeseen problems develop. The area will be divided into 'blocks' with the properties in each block being treated during the same period, starting with those properties that are most

at risk. BAM Ritchies will develop a detailed proposal which will be shared with residents as soon as it is confirmed.

4. Will residents be involved in discussions about work that will be taking place at their properties?

Yes. BAM Ritchies will agree the approach to be taken at each property with the homeowner before any work commences. The first agreements will be arranged in early February.

5. Will properties need to be vacated while the work is underway?

The treatment work involves heavy engineering equipment and, for the protection of people and property, each site will need to be made secure. Where the mine runs underneath or close to a building, the building will have to be empty of people during the treatment works. We will be working closely with residents to minimise the time anyone needs to leave their home. Depending on the works being undertaken, it may be possible to return briefly to properties during the day. It is anticipated that properties will need to be empty for no more than two weeks and in most cases it should be less time but this cannot be known for certain until some work has been completed. The timing of work at each site will always be subject to change if there are unforeseen problems.

6. How will those who have particular difficulties with vacating properties be helped?

Most residents will need to make their own arrangements for vacating their properties during the works. Through the series of home visits, Council officers have identified the circumstances relating to each household directly affected and are in discussion with the County Council and Health agencies to assess what special support can be provided. Until the actual date of the requirement to vacate the property is known, it is difficult to specify what arrangements can be made. There is at least one vacant property on the site which, if treated first, can potentially be used to accommodate those who have restricted mobility. Other nearby Council-owned properties are also being made available to help those with particular needs.

7. Can residents enter the properties during the works

This should be possible but will need the agreement of the contractors and Hyder consultants to ensure that safety and security is maintained at all times.

8. Will properties be entered by contractors while empty?

No. Where work is carried out underneath a property, it will be necessary to check that the treatment has been successful so that the homeowner can receive assurance that the building is no longer at risk from the mine. This is referred to as validation. In some cases this will mean checking that the work has succeeded by drilling down into the ground through the floor of the building. In these instances it will be necessary to enter the building but this will not be done in the homeowners absence unless consent is given to proceed.

9. The latest draft letter to insurance companies stated that damage to internal flooring would not be paid for, whereas residents have always understood that all property would be reinstated. Why is the letter different?

The contract for the work includes a requirement that all properties will be reinstated. In some circumstances, however, the impact on the property may be very significant, such as where there is special flooring in place like hardwood floorboards, decorative tiles or decking. The contractor will take all possible steps to avoid drilling through such flooring but if this proves absolutely necessary, the drill hole can be repaired but the cost of fully replacing the entire floor cannot be met. In these instances the homeowner should consult with the insurance company before the validation work is undertaken.

10. Will properties have to be cleared for the validation work?

No. Validation will only be done internally when it cannot be avoided and involves only drilling a small hole in the floor of one room. A small amount of dust and disturbance will result which will be cleared away afterwards as part of reinstatement. Residents may wish to remove valuables in the affected room and this can be done in agreement with the contractors.

11. How will properties be secured during the works?

Each 'block' of properties will be secured by a compound fence during the work at those properties. The contractors will provide 24-hour onsite security and have contact with the local police station in the event that they need to report suspicious activity.

12. Will there be a site office and someone to contact with concerns or queries?

BAM Ritchies will set up a Community Information Centre on Highbarns (Compound 3) where a full-time member of the contractor's team will be

available for comments and queries for the duration of the contract. A phone number will be available for out of hours security issues. A site compound will be set up on the Pond Road green (shown as site No. 2 on the attached map) for the storage of equipment and materials. Another compound will be set up at Compound 1 on Chambersbury Lane for the site offices and welfare facilities for the work force.

13. How much noise and disruption will there be?

Inevitably with engineering work of this size and complexity, heavy equipment will be needed which will generate a significant amount of noise when in use. To reduce the impact no air compressors or water pumps will be used. Electrical generators will be needed which produce noise similar to an idling car engine. During non-working hours, these generators will continue to operate to maintain site security.

14. Chambersbury Lane is narrow and usually has cars parked along it. Won't building a compound there cause more traffic problems?

The Chambersbury Lane site will be used to provide facilities for contractor staff during the day. Vehicle access will be required while this is set up and from then on there will only be small deliveries made. This should not significantly increase traffic along Chambersbury Lane or disrupt the existing traffic flow. However, there will be restrictions on parking in the area. Residents on Chambersbury Lane will be advised in advance of the compound being constructed.

15. How will traffic and parking be managed?

The bulk filling and grouting materials will be mixed offsite and transported to the works when needed. This will significantly reduce the area taken up by plant which would otherwise displace residents' vehicles. Also, contract staff will be parking at the Nash Mills Community Centre so as to reduce daily traffic flows. By these means site traffic will be kept to a minimum and the contractors will seek to avoid moving vehicles and equipment at busy times such as during the school runs. When roads need to be partially restricted because of compounds, designated parking areas will be specified by the contractor, mainly using the No.2 and 3 site compounds.

16. When will the bollards on Highbarns be removed?

As soon as the work is completed and validated. Temporary removable bollards will be used to allow access for the contractor's vehicles and the permanent fixture removed as soon as possible on completion.

17. The roads in the area are difficult in severe weather conditions. Will this disrupt the works?

Severe snow and ice will have an impact on the work. However, there is enough contingency in the programme to allow for some weather delays. If the weather is very severe in January/February this may have an impact on the overall timetable and the programme will be revised and published accordingly.

18. Will utility companies know what is going on?

Contact with Herts Highways and Affinity Water has been established to provide advance notice of the works. Other utility companies will be contacted as necessary.

19. How will residents and others be kept informed?

20. In addition to day-to-day liaison through the Community Information Centre, the contractor will provide regular updates through a newsletter. Local schools have been informed and visits will be made to schools, if requested, to advise children about the potential dangers of the site. The Council's website will continue to provide details of developments. The Residents Group is available to be contacted at all times. A revised contact list is available on the Council's website, but for clarification of any of the answers provided in this document please contact the following:

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