

Land at ex-Forticrete site, Hillhead Quarry, Brierlow Bar, Buxton.

Application for planning permission to store and transfer biomass fuel (wood chip) on land forming part of Hillhead Quarry (ex-Forticrete) until 31 May 2026.

Applicant: Stonevada Ltd

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1. Description and background of the proposal.

The application is for full planning permission to maintain an active stockpile of biomass fuels in the form of wood chips (the additional use) on part (c 0.7ha) of the land originally occupied by Forticrete Ltd (ex-Forticrete land) which forms part of Hillhead Quarry. This use has been undertaken at the site for two years and this application is therefore to regularise the activity going forward.

The ex-Forticrete land has the benefit of a planning permission granted by High Peak Borough Council (HPBC) ref HPK/2011/0199 for “for a range of storage uses, to include, HGV's and commercial vehicles, Police impounded vehicles and stockpiling of minerals (mainly for winter road maintenance.”(the 2011 Permission). This permission expires on 31 May 2016, and an application to extend this date until 31 May 2026 is currently being considered by HPBC (ref HPK/2016/0244).

The 2011 permission document does not itself restrict the permitted uses to those referred to above, and therefore it could be argued that the principle of storage (stockpiling) of other materials has been established. However, Condition 2 thereof purports to limit the uses to those specified and therefore any storage of other materials is prima facie, a breach of this condition. Furthermore, the additional use being a waste related use, it falls within the remit of Derbyshire County Council as Waste Authority rather than HPBC.

The applicant proposes that the biomass stockpile use should be similarly time limited to coincide with the expiry date of 31 May 2026 referred to in the above pending application to HPBC.

The reason given by HPBC for the decision to grant the 2011 permission was “because the Council considered that the application has put forward a proposal which would not harm the visual and rural character of the open countryside and would not prejudice the restoration and aftercare of the mineral resource”.

The decision to grant the planning permission was also taken “having regard to all other relevant material planning considerations and to the following relevant policies and proposals in the Development Plan:

- High Peak Local Plan Saved Policies
- EMP 7 - Industry and business in the countryside
- GD6 - Landscaping
- OC1 - Countryside Development
- OC4 - Landscape Character and Design
- TR5 - Access, parking and design
- Derby and Derbyshire Minerals Saved Local Plan Policies 2007
- MP10 – Reclamation and After-Use”

The site is hard surfaced in concrete and is contained within a shallow quarry excavation.

Neither the proposed extension of the time limit on the 2011 permission nor the continuation of the proposed additional use will involve any physical change or development of the site.

No changes to the application site have been undertaken since the grant of the 2011 permission and none are currently proposed.

Although the Derby and Derbyshire Minerals and Waste Local Plans and the High Peak Local Plan have progressed through various stages of review over the past five years, replacement Plans have not yet been adopted and therefore the same saved policies referred to above still apply.

Hillhead Quarry, of which the application site forms a part, remains silent, having not been operated for the extraction of limestone since it was closed some 15 years ago.

Although the applicant is not aware of any plans by the operator to re-open the quarry in the next 10 years, it is understood that it remains a strategic resource with planning permission which is expected to be required in the future. Accordingly, its early restoration, including the application area, would not be appropriate.

Although this is procedurally a County matter, the reason given by HPBC for the grant of the 2011 permission, and the policies with which it complies, remains relevant in relation to the additional use proposed. Accordingly, as there are no altered circumstances which would require re-assessment of the validity of the HPBC's decision, and given that no adverse environmental impacts associated with the additional use are likely to arise (see later section of this statement), the applicant believes that it would be reasonable for Derbyshire County Council as the relevant Planning Authority to reach the same conclusion.

On this basis, the applicant believes that there is no valid or reasonable reason why this application should not be granted.

2. Background pre-2011 history:

The site had been used for the manufacture of concrete products by a company named Forticrete since c 1980, the principal raw material having been supplied from Hillhead Quarry, of which the site is a part. The last permission granted for this use, issued in 2002 (CON/2001/0081), permitted the importation of limestone into the site following the closure of Hillhead Quarry in order to continue with manufacturing from the site.

This use ceased a few years ago and the main manufacturing building was demolished and removed from the site.

3. The proposed additional use:

The use of biomass fuel is acknowledged as carbon neutral and thus meets the climate change and sustainability tests which form a consistent and fundamental thread through current and emerging government policy and guidance. It also by its nature comprises a beneficial use of discarded materials, thus relieving pressure on the use of natural resources.

The use of such materials inevitably requires the establishment of infrastructure to manage and distribute it to where it is required and this proposal forms part of that infrastructure.

The biomass material is delivered to site from the manufacturer in covered HGVs in its processed state ready for downstream use. It is end tipped to form a single stockpile and subsequently re-loaded on to HGVs by loading shovel for despatch to the end user. No treatment or processing of the material is required or carried out.

Annual throughput will be of the order of 30,000 tonnes, which equates on average to c 4 daily laden movements in and 4 out per day. Movements in may vary depending on the supply situation but are unlikely to exceed 6.

Delivery journeys in particular do not necessarily take place on a daily basis, so it is important that no restrictions on the permitted movement numbers, hours or days are imposed in view of the flexibility required to meet both the manufacturer's and downstream customers' needs. The applicant currently holds an appropriate S2 Waste Exemption under the Waste Management Regulations for this activity.

The existing access shown on the Application Area Plan will continue to be used.

4. Security

The site is subject to 24 hour on site surveillance and monitoring.

5. Environmental impact of biomass stockpiling:

The site is entirely screened from outside by intervening solid topography and the proposed additional use taking place upon it thus has no visual or landscape impact on the surrounding land, in particular, on the Peak District National Park.

Apart from Hillhead Farm, which lies c 150m to the east of the site and has been subject to the industrial and quarrying operations at the site for many years, the nearest residential property, located opposite and adjacent to the junction of the access road and Harpur Hill Road, is some 800 m away.

Apart from a short section of public footpath which runs alongside the first section of the access road from Harpur Hill Road, the closest public footpath is c 600m away and screened from the site by intervening topography.

Noise and dust generated by the additional use are in any event minimal and effectively contained within the site and thus will have no impact.

The site has no heritage, ecological or archaeological value, having been originally excavated out of solid limestone and used for industrial purposes over at least the past thirty five years.

There are no ecological, geological or landscape designated areas in sufficiently close proximity which are or could be adversely affected by the additional use.

The site is hard surfaced throughout in concrete. Run-off water from the biomass stockpile is minimal given its absorption capacity and its live nature (the constant nature of its charge and depletion).

No oil based fuels are stored on site.

The site is not liable to flooding and is not within an identified Flood Zone.

Historic and existing levels of traffic movements using the existing junction of the access road with Harpur Hill Road associated with the Forticrete use of the land, the quarry itself (including the Hillhead Quarry Exhibition) and the existing Transport Garage, together with those associated with the existing permitted users of the application area far outweigh the additional movements associated with the proposed additional use. The cumulative impact of the relatively minimal additional movements is therefore very small.

Accordingly, the applicant does not believe that the production of independent technical reports on any of these matters is justified.

6. Conclusion

Neither the uses approved in 2011, nor the proposed biomass storage use, which has in any event been carried out for the last two years, cause any harm to the visual and rural character of the open countryside, nor will they prejudice the restoration and aftercare of the mineral resource at Hillhead Quarry.

No environmental harm to any interests of acknowledged importance will be caused, either directly, indirectly or cumulatively.

The proposed additional use also remains compliant with the aims and policies of the current approved Derby and Derbyshire Minerals and Waste Local Plans and with national planning policy as expressed in the National Planning Policy Framework.
For these reasons it is considered that there are no sound planning reasons to refuse approval of this application.