

ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE - DEVELOPMENT CONTROL SUB-COMMITTEE - 28 MARCH 1990

REPORT BY COUNTY PLANNING OFFICER

RR/90/254(CM) - VARIATION TO CONDITION 12 ATTACHED TO PLANNING PERMISSION REF: RR/85/51(CM), RELATING TO OPERATING HOURS OF OVERLAND CONVEYOR, LAND BETWEEN BRIGHTLING MINE AND MOUNTFIELD WORKS - BRITISH GYPSUM.

1. INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1. This is an application under Section 31A of the 1971 Act for the variation of a condition attached to an existing planning consent.

2. SITE AND HISTORY

2.1. The site is located within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, to the south-west of Robertsbridge. The overland conveyor links the Brightling Gypsum mine with the main works and plasterboard manufacturing plant at Mountfield; it is 5km long.

2.2. The landscape in this area is undulating and for much of its route the conveyor passes through woodland; however, in its central section, the countryside is more open, and here the conveyor passes between small settlements at Oxley's Green and Hollingrove.

2.3. When the Brightling adit mine opened in 1963, it was linked to the main works at Mountfield by an aerial ropeway. In 1985, this Sub-Committee granted conditional planning consent, under ref: RR/85/51(CM) for the replacement of the ropeway with an overland conveyor. The routes of the ropeway and conveyor only differed to any extent over a relatively short section close to Hollingrove.

3. PROPOSAL

3.1. Condition 12 attached to planning consent ref : RR/85/51(CM) reads as follows :-

"The conveyor shall only be operated between the hours of 7.00 a.m. and 11.00 p.m. on Mondays to Fridays inclusive and 7.00 a.m. and 3.00 p.m. on Saturdays and not at all on Sundays and Bank Holidays, without the prior consent in writing of the County Planning Officer".

3.2. The Company wishes to vary the condition, ideally to have flexibility to operate the conveyor at any time. However, should the County Planning Authority consider that this could give rise to local concern, they request that operation of the conveyor be permitted between 06.00 Monday and 15.00 Saturday, inclusive, and that operation at other times, except in an emergency, be subject to agreement with the Authority.

4. CONSULTATIONS

4.1. The views of Rother District Council, and the Parish Council, are awaited.

5. CONSIDERATIONS

Background

5.1. Work on the installation of the conveyor began in March 1988 and in July 1989, the ropeway was severed and since that time, all gypsum rock from Brightling Mine has been delivered to Mountfield using the conveyor.

5.2. In December 1987, the Sub-Committee granted planning consent, under ref : RR/87/2260(CM), for various extensions to the board plant at Mountfield. These works are well advanced and the board plant is now being commissioned.

5.3. The Company states that the reason for seeking the proposed variation is to meet the increased raw material demands of the extended plant. When operating at its optimum output this would require the running of the conveyor outside the present permitted hours in order to maintain gypsum supplies.

5.4. A noise condition is also attached to planning consent ref : RR/85/51(CM) which specifies that noise levels should not exceed 50dB(A) at a distance of 25m from the conveyor installation. The reason for imposing this, and the hours condition, arose because this type of conveyor was the first installation of its kind in the U.K. and there was a need to prove its performance to ensure that environmental effects, in particular noise, were not a problem. The Company at the outset did not wish to see a time restriction, in view of the fact that no such control was imposed on the aerial ropeway, but accepted the noise condition.

Noise

5.5. The conveyor has been operating for 9 months without apparent complaint. As members may recall, the installation is fully enclosed and when running it emits a steady humming noise; observations indicate that, in relatively still conditions, it is inaudible at distances greater than 100m.

5.6. In the light of the Company's request, I consider noise to be the only issue, and I have undertaken a noise monitoring survey in the area closest to nearest housing at Hollingrove. This indicates noise levels from the conveyor well below the specified limit; the 50dB(A) level is achieved, in fact, only 1 metre from the conveyor, and at 25m, levels of only 39-40dB(A) were measured.

5.7. The only dwellings within 200m of the conveyor are 3 at Hollingrove, and 1 at Brightling. At Hollingrove there is an existing tree screen between the properties and the conveyor, which will eventually be strengthened by a tree planting scheme currently underway. At the nearest dwelling, 90m south of the installation, the survey showed that the operation of the conveyor was inaudible to the human ear in relatively still conditions; noise levels of 31-32dB(A) were measured, the main noise sources being bird song and distant aircraft noise.

6. CONCLUSION

6.1. From the results of the noise survey, I consider the operation of the overland conveyor to be satisfactory. I appreciate the need for the Mountfield plant to be operated as economically as possible in the current, difficult trading circumstances, and the importance of safeguarding local jobs. The proposed variation is related to this objective, and I am satisfied that it could proceed without adverse environmental effects. I recommend that the condition be varied as requested.

7. RECOMMENDATION

7.1. Subject to no objections from consultees, it is recommended that application ref : RR/90/254(CM), the variation to Condition 12 attached to planning consent ref: RR/85/51(CM) be approved, and that the condition be amended to read as follows :

"12. Except in the case of emergency, the conveyor shall only be operated between the hours of 06.00 on Monday and 15.00 on Saturday inclusive and not at all on Sundays or Bank Holidays without the prior consent of the County Planning Officer."

7.2. In the event of objections from consultees, this application should be referred back to the Sub-Committee.

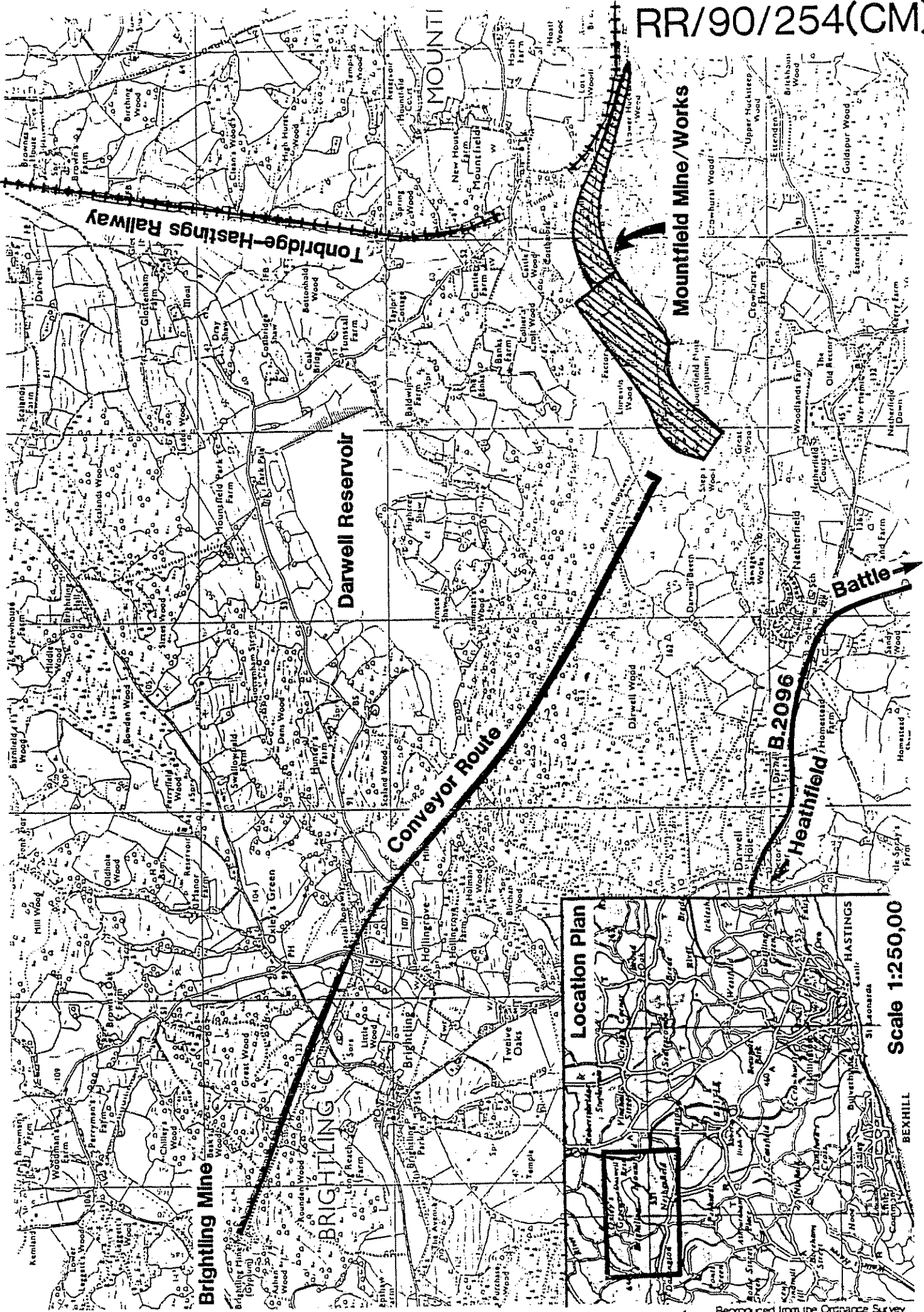
8. BACKGROUND MATERIAL USED BY THE AUTHOR IN COMPILING THIS REPORT

1. Application files RR/85/51(CM) and RR/90/254(CM)

MALCOLM REECE
County Planning Officer
22 March 1990
REF: DCSUB/RR254CM.RB
RB/ph

7670 2028

RR/90/254(CM)



Tonbridge-Hastings Railway

Darwell Reservoir

Conveyor Route

Mountfield Mine/Works

B.2096

Battle

Location Plan

Scale 1:250,00

Scale 1:25,000

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