INTRODUCTION

One of Defra’s priority interests in land use planning is the protection of best and most versatile agricultural land (grades 1, 2 and 3a) from irreversible development. Linked to this is the recognition in the UK Strategy for sustainable development of the importance of safeguarding agricultural land to meet the needs of future generations, and minimising the loss of soils to new development. (DETR: A Better Quality of Life: May 1999: Paragraphs 6.66 and 8.50). The importance of soil is also highlighted in The First Soil Action Plan for England: 2004-2006. In terms of Government policy it is not necessary for high quality land to be restored to agricultural use, but that the restoration and after-use following mineral or waste development should safeguard it’s long-term agricultural potential. It is on this basis that the guidance has been written, although there are also circumstances where lower quality agricultural land may warrant restoration to a high standard.

Achieving high standards of restoration is important in terms of sustainable development, also it keeps the largest number of options open for the future use of the land.

Competence of consultants and Health and Safety

An important basis of schemes of working and restoration are Agricultural Land Classification Surveys and Statement of Physical Characteristics Reports. Their preparation should only be undertaken by a competent person with proven and relevant experience in the field. Appropriately qualified persons would be expected to be members of the Institute of Professional Soil Scientists*, the British Institute of Agricultural Consultants or other relevant professional bodies. As a minimum requirement, the competent person would be expected to have 3 years recent experience in carrying out agricultural land classification surveys.

Where reference is made to pesticides and plant nutrition, advice must be obtained from BASIS and FACTS qualified advisers respectively.

Persons using this guidance must comply with the Health and Safety at Work Etc. Act 1974 and it's relevant statutory provisions. This requirement takes preference over any guidance in the document.

The user of this guidance is solely responsible for all liabilities that might arise. No liabilities are accepted for any losses of any kind arising from the use of this guidance.

*The Institute of Professional Soil Scientists maintains an approved list of members suitably qualified to provide technical advice on the planning, working and restoration of sites (see Addresses).