On 21 May 1999 the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) announced changes to the work that the Farming and Rural Conservation Agency (FRCA) undertook on the Ministry’s behalf in relation to land use planning. In essence the changes were a refocusing of inputs, reducing detailed involvement with ad hoc land use planning work, and concentrating more on strategic relationships with Government Offices, planning authorities and the Regional Development Agencies, and inputs to development plans. In addition, priority was to be given to the integration of agricultural considerations, and especially the implementation of the EU Rural Development Regulation, into wider Government policies affecting the rural economy and the environment.

MAFF therefore no longer undertook Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) surveys, except in exceptional circumstances. Instead, greater use was made of desk studies and predictive mapping techniques. It was up to applicants to provide ALC surveys and Statement of Physical Characteristics Reports for proposed sites.

After the formation of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and the Rural Development Service (RDS) in June 2001, work continues on the above priorities.

Following discussions with sectors of the minerals and waste industry, MAFF agreed to commission FRCA to produce guidance on the agricultural aspects of mineral and waste development, in terms of their experience of “good practice”. This work was continued by RDS, and aims to help fill the gap left by the reduced detailed inputs to ad hoc land use planning work, particularly for mineral planning authorities.

This guidance is based on the technical knowledge and practical experience of FRCA and RDS staff, with advice from the Steering Group formed from a wide cross-section of representatives involved in the minerals and waste industry. The guidance supplements training events run by MAFF/FRCA/RDS over recent years for mineral planning authorities and mineral operators.