Aftercare | General Condition of Site

Ref: CHECKED

Please see Annex AC5 for supporting information, and the “Introduction” for Health and Safety considerations and advice on the use of the guidance.

1. Does the land in aftercare appear to be in good condition
The aftercare of a site involves the carrying out of various activities, some of a general nature, others more specific, viz. soil analysis, fertiliser applications, pest/disease/weed control etc. However, the importance of the general appearance and overall condition of the site should not be underestimated - sometimes this aspect of the site management can be the most informative.

2. During aftercare meetings or visits a visual inspection should include the following
   a. is the general management of the site acceptable
   b. is there a likelihood of unauthorised access (urban-fringe etc)
   c. whether the site is being trafficked unnecessarily
   d. are unauthorised materials (plant/equipment etc) being stored on site
   e. is differential settlement a problem
   f. is crop growth even and consistent in appearance
   g. does weed growth seem to be a problem
   h. are grazing livestock on site
   i. is there evidence of rabbit or pigeon damage

COMMENTS

For more detailed information see:
- MPG 7 The Reclamation of Mineral Workings (DoE 1996)
- Weeds Act 1959 (Defra PB7189 and PB7190)
- Green Code - Code of Practice for the Safe Use of Pesticides on Farms and Holdings (MAFF 1998 PB3528)
- Identification of Injurious Weeds (MAFF 1999 PB4192)

Cross references:
- AP 7, 11
- SW 10
1. Does the land in aftercare appear to be in good condition

Operations on site are normally those required by the agreed aftercare scheme or condition. At the annual aftercare meetings, it is against this background that the management of the site is assessed, i.e., have the agreed cultivations been carried out, has the right crop been sown (variety, seed rate etc) has a soil analysis been carried out etc. While it is important that the approved scheme is implemented (and amended where agreed), it is equally important that the site is viewed as a whole and not simply as an area for which a set of tick-boxes exists. It is perhaps worthwhile at this stage to quote MPG7 The Reclamation of Mineral Workings (DoE 1996) about the purpose of aftercare, viz. 'The ultimate aim behind the concept of aftercare is that, over time, the land will be brought to a standard whereby it does not have to be treated differently from undisturbed land.' Annual aftercare meetings, the implementation of the agreed scheme, the carrying out of remedial works, the overall cared-for and well-managed appearance of the site are all key factors for achieving this objective.

2. During aftercare meetings or visits a visual inspection should include the following:

   a. is the general management of the site acceptable
      Notwithstanding those actions which are required to be carried out, this can best be described as the ‘first-impression’ when going on to the site. Does the site look neat and tidy, does it give the impression it is being managed in a positive way to achieve the aftercare objectives. If the site is to be restored to a similar after-use to that which exists on neighbouring land, is it beginning to blend in with the local landscape? A site which gives the appearance of being well-managed and cared for, usually is. A site which has clearly had a number of remedial works or actions carried out immediately prior to the aftercare meeting may give a different impression.

   b. is there a likelihood of unauthorised access (urban-fringe etc)
      Newly restored land often attracts joyriders, travellers, vandals etc. Sites on the edge of urban areas can suffer severe urban-fringe problems. The establishment of good hedges/fences and particularly ditches, can often deter all but the most determined. Operators are well aware of the vandalism which occurs to machinery/equipment when left on site and wherever possible, remove it to a safe location, which might further reduce the attractiveness of the site. Quite clearly, criminal damage is a matter to be taken up with the relevant authorities.

   c. whether the site is being trafficked unnecessarily
      There is often the temptation to use restored land as a short cut for on-site traffic. This is particularly so on the larger sites, where a number of phases are at different stages of working and accessing different parts of the site can become difficult. It is an easy option, therefore, to simply drive straight across restored areas. Where the aftercare crop is grass and the area is under the management of the operator the problem can be particularly bad. Where such trafficking
becomes established over a period of time, permanent crop damage occurs, the surface becomes rutted and severe soil compaction can result. This is an issue which should be taken up with the operator and proper routes defined for site traffic. Rutting can also be caused by agricultural operations, independent of and separate to any trafficking by operator’s machinery. The cause of this may be poor agricultural management e.g. bad timing of cultivations. Such instances will need to be addressed if the situation is not to deteriorate.

d. are unauthorised materials (plant/equipment etc) being stored on site
As with the problem of trafficking over restored areas, these same areas are often used as temporary areas for storing equipment, imported materials (soils, inert fill etc). It is unlikely that the approved working scheme will have permitted these operations and thus a breach of the planning permission will have taken place. Large areas of restored land can be damaged this way, causing long term problems, expensive remedial works and delays to the aftercare period itself, perhaps requiring additional years to be added.

e. is differential settlement a problem
Differential settlement is not always predictable and is not always a problem. However, early identification is necessary and the situation needs to be monitored regularly in order to assess both the area involved and the rate of settlement. Differential settlement is seldom a problem on sites backfilled with inert materials. Once the extent of the problem has been identified and assessed, it normally requires specialist advice to prepare any remedial measures. As any remedial works will invariably require trafficking across the site, either to place more soils (in order to raise levels), or more major works involving the stripping of the restored soil profile to place more fill material in the void, normal good practice soil handling criteria should be followed at all times. Where this occurs during the aftercare period, there will also be an obligation to either re-seed or implement interim management measures on any disturbed areas. It is important to realise that repairing minor areas of differential settlement may cause greater damage to the land than leaving it alone.

f. is crop growth even and consistent in appearance
Although crop husbandry and crop management require specialist knowledge and skills, it is reasonable to assume that any crop, throughout its various stages of growth, should look even and consistent in appearance. It is important, therefore, to walk through and/or around the crop in order to make this assessment. Areas where crop growth/appearance is not consistent require further investigation. It is at this stage that good site and aftercare records can play a significant role. Good records and a methodical approach are the most likely ways of identifying the problem. The most common reasons for patchy crop growth are:

- compaction
- poor drainage
- variation in soil type (especially where imported soil was used in the restoration)
- lime/nutrient deficiency
• contaminated soils
• pest/disease
• rabbit, pigeon and deer grazing, especially where close to boundaries with woodland, areas of scrub, open neglected areas etc
• landfill gas in the soil profile

An inspection of the restored profile is likely to identify any compaction/drainage problems. A soil analysis may also be required, normally included as part of the aftercare scheme.

g. does weed growth seem to be a problem
Where arable cropping is being followed, weed control should be a normal part of the overall crop management. Effective weed control assists in both the yield and quality of the crop. Weed growth is more likely to be a problem in under-utilised grassland. Grass is a common crop during the first few years of aftercare, but for the grassland to develop into a useful and productive sward, it has to be carefully and positively managed. Without such inputs, weed growth can soon become established, rapidly displacing the less competitive grasses and subsequently spreading greater quantities of weed seeds. Weed growth can be a major and persistent problem throughout the aftercare period and should not be ignored. Advice on which herbicides to use should be given by someone who is BASIS qualified.

h. are grazing livestock on site
It is normally inadvisable to introduce grazing livestock onto a site in the first year or so of aftercare, unless they are sheep or young cattle. During the first few years of establishment, the sward and soil surface are very prone to poaching (damage by the feet of livestock; including sheep and young cattle, especially when the ground is wet). The introduction of livestock is best achieved by discussion at the annual aftercare meeting when the state of the sward can be assessed.

Perhaps the two main issues to consider once the introduction of grazing animals (usually sheep) has been agreed is:
(i) ensure that sufficient numbers are available to allow the whole area to be grazed satisfactorily, and
(ii) because restored land is more prone to poaching than undisturbed land, it is preferable to have alternative grazing land available if weather conditions deteriorate. With very little notice it should be possible for stock to be moved off the aftercare area(s) to other established grassland, where the risk of poaching is significantly less.

i. is there evidence of rabbit or pigeon damage
Rabbits feed primarily on grassland or cereals but they will eat a wide range of other crops. Roots, brassicas and market garden crops can suffer severe damage, both to the growing plants, and the marketable end-product. Rabbits are a major pest and serious crop losses can occur if left uncontrolled. Occupiers of land have certain statutory obligations regarding rabbits that are harboured on
their land. They have a legal responsibility to control infestations and prevent them from causing damage to neighbouring crops. Advice on rabbit control can be obtained by contacting the local Defra office. Pigeons can cause significant damage, particularly on oilseed rape crops and should be controlled or deterred as necessary.