

Still more pits? We're just not ready

AS ALL OUR READERS must know by now, a central theme in the Harper Conservatives' attack ads is that Liberal Leader Justin Trudeau is 'just not ready' to become prime minister.

Since the ads seem to have succeeded in knocking the Trudeau Liberals from first to third place, perhaps 'just not ready' is a theme that would be effective elsewhere.

And as we see it, one place it could be particularly effective would be in response to the current proposals for large gravel pits in Dufferin-Caledon riding.

There's no doubt whatsoever that most of Dufferin-Caledon contains vast amounts of aggregate - mainly gravel, but also limestone - or that few areas with similar quantities of the materials are so close to the Greater Toronto and Hamilton areas, which contain by far the largest markets for their use in construction of roads and buildings.

But the sad fact of the matter is that both Dufferin County and Caledon already have many large gravel pits, some of which are currently in use and a few of which have been the scene of extractions for more than half a century.

No one need go further than a few miles in any direction from Caledon Village to see just how much prime farmland has been swallowed up by the aggregates industry.

But you'll have to travel a lot farther to find anywhere where a pit or quarry has been rehabilitated and now serves society as farmland, housing or a site for recreation.

That's not to say that rehabilitation cannot realistically take place or that it hasn't in sometimes spectacular fashion.

In Brampton, for example, residents now can enjoy splendid recreational facilities at Professors Lake and live in equally splendid housing in subdivisions that have been built on former gravel pits and the original Brampton brickyard.

A similar potential exists south of Caledon Village, where several small lakes now occupy parts of the still-active gravel pits where extraction was allowed to go below the water table.

But even today, nearly 70 years after the sand and gravel extraction there commenced, we've heard precious little as to the manner or timing of the rehabilitation of the huge pits on both sides of Highway 10.

Worse yet, the fact is that Caledon has many other pits that haven't seen a shovel for many years but still sit idle, protected from public view by berms.

And that's one reason we see a need for local politicians to take up 'just not ready' as a rallying cry against proposed new pits like the one near Melville and the Arbour Farms site in north Mulmur.

As we see it, this part of Ontario won't be ready to accept new pits and quarries until the industry has at least begun rehabilitating abandoned sites and established timelines for completion of the work at no expense to the taxpayer.

A starting point should be the immediate removal of all berms, so the travelling public will finally be able to see what needs to be done.

Beyond that, the rehabilitation scheme for each pit should be submitted to local councils and made subject to advertised, public hearings.

In some cases, the industry should be able to get itself off the hook by simply giving former pits to the Province or a conservation authority.

(A good example of that would be the old pits immediately north of the eastern part of Forks of the Credit Provincial Park.)

And when the job of rehabilitating all the old pits is at least under way and timetables firmly established, any new pits should be subject to new rules, the main one being that rehabilitation would take place progressively during extraction, and that the pit would have no berms, as a symbolic acceptance by the aggregates industry of the need for transparency and accountability.

One more thing: local taxpayers should never be on the hook for damage done local roads when they become haul routes, particularly if the pit or quarry happens to be outside the particular municipality.