

SCRUTINY PANEL REVIEW OF WALLEY'S QUARRY LANDFILL SITE - WRITTEN EVIDENCE SUBMISSION

The issue of the landfill site was a major topic of conversation on the doorstep when I was campaigning for the general election in 2019, and I therefore made it a priority as a new MP to explore what more could be done to address the issue facing this group of constituents. It has been made clear to me by many constituents that this is a significant problem, and it has repeatedly been impressed upon me, not only by constituents contacting me directly, but also through conversations with Stop the Stink, how significant and widespread the concern is about the odour in particular.

I immediately, upon being elected, undertook to meet with the relevant parties to raise concerns and discuss a way forward. I met with representatives of the Environment Agency in January to discuss the site. I also had a meeting with representatives of RED industries upon being elected.

RED are legally compliant with the terms of their environmental permit, and I am grateful for their charitable endeavours in the local community, for example their support of the Donna Louise. However, clearly, reductions in odour from the site for those who live nearby would be welcome. I also feel that their communication with the local community suffers from a lack of empathy. I find it disappointing that when discussing the issue of odour, representatives of RED would not admit to me that the site smells. As the representative of thousands of local people, many of whom have come to me about the smell of the site, it is difficult for me to have a productive conversation with RED without a shared understanding of the basic facts. From the residents, there will always be a resultant lack of trust of RED if they do not engage on this point. There are also some issues with traffic management at the site, although I understand that a new unloading pad has been approved for the site, which will hopefully reduce the number of vehicles driving across the landfill site and ensure a quicker turnaround time for vehicles which will reduce waiting times for trucks entering the landfill.

I receive monthly community updates from the Environment Agency, which contain the relevant contact information for reporting issues, and updates on the site, which are welcome. I believe the Environment Agency needs to embrace a much more transparent approach to monitoring the site. The fact that it took nearly 6 months for the finding of the most recent monitoring exercise to be made public in my view damaged trust and led to suspicion from the local community, who felt that their concerns had not been taken seriously.

I find it disappointing that the Environment Agency did not in their monitoring report go so far as to say that the smell is coming from the landfill itself. To quote exactly they say "Directional analysis showed that there was a continuous source of CH₄ (methane) and H₂S (hydrogen sulphide) from the direction of Walley's Quarry landfill site and that a build-up of these compounds was seen under conditions of low wind speed and temperature and high

pressure.” This has also undermined trust, as residents feel it is obvious where the smell must be coming from.

One useful way the Environment Agency could improve trust and demonstrate their commitment to transparency would be by establishing permanent monitoring sites, perhaps in the same locations as the Environment Agency had used during previous monitoring exercises, with the data from this monitoring made public on a live website. I believe this would be a more successful method of demonstrating that the public’s concerns were being treated with the appropriate seriousness, rather than a somewhat opaque and not particularly well-understood reporting system as it stands now. The current system relies on residents reporting how bad the odour is on a given day on a subjective scale of 1-6, which I think fails to appreciate that a resident taking the time to report the smell in the first place should be notable in itself.

Some form of classification of the level of odour-causing gas in the air, e.g. a ‘traffic light’ system of Red, Amber, Green or some comparison of the published live data against the levels taken the previous month would also be useful to aid understanding. I think evidence that scientific monitoring was taking place on an ongoing basis would go some way to reducing anxiety. It would also eliminate some of the delays in action being taken if the smell was to get notably worse, as there would be clear and valid evidence that levels were higher in the air at the time that the problem arose.

On the question of the merits of the proposal to increase the amount of waste that RED Industries is allowed to import to the site from 250,000 per year to 400,000 tonnes per year up until 2024, I know that different residents' groups have different positions about the merits of the proposal. I have certainly been presented with compelling arguments on both sides and can see the appeal of the capping off process being brought forward, but I know that the prospect of increased dust from lorries and existing problems with traffic management concern some residents.