



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Mr Martin Hamilton
Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council
Castle House
Barracks Rd
Newcastle-under-Lyme
ST5 1BL

16th March 2021

Dear Martin

Re: Walley's Quarry Landfill

Prior to the Council's EGM on Thursday, I am writing to provide further detail as to how the foul odours from Walley's Quarry landfill are impacting my residents, businesses, schools and other institutions. This is further to the evidence I gave to your Council's Scrutiny Review Committee last August, since when the situation has deteriorated markedly, culminating in Red Industries' decision to stop accepting waste last week.

Odour has been an issue for years, but complaints picked up notably in September and accelerated rapidly in the New Year. In the last three weeks the odour has become intolerable, as I have smelt for myself when on odour tours. The odour has been noticed by residents across the whole Borough as well as further afield; all three Stoke-on-Trent MPs have discussed the issue with me and raised it with the Environment Agency. Many businesses, organisations, schools and residents have been in contact with me about it.

For example, I have received correspondence from the Business Improvement District (BID). They have informed me that many businesses are finding the constant presence of the odour to be having serious detrimental effects on their businesses both in the town centre and outside the ring road. Some of the issues being highlighted relate to the need to invest in air conditioning solutions, concerns for their staff welfare and wellbeing, as well as serious complaints from customers.

I share many businesses' concerns that as they come out of lockdown and start to reopen, it will be very difficult to encourage people back to the town centre because of the smell, particularly with respect to our hospitality offering.

On 8th March I visited St Giles' & St George's Academy and spoke to some of the children who had written to me about the impact the smell has on their ability to focus during lessons. The Headteacher, Mrs Pointon, told me about the numerous occasions she has arrived at school to overwhelming odour in the building. I have had similar reports from St Wulstan's, St Luke's, Silverdale Primary Academy, Knutton St Mary's, St John Fisher, Merryfields, and Friarswood, as well as other pre-schools and nurseries in the area. I will append their correspondence to this letter.

Walley's Quarry is comfortably the biggest issue that I receive correspondence about in my mailbox. Since my election in 2019 I have had over 700 recorded emails about the odour. Many of these people have suggested that the odour is causing them and their family health issues. I have advised them to contact their GP with these concerns. Further to this, I met with GPs at Silverdale Village Surgery last Friday where they

reported patients presenting with:

- exacerbations of asthma
- hay-fever-type symptoms
- nausea
- depression
- insomnia

I understand that the surgery will be submitting their own evidence to you as well.

Since Christmas, Walley's has dominated my inbox to an overwhelming degree, such is the strength of feeling and number of incidents. Over the past few weeks, when the smell has got particularly bad, 54% of contacts have been about the landfill. I currently have around 500 individual, currently unresolved cases relating to the landfill. My postings on social media about the issue usually attract about 10 times the regular amount of engagement, with the meeting I had with the Prime Minister reaching approximately 35,000 people via Facebook. This illustrates the importance of the issue to my constituents – aside from the Covid pandemic, it is the single issue that is having by far the most dramatic effect on people's day-to-day lives.

The odour is adversely affecting constituents' lives in many ways: house sales have fallen through; others have had to cut their asking price. Residents in social housing have turned down the opportunity to move into more easily accessible living, as they did not want to move closer to the epicentre of the stink. It has curtailed day-to-day activities, broken residents' sleep and clearly impacted many people's mental health. I have reproduced a few examples of what has been said to me to show the seriousness of the odour on their lives:

"It's affecting my health, I have MS and it's triggering migraines. My 13 year old son who has asthma can't stop coughing and has vomited."

"My twin 1 year old grandchildren stayed and they have been coughing all night, we are all shattered and it is sending us crazy. I would like to escape my own home and area."

"the smell from the landfill is bad this morning at half 3...Not happy at all. something needs doing and fast."

"I deserve fresh air!!!! My son deserve fresh air! Not worth living! We cant sleep!!! We cant breathe!!! I feel sick all the time!!!"

"On Friday we buried my mum at Silverdale cemetery and I've visited every day since. Today I've had to wear a mask as the smell is so strong and enough to make you sick! Its heart-breaking that we can't spend as much time as we want with our loved ones at the cemetery due to the horrendous smell."

"We have over £40,000 worth of stock... somehow the smell is now within (the store) and will no doubt settle on to the clothing range which then in essence makes our stock unsellable and worthless."

"When we hopefully emerge in to a world with less COVID restrictions, I would anticipate that this will become a significant issue in attracting businesses and investment into the town. Who on earth would want to bring their business here suffer the stench out of choice?"

My team of staff is small and issues related to the odour have recently been taking up the majority of their time. In addition to responding to constituents, my staff and I have been in meetings with and visited several organisations, participated in media interviews, drafted press releases, written speeches, presented a 10 Minute Rule Bill in the House of Commons, and generated multiple social media posts, all on this one topic of odour emanating from the landfill. In recent weeks I have had to hire a temporary additional member staff to help with the workload.

I have been very glad to serve my constituents in this way: this is fundamental to the role of an MP, and improving the lives of local people is one of the reasons I wanted to enter politics. However the nature of this situation is not sustainable in the long term –not for me nor, more importantly, for them. I very much hope that the Council, working with the Environment Agency, the operator, and Public Health England, will be able to find a way forward that eliminates Newcastle’s startling odour problem.

The smell emanating from Walley’s Quarry Landfill is my top local concern. I will continue to push for action on it. I hope my submission helps provide a clear picture of the impact the odour is having on everyone’s lives.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Aaron Bell', written in a cursive style.

Aaron Bell MP
Member of Parliament for Newcastle-under-Lyme

Enc.: correspondence from local schools

cc: Cllr Simon Tagg, Leader of the Council