

Rt Hon Therese Coffey MP
Secretary of State for Environment, Food
and Rural Affairs
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

My Ref: AW / TK 105

Your Ref:

Date: 10 October 2023

Dear Secretary of State

Call for Public Inquiry – Environment Agency Monitoring and Regulation of Walleys Quarry Landfill Site, Newcastle-under-Lyme

As you know from your visit earlier this year, Walleys Quarry Landfill site in Newcastle-under-Lyme has caused severe distress to nearby residents for many years. People have reported acute physical symptoms from the noxious odours and emissions of hydrogen sulphide and methane. They have also repeatedly complained to the Environment Agency (EA), and both Staffordshire County Council and Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council about the impact on their mental health and wellbeing.

Public concern about the site has been expressed by various protests, local campaigns, questions in the House of Commons by local MPs, legal actions and more recently BBC investigations. We have also hosted visits by numerous Government ministers to the area so that the impact of the odours on local people could be experienced first-hand.

Therefore, the announcement last week by the Environment Agency that the air quality monitoring equipment around Walleys Quarry had not been calibrated correctly, and that the data collected since 2017 is both incorrect and unable to be rectified, is both shocking and appalling. This flawed data was consistently used to reassure the community and partner agencies that there was nothing to see here, despite what local people were telling us.

For several years, the local community and partners, including our two councils, have expressed deep misgivings about the regulatory performance of the EA. Prior to learning of this failing, both the community's and our faith in the Agency was low. It is now at rock bottom. We have repeatedly raised our concerns with the EA themselves, with Defra, and with the Prime Minister's Office about the

effectiveness of both the EA and the regulatory framework they are operating within. Time and time again, these concerns have been rebuffed, often with reliance on that incorrect data as evidence of progress.

We therefore simply cannot fathom how this issue was not uncovered sooner, and how hydrogen sulphide emissions have been underreported, at times in the region of 70%. Consequently, around six years of data, and all the public health advice issued using that data is now either incorrect or highly questionable.

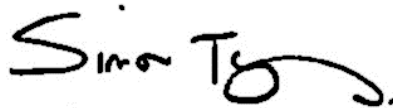
People in Newcastle-under-Lyme have already suffered enough; these data failures add insult to injury. We believe that the only way to answer these pressing questions is the establishment of a full, independent public inquiry into the effectiveness of the Environment Agency. The remit of the inquiry must be broad enough to investigate not just the collection of data and its validation, audit, and reporting, but also the way in which landfill sites are managed, regulated and how redress for breaches is made. We know that Aaron Bell MP is also urging for a public inquiry. Until there is proper transparency and accountability, the Walleys Quarry issue will never be truly resolved.

We look forward to hearing from you at the earliest opportunity.

Yours sincerely



Alan White
Leader
Staffordshire County Council



Simon Tagg
Leader
Newcastle under Lyme Borough Council