

From: Helen Morgan MP <helen.morgan.mp@parliament.uk>
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To: contact@Senedd <contact@senedd.wales>
Subject: (Case Ref: HM9406)



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Good morning,

I am writing on behalf of a constituent, Tom Attwood, who has contacted me regarding the closing of the Ffos-y-fran coal mine.

I have attached his correspondence in its entirety, and would be grateful if you could forward this correspondence to the select committee for Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure, asking for a response to Tom's letter, that I can share with him.

With thanks and kind regards,

Helen

Helen Morgan MP

Member of Parliament for North Shropshire
House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA

1st Floor Offices, Maypole Court, Wem, SY4 5AA

Phone: 020 7219 6104

Email: helen.morgan.mp@parliament.uk

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Mr Thomas Attwood



18th July 2023

Re: Ffos-y-fran Coal Mine Appeal – Heritage Road Steam Impact

As an extremely dedicated and enthusiastic owner of a 1920 Steam Lorry and miniature traction engine, I write to express my concerns and implore consideration of perhaps the unintended but nevertheless dramatic impact that the demise of indigenous steam coal supply in the UK poses to countless charitable events, businesses, enthusiasts and the many visitors who all enjoy and benefit from this charming hobby.

The UK has as a long-established love of engineering and science and as such the steam-based heritage sector is a quintessential British identity, recognised the world over and a significant source of domestic and international tourism. Often emulated but never rivalled, Britain has some of the best and world-oldest steam railways, pumping stations, marine and my love, road steam engines. Often road steam is the pursuit of a private owner, much like myself; dedicated to our little bit of preservation and keeping steam alive, safe and relevant in the modern age. Did you know for example, the road steam sector alone contributes an estimated £745M per annum to local businesses and charities through ever popular steam rallies, events and museums attracting circa 10 million visitors?

Usually privately financed at great personal expense. Owning, maintaining and sharing a road steam engine with the public is not a hobby but more of a lifestyle choice. On a personal level we are often deeply impassioned by the engineering marvels of centuries' old technology and ingenuity, we genuinely delight in sharing that with the public who perhaps have never seen or considered the advent of mechanised transport and agriculture. A working demonstration of a steam engine embodies and inspires great engineering prowess but also brings alive the cultural and social context of life during and after the industrial revolution, helping to educate and inform on the positives and negatives from history. A steam engine is still the only inanimate object that conjures up a "living" machine. It needs feeding and watering to awaken it and to work it, you must read how it is responding and adapt accordingly to get the best out of it. In a World rushing towards Artificial Intelligence there is a palpable similarity to be drawn in many ways.

Removing some of the romance from the embodiment of a "living" machine, there is a very important and troubling concern around one of those key elements, that of feeding. Or to put it more clearly supply of the food (energy source) – coal. Most UK built steam engines were designed to burn dry steam coal, to maximise the best efficiency and cleanest burning characteristics obtainable at the time of their construction.

Ffos-y-fran Mine near Merthyr Tydfil has provided the heritage sector with a high quality hard coal, which has generally become the favoured fuel for its:-

- Clean burning characteristics (low to no visible smoke and emissions.)
- Long-lasting burning – leading to very efficient use.
- Indigenously mined, washed and distributed reducing transport miles.
- Available (pre-2022) at an economically viable rate.
- Giving employment to UK workers from mine, transportation, merchants etc.

Sourcing an alternative good quality lumped steam coal, even on a global search is extremely challenging and currently a similar or better fuel has not come to fruition. Ffos-y-fran is possibly the last bastille of the high-grade coal with which the UK heritage sector's steam engines were designed to run on. Therein you may be able to tell that by starving away a good quality food (coal) from the heritage sector may inadvertently lead to the diminishment or demise of the industry in its entirety including those that it supports, encourages and inspires.

May I urge you to consider if your influence and guidance can assist in seeing a constructive way with which mining at the Ffos-y-fran coal mine can be approved, to help protect this very important part of our national identity. Coal mining may be considered part of Wales' heritage but allowing it to cease altogether runs the risk of consigning the heritage sector to history, an act I cannot imagine is truly desired by anyone. Whilst we may be outwardly perceived as an antiquated interest, we are made up of people from very diverse and differing backgrounds. For example, some of which are embracing our need to research and develop alternatives to coal with much enthusiasm or open-minded pragmatism, but this is in its infancy. We still have much to learn and develop, unfortunately time is not on our side and so this is a very challenging time for us all who are faced with and threatened by:-

- Escalating costs of seeking other fuels.
- Escalating and remaining elevated current fuel cost following the energy crisis.
- Difficulty in supply of an alternative fuel.
- Inferior fuel in terms of quantity consumed and visible emissions.
- Increase of overall transportation emissions if not indigenous.
- Tempering public reaction and understanding to fossil fuels and emissions.

May I close, with my final personal plea? As a professional self-employed engineer in my thirties, I was inspired as a child by watching and being mesmerised by the thunderous workings of steam engines. They captured my imagination; it is no coincidence that I studied engineering and my career is a passion and a passion that funds my hobby. I am far from alone in this story. But what is even more important and so-often goes unnoticed, this hobby is escapism, not just my escapism but those who partake and engage in a little sense of nostalgia for a few hours at a weekend. A return to simple fun with like-minded friends, engaging with the public and sharing that enjoyment, relaxation and mental well-being implicitly. We are feeling more at risk of losing the hobby we love so dearly and who knows how many future generations are yet to be inspired. It bothers us to think this could be at threat, all for the sake of the supply of the finest coal available in the World, which is here in our own lands.

Yours Faithfully,

Tom Attwood