

Julie James MS

Minister for Climate Change

11 January 2024

Dear Minister,

Ffos-y-Fran opencast mining site

I am writing on behalf of the Climate Change, Environment, and Infrastructure Committee to follow up on our previous correspondence regarding the Ffos-y-Fran opencast coal mine. We appreciate your detailed response of 15 September 2023 to our initial inquiry. However, areas remain where further clarity is needed. We hope you can provide further clarity on the role of the Welsh Government now that the legal action against the site operators has ended.

As you will understand, the committee continues to be deeply concerned about the restoration of the Ffos-y-Fran site, and potentially other opencast mining sites in Wales. It has been widely reported that a significant financial gap exists between the estimated restoration costs and the funds set aside by the mining company.

1. It has been reported that the mining company had put aside only £15 million for restoration. In your letter, you refer to this as a “£15 million pound deposit” that “is intended to fund some restoration in the event the site operator fails to comply with the restoration conditions”. Is it the case that the mining company has put aside no funds beyond an initial deposit?
2. Estimated remediation costs for the site reportedly range from £120m to £175m. What, if any, assessment has the Welsh Government made of the total restoration cost for the Ffos-y-Fran site?
3. What measures are available to the Welsh Government to ensure the mining company fulfils its financial obligations for restoration? What contingency planning has taken place should the company fail to meet these obligations?



4. In your letter, you said that, in the absence of adequate funds, it would fall to the Council to make the site safe and, in the longer term, complete the restoration. You explained that multiagency talks are underway to prepare contingency arrangements should the site be abandoned. Could you provide an update on progress?
5. What types of agreements exist across Wales to fund the restoration of sites after operations cease? Are you satisfied there are sufficient safeguards in place to ensure the funds are sufficient for full site restoration or remediation?
6. Are there specific active or inactive opencast sites that raise particular concern that the monies accrued (through bonding and other mechanisms) fall short of the financial liabilities associated with restoration and aftercare to agreed planning conditions?
7. Has the Welsh Government undertaken any work on issues relating to opencast remediation since its 2014 report "Research into the failure to restore opencast coal sites in South Wales"? What, if any, action did the Welsh Government take in light of the report's findings?

The cessation of operations at Ffos-y-Fran will inevitably impact the local workforce. The transition of these workers to new employment opportunities is paramount.

8. In your letter, you refer to several programs and initiatives intended to support former workers at the site. Can you provide an update on the progress of this work and its success so far in finding alternative employment for the workforce?

In conclusion, the Committee emphasises the importance of transparent and effective management of the post-mining transition at Ffos-y-Fran. We believe that addressing these concerns is vital for the area's environmental integrity and its residents' well-being.

I look forward to receiving your response no later than Thursday 22 February 2024.

Yours sincerely,



Llyr Gruffydd MS,
Chair, Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure Committee

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg. / We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.