

# P-06-1476: 1000 metre mandatory buffer zone for all new and existing quarries

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 18 Tachwedd 2024  
Petitions Committee | 18 November 2024

Reference: SR24/9617-3

**Petition Number:** P-06-1476

**Petition title:** 1000 metre mandatory buffer zone for all new and existing quarries

**Text of petition:** Ensure mandatory buffer zone for all new and existing quarries in Wales. We propose at least 1,000.00 metres buffer zone from all residential areas, schools, hospitals, and care facilities. Currently the law allows for quarries to be located as close as 200 metres away from residential areas and schools. This is affecting people's health and causing damage to property. The bigger buffer zone we can have the better.

## 1. Background

Welsh national planning policy is set out in [Planning Policy Wales \(PPW\)](#). PPW says development plans should clearly identify buffer zones around existing and proposed minerals sites where new development which would be sensitive to adverse impact, including residential areas, hospitals and schools, should be resisted.

Paragraph 5.14.45 of PPW says the maximum extent of the buffer will depend on a number of factors:



... the size, type and location of workings, the topography of the surrounding area, existing and anticipated levels of noise and dust, current and predicted vibration from blasting operations and availability of mitigation measures.

Paragraph 5.14.46 says: “Buffer zones will of necessity vary in size depending on the mineral being extracted and the nature of the operation, ...”

The PPW paragraphs relating to buffer zones are reproduced in full in the annex to this briefing.

PPW also refers to the minerals technical advice notes. Minerals technical advice note (MTAN) Wales 1: aggregates says that the minimum distance from a hard rock quarry should be 200 metres, and for sand and gravel (and others where no blasting is permitted) it should be 100 meters.

MTAN 1 also says:

The buffer zone should be defined from the outer edge of the area where extraction and processing operations will take place, including site haul roads, rather than the site boundary, as there may be land within site boundaries where mineral activities are limited or no operations are proposed so that the impact of the proximity of such land is negligible.

## 2. Welsh Government action

The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Energy and Planning, Rebecca Evans MS, wrote to the Committee in relation to this petition on 7 October 2024. She reiterated the Welsh Government’s policy, as set out above:

Planning Policy Wales (PPW) and Minerals Technical Advice Note 1 Aggregates (MTAN1) contain comprehensive planning policy which is robust about controlling the impacts of quarrying.

The primary purpose of buffer zones is to limit the impact of mineral working and to protect land uses that are most sensitive to the impact of mineral operations by establishing a separation distance between potentially conflicting land uses.

The 200m buffer zone outlined in national policy is a minimum distance and the buffer zone should be defined from the outer edge of the area where extraction and processing operations will take place, including site haul roads, rather than the site boundary.

The maximum extent of the buffer zone would depend on a number of factors: the size, type and location of workings, the topography of the surrounding area, existing and anticipated levels of noise and dust, current and predicted vibration from blasting operations and availability of mitigation measures.

Buffer zones will of necessity vary in size depending on the mineral being extracted and the nature of the operation but must be clearly defined and indicated on development plan proposals maps.

### 3. Welsh Parliament action

On 16 October 2024 the Senedd debated a Member's Legislative Proposal on Bill relating to planning processes for quarry development. The proposal was brought forward by Heledd Fychan MS and worded as follows:

To propose that the Senedd:

1. Notes a proposal for a Bill on introducing a presumption in planning processes against approving quarry development in close proximity to settlements.

2. Notes that the purpose of the Bill would be to:

a) require the risks of proposed quarrying sites to the environment and biodiversity, and to public health, to be assessed as part of the planning process;

b) set a mandatory buffer zone of 1,000 metres for all new and existing quarries; and

c) provide that the decision on a planning application for quarry development may only be made by the relevant Welsh Government Minister, with consideration given to the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

The Cabinet Secretary said in the debate she doesn't agree that new legislation would be appropriate or effective, as circumstances vary on a case-by-case basis. She believes planning decisions relating to quarries are localised and best dealt with through the policies in Local Development Plans. She also said:

Introducing a mandatory buffer zone of 1,000m could bring about some unintended consequences, which would prevent the use of land for other uses, prohibiting or adversely impacting on the provision of key infrastructure, such as house building, for example.

A number of Members raised concerns during the debate, including Heledd Fychan MS who asked whether current policy reflects latest World Health Organization advice and the aims of the Environment (Air Quality and Soundscapes) (Wales) Act 2024. Hefin David MS highlighted that MTAN 1 had not been updated since 2004 and asked if there was merit in reviewing it.

The Cabinet Secretary responded to these concerns saying she'll consider reviewing the guidance should evidence suggest it was no longer up-to-date.

The Senedd rejected the motion for the debate: For: 14, Against: 18, Abstain: 15.

## 4. Annex – PPW wording

### Buffer Zones

5.14.44 There is often conflict between mineral workings and other land uses as a result of the environmental impact of noise and dust from mineral extraction and processing and vibration from blasting operations. Buffer zones should be used by planning authorities to provide areas of protection around permitted and proposed mineral workings where new development which would be sensitive to adverse impact, including residential areas, hospitals and schools, should be resisted. Within the buffer zone there should be no new mineral extraction or new sensitive development, except where the site of the new development in relation to the mineral operation would be in a location remote from the active mineral site or on the far side of an existing built up area which already encroaches into the buffer zone. Other development, including industry, offices and some ancillary development related to the mineral working, which are less sensitive to impact from mineral operations, may be acceptable within the buffer zone on a case by case basis.

5.14.45 To avoid conflict between mineral workings and other land uses buffer zones should be identified in development plans around existing or proposed minerals sites. The maximum extent of the buffer zone would depend on a number of factors: the size, type and location of workings, the topography of the surrounding area, existing and anticipated levels of noise and dust, current and predicted vibration from blasting operations and availability of mitigation measures.

5.14.46 Buffer zones will of necessity vary in size depending on the mineral being extracted and the nature of the operation, but must be clearly defined and indicated on development plan proposals maps. This will ensure that there is unequivocal guidance on the proximity of mineral operations to sensitive land uses and that the potential impact of existing and future mineral workings is recognised and planned for in the area around the mineral operations. Further guidance on the factors that should be taken into account when defining buffer zones for particular minerals is provided in the MTANs. Whilst the primary purpose of buffer zones is to limit the impact of mineral working their wider beneficial role as part of green infrastructure provision and protecting and enhancing biodiversity should be explored.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.