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Heidelberg Materials UK

Craig-yr-Hesg Quarry
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28 January 2025

Craig-yr-Hesg quarry

Dear Carolyn

Thank you for your letter following the Senedd's Petitions Committee's consideration of Petition P-06-1476 re mandatory buffer zones for all new and existing quarries. We respect the work of the committee and the role it plays within the Welsh Parliament and are pleased to respond to your request for further information about our approach at Craig-yr-Hesg quarry.

For ease I have used the same headings below in responding to the points you raise in your letter. However, firstly I want to stress that Heidelberg Materials is committed to being a responsible operator and we operate in full accordance with the strict regulatory regime that underpins modern quarrying. As you will be aware, mineral extraction at all our quarries in Wales is predicated on the detailed planning and permitting conditions in place. These have been shaped by statutory policy as well as the work of regulators and NGOs over many years – with the resulting regulations that we and others in our sector work to set to ensure that people, property and the environment are protected.

At Craig-yr-Hesg quarry, where approval for the 10 million tonne extension was granted by the Minister for Climate Change in 2022 following a Public Inquiry, our operations are subject to a comprehensive set of **57 modern planning conditions**. These have been set to mitigate the impact of quarrying and measures include extensive dust suppression activities, the construction of bunds to provide natural screening and noise attenuation, the planting of over 3,200 trees as well as both a Species Protection and Habitat Management Plan and a Tree and Woodland Management Plan, approved by the local authority - Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council (RCTCBC). Our operations are also subject to regular compliance reviews by the regulators.

We remain committed to playing our role within the local community at Craig-yr-Hesg. In addition to supplying local customers, supporting the local economy and contributing to local business rates, we also support community initiatives. This has previously included us enabling the part-funding of Glyncoch Community Centre via the Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund, as well as donating land for the Craig-yr-Hesg Nature Reserve. Going forward we will continue efforts to ensure the benefits of our operations to the local community are fully realised.

Our response to requests for further information on quarry mitigation:

- **Engaging with the local community**

Heidelberg Materials is committed to building a safe and inclusive future and this includes developing local community engagement plans at all our sites. Developing effective community liaison groups at key sites is also a priority and existing groups have not only led to our involvement in local schemes and community initiatives, including providing financial support, volunteering and material donations, but have also resulted in us responding to feedback by adapting operational practices, such as blast design, HGV routing etc.

As my colleague Astrid Dahl set out in her letter to you of 27 November 2024, since 2015 we have taken numerous steps to reform a liaison group for Craig-yr-Hesg quarry. Indeed the 2022 planning approval includes the requirement to develop a strategy for the setting up of a Community Liaison Group (CLG) and take steps for its implementation. However, our attempts until recently were unsuccessful – including being publicly rebuffed by invited local elected representatives. In recent months we have been fortunate to be able to draw on the support of RCTCBC in helping to shape a CLG. Ahead of the Christmas break an initial meeting hosted by RCTCBC took place – including participation from community representatives, us and other stakeholders. This marks a major milestone in this area, and we look forward to being able to build on this.

In addition to this, and as Astrid also detailed in her letter, last year also saw us stepping up direct engagement activity with the community with the aim of developing further dialogue. Activity included hosting a drop-in event, developing a website with extensive FAQs, door-dropping information and setting up a WhatsApp blasting notification service. Since June 2024 we have also responded to over 130 separate items of correspondence from 42 residents, received via our newly set up 0800 number and email inbox.

Last month we also door-dropped a further letter to the local community. This provided an update on the first phase of the quarry extension, including groundworks and soil stripping, which is now nearing completion. We'll continue to keep the community informed about developments at Craig-yr-Hesg quarry going forward and are hopeful that the new CLG will also work to ensure a better flow of information with local people.

- **Air quality**

The potential air quality and dust hazards from quarries are well understood and addressed through the stringent regulatory controls that are integral to a quarry's planning and permitting conditions. At our local community drop-in at Craig-yr-Hesg and via the FAQ section on our website we have sought to provide information to reassure the local community about this topic.

As set out above, fugitive, or nuisance dust, is managed by a range of measures. These include the use of bowsers, sprinklers and wheel washes to minimise dust, the creation of screening bunds and new woodland along the extension area boundary. These measures were agreed with RCTCBC as part of a Dust and Particulate Management Plan and Dust Monitoring Plan for the whole site and which will be reviewed by the council at regular intervals during our operations.

In addition, RCTCBC carries out air quality monitoring beyond the quarry boundary. Part-funded by Heidelberg Materials, this covers the measurement of levels of fine air-borne particulates, including PM10s and PM2.5s. The data is collected from a location in Garth Avenue, Glyncoch, and is available for public review in real time at: www.airquality.gov.wales/air-pollution/site/RHD7#latestdata. It shows, in a full transparent way that annual average readings are well within the safe levels mandated by the UK's Air Quality Standards.

We recognise that some in the local community have expressed concern re potential links between quarrying with possible health risks including Respirable Crystalline Silica (RCS) dust and/or silicosis. To provide reassurance a handout distributed at our June 2024 drop-in, and still available on our website, sets out information from the [IMA-Europe AISBL safe silica website](#). This states that:

“The body is only impacted by inhaling high levels of RCS over many years, meaning that only people working in the direct vicinity of industrial processes are at risk. There is a natural background level of RCS in the air, but the levels are so low that it poses no risk – and a quarry/factory/plant near you does not increase levels of RCS beyond that natural background level.

“Living near a quarry does not put you at any risk of getting cancer. Independent studies conducted notably in the UK by the government health and safety laboratory, HSL, on behalf of the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) confirm that quarrying does not have any significant impact on air quality outside the quarry boundary. Furthermore, there is no evidence to suggest any link between quarrying and lung disease among members of the general public who live nearby.”

- **Noise Pollution**

Quarry noise conditions have been developed over many years in line with extensive primary and secondary legislation as well as guidance from the Health and Safety Executive's (HSE) and other specialist NGOs. In Wales quarrying permitting conditions, including noise limits, are also informed by guidance from the Welsh Government (Minerals Technical Advice Note 1 [MTAN1]).

At Craig-yr-Hesg quarry limits on noise from our operations are set at six selected locations, also known as receptor sites. The daytime limits relate to background noise levels, with a maximum limit of 55 dB LAeq (average sound level over one hour) at any of these receptors. At night, between 19.00-07.00, the noise level from quarry operations cannot exceed 42 dB LAeq at any of these receptor properties.

On-going compliance with these regulations is regularly checked by the regulator, RCTCBC, with no concerns raised. The development of screening bunds and planting (as detailed above) around the quarry extension area will help to provide noise mitigation for near neighbours for the approved quarry extension area. (Please note information pertaining to quarry blasting is set out under the Risk of structural damage section below).

- **Protection of water resources**

Water management from Craig-yr-Hesg quarry forms part of the extensive quarry operating conditions and compliance with these are assessed by the regulator, Natural Resources Wales (NRW).

NRW conduct routine site monitoring, which involves testing water samples to assess the quality of the water discharged. In addition, NRW carries out periodic site inspections to ensure our compliance with all the relevant consents.

As in standard practice in the quarrying sector, any issues or concerns raised by the regulators during assessments are followed up by the site team and appropriate remedial steps taken – if any are required. In addition, you will be interested to know that Heidelberg Materials is committed to sustainable water management, and we have committed to a 10 per cent reduction in freshwater consumption by 2030 (on a 2020 baseline).

- **Preserving Property values**

Craig-yr-Hesg quarry has helped shape and support the development of the local area for over 130 years. We believe that there is no significant impact because of the approved scheme that would materially change the character of the neighbouring community or impact on the value of housing.

- **Ecosystem conservation**

Working sustainably is at the heart of everything we do. Our 2030 commitments set out our approach, including to being nature positive – contributing positively through our biodiversity programmes and sustainable water management (see our [website](#) for details).

As referenced above, our planning conditions at Craig-yr-Hesg quarry, require both a Species Protection and Habitat Management Plan and a Tree and Woodland Protection Management Plan, approved by the local authority, RCTCBC. These approved schemes along with the construction of the screening bunds have been designed to provide natural screening, noise attenuation, a physical barrier and, importantly, a wildlife/ecological corridor. As mentioned above, over 3,200 new trees will be planted on the main screen bund and around the eastern and northern boundaries of the extension area and this work has already begun. We have also already put up 20 bat boxes and 20 bird boxes as well as 50 dormice nesting boxes to increase the nesting and roosting opportunities across the site. Soils and overburden removed during the phased extraction of the extension area have either been used to create the perimeter screen bund or will be stored for use throughout the progressive restoration, which will see quarry faces in worked out areas restored to enhance the ecological and landscape value of the site.

Our overarching objective is to deliver biodiversity uplift through the positive management of the habitats currently found on site within the quarry and our wider landholding and the creation of a mosaic of woodland, grassland and heathland, reflective of the area's character.

Our site Biodiversity Action Plan is available to view in the documents section of our Craig-yr-Hesg community [website](#). You may also be interested to know that we have annual meetings with the County ecologist to review progress and future activity.

- **Community wellbeing and quality of life**

Heidelberg Materials places the health and wellbeing of employees, communities, and suppliers at the core of our business operations. This includes working to empower the communities where we operate.

As referenced above, many of our other quarries around the UK have well established liaison groups which have helped nurture dialogue and the implementation of meaningful action to the benefit of host communities. Unfortunately, our efforts at Craig-yr-Hesg quarry have previously been rejected, though we continue to work to set one up.

At Craig-yr-Hesg, in addition to actively supporting the development of the local community hall, activity in the community has also included staff volunteering and the donation of materials. For example, earlier this month we agreed to donate some fence posts to a local allotment group so that members can repurpose them to repair their fences after a series of break-ins. We recognise that there is more we can do in this area and our Craig-yr-Hesg community website contains details about our community assistance programme and how local people can make [applications for community support](#).

We are aware that some residents have expressed concerns about the perceived loss of amenity space. However, we should point out that there have never previously been any public rights of access over the quarry extension area, and it was 'first identified in the local authority's 2011 Local Development Plan which would have been consulted on. Nevertheless, to ensure local connectivity and amenity access we are creating a permissive path over land to the north of the extension area to provide pedestrian access from Glyncoch to the Lan Woods to the west.

In addition, as part of our planning application, we offered to gift 11.4 acres of land to extend Coed Craig-yr-Hesg woodland which forms the Local Nature Reserve (LNR). The 40- acre LNR was gifted by us to RCTCBC 1993, together with a sum to manage the woodlands. Although the council did not take us on this, we would be happy to revisit this offer.

- **Risk of structural damage**

As set out at our June 2024 drop-in and in the FAQ section on our website, the way in which a quarry blast is experienced can be shaped by a number of factors including geology, blast design, vibration, air pressure, frequency, distance from the blast quarry face and even the weather.

Quarry blasting in the UK is highly regulated: it has well-defined limits on ground vibration, based on peak particle velocity (PPV). Operating within these standards means that there is no risk of structural damage to nearby homes or buildings.

British Standard 7382: part 2 1993 underpins the stringent blasting regulations that we, like all operators work to. This standard is informed by research that blast vibration values in excess of 50mm/s PPV would be necessary to cause structural damage to homes. The permitted levels for Craig-yr-Hesg quarry allow blasts up to the regulatory limit of 6mm/s Peak Particle Velocity (PPV), at 95% confidence. This reflects planning guidance in Wales.

We are also required to monitor blast vibration in line with a Blast Monitoring Scheme approved by RCTCBC. The average PPV recorded for all blasts at Craig-yr-Hesg quarry since 2018 is below 3 mm/s PPV – so well within the permitted levels on this logarithmic scale. For reference, research has indicated people will generally become aware of blast induced vibration at around 1.5mm/s PPV, so this indicates that people can be aware of blast vibration even when associated vibration levels are low.

Details of forthcoming blasts at Craig-yr-Hesg quarry are posted on signage at the quarry gate and on our community website. Last year we also introduced a free blast notification service via WhatsApp for residents.

- **Planning and zoning consistency**

I am sure you are aware that every local authority is required to maintain supplies of minerals and local mineral plans are developed to ensure that minerals are extracted and used in a way that balances the needs of the economy and society with the impact on the environment. And, of course, minerals can only be extracted where they exist, and this is shaped by geology.

The Regional Technical Statement for Aggregates identifies a need for a minimum Local Plan allocation of 9.5 million tonnes of new crushed rock reserves over nearly 25 years. This was recognised in the adopted RCTCBC 2011 Local Development Plan (LDP) by the inclusion of an area of land adjacent to Craig-yr-Hesg quarry as ‘a preferred area of known minerals resources’. This was the only area identified within the LDP for new aggregates supply.

In May 2015 Heidelberg Materials UK (known as Hanson UK until October 2023) submitted a planning application for a 10 million tonne extension to Craig-yr-Hesg, located within this ‘preferred area’ referenced above. The application took over five years to get to planning committee but, despite policy support and a firm recommendation for approval from planning officers, the planning committee refused the application in July 2020.

An appeal was lodged against that refusal which was ‘called in’ for determination by the Minister for Climate Change and examined at a public inquiry held in June 2022. The Inspector concluded that the proposals, with their associated mitigation measures, would comply with the development plan and relevant Welsh planning policy. In making her recommendation that the appeal be allowed, the Inspector made it clear that she considered her decision to be in accordance with the sustainable development principle of the Well Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. The Minister for Climate Change agreed with the Inspector and, as you are aware, allowed the appeal, granting planning permission in October 2022.

With regards to zoning, the creation of screening bunds and planting at Craig-yr-Hesg quarry will further help to provide clear delineation between the site and the surrounding area. It is also worth highlighting that we will continue to adhere to all the stipulated conditions, including, noise and blast vibration, regardless of the distance between the quarry extraction area and the key receptor sites within the community.

To conclude this point, the extension at Craig-yr-Hesg quarry was determined on the basis that it would operate within the existing planning regulatory framework with extensive measures and modern planning conditions in place to mitigate impact and ensure the community and

environment are protected. We are of course aware of proposals to change future and existing buffer zones around quarries debated both in Westminster and more recently in the Senedd. Our response to this reflects those of the Mineral Products Association in that, if imposed, this would be detrimental to ensuring secure supplies of aggregates in Wales. It would also lead to a loss of jobs and inward investment as well as the need to import materials for use in Welsh construction and maintenance projects.

I appreciate that is a lengthy reply to your letter – somewhat reflecting the extensive regulatory and planning regime in place for mineral extraction – and I hope that the above goes some way to providing reassurance. We would of course be happy to answer any further questions you may have.

Kind regards

Simon Willis

Simon Willis
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