

SENEDD PETITIONS COMMITTEE: HAFOD LANDFILL LIAISON GROUP

1 Introduction

1.1 The Liaison Group was set up to provide a communication link with residents and consists of representatives of Wrexham County Borough Council (WCBC), Natural Resources Wales (NRW), Local Councillors, representatives of Community Councils and local residents. Meetings were initially quarterly but over time this was reduced to four monthly and then to every six months. Because there has been a great deal of publicity recently concerning the rise in complaints, particularly regarding odour, the meetings have now reverted back to quarterly.

2 Odour

2.1 Residents of Johnstown and the surrounding communities, including Ruabon, Rhosllanurchrugog, Ponciau, Penycae, have had to endure noxious odours from this site for more than 20 years; often during the night, when the smells enter our homes. This happened recently when I had to close the bedroom window at 5.00 am, although the smell remained in the house long after the windows were closed. This issue has been raised in previous meetings, but we have not been given an explanation as to why this occurs so frequently outside the site's hours of operation.

2.2 During recent periods of hot sunny weather there have been comments and statements by Council Members, NRW etc, that following recent changes carried out at the site real improvements have been made, which they believe to be borne out by the reduction in the number of complaints regarding odour. However, as we know from bitter experience this is most definitely not the case. The problem is invariably much worse in cold, wet weather - two recent occasions of odour occurred on wet days.

2.3 The problems regarding odour are a regular topic for discussion at the Liaison Group meetings, when questions are asked and concerns raised. In response to these Enovert and NRW always seem to be able to provide, often repeated, reasons why it is not the fault of the landfill site. We have often been told, for example, that the odours are agricultural in nature or they have been caused not by the landfill, but by any one of a number of factories on the nearby Vauxhall Industrial Estate. (Liaison Group minutes 11 March 2025). When you have lived most of your life in an area where there are farms you tend to be able to recognise agricultural smells quite easily. Also living relatively close to a small industrial estate, where many residents actually work, you come to know those smells too. No other activities produce the horrendous gas smells that emanate from the landfill site.

It would seem that Hafod is not the only Enovert site which is experiencing serious problems regarding odour. Below is an outline taken from local press and the BBC news website detailing problems at two other landfills owned by Enovert, which are remarkably similar to those experienced at Hafod. The responses given by Enovert and

P-06-1510 Direct NRW to revoke the environmental permit and ensure the closure of Enovert's Hafod Landfill Site in Wrexham – Correspondence from Ann Griffiths, Hafod Liaison Group

the Environment Agency are also almost identical to those given for Hafod, as can be seen from the extracts below from coverage of events.

- **Highfield South Landfill Site, Walsall**

Birmingham Live 10 January 2020:

Is this the smelliest place in Britain? Disgusting landfill stench ruining people's lives.

'I wake up in the night with it. My son woke up about 3 weeks ago and he was physically sick. On an evening and in the night it is absolutely vile.'

'We wake up and the smell is in the house. All doors are shut, all windows are shut.'

BBC 23 March 2025:

Following a petition in 2019 to 'stop the horrendous smell from the landfill site' Enovert carried out work to repair and upgrade but the 'intolerable odour' persists.

A spokesperson for Enovert said: 'Enovert's Highfield South landfill site is operated in accordance with its environmental permit.'

- **Bellhouse Landfill Site, Stanway, Nr Colchester**

BBC 15 February 2024:

Enovert agreed to undertake works to minimise the potential for odour. These works included the drilling of additional gas collection wells installation of temporary capping and increasing the application of daily cover materials. An Environment Agency spokesperson said, 'We are investigating recent reports of odour thought to be from the site. There are potentially several odours that could be attributed to the landfill. However, there are other potential sources of odour in the local area.'

BBC 29 July 2024:

Further increase in odour complaints; described as the 'Stanway Stink'. Enovert carried out work on cells, but odour persists. 'I wake up in the middle of the night ... the whole house will smell of it.'

Response from Enovert Chief Executive, Mark Silvester: 'We work within our environmental permit.'

- **Hafod**

BBC 23 October 2024:

Sleep does not even provide an escape from the smell for one neighbour of the site.

'I could be in a deep sleep and all of a sudden I start to heave so I have to go and shut the window.'

BBC 31 January 2025

'Even when the doors and windows are shut, the smell comes into the house.'

Mark Silvester said the company has undertaken 'capping and gas extraction system works' aimed at addressing odour emissions at the site. He also added, 'The landfill holds an environmental permit and is stringently regulated by NRW.'

2.4 The actual reporting of incidents has also been a contentious issue. I feel that the number of complaints does not always appear to give a true picture. When there is

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higher number of complaints than usual, we are told by NRW and Enovert that many of these don't appear to be genuine because they are, for example, anonymous. On the other hand, if the number of complaints is low, they congratulate themselves saying that any improvements they have made have been successful. On one of these occasions, I and a number of others did genuinely report incidents of odours, but these were brushed aside because of the high number of complaints. Unfortunately, many people who once reported odour issues no longer do so because they now feel that it is a waste of time. In fact, at one meeting it was pointed out that because the validity of the incident reports was being queried, it was beginning to make people feel that they were no longer being believed or taken seriously.

Ironically, the timing of the Petitions Committee is somewhat advantageous to Enovert. The recent increased scrutiny has coincided with weather conditions that have traditionally produced lower odour levels, but as we move into autumn and the focus on the site has concluded, the gas smell will become unbearable again.

3 **Air Quality Monitoring**

Air quality monitoring is also of great concern because the site is so close to houses; not only as a nuisance issue but because of any possibility of risks to health. Recently four air quality monitors have been placed around the perimeter of the site and one on the Community Centre. I asked at a Liaison Group meeting at least six months ago if one could be sited on the Nant Parc Estate and it was generally agreed that one should be placed on the Bowling Club in Bryn Avenue. When asking for an update on this at the meeting of 11 March 2025 I was informed that the matter was ongoing, but I have since learned that this monitor is to be sited on the school on Bangor Road but to date no monitor has been placed at the school.

The data from the monitors is to be collected and analysed by a company appointed by Enovert. It is difficult to have confidence in this data because they have already admitted they are currently measuring hydrogen sulphide against the higher levels permitted within an industrial setting, where those exposed to it would be wearing protective clothing. Furthermore, in August 2024 it was stated that levels of hydrogen sulphide at the Walley's Quarry landfill site in Staffordshire had been consistently under reported by the Environment Agency, from the initial installation of the equipment in 2016 right up until August 2023, due to the air quality monitors being incorrectly calibrated.

4.0 **Stakeholders Group**

Earlier this year a stakeholders group was set up by WCBC but there is no representation of residents on this group. Whilst I appreciate that it is not always possible to include everyone at these meetings, I do feel that by virtue of the fact that we, the people who live and work here, and are the most affected by the site on an almost daily basis, should have been represented, even if only in a small way. In response to a query regarding this we were told that all the members of the stakeholders group were working on our behalf and that the information would be filtered down to us. Most of the information is put on websites etc. which is not always accessible to everyone.

5.0 Permit

One of Enovert's most frequent responses to any complaints about the site is 'we are working in accordance with the permit'. The permit was granted more than 20 years ago and in that time many things have changed. For example, today it is stipulated that a landfill should be much further away from residential properties. At Hafod the nearest houses are only separated from the boundary of the site by a railway line.

Waste disposal legislation has already evolved during the time that Hafod has been open and who is to know what changes may take place in the future. With the permit covering such a long period of time, permissions should be revisited in order to confirm that landfill still remains the most suitable outlet for waste.

6.0 Conclusion

The seemingly 'cut and paste' responses from Enovert and NRW, where they go into great technical detail showing how much work they have been doing, or stating they are operating within their permit, show an inherent indifference to the realities of living in such close proximity to the landfill. We have already endured the effects of this site for more than 20 years and these will continue for at least another 30 years. Residents born around the turn of the millennium will not have known a time before the pervasive smell in the local area. With the permit allowing waste to be deposited until 2055, there is a good chance that some individuals in the village will have had their whole lives blighted by the gas and it is those without the means or opportunities to move away from their birthplace who will bear the greatest consequences in terms of health risks and poorer quality of life.

Ann Griffiths