

Council – 27th February 2020

Response to the Petition: “Stop the horrendous smell at Highfields Waste Disposal Site, Walsall Wood”

Service: Highways & Environment - Pollution Control

Wards: Rushall Shelfield Ward and Aldridge North and Walsall Wood Ward

1. Summary

A petition was submitted to Council at its meeting on the 6th January 2020. The petition, containing over 3,000 signatures, calls on the Environment Agency and Walsall Council to “stop the horrendous smell at Highfields Waste Disposal Site, Walsall Wood.”

The Council’s petitions scheme states “if a petition contains at least 1,500 signatures it will be debated at a meeting of the Council”.

2. Report Detail

2.1. Statement of Petition

“Stop the horrendous smell at Highfields waste disposal site, Walsall Wood

I along with many other residents of Walsall Wood, Rushall, Shelfield, Brownhills, Clayhanger, Pelsall and visitors to these areas have been suffering an increasing amount of smell from the Highfields Waste Disposal Site (landfill) opposite the Horse and Jockey pub for several months.

I personally live approximately half a mile from the site and the smell is so bad particularly through the night, it leeches into my home even when the doors and windows are shut affecting sleep quality and some mornings we wake up feeling physically sick. We have to run steamers through the night with essential oils to disguise the smell and during the day burn candles.

When you wake up you feel trapped because your home smells of a noxious, gassy, eggy stench but you can’t even open your windows because the smell outside is even stronger. On some days I’ve had to leave my home to get a break from the odour because it’s made me feel ill constantly smelling it. You can drive all the way through Brownhills some days before you are free of the smell.

The landfill is opposite a residential home and the Horse and Jockey Public House. After discussions with them they have said the smell is affecting their business and I can only assume it must be having the same affect on the Barron’s Court Hotel which is to the side of the landfill.

I have heard many reasons why we might be getting an increase in the smell i.e weather, but we get this smell when it rains, when's it's sunny or when it's frosty.

Vandalism to the pipes. If this was the case why haven't the pipes been fixed by now? We've been experiencing this problem increasingly since the summer. Emergency work? What will the time frame be for this work to be carried out.

As a community we've made many complaints to the environment agency, Walsall Council, the landfill site itself, local councillors and MPs.

This petition is to show them just how many people are really affected by the smell whether it be passers by having the awful stench coming into their cars and buses, our children walking to school, joggers having it hit the back of their throat while they are trying to get some exercise, our local community and businesses trying to make a living and the local residents who have to wake up to this smell day in, day out where there really is no escape."

2.2. Background

The Highfield South site has operated as a landfill since April 2008. It is licenced to take non-hazardous waste and inert soils for reuse in the restoration of the landfill site. The Site is located approximately 4.6 km northeast of the centre of Walsall and 2.1 km northwest of the centre of Aldridge. The residential area of Shelfield is to the southwest and Walsall Wood to the northeast.

The Highfields Landfill is managed by Enovert North Ltd, part of Enovert Management Ltd. Enovert operate 14 landfill sites across South East, South West, Midlands, Wales and the North West including a second site in Walsall Borough, the Vigo Utopia Landfill in Walsall Wood.

The Environment Agency (EA) is the primary regulator and is therefore responsible for administering the environmental permit held by Enovert North Ltd. This governs the operational practices of the Highfields landfill, setting out conditions that among other matters stipulate permissible waste types and handling, emissions and monitoring. As the primary regulator the EA are empowered to exercise direct controls or sanctions concerning the site.

The Council are under a statutory duty to take reasonable steps to investigate complaints of alleged nuisance. In the case of installations (i.e. premises and operations) that are subject to permits issued by the EA, these powers are restricted. Due to certain constraints, officers are only empowered to issue an abatement notice that is open to legal challenge under a statutory appeal process. Moreover, this course of action is unlikely to achieve a speedy resolution if improvement works and measure are underway as requirements on behalf of the EA to improve the management and control of odour.

2.3. Response to complaints about the Highfields Landfill

Since November 2019, there has been an increase in complaints to both the EA and the Council regarding the odour emanating from the Highfields Landfill site.

In response to increasing complaints, Pollution Control Officers have been in regular liaison with colleagues at the Environment Agency. Visits to site both individually and collectively have been undertaken to monitor progress of remediation works and to assess odour

The EA has agreed work to be carried out on behalf of the operator in respect to a number of improvement actions. In light of this, specialist equipment has been employed to locate sources of odour and various repairs and upgrades have been undertaken concerning the gas extraction infrastructure; leachate (liquid produced by decomposing waste) tanks; leachate pumping; and the gas engine that is deployed on site to burn landfill gases. The EA have also accepted a surface capping programme that is now underway to seal parts of previously tipped areas. Furthermore, a gas audit has been undertaken by the EA, the findings of which are presently awaited.

The operator has advanced a commitment to resolving the situation and continues to undertake measures to control malodours. This was confirmed at the (reinstated) Highfield Liaison Committee meeting held on 7th February, with the company providing details on the installation of new gas wells, along with improved gas tight seals around leachate wells, increased gas extraction, added capacity for leachate (liquid) storage and use of synthetic capping media. Further capping work to seal the older waste cells is scheduled to continue over the coming weeks.

In response to concerns regarding the health impacts with particular reference to emissions of hydrogen sulphide gas, Pollution Control Officers commenced *ad hoc* monitoring on the 3rd February. No hydrogen sulphide was detected; however, officers acknowledge that the smell of leachate and/or landfill gas was present. In this context it is noteworthy that hydrogen sulphide is only one several known typical components of landfill gas that produces malodour, and whilst it is common place to assign such odours as hydrogen sulphide, this is not necessarily the case.

Public Health England have been requested to provide a position statement concerning the implications of living in the vicinity of Highfield landfill site. They have responded by confirming that living close to a well-managed landfill site does not pose a significant risk to human health. Based on the information and evidence collated to date, officers do not have evidence to demonstrate that living near Highfields landfill to poses a significant risk to health.

Notwithstanding, the EA are now looking into setting up environmental air quality monitoring equipment in the vicinity of the site to further assess gas emissions. An update on this is expected at the next Liaison Committee meeting in March.

2.4. Community Engagement

Due to the wide reaching impact of the odour from the Highfields landfill, the EA and Walsall Council are working collaboratively to keep local residents and their representatives updated.

On the 8th January a briefing note, summarising the position of the Council, the Environment Agency and the site operator Enovert North Ltd with respect to the Highfields Landfill was issued to Councillors.

On the 10th January, Council officers and Environment Agency representatives met with Wendy Morton MP, local Councillors and a representative of local residents to provide an update on progress at the site and actions planned to deal with the odour.

On the 24th January, a newsletter was shared with local residents via social media using the petition page and a dedicated webpage was launched on the 5th February. In addition, newsletters and other relevant information has been posted on the Council's website.

Author

Kathryn Moreton

Group Manager [Highways & Environment]

Tel: 01922 65 8031

Email: Kathryn.Moreton@Walsall.gov.uk

Simon Neilson

Executive Director

19th February 2019