

Whinney Hill Landfill Site, Accrington

8 April 2025

Questions and Answers Document

This document has been produced by the Environment Agency, with input from the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA), Natural England and Lancashire County Council, to answer questions from the community regarding Whinney Hill landfill site. This document will be updated as and when new questions are raised.

Multi-partner working

Q: What organisations are involved with resolving the issues at Whinney Hill landfill site?

A: The Environment Agency is working with a range of partners to resolve the issues at the site. These include Natural England, Lancashire County Council, UKHSA, and Hyndburn Borough Council. Each organisation has a different role in providing advice or regulating under specific legislation at Whinney Hill landfill site:

Environment Agency - We are the primary regulator of the waste activities at the site in accordance with the Environmental Permitting (England & Wales) Regulations. The site is operated by SUEZ Recycling and Recovery Lancashire Ltd who hold the environmental permit for the site. The most appropriate way to deal with the current issues on the site is through that permit.

Natural England - Advise on the natural environment in England, helping to protect England's nature and landscapes for people to enjoy.

Lancashire County Council - Have a dual role in planning control and public health guidance for Lancashire.

UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) - Provides the government and the public with health information based on evidence and information available.

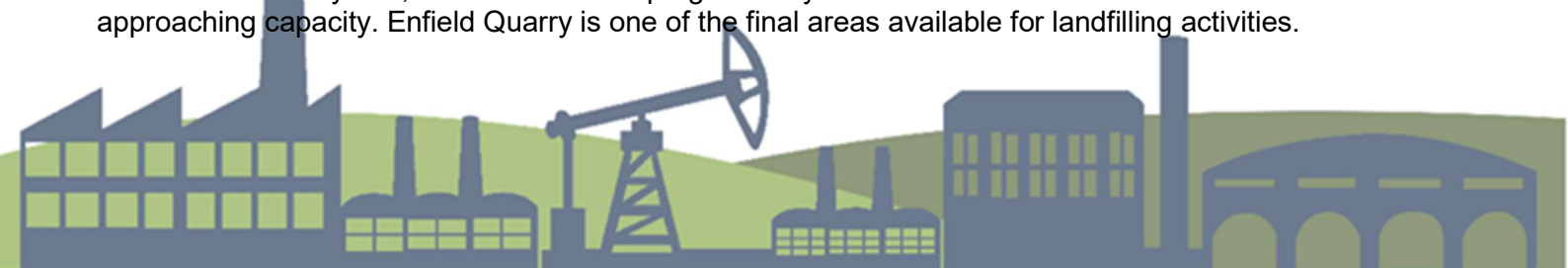
Hyndburn Borough Council - Have a duty for monitoring under statutory nuisance legislation.

Odour

Q: Why have I noticed odour from the site recently?

A: In late 2023 the operator of the site, SUEZ Recycling and Recovery Lancashire Ltd, moved landfilling operations to a new location within its permitted area, known as Enfield Quarry. Enfield Quarry sits to the eastern end of the site and is closer to residential areas than previous operations. The process of handling and landfilling waste material does inevitably generate odour, the closer it is to residential areas the greater the risk of impacting the community.

Over a number of years, the site has been progressively filled with waste and the landfill is now approaching capacity. Enfield Quarry is one of the final areas available for landfilling activities.



Q: What is the Environment Agency doing about the issues at the site?

A: The Environment Agency is the primary regulator of the waste activities at the site in accordance with the Environmental Permitting (England & Wales) Regulations. We have made it clear to SUEZ that they must take all necessary steps to minimise the impacts caused by their operations. We also expect them to keep the community informed about what they are doing to mitigate the impacts.

We have increased our regulatory visits and introduced frequent visits to the local community to check on odour and pests. We will continue carrying out these checks until the issues are resolved.

We are working hard to ensure that SUEZ complies with environmental regulations and minimises the impact on local residents.

Q: What is SUEZ doing to reduce the impact of odour on the community?

A: The specifics of what is happening day to day on the site and the detail of future plans is for SUEZ to describe. SUEZ have created a community website for Whinney Hill to keep residents up to date. You can view that at <https://www.suez.co.uk/en-gb/whinney-hill>. The Environment Agency are insistent that SUEZ provide assurances that all control measures, such as waste cover and landfill gas controls are in place and effective on a daily basis. This is the requirement of the environmental permit.

Q: What are the different types of odour at a landfill site?

A: There are two main odour sources that the community may notice coming from the landfill:

1. The waste as it is deposited can produce an odour like a household dustbin
2. The gases produced by the biological and chemical breakdown of the waste over time producing a variety of odours including a vinegar, ammonia and sulphur (rotten egg).

The waste that goes to Whinney Hill landfill is largely from household bin collections in East Lancashire. In warmer weather the waste from these bin collections tends to be more odorous, this then increases odours at the landfill site when it is tipped.

As waste breaks down in the landfill it generates landfill gas. This gas will tend to rise through the landfill. The rate of landfill gas generation depends on number of factors such as the age of the waste, the type of waste, how wet it is and the weather conditions. Landfill gas typically contains methane (approximately 65%) and carbon dioxide (35%) which are not odorous gases. There will typically be a range of other compounds at relatively low concentrations within the landfill gas known as trace gases. These trace gases can contain substances which cause landfill gas to be odorous.

Q: What are the odour limits for Whinney Hill landfill operations, and how are they enforced?

A: There are no set limits for how odorous a waste site can be. However, operators must produce an odour management plan outlining the appropriate measures necessary to prevent odour pollution, or minimise it when prevention is not practicable.

When regulating odour pollution at Whinney Hill landfill we follow the 'H4 Odour Management Guidance - how to comply with your environmental permit'. You can view a copy of that at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/environmental-permitting-h4-odour-management>



Q: Do you monitor air quality to assess the impact of the site's emissions on residents' health?

A: The Environment Agency requires an operator to undertake some emissions monitoring on site, but this does not include a specific assessment related to residents' health. Where necessary, we work with the UKHSA on assessing health impacts.

Whilst odour is unpleasant, monitoring data indicates that the levels of hydrogen sulphide, which produces a rotten egg smell, are low at Whinney Hill. Hydrogen sulphide is often present in landfill gas and it can be detected by olfactory senses (smell) at very low levels. This has been the focus of health concerns at other landfill sites, such as Whalley's Quarry and Jameson Road.

Pests

Q: Why are there so many gulls at the site?

A: The gull population at the site fluctuates but this year numbers appear to have risen without an obvious cause. An increase in gull numbers is normally a result of the presence of a readily accessible food supply and habitats where they can build nests and breed. The landfill is an environment that provides a source of food and large areas of land where they can stay relatively undisturbed.

Q: What is SUEZ doing to reduce the impact of gulls on the community?

A: SUEZ are taking steps to manage the gulls in line with the environmental permit. They are expected to cover the waste at the end of each day to reduce the food available for birds scavenging on the landfill. During our regulatory visits they have been deploying a variety of other bird control methods, such as cannons and birds of prey to disperse the gulls away from the site. However, these measures may disperse the large population of gulls into the local community.

The exact detail of what SUEZ are doing, or what they are considering to minimise the impact of the gulls is for them to describe. This does include those already listed within their pest management plan but is not limited to just those measures. We expect SUEZ to consider all measures available to them.

Gulls, their eggs and nests are protected by law under the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981, as amended). Harming them and killing them can result in large fines and criminal charges.

Q: How does the Environment Agency monitor and ensure compliance with pest control regulations at landfill sites?

A: This is done through observation on announced and unannounced inspections of the site. Our officers review the pest management plan, which is required by the environmental permit. This sets out the appropriate measures the operator must take to prevent pests or minimise them when prevention is not practicable. During a visit the inspector will ensure that the pest management actions are being undertaken.



Q: What enforcement actions can be taken if SUEZ fail to manage pest control effectively?

A: If the site is not employing all appropriate measures as set out in the pest management plan, or trying other additional measures not set out in the plan, SUEZ could be scored as a breach on Compliance Assessment Reports and this could be escalated to an enforcement notice.

SUEZ have confirmed at recent community liaison meetings that they are engaged with Natural England and looking to adopt additional measures to control gulls. Natural England have requested SUEZ employ 'shoot to scare' ahead of Natural England finally determining a lethal control licence and works are underway to ensure the site is fully risk assessed for this activity.

Q: Why have I seen an increase in Crows at the site?

A: Corvids will exploit any easy source of food and landfill sites are one of them. At this time of year and especially following cold snaps they will congregate on these sites in quite high numbers to get access to the easy pickings that landfill sites provide.

Q: Is the site responsible for the increase in rats that have been seen in the community?

A: We have seen an increase in reports of rats in the community over recent months. Rats tend to stay on a landfill site where there is a more abundant food source. However, as SUEZ adopt measures to better cover waste for odour control this may change some rodent behaviour. During a recent community liaison meeting, SUEZ confirmed they were working with a rodent specialist and had laid new traps to assess rodent numbers on site.

Lethal control licences for the gull population

Natural England advise on the natural environment in England and are responsible for issuing licences for activities that affect birds. They have provided the following responses to community questions.

Q: Have Natural England been engaging with SUEZ?

A: Natural England have been in contact with SUEZ regarding the presence of a large population of gulls at Whinney Hill landfill. Natural England's Wildlife Licensing Service visited the site in December 2025 and are in regular contact with SUEZ supporting non-lethal methods that they are currently employing onsite.

Q: Can the gull population be culled?

A: Licences for lethal control can be issued as a last resort by Natural England, where a clear risk to public health or public safety is shown. Lethal control licences are used to enhance non-lethal scaring measures and deter the remaining live gulls, as they learn that the area isn't safe.

To date, Natural England have received a licence application for lethal control of gulls at Whinney Hill landfill. Although Natural England are in the process of assessing this licence, it is important to note that if any licences were granted to control birds, these would be used to enhance non-lethal scaring measures and deter the remaining gulls from the area through reinforced learning.



Licences to control gulls are used periodically to enact behavioural change in birds and are not used for mass culling. This means that actions under licence show change over time as opposed to an immediate resolution.

To find out more about non-lethal measures that can be employed both without and in support of a licence, you can refer to Natural England's publicly available Wildlife management advice notice: legal measures for managing wild birds at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/wildlife-management-advice-notice-legal-measures-for-managing-wild-birds-wml-gu01>

Planning, lorry traffic and pollution

Lancashire County Council are responsible for land use planning and highways. They have provided the following responses to community questions. You can view the relevant planning permission relating to the site at: <https://planningregister.lancashire.gov.uk/Planning/Display/11/03/0017> and <https://planningregister.lancashire.gov.uk/Planning/Display/11/11/0082/2>.

Q: Who is responsible for issues relating to lorry traffic and air pollution, arising from the landfill?

A: Lancashire County Council are responsible for the land use planning and highways. The planning application for the Global Scheme proposal for Whinney Hill in 2003 (ref 11/03/0017) was the subject of an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIR). The EIA process included an assessment of traffic impact and the air pollution impacts that would result from the anticipated volume of Heavy Goods Vehicle (HGV) movements.

Q: Are there any restrictions on the number of vehicle movements allowed daily to the site to minimise disruption to the local community?

A: Condition 19 of planning permission 11/03/0017 controls the level of HGV movements to the site. The condition limits HGVs leaving the site to 1100 between Monday to Friday, with no more than 230 leaving the site on any one day, no more than 120 leaving the site on Saturdays and no more than 10 leaving the site on Sundays.

Q: What steps are being taken to reduce emissions and dust pollution from these lorries?

A: Conditions 17 and 18 of the planning permission 11/03/0017 deal with the installation and use of wheel cleaning facilities to ensure that HGVs leaving the site do not deposit mud on the public highway which might give rise to dust issues.

Q: Has Lancashire County Council assessed the impact of road damage and increased traffic congestion caused by these vehicles?

A: The EIA accompanying the 2003 planning application (ref 11/03/0017) included a traffic assessment that examined road capacity and congestion issues on the highways that would be affected by landfill traffic.



Q: What is the agreed landfill height and the date of the last survey to ensure it remains within its permitted limits?

A: With any landfill site there are two levels that are typically referred to around the height of a landfill, these are 'pre-settlement' and 'final' levels. As waste is placed in a landfill, it will start to breakdown and will 'settle' to final levels.

The agreed pre-settlement heights are shown on drawing ref 3.2F that accompanied planning application 11/11/0082. This application was to revise the phasing and restoration details as contained in planning permission 11/03/0017. Condition 38 of the planning permission requires SUEZ to submit an annual monitoring report which includes a topographic survey of current levels over the site. The last monitoring report including a survey was submitted in March 2024. At that stage the tipping levels appeared to be within the limits shown on drawing 3.2F.

We are aware that that some void space has been sacrificed in the current cell to move operations further away from residential property to reduce the impacts on the community. We expect SUEZ to submit its annual monitoring report soon.

Q: What is the rationale that determines the proximity for tipping to the distance of residences?

A: There are no distances set down in legislation or other planning advice relating to the minimum distance between residential properties and landfill operations. There are guidance levels in relation to noise at residential properties. However, at Whinney Hill there was already existing planning permission dating from the 1980's that permitted landfill activities within Enfield Quarry in close proximity to residential properties. This represented an established fall-back position when the 2003 planning application was determined.

General

Q: Will the odour and pests be completely eradicated at the site?

A: No operational landfill could ever promise to be completely odour and pest free. This is mainly due to the nature of waste materials and the operations and processes that occur on site. There may be occasions where odour and pest levels do increase, however these should be short lived and not have a prolonged impact on a local community. The Environment Agency would expect all appropriate measures to be employed by the operator to make sure that the risk is managed.

Q: Why won't the Environment Agency issue an enforcement notice to SUEZ requiring full compliance with their environmental permit conditions?

A: SUEZ are following their procedures as set out by its environmental permit to try to minimise the impact on the community. They are adopting the industry standards, known within our guidance as 'appropriate measures'. SUEZ are also bringing in consultant expertise and taking advice from other government bodies. However, If SUEZ do fail to act on advice, not undertake or consider all available measures in a timely manner, or if all have been undertaken and do not improve the situation at the site, then we will consider regulatory notices to bring into compliance, reduce or suspend waste activities at the site. At this current point, not all avenues have been explored so we are not at that stage yet. We understand this is a difficult message to relay to the community, but following due process can take time before improvements are seen.



Q: What does the Environment Agency consider an acceptable level of waste coverage within the tip face, particularly at the end of each working day by SUEZ?

A: We are no longer prescriptive as to cover thickness and type at landfills as there are a wide range of materials available, each with different properties and effectiveness. As part of the environmental management plan, SUEZ must comply with their cover management plan which they are currently doing. We are actively discussing this with SUEZ when we inspect the site to ensure the most appropriate measures are being undertaken.

Q: Can you close the site down?

A: We expect SUEZ to meet the conditions set out in its environmental permit and work to their environmental management plan, trying all measures available to reduce the impact of odour and pests on the community.

If SUEZ do not undertake, or consider, all measures needed to reduce the impact the site is having on the community then we can escalate our enforcement response. We have options which can make the operators comply with conditions on the permit and, in more severe cases where we feel the operators are not doing enough, we can issue regulatory enforcement notices so that an operator takes steps to make improvements. We can also consider regulatory notices that can reduce or suspend waste activities at the site.

Health impacts

The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) provides the government and the public with health information based on evidence and information available. They have provided the following information.

Q: What can I smell?

A: The odour pollution from waste at the landfill site. Waste odour is caused by fresh waste rapidly decomposing and tends to come from vehicles travelling to and from the site and whilst it is tipped. This is similar to the odours that are contained within a domestic bin. It poses little risk to human health and can be tackled by depositing the waste quickly and covering it with soils called “daily cover”.

Q: Are the odours causing or going to cause health effects?

A: The human nose is very sensitive. Many things have a strong smell at levels at which there are no direct harmful effects to health. However, strong smells are unpleasant and can impact on wellbeing leading to stress and anxiety. Some people may also experience symptoms, such as nausea, headaches or dizziness, as a reaction to strong smells, even when the substances that cause those smells are themselves not harmful to health. Following exposure to any substance, the adverse health effects depend on several factors, including the amount to which you are exposed (dose), the way in which you are exposed, the duration of exposure, the form of the chemical and if you were exposed to any other chemicals.



Q: What can I do to reduce my risk?

A: Individuals can close doors and windows whilst the smell is present and then open them to vent the smell from the premises when the smell has cleared.

Q: What symptoms may I experience as a result of odour?

A: Short-term transient health effects may be experienced such as irritation to the eyes, nose and throat. People who have health conditions that affect breathing, such as asthma, may experience increased frequency and/or severity of symptoms. With continuing exposure, these effects may be prolonged but are not anticipated to continue long-term once exposure is reduced.

Q: What can I do to reduce symptoms caused by odour?

A: To limit the effects of the odour as much as possible, we would advise:

- Close windows if there is an outdoor odour and open them once any outdoor odour has reduced. You could consider closing windows at night and opening them in the morning in the absence of odour.
- Ventilate your property when there is no odour outdoors.
- Contact NHS 111 or your GP if you have concerns about your individual circumstances and require health advice.

Who to contact

Q: Who do I report incidents of odour and gulls to?

A: We encourage people to report things to us on our 24-hour incident hotline: 0800 807060. Or via email: incident_communication_service@environment-agency.gov.uk

Reporting things to us helps us to build up a picture of the extent and impact of the pest and odour issue within the community.

Q: Who do I contact about health concerns relating to the site?

A: Members of the community should contact NHS 111 or their GP if they have concerns about their health and need advice.

Q: Why doesn't the Environment Agency provide feedback when I report incidents?

A: We don't provide feedback for each report as per our organisational policy, but you will get a reference number so you know it has been recorded. The reference number will be provided to you either by email or verbally over the phone depending on how you make the report. These reports are then flagged to the site inspector who looks at all reports to identify the issue, location and likely causes. The reports are then sent to the site (minus personal information) and the operator is asked to take immediate action in the areas that have been identified as causing an issue. We then monitor the situation and check on these issues when we carry out our inspections at the site.



Landfill sites are dynamic environments and issues change frequently. For example, we may see increased odour complaints when gas wells are being drilled, but when those wells are completed and attached to the extraction system they will reduce the likelihood of odour. It is important that we know when there are problems so that we can target our resources to the biggest issues and work with the site to resolve them.

Staying informed

Q: How can I stay updated with information relating to the site?

A: We have created a dedicated webpage to share up to date information about Whinney Hill landfill site. You can access the webpage on the following link -

<https://consult.environment-agency.gov.uk/cumbria-and-lancashire/information-on-whinney-hill-landfill-site>

You can also sign up to our mailing list through the dedicated webpage to receive information produced by the Environment Agency when it is released.

We're committed to keeping the community informed about our actions and progress at the site through attendance at scheduled community liaison events, community updates and keeping the webpage updated with current information.

