

## Walleys Quarry

### Public meeting by Zoom, 3 August 2021

- Good evening everybody and welcome to this multi-agency engagement event tonight. My name is Rob Barber and I'm the Deputy Chief Fire Officer for Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service and I've been asked to chair tonight's event. The purpose of tonight's event is to explain how partners are continuing to work closely together to address the issues at Walleys Quarry, recognising the significant impact on local people.

I'm a resident of Newcastle under Lyme and I personally understand these impacts upon our communities, both physically and mentally, and I can assure you that all agencies are working hard to try and overcome these issues and tonight's event will explain what actions have been taken recently.

We're all here this evening to listen to your concerns but please may I ask that we retain a respectful and dignified approach, both during the session and afterwards, as we all want to alleviate the issues currently being faced but we've got to do that in a respectful manner. I recognise that not everyone can access these online events and we will be looking to hold a face-to-face event once we're able to do so. We will also be asking how the public would want to see these engagement events develop in the future later on this evening.

For those who could not attend the last public event I would just like to clarify that the management of the issues associated with the quarry is now being dealt with, with what's known as a strategic co-ordination group. Basically, this is a higher level of management and oversight and provides all strategic leaders with an understanding of the issues locally. It also provides a link to central government, in order to raise the local issues at a national level.

We have a panel of speakers this evening from the key agencies involved and we will be able to update you on progress being made as well as taking questions following a short presentation. I'm just going to introduce the panel members now.

From Staffordshire County Council we have Dr Richard Harling MBE. Staffordshire County Council are responsible for protecting and improving the health of the population within Staffordshire. It's also responsible for determining and monitoring planning permissions. Richard is here to answer

questions regarding the health of the population within Staffordshire and not any planning questions.

From Newcastle under Lyme Borough Council, we have Martin Hamilton. Newcastle under Lyme Borough Council are responsible for monitoring air quality across the area including the assessment of statutory nuisance.

From the West Midlands Environment Agency, we have Clare Dinnis and Marc Liddeth. The EA are responsible for regulating the compliance of the environmental permit held by the landfill operator.

From Public Health England we have Nic Coetzee and Ovnair Sepai. Public Health England are responsible for providing specialist air quality and toxicological advice. Public Health England provide evidence-based, scientific expertise. Public Health England has no statutory powers in relation to the odorous site.

And finally, from Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Clinical Commissioning Group, we have Dr Alison Bradley. The North Staffs CCG is responsible for commissioning healthcare services for the population it serves, which includes urgent and emergency care, GP and community health services and mental health support.

In addition to the panellists, we also have Simon and Jack from Wilson Sherriff who are helping with the facilitation of tonight's event.

I just need to cover off a few housekeeping issues related to the software that we're using and I'm going to ask Jack from Wilson Sherriff, just to talk us through the software and to make sure the event can run smoothly, so over to you Jack.

- Thanks. Hi everyone, thank you so much for coming. I'll try and make this fairly brief so we can get to your questions. This is just a general troubleshooting slide. So, you will have already joined audio because you wouldn't have been able to hear me otherwise but just in case someone hasn't managed to join audio, this is here and you need to click on this join audio button, otherwise your audio won't connect. If you've got a mute and unmute in the lower left-hand corner, then you've already done it. What you might have trouble with if you can't hear, is you may not have the correct audio device selected and to do that you need to click on the arrow next to your microphone and make sure that the right speaker and microphone are

selected. As you can see, I have four different speakers here and only one of them is actually my headphones so it's worth checking to make sure that you've got the right one. If all else fails, then try turning it off and on again. Leaving and re-joining the meeting can resolve issues because it's technology and sometimes these things don't work out. I'm just going to leave this up for ten seconds or so, just in case there's somebody following along who can't hear my voice and then I'm going to move on to the main tools that we're going to be using for this session.

Okay, so hopefully everybody who needs that has done what they need to. What we're going to be using today, this session is a little more secure than usual because we are sharing the link publicly. That means your contributions are going to be done through the Q&A mainly and in order to do that, you just click on the Q&A button at the bottom and submit your question. All the panellists will be able to see your question and they can comment on it. If they comment on it, it moves it to the answered column but that doesn't necessarily mean we've answered it. So, if your question gets moved to the answered column without it being answered, it doesn't mean that your question has been dismissed, it just means that people may have written who they are fielding that question to or something like that.

The other command that should be on your bar is the Raise Hand button. That just notifies the host and co-host of who would like to speak so if you put a question through we may ask you to speak and if we ask 'who put this question through', it may be useful to put your hand up.

When we ask you to speak, you will be invited to speak, and you will see this prompt come up and it just invites you to unmute or mute your microphone. And these are the three things you have to bear in mind today. The Q&A function is how you do most of your questions, Raise Hand if you want to speak and then unmute your microphone when we invite you to speak. I hope that was clear.

- Thanks Jack, that was really useful. I will endeavour to manage the questions in an appropriate order but please bear with me as I try to navigate through the session. If we can now move on to the short presentation that we've got from the multi-agency panellists, and we'll start off with slide one, which is Martin Hamilton – slide one please.

- Okay, thank you Chair. I'm going to cover off all three points that are on slide one. They all relate to work that the council has been doing over the past number of months and which culminated with a special meeting of the council's cabinet on the 21<sup>st</sup> July. Over the past few months our environmental health officers have been reviewing, collecting and reviewing a range of data about the impact of the odours of Walleys Quarry in the community in order to identify whether or not they constitute a statutory nuisance. So that's a technical level of annoyance and nuisance arising from the odours, and takes into account not just the strength of the odour but the time of day, the duration of which the odours are taken and the location.

So, by the 21<sup>st</sup> of July there was quite a raft of information that had been collected so we have looked at the air quality data that we have collected with colleagues from the Environment Agency and the County Council from the four static air quality monitoring units that are around the site. We've also collected data in a number of sample homes using hand-held air quality monitors and we've also taken quite a range of observations by environmental health officers, we've looked at the complaints data that we've had and also the impact statements that have been provided to the council by members of the public who are experiencing these odours on a regular basis. We've also commissioned a number of pieces of advice by experts in this area, both looking at the analysis of the air quality but also an expert in landfill so that we can better understand what may be happening on the site.

At the meeting on the 21<sup>st</sup>, Cabinet heard that the Head of Environmental Services at the council had analysed the information and concluded that it did amount to a statutory nuisance and therefore puts us in a position as a Local Authority where we are able to take the action that we can, which is to serve an abatement notice on those giving rise to the nuisance.

This is very much a matter for technically experienced officers and qualified officers to take as opposed to Cabinet. But what Cabinet considered was the range of evidence that we were underpinning that decision on, the financial implications of moving forward with this, the legal process and also the risks that would be associated with the abatement process.

Having reached the decision that the odours from Walleys Quarry amount to a statutory nuisance, we are now under a duty to serve an abatement notice and that would take the form of a notice that requires those responsible to stop that nuisance. As with so many aspects of this particular issue, the abatement

notice that we would serve is subject to...there's an opportunity for appeal there so one of the things we've done in allocating funds to this is to anticipate the fact that there will be...there may well be an appeal and therefore we would need to go through the process of defending that.

The process that we would go through is that we will shortly be in a position to actually serve that notice. You may ask, why has it not happened already? There are I's to dot and T's to cross in terms of getting the wording and the focus of that absolutely right and accurate so that it can withstand the appeal process. When the matter is appealed, it would then fall to magistrate's court, we would then go through a process there and on anticipating that we would win any such appeal and would have an abatement notice put in place, there would be a requirement on the operator to abate the nuisance that residents are currently experiencing.

The impact of this for the council and for residents actually happens further downstream. So, the ability to take action in relation to that enforcement action falls into place if a situation arises where in the future there are odours from the site at a level of a statutory nuisance and then the council would be in a position to seek to prosecute for failing to abide by an abatement notice.

What we've done so far is establish...and I'm sure residents will take a view, no surprise there...but have established that there is a statutory nuisance and then we put the abatement notice in place, we will undoubtedly go through some legal process with that and assuming that we would win that process, we would actually then get the abatement position to assert that. So, it's quite a lengthy process from the point when the abatement notice is served. We will no doubt be involved in legal discussions for some time but until we see quite what the nature of any appeal will be, we would be unable to judge quite how long.

Cabinet earmarked the funds for us to be able to progress with this and to be able to make all progress with taking the only action that the council can in term of this, which is this statutory nuisance abatement process.

Rob, would you like to pick up the next speaker?

- Thank you, Martin. The next slide is going to be presented to you by Ovnair and Nic so over to you please.

- Yes, thank you and good evening. I'm Ovnair Sepai, I'm a toxicologist at Public Health England. I think it was mentioned at the last meeting, Public Health England's remit is to protect public health. We in the toxicology department are responsible for the risk assessments that you would have seen as published on the Environment Agency website.

The first thing we did was to evaluate the available guidance values that are published by international authoritative bodies, and determine which guidance values, which comparators we would use to carry out our risk assessment. Once we received exposure data from the Environment Agency, we then compared the exposure levels to the appropriate guidance values that you can see in the top right-hand box, in order to determine the level of risk to the general population.

You'll see from the graph on the left-hand side of this slide, the four monitoring points, that's 1, 2, 6 and 9. And the summary data for the months of March, April, May and now we've got June data. You'll see that MMF1, 2 and 6, the levels are generally below  $5 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$  but MMF9 has been consistently higher and significantly higher compared to the other three monitoring points.

The value that we've compared it to is what's called an intermediate value, that's between two weeks and up to a year of exposure is  $30 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$  and you'll see that all the levels are below  $30 \mu\text{g}$ , so the intermediate value and there is an encouraging reduction in the levels that we see from the one site, the number 9, which had been showing higher levels.

In summary, the Hydrogen Sulphide data up to June shows continuing exposure with levels showing a promising downward trend. As these levels are below the intermediate guidance value that I just mentioned, we expect the risk to long term physical health to be small. However, you'll see that the levels, especially of MMF9, if you look at the bottom right-hand square, which shows you the percentage time that the odour threshold has been exceeded and that threshold is  $7 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ . And again, unsurprisingly it's MMF9 that has exceeded that 7 value at the greatest percentage.

So, although the levels are dropping, we still feel that as they are above the odour threshold and hence there is still a concern for the exposure, and we would want to see a continued decline. Therefore, you will see in our risk assessment that Public Health England have strongly recommended that more

measures are taken to reduce the odour from this landfill site.

Thank you.

- Thank you Ovnair. Moving on to the next slide, this is Staffordshire County Council and Richard Harling is going to take this one.

- Thank you Chair. We've been monitoring the impact on the health of local residents. There are a range of sources through which people are reporting both the odour and symptoms. They include the impact statements to Newcastle under Lyme Borough Council, a survey conducted by Aaron Bell MP and the symptom tracker which is available on the County Council's website.

There are three types of symptoms being reported. The first group relate to the odour and they are typically complaints of feeling sick, headaches, dizziness and disturbed sleep. Secondly, relate to the hydrogen sulphide gas. Those are things like stinging eyes and difficulty breathing which appear to be particularly serious in people with underlying problems such as asthma. And thirdly, reports of mental health problems such as feeling anxious or depressed.

There is a very good correlation between proximity to Walleys Quarry landfill site and symptom reports so symptoms are reported much more frequently and severely by people who live within three miles of the site. You've heard from Public Health England that their expert advice is that the risk to long-term health is likely to be low. However, we are getting more and more concerned about the impact on health, both in the short term and in the long term because this situation has been going on for so long and because we do not yet have a clear timescale for when it might be resolved.

Thank you Chair.

- Thank you Richard and now for the final slide we're going to move on to our Environment Agency colleagues and that's Clare and Marc please.

- Thanks Rob and good evening everyone. An update from the Environment Agency around our continuation of the strategy which we mentioned previously at other meetings. But for those of you joining us for the first time and maybe are not aware of the strategy, which is to contain, capture and destroy, more information can be found on Citizen Space.

What I'm going to cover off is just the three elements under each of those headings. So, under Contain, this is all about containing the gas and the

emissions that come from the landfill site. As people are aware, we have instructed the operator to cover a portion of the landfill through capping, that is through permanent capping and temporary capping of certain cells and that has equated to about 50% of the landfill site being capped. The operator has now gone out and looked at technology from across the seas in the US and this is a material called Posi-Shell and that Posi-Shell will be used to cover certain areas of the landfill site on very steep flanks. That's going to be approximately 17,000m<sup>2</sup> of temporary capping using Posi-Shell and that will take the capping of the landfill site to around 70% once that has been installed.

That is making its way to the site. It is going to be a material that we have looked at with the operator. They have provided us with a method statement, and we are satisfied with how they're going to be utilising that material. And as that is installed, we'll be closely monitoring its full effectiveness on any future emissions from the site and the area it's covering.

In terms of the Capture, this is around the piping wells that are all part of the landfill gas management system. The wells, which take the gas from the actual ground from the landfill to the gas management plant, again there are a number of improvements the operator is currently making on the site. They will be installing up to 21 new operational pin wells. Some have already gone into effect and there are more being installed this week. We are obviously keeping a close eye on making sure they are keeping to the timeframes on the installation of those pin wells.

And all those pin wells along with some more deep wells that will be going in between now and September to extract the gas for the landfill site will start to pull gas away. And that should start to see improvement around the gasses that are being emitted from the site.

In terms of the part around the Destroy element, this is now focussing on the gas management plan and the destruction of the gas, either through engines which are converting it to energy or through layers of burning.

There has been a new revised gas management plan submitted to us by the operator. They had the deadline date of 31<sup>st</sup> July to get that revised plan to us, which they did do. We have already started work over the weekend and continue to do so to revise that document and look at all the improvements and actions that they say they're going to make around the gas management, and we will be reporting back through the community on those once we have

agreed all the actions through the operator and the gas management contractor on how that would be taken forward.

I'll quickly hand over to Clare now who will give an update with regards reporting incidents through to the Environment Agency.

- Thank you, Marc, and good evening everybody. So, actually I can see, whilst we've been going through the presentation that there's a question related to this as well but one of the things that we wanted to talk to you about tonight was reporting and that's the reports that you make to us at the Environment Agency, because I know this has been something that has been really important on social media, it's something that has been raised to us over a number of months.

The reports that you make are important to us, absolutely they are and they're part of helping us to understand the picture of what's going on but they're not controlling our actions and they're absolutely not controlling our resources, so where people have said that they are making two or three reports a day and they don't feel they are being logged as individual reports, that isn't making any difference to how we are determining what we're doing on site or to any of the actions we're taking there. But, that said, we do still want to hear from you, and we do still want to hear those reports.

One of the other things that we're really conscious of is that often there are lengthy waits on telephone lines – it's been difficult to get through. Although we have increased our staff on those lines, we are trying to look at other things that we can do to make it easier for you to do that reporting.

We've had an email template that has been there, but in the background, we've also been working on an online form for you to be able to report in to us. We hope that that will make it easier and quicker for you to be able to do but we've also talked about this - it would be wrong of me not to say that we also think that it would be better for the Environment Agency, because those lines that are there, the incident report lines are there to tell us about things that we don't already know about.

Some of the delays in doing this have been simple delays in terms of government IT and the way that we need to do this, but we have managed to get this going and to get it going quicker than we ordinarily would be able to. We've tested a form with a very small number of community members who have started to give us feedback on that already. And really importantly, some

of the feedback that they have given us is that what they tested is better than the email form, so that is good. They have also given us some other information which we are going to work on.

We've released the form, it is available through the Citizen Space page now, you can access it tonight, you can report on it now but it's not going to stand still. We will be continuing to evolve it. At the moment that form will come to our staff in our incident centre and you will then be sent an incident reference number, and it will take a number of days to get that incident reference number. The first set of changes will automate that, so as you submit that form you will get an incident reference number immediately and that should be available within the next few weeks and then there will be continued evolution as we hear feedback from you, as we move it towards something that will look a little bit more like the usual government systems that you use for checking your driving licence or for reporting to the NHS or whatever you are doing with gov.uk.

We will also talk to Newcastle Borough Council and Staffordshire Borough Council about whether there is something we can do to share those reports and to collate those together so that people are only having to report it once. But the important bit at the moment is on the Citizen Space page, that is live now, that form is there, and it should be something that is easier for people to use.

All of that said, the phone number is still there, and you can still use the phone number. We would prefer for you to use the form but if there is ever an issue with the form or if it's not something that's working for you then the phone number is still there, and you can still report it in that way.

Thank you Chair.

- Thank you, Clare, thank you Marc and thank you to all the panellists for that presentation. What I'm going to do now is I'm going to move on because we have got a number of questions coming and I want to make sure we can get through as many of those so, I'm going to go to Tom Currie and I see your first question so Tom, your mic will be open, and you can ask your question and I think it's aimed at Public Health England.

- PHE's own literature says that chronic exposure to hydrogen sulphide is likely to be the same as acute exposure. How can you justify the claims about long-term effects given that it says that in your own literature?

- Yes, thank you Tom, I can obviously take that question. So, your question is that our website states that chronic effects are the same as acute effects...
- No – exposure. Chronic exposure is likely to be the same as acute exposure.
- Yes, the effects from chronic exposure are likely to be the same as effects from acute exposure. So, what that means is that the end points that you are seeing, what the health effects are, are likely to be the same so if you have an acute exposure you are likely to get irritation, respiratory discomfort, possibly increased asthma events because of the irritation...
- ...Death. Acute exposure leads to death.
- Sorry, no...let me explain. However, chronic exposure at lower levels will give you the same health effects that I have just mentioned. If you have an acute very high exposure, which is only seen let's say in an occupational setting or if there's some kind of an accident or in some cases where you have for example natural sources of hydrogen sulphide that are at very high levels, will you see death. You will not see death at these lower levels. So, what we have said on our website is absolutely right. So, you have to remember, it's not only exposure level it's also exposure duration and we take all of those aspects into account when we are doing our risk assessments.
- That's not true.
- Thank you Ovnair and thank you Tom for the question.

I'm going to move on now to a question from Louise Wilson and this is aimed at the EA so Marc, could you answer this question. We'll unmute you now Louise.

OK, so we seem to be having a problem with Louise's microphone. I'll read the question and Marc if you would pick it up please.

- We've been led to understand that Red are paying the EAs expenses for dealing with this site. Is this correct and if so, how can we be sure that this does not undermine their duty to protect us?
- OK, thanks Rob and thanks Louise for the question as well. So, in terms of paying expenses, what I'll just clarify in terms of what Walleys Quarry Ltd are being charged for by the Environment Agency so it's something that we call time and materials. So there are specific elements of work that we carry out as an organisation to any operator that we can recharge back to them for the time and or materials that we are deemed under our process and procedures. Just to assure you, that all the elements that we do charge for, in this case to Walleys Quarry Ltd, do not undermine any operational activity or anything that

we do in the future. There isn't, from my perspective and from the Environment Agency's perspective, something that we are charging for that should not be charged for or could be held against us in the future.

I'm hoping that answers the question Rob and apologies that Louise couldn't get through just in case there was a follow up question on that.

- Thank you for that answer. I'm going to move now to a question from Annie Miles. Annie, can you be unmuted and ask your question, I think is for the EA.

- Wonderful. So, I've got a bit of a two-part question really. What assurances can you give residents that they will be notified and evacuated if gas emissions reach dangerous levels, particularly during the night when we are sleeping? Also, how long does it take for tromelled waste to start emitting gas? If it is a matter of weeks, then why are new deliveries of tromelled waste being accepted? Thank you.

- Thanks for those questions and I'm going to put the first part of that question to Martin at Newcastle under Lyme Borough Council.

- Okay, thanks Chair. The monitors that we have at the moment do not have an alarm system on them but what we do know from both the static monitors and also what are called the Jerome handheld monitors we have used in people's houses is that there have really only ever been the two brief instances where the static monitors have picked up hydrogen sulphide levels at a level that was over the World Health Organisation health threshold. The handheld ones we've used in people's homes, there have been lots of instances where it has been above the annoyance, the World Health Organisation annoyance level but not above that health level. So, I think you can get some assurance that as it currently stands, you're not going to see spikes above that level.

Were something to happen that was above that level, I think you'd be looking at some form of incident that gave rise to that and therefore I think we'd really then be looking for either ourselves or the Environment Agency or other people who have got out of hours officers to be picking that up and we would then put in place the well-practiced rest centre plans that we have for responders in terms of civil contingencies like that so, the same as we would do with a fire. But what we don't have is, at the moment a routine alarm to alert people to that particular risk.

- Are there any plans to have an alarm to alert people? Because, what I'm finding is that when I'm sleeping at night and then the gas comes into my house, I wake up and I'm choking on it and it's quite unnerving to think, we're sleeping in this and this is a gas that can kill and you've said yourself that levels

have been above the World Health Organisation limits for health. So, what are the plans to get those alarm systems in place?

- One of the things, I chair a group that is the Community Cell under the SCG, and we've put together a range of options of things that we can look at and one of the options that we have on the table at the moment that we need to evaluate is having some form of alert system put in place. We just need to be satisfied that you could get something that was sufficiently nuanced because what we know about the odours from Walleys Quarry and the hydrogen sulphide from Walleys Quarry is it will be in one direction one day and a different direction another day so, you would need to have something that was actually fairly nuanced so we are looking at that to see whether or not it is something there is merit in introducing.

- How long do you think that will take before that is put in place?

- I couldn't say. We would need to go through the process of really evaluating the value of that but what I would say is, when we've monitored this in people's homes we haven't found instances of where it is above the health threshold and ourselves and County Council are in the process now of setting up another round of in-home monitoring where we will have monitors that we can leave in specimen homes for a period of time that will again allow us to monitor that and see whether we have any instances where they are above that health threshold. But looking at the trajectory of the data so far, that's not something that I'm anticipating.

While I mention those monitors, there was another question, Chair that came in about air quality monitors for schools and I think, when we have that next set of Jeromes to deploy, we can take a look in September at whether there is also some merit in putting those into schools for some periods.

- Thank you for answering my question. I wondered if, I'm not sure if you're the best person or not for my other question which is, how long does it take for tromelled waste to start emitting gas?

- I think that's a question for the Environment Agency.

- Thank you very much. So, my question is, how long does it take for tromelled waste to start emitting gas? If it is a matter of weeks, then why are new deliveries of tromelled waste being accepted into the landfill site? Thank you.

- Rob, I'll take that and thanks very much for the question Annie. In terms of tromelled waste and fines in particular, they can produce a gas over a fairly short period of time but as you can probably appreciate it depends on the type of fines that are in there. And there are other factors that also play into that so

things like temperature, moisture within the soil, that will also have an impact on how quickly gases will be produced. And what we also have to bear in mind is that not all tromelled waste, taking away the focus of, certainly around hydrogen sulphide and we mentioned gypsum with this situation, but a lot of tromelled waste in there does contain high levels of sulphates so therefore won't produce high levels of hydrogen sulphide gases that we're seeing. In terms of the waste that's coming in, there is obviously waste exception procedures that are in place, that's obviously being checked by ourselves and that's being checked by the operator's transfer notes. Everything that's going through pre-acceptance to acceptance on site is being monitored through those transfer notes. Does that answer the question and is there anything further on that?

- Sorry, I've muted Annie and moved on so we can get some more of these questions. Sorry about that Annie.

- Okay, thanks Marc for the answer. I'm going to move on. We have a question from Nick Moore and I recognise that we did cover some of this off in Clare's introduction. Nick, are you happy that you got the answer that you required?

- Yes, fine with the answer thank you.

- Thank you. I'm going to move on now to Paul G, and I believe your question is for the Environment Agency.

Okay, we're having problems unmuting Paul. I'll read his question then: Is the Environment Agency prepared to admit that the monitors are not representative of where the complaints are received? They don't represent us between one, two, three and even four miles away. When will we receive the results of work of which you said you had the answers to some time ago?

- Thank you Rob and thank you Paul for the question. The monitors are located in order to be able to give us the information about the odours that are leaving the site. They are not there to try and understand that breadth. As I said, the information about the complaints is important as well and I know that one of the things that the multi-agency group that is looking at that air quality has been doing, is looking at that modelling work that you talk about. I don't think we said there are results that are available. We said that it was work that was being looked at. But as I've said before, the focus at the moment of that, is not something that is impacting what we're doing on site. It's not something that is having any difference in terms of the resources or the actions that we're asking Walleys Quarry to do. The information that Richard shared about the spread of the complaints right at the very beginning and other things will be feeding into

the work that Martin talked about around understanding what can be done for the community and within that, looking at the range of impacts from the site. But the air quality is about what is leaving the site and that is why those monitors are there and they were looked at by experts from across all of the different organisation who are involved in managing the air quality to make sure that they are in the right location. And we've agreed that they will stay there through, beyond the end of the August. There's no question that we'll be taking them away at this point so we will be continuing to collect that data and continuing to use it.

- Thank you Clare and thank you for the question.

We've got a question now and it's for the EA and it's from Steve Jones. Steve would you like to ask your question please.

- The unshielded cells, what catches the gas? So, the open cells where you're taking the rubbish in, the gas that comes out of it, how does it get captured?

- Okay, that goes to our EA colleagues please.

- Thanks for that Steve, I'll take that question Rob. In terms of the capturing of gas from those cells, it's around capping. There's obviously what we call emission surveys that the operator carries out and the emission surveys give us areas that they believe are in layman's terms where there are gas leaks. This is where, I mentioned previously about the pin wells and all the piping infrastructure that's laid down – all the pipelines that capture those gases. Whilst they're in a transition of putting down the permanent capping, there is the ability to capture those gas emissions through those things that I described, those pin wells which are on the surface layer of the gas, so not the deep-down gases that are being produced but ones that are possibly closer to the surface. Those pin wells, along with the deep wells take all of that gas to the gas utilisation plant, which is then, as I mentioned previously around the engines to turn into energy and also the flaring as well.

- So, does the cell get covered when you put fresh rubbish on it?

- At the end of each day when fresh rubbish gets put in, there is what's called a daily waste cover. That's how, at the end of the day they will cover that rubbish to reduce the odours that are being produced but to take away things like birds for example coming in and picking that waste away so there is the daily cover that's there so it's not temporary capping, it's what's called daily cover that goes over that fresh waste that goes into the site.

- That's great, cheers.

- Thanks Steve for the question.

I'm going to move to a question from Richard Morgan now and I know it's been asked previously but I know many people that are on the call tonight didn't have the answer last time, so it is a question for our EA colleagues once more. Richard Morgan, do you want to ask your question please?

- Hi, first question really – two parts to it: One - why is the Environment Agency not reviewing the permit to look at the waste being deposited, looking to reduce the contaminated waste, the toxic wastes that seem to be going into the site? And the second one is, why are they not looking to temporarily closing the site while the odour emissions are being resolved, rather than continuing to bring in waste that, no one seems to know what's being taken in there really?

- Thank you Richard and I'll ask our EA colleagues just to give a response.

- Thank you, Richard and thanks Rob. Richard, there's two parts to your question. I think there's something about the distinction between the waste that has been going in over a period of weeks or months which has caused the problem that we've got with the site at the moment and there's a difference with the waste that should be going in and we believe, and we've got procedures in place to understand what is going in now. We have required the operator to do additional scrutiny, we are doing additional scrutiny ourselves, and there are an awful lot of checks that are going on within our normal processes and procedure on what is going into the site now. That waste should not be creating anything more than a typical landfill smell and should not be, with the appropriate measures, smells outside the boundaries of the site. Because of that, we don't have the regulatory powers to stop them taking that new waste onto the site. I know others have asked questions in the past about other sites, where we have suspended permits but where we have done that, it has been in relation to specific conditions that have been broken at that time and therefore we were able to suspend the taking on of waste at those sites for a short amount of time while they did that. That's not the situation we're in with Walleys Quarry Ltd. And the risk is that if we did try to do that, the operator could appeal, no problem with the operator appealing a decision if we feel that it's the right decision to make but depending on how they chose to appeal, that could then have an impact on our ability to enforce other parts of the permit, which are requiring them to do that additional capping, the additional capture and the work on the gas utilisation plant that Marc talked about right at the very beginning and that would be a worse position than we are in now and that's not something that we are prepared to do.

In terms of permit changes, at the moment a hundred percent of the focus is on understanding and getting a change to the situation that we've got at the moment. Depending on what we learn from that, we've said all the way along that the site has not been responding in the way that we would expect it to, so as we are getting the operator to do more, we are learning more about what is going on in that site at the moment. That may or may not lead to permit changes in the future but that's not something that we're focussing on right now, what we're trying to do is to sort out the issues that are going on now.

- Thank you, Clare and thank you Richard for your question. The next question I've got from, it's just the name of Richard – I've haven't got a surname. Richard, do you want to ask your question and I believe again it's pointed at the EA.

- Two Richards on the participant list so I'll just allow both of them to talk. I hope that works for you Richard...

- Okay, I'll ask the question on behalf of Richard. A fall in MMF data seems to be in line with sunlight hours. Can we expect a second wave in the autumn?

- Thank you Rob, I will take this one because I think Richard had pointed it towards me. We said all the way along that usually odour complaints about landfill across the county, across the world in fact, are more prevalent where it is cold. And that is because of weather conditions, temperature inversion and the escape of the gas in terms of, once it's out and once it's in the atmosphere. So, it is true that we have seen higher complaints from Walleys Quarry, or related to Walleys Quarry in the autumn and winter months and that is a risk that we are very, very mindful of at the moment. That's why what we have said, where we have seen...I absolutely recognise that the residents are telling us that the odour and the smell hasn't improved, but the air quality data is telling us that the levels of hydrogen sulphide have lowered over the last couple of months, which is good news but it has also been warmer over the last couple of months as we are in the late spring and summer. Everything we are doing is to try and get that into a better position, whether it is a sustainable reduction in hydrogen sulphide levels and it is something that continues through the autumn and into the winter. But it is one of the things that we are absolutely acutely aware of.

- Thank you, Clare, and Richard's follow up question was: when did the EA do an unannounced check on the waste being accepted?

- I don't have a specific date for you Richard but what I can tell you is that it's

part of the strategy. But actually, the strategy is not just about visual checks, it's also about the recording that we do, the samples that are taken because particularly with tromelled waste, we need to be able to understand that, rather than just look at the waste. So that is absolutely part of what we do, what we require the operator to do and where there's been that increased scrutiny since they started retaking waste after the capping at the end of April.

- Thank you, Clare and thank you Richard for those questions. I'm going to move now to two questions from Stephen Murray, so Stephen can I ask you to ask your second question first, which will be aimed at the clinical commissioning group please.

- One of the questions we have is that local people are having issues with GP surgeries accepting that their health problems and symptoms are related to the landfill. Could you please issue a directive to instruct surgeries that they need to record the patients concerned as landfill related?

- [inaudible]

- Alison, could you log out and log back in again and we'll come back to Stephen's question and hopefully the audio will improve. I'm sorry about that Stephen but obviously the technology let us down on this occasion. So, we will move on to Christine Easom and that's pointed at the EA, so Christine, if you would like to unmute yourself and pose your question.

- My question is, over time, and it has been hinted at in this meeting a little bit, the EA are not suggesting that it's the new waste that is responsible in any way for the odours that we have been having. But some members of the local community who do seem to have relevant expertise and have prepared extensive research, have suggested that it is and I'm wondering, has the EA seen that research and would they be prepared to look at it and talk to those people just to see if that sheds any light at all on the situation and whether that can contribute something valuable to the ongoing mystery, if there is one, and if there isn't a mystery can we all be told that there is no mystery? That's my question.

- Clare, can you pick that one up please?

- I can, absolutely and Christine, I'm going to have to be really careful about how I answer this because this is related to ongoing legal cases and it would be wrong of me to give lots of detail on that. And I realise that will be frustrating for you and I am sorry. What I think I can say is that we are always happy to hear from people who have additional evidence. We obviously need to have

those conversations in a way that doesn't undermine any legal processes so perhaps that is something we can take on separately and I'm sorry I can't say any more than that just now.

- That's fine, that's fine. If there's a way to, if you haven't already seen it, if there's a way to put you in touch with some of the information that has been very freely shared amongst us. It's been stuff that has been prepared for us. So I am able to do that.

-Thank you Christine.

- Thank you, Christine. I'm going to move back to Alison now and see whether your audio has returned.

- Alison, can I suggest that you switch off your video and that may help us with your audio.

- No, we appear to have lost Alison at the moment so I'm going to move on to a question that has been sent in from Hilary Jones. Hilary, would you like to ask your question, and it is pointed to a number of panellists.

- Okay, yes it's a statement and a question. It's about the new reporting form that Clare referred to that I reckon needs to be advertised to the community as a whole. Can any funding be undertaken for leafleting? Leafleting undertaken until May, which I think was funded by the community as a whole, couldn't reach the whole borough given that there are 45,000 households, so it's big expenditure. An insertion in the Newcastle Life magazine would be a good idea as a starter. The deadline for the next edition, the September one, is next week. Because I reckon, I might be wrong but I reckon that the community as a whole are only aware of the email or phone option and it's certainly easier to report online via email, rather than having to wait around on a phone, particularly for busy people obviously having to go off to work. Because most of the smell, and I've put this in the question, but most of the smells are overnight, so you're impacted, and you need to report first thing in the morning. Which incidentally, as I've discovered today actually involves reporting for two days. Because it's overnight, the evening and the first part of the night occur in one day, so that's one report, then you have to give details for the rest of the night and the morning on a second report for the second day. People shouldn't have to wait around on the phone. And also, as a final thing, I trust that the effect of the summer holiday period will be taken into account when looking at the reporting figures since obviously some households will be away for some of the time and therefore not reporting.

- Okay, thank you Hilary. Lots in there and I think a short answer from the Environment Agency's point of view is, yes absolutely we can look at this. We have literally made it live today so that we can tell you about it now and we can reach more of you here with that, but that won't be the only way that we'll be telling people about it, we'll be doing some stuff in media, we'll be doing some stuff in various other groups and we're going to ask you at the end of this actually to tell us more about how you as a community want to engage with us because we are conscious that this is one way, it's not everybody's preferred way and as we've said right from the very beginning, it's not necessarily reaching everybody.

We did actually, as the Environment Agency back in March or April, write to all of the residents who lived within the area that we had at that point had reports from. And it sounds very similar to what you are talking about. That letter went to 46,000 people. So I'm quite happy that my team and I go away and have a look at that again.

And your question about summer holidays was the other bit – absolutely, when we look at the reporting, we overlay with that what we know about the current circumstance in things like summer holidays but also whether bank holidays and with what we know has been happening on site.

- Thank you, Clare and thanks for that question Hilary. So, the next person I'll bring in is Chris Hodgson. Chris's question is aimed at EA colleagues, so Marc or Clare. Chris, would you like to ask your question now please?

- Hi, my question is, is any of the gas currently flared off? What are the plans regarding the increase in flaring as noted in the presentation earlier and what is the impact on air quality of burning this gas? Are the flames enclosed in some form and the emissions treated in some form before they go into the air? And will the heat created be used in some form?

- Thanks Chris, for that question. In terms of the flaring, that is something that is active now and in terms of the increased flaring that is something that is being formed and looked at, at the moment under the revision of the gas management plan that I mentioned during the presentation. In terms of the actual flaring, there's another process that it goes through before that which is obviously through the engines and that's the bit that is converting the energy and that's electricity and that's put back to the grid. So, there is the activity there of taking the gas from the landfill through the gas utilisation plant and converting that into energy.

In terms of the emissions from the flare, the emissions and everything that is burnt through the flaring will not be causing issues to the atmosphere from that burning. And what we have instructed the gas management company to actually do under a notice, which is to put all different areas of telemetry onto that gas utilisation plant so that we can get information to ensure that that is working as effectively and efficiently as it should do regarding the extraction of gas from the landfill, the conversion of that gas into energy and also the flaring of that gas in terms of burning it off.

- Thank you, Marc and thanks Chris for the question. I'm going to move to another question for EA colleagues and it's from Tracy Coppins so Tracy would you like to unmute yourself and raise your question.

- We can't hear you at the moment Tracy.

- I think we may actually have lost Tracy from the participants.

- Okay, I'll ask the question on Tracy's behalf. Last night, a lorry was waiting to unload category three waste, not for human consumption. Are Walleys Quarry allowed to accept that type of waste as an Environment Agency call handler knew nothing today. I assume it was her first day as she didn't know anything and didn't ask the usual list of questions. So, Marc or Clare, could you pick that one up please?

- Yes, I'll pick that one up again Rob. Thanks, Tracy for that question. In terms of the load that obviously was witnessed coming in, we would probably need to get a bit more information on that. We need to just understand exactly what the waste was - obviously saying cat 3, we need to just look into that. As we mentioned previously, the operator will always be having those transfer notes coming in so we will look into that information and we will provide a...what I suggest Chair, is back through our frequently asked questions, we will capture this and put a response directly to that so Tracy and others on the call can hear that.

- That would be great. Thank you, Marc and thanks for the question Tracy.

I'm just going to try now to go back to Stephen Murray. And Stephen you had a question for Alison Bradley. Could you ask the question again and hopefully audio will be okay this time.

- I don't see Stephen on the participants list now. No, he is here.

- Actually, let me get my questions out of the way because there are three queued and you did say I could ask two.

- Yes, we have time for all three now Stephen.
- Thank you very much. I'll start with the issues that we are having with local GP surgery not willing to put down the patients concerns that their symptoms and their ill health problems are due to landfill issues. Can you issue a directive to all surgeries that they must acknowledge at least that the patient has concerns that their health problems are due to landfill?
- Thanks Stephen, can you hear me now? I'm leaving my camera off because I've clearly got a very poor internet connection. In terms of recording the patient's concern, that's certainly something that I can request the surgeries in the area to record those concerns. I think it's difficult from a GP point of view to be able to say whether the symptoms, which are quite non-specific and could be attributed to lots of other conditions, whether they are actually related to and could be attributed to the quarry odours but certainly I can go back to the GP surgeries and take that back and request that they record the patient's concerns that the symptoms may be related.
- Thank you, Alison.
- My next question is to PHE. Are you taking a holistic approach to analysing the poisoning of the population with the toxic gases, which of course are not just H<sup>2</sup>S but also benzene and other VOCs and also contain particulate matter of 2.5 sometimes smaller?
- Ovnair, can you take that please?
- Yes, I can kick off with that thank you. The approach that we have taken is that all the data we have received from the Environment Agency we assess against standards. So, if you look at the risk assessment, we also look at the particulate matter that they're all below the health guidance values. We have received unratified data for BTX, so for benzene, toluene, xylene etc and so far, those levels are low, so below the guidance values that the environment Agency uses. Yes, we do look at all the data that we have. We wouldn't look at only hydrogen sulphide.
- If I can follow up on that please. Clearly, as a toxicologist you must be aware that the combination of multiple agents upon health in a combined formulation, are going to have much greater effect. Are you taking that into consideration, that this is a combined assault on the human body not just an individual step-by-step process?
- You're quite right and one of the challenges we have, as you probably know is risk assessment for mixtures. So, what we would do is look at what we know is

in the mixture and we assess whether those components would have any synergistic or additive effects with each other. There is no evidence that hydrogen sulphide has a synergistic effect with, for example benzene or particulate matter. As I say, it is a challenge, we do consider that, and we consider that quite seriously because that's one of our biggest challenges: mixtures assessment. The other thing I would like to say on that point is that the values that we are using are incredibly precautionary, that is that they are very low levels. If we had higher level exposure for the different components, we would be more concerned about the mixture effect. But at present the levels that we are seeing are not causing us concern with regard to mixtures.

- So, on the particulate matter then, you have the chemistry do you, from the EA? You have the chemistry analysis of the particulate spread?

- No, we have just the particulates.

- So basically then, what you're saying is you're not able to form a proper conclusion because you don't know what interactions are undergoing within the particulate matter because you don't know the chemistry?

- Well, that's not entirely true because we know that the actual particulate matter that is there is at low levels, we also know that the health guidance values that we are using for the hydrogen sulphide is looking at the most sensitive endpoint, so it's the most precautionary endpoint, so the risk assessment we've done is incredibly precautionary and that should take into account any kind of mixtures that might be there, but we would only be concerned if they were there at higher levels.

- What happens if the particulates contain arsenic?

- You wouldn't expect these kind of particulates to contain arsenic.

- I've analysed them under EDS and DSEM and I can tell you that they do.

- Well, I think that data needs to be discussed with the Environment Agency, we haven't seen that. But then the other issue I would also state is that, let's take arsenic as an example: it doesn't have the same mechanism as hydrogen sulphide. Therefore, you would not expect either an additive or a synergistic effect with exposures to the two. So, even if it is there, you wouldn't expect, as I say a synergistic or additive effect of the two exposures.

- Thank you very much.

Finally, just to the EA and Clare, you have stated that you've got to operate with the licences and the laws with regard to the issues of the landfill, well clearly the landfill has a clear issue with hydrogen sulphide. One of the easiest ways of reducing that is to ensure that the only items being tipped are inert

and that in the nature of all organics are banned. You could also reduce the loads per day until the gas issue is sorted. So you do have more weapons in your arsenal, I'm just wondering why you're not using those.

- Stephen, I think this comes back to what it is that is causing the issue and what's causing the issue is the decomposition of the waste that's already in the landfill. We would need to be able to prove that it was waste that was coming in now that was causing the problems in order to be able to restrict...we would restrict the tonnage rather than the number of loads or to change the waste types that were there. And as long as the landfill is operating within its required permit conditions in terms of what it's accepting, then that should not be what is causing the issues now. And we don't have any evidence to suggest that they are not.

- But you've told us in the past that they have been taking, in recent history, as in a few months, that they have been taking in waste that they are not permitted for. You've told us that yourself.

- We've told you that that's our assumption. We've told you that we think that's what's caused the problem at the moment, so not in the last few months, that's something that we think happened before that time and is now decomposing. We've also told you that we've required the company to do increased checks and that they've been sending more loads of waste away and we've told you about the checks that we've been doing, up and down the waste chain and in line with our processes so that is absolutely happening and giving us the assurance about what is going in now.

- Thank you, Clare and thank you Stephen. I am going to have to move us on. You did get your three questions. Thanks for that really good exchange there.

I am just conscious of time – we have got another item on the agenda. I've got a couple of questions that have come in from pre the event tonight from Steve Jones. I was just wondering if Marc or Clare could answer these please.

Does Walleys Quarry have a problem with the inflow of groundwater? Are the lagoons big enough to hold groundwater/leachate and how does the water/leachate get disposed of? Which company does this? So, if we could make those the final questions that would be great, thank you.

- Thanks Chair, and thanks Steve for those questions as well. The first one in terms of, does Walleys Quarry have a problem with the inflow of groundwater. There is no evidence that we've found at all around infiltration of groundwater to this site at all. Actually, the groundwater levels are maintained to below the base of the site. How that is maintained is through actively pumping out from

the sump below that site so when that groundwater is taken out, it's gone through pre-treatment, so that's aeration and sedimentation type work before any of that is discharged into the local Silkdale brook. That is all stipulated within the permits and we know that we have obviously had concerns about what was going into the brook and that is why we have deployed monitoring equipment into the brook to keep a very close eye on anything that does get discharged in there going forward.

In terms of the questions around are the lagoons big enough to hold groundwater or leachate? Leachate from the actual landfill is removed from the site via a number of leachate collection points that are put around the site to pull out the maximum amount that it can do. It is then stored in what's called closed leachate storage tanks that are based on the site before it enters the beyond site leachate treatment plant itself. It is not actually stored in those open lagoons, so the leachate all goes through that process. In terms of the way that it's actually treated, leachate goes through what's called a biofilter and again that's on site. The way that leachate water is all managed is, once it's all gone through the biofilter it is then either discharged to the foul sewer and that is under the permissions of the water company, so the water company will make sure that they are completely happy with what's being discharged to the foul sewer and, or if there's a huge amount then there is always the option of that being tankered off site and that then goes to a licensed facility and all the checks are in place to ensure that that is all being handled under the permissions they have around that being moved. So hopefully, Chair that answers the three questions from Steve but we'll make sure, again that we pick those up and put them there on the FAQs for everyone to see.

- Thank you Marc for that detailed answer.

I'm just going to pass us on now to Simon Wilson, who is just going to talk us through how we look to engage with our communities going forward so, over to you Simon and then I'll just wrap up the session and close the event.

- Thanks very much indeed Rob and good evening. My name is Simon Wilson. I've been asked to bring a bit of an independent look at how the partners are going to continue engaging with you as a community and we just wanted to ask you that question this evening. The partners present today held this event as a follow up to previous community events - opportunities for you to ask questions and for them to report on progress. What we wanted to do was ask your thoughts about the best ways to engage with you for the future. That's about keeping you informed, getting your questions and discussing issues with

you over the coming weeks and beyond that if necessary. We're not just going to be asking people this evening, we're also going to be asking more widely about what will work.

Obviously we are thinking about, as Rob said face to face meetings when we can, maybe more of these types of virtual sessions, there's also the scope to use social media – Facebook and Twitter and so on - but also more physical things like posters, there were some useful comments about leaflets, about using the local press and so on. It won't just be one method of keeping people informed and engaged, it's going to be a mix.

We'd just like you to use, if you would, the Q&A as before with any comments you have about what would help, what would be useful ways of keeping in touch over the coming weeks. We will also put in the chat for you the email address if you want to send any further thoughts in. We've got the general enquiries email address in the chat so please feel free, if you want to make any further suggestions.

We're not going to respond to those this evening. What we're doing is gathering ideas at this stage. But if you'd like to put in the Q&A any thoughts about how you would like us to move forward with this engagement, please could you do so. Thank you.

- Thank you, Simon and as we said, that will remain open for a period of time this evening.

- I'd just like to wrap the session up then tonight and I'd just firstly like to thank everyone for the way in which you'd conducted and approached today's event. It's been really useful, a good exchange of opinions and some really great questions coming in.

We will be publishing the questions and answers for everyone. And we will also provide answers to the questions that were submitted prior to tonight's event that we haven't had time to answer online this evening.

We do recognise the impacts to all of our communities to this issue at Walleys Quarry. The multi-agency partnership will continue to work hard to resolve these current issues. And by engaging with you we hopefully can get the communication out to you in a timely manner and make sure that all of your questions are answered.

So, from all of us tonight, thank you, to all the panellists thank you for your time and for the responses given and hopefully we will see you again soon.