



Department
for Environment
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Walleys Quarry Engagement Session

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Participants

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Adam Lines

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Sarah Dennis

Mark Sitton-Kent

Carl Moss

Operator: Hello and welcome to Walleys Quarry Engagement Session. My name is Molly and I'll be your coordinator for today's event. Please note that this call is being recorded. And for the duration of the call, your lines will be on listen only. However, you will have the opportunity to ask questions. This can be done by pressing star one on your telephone keypad to register your question at any time. If you require assistance at any point, please press star zero and you will be connected to an operator. I will now hand you over to your host, Clare Dinnis, Area Director for West Midlands to begin today's conference. Thank you.

Clare Dinnis: Thank you Molly. Good afternoon everybody and thank you for joining us today. I think it goes without saying that this is not the way we'd ordinarily choose to be talking to you. But given COVID safe restrictions on the number of people that we can have in one place, this felt like the best way to be able to reach as many of you as possible and hear from as many of you as possible. So, I hope that we can make this work for everyone. However, we will be looking to run face-to-face events as soon as Covid restrictions start to lift even further and we're able to do that. Now, many of you will have heard me say in media interviews that we recognise how hard the situation is in Newcastle under Lyme for each and every one of you. And I'm really conscious that those feel like empty words when you're the ones who are living with this. Please believe me, they're not.

This is our primary operational focus, because we know that the impact you're living with is unacceptable. My team has regulated Walleys Quarry more intensely than other landfills for several years, but we've increased this further still since the beginning of this year, because we don't want you to have to live with this. And we want to be able to solve those problems. Now, our aim today with this session is to give as much time as possible to your questions. But before I do that we also know from social media and from the letters that you've written to me and to the Environment Agency that there are some common questions many of you want to hear the answers to. So, I'm going to start with three of those. The first of those questions is about what's happening on site now.

So, you'll be well aware that during late March and April we instructed Walleys Quarry Limited to cap off parts of the site. The purpose of this was to help contain the gas that was being produced or has been produced inside the landfill itself, so that it can be collected and then taken through the gas engines and the flare and destroyed. This was always going to be just

step one. There was always going to be more work to be done beyond this. But it is absolutely true to say that we expected actions to have had more of an impact on reducing odours than they did. However, before the company had even completed that initial capping, we'd already instructed it to begin work on the next stages. And those included an up-to-date survey of the emissions that are coming from across the whole of the site. That work is complete, and it's led the company to identify 60 to 70 actions to further tackle that problem.

And we instructed them to start on those immediately. And Walleys Quarry Limited told me yesterday, when I was on site, that they're about a quarter to a third of the way through completing those actions, and confident they'll all be done by the 1st of June. Now, I'm not going to go through all 60 to 70 of them, but they are broadly around work on the infrastructure of the sites, so the gas wells and leachate wells, replacing and looking at the seals on them and that kind of work. And work to improve temporary tapping in areas of the site that weren't included in that enforcement notice, so not in the first two cells. And that work is targeted to where we are seeing higher gaseous emissions through that surface emissions survey. Beyond that work, we've instructed the company to then go on and re-do the emissions survey again, so that we can test the impact of those actions and we know where they've been effective and where further work is needed.

We've instructed the operator to do a further audit of its gas management system and come back to us by the 4th of June. And we've instructed it to re-do its gas management plan. We're also still requiring Walleys Quarry Limited to inspect every single load of waste that's coming on to site. And my officers are doing announced and unannounced checks of that waste on site and, further up the waste stream, where those lorries are coming from. Now, one of the things that's been asked too in relation to what's happening on site is why are there no penalties for the company? Why are there no further consequences? And that is because this is not the time for that, not because it won't happen. That step will come, but once the odours are reduced. So, building that case and understanding what we can do does not distract either us or the company from getting to the point where the odours are controlled as quickly as possible.

The second question, which we hear really often, is why don't we close the site? So, first and foremost is it's not new waste that's coming into the landfill that's causing the odour. It's waste that's already in there and that is degrading over time. So, stopping new waste coming in won't solve the problem. And our focus is absolutely on stopping the problem. But it's also important to recognise that because that new waste is not the problem, the Environment Agency doesn't have a legal justification to take away, or even to temporarily suspend Walleys Quarry Limited's permit. And, in fact, doing so could result in it being more difficult, if they were challenged, for us to use the powers that we do have, and hence could result in the odours being an issue for longer. And I'm not prepared to risk that.

I know that over recent days many of you have been sharing on social media details of other sites around the country where permits have been temporarily suspended. Now, those sites have absolutely gone through the same legal and regulatory rules that we are using here. The details at those sites have been different, and hence the actions that the Environment Agency in those areas took were different. And they're not something that we can use at this stage. The last thing in relation to closing the site I need to say is that it's really important we're clear with you that that closing any landfill early comes with some very significant risks about ongoing management and site abandonment. This is important because the waste will continue to

degrade for several years after the landfill is closed. And if we end up in a situation where there's no operator to manage the gases produced, that could end up a much bigger and longer term problem for the community and for the local authority. It could delay the actions that are taken and delay the resolution of the problem. And, again, that's not a risk that we think is appropriate to take.

So, the third question, the three that I said I wanted to answer before we start is, why is this taking so long? Walleys Quarry landfill is not behaving in the way that we would ordinarily expect it to. I absolutely know that that's not what you want to hear, but it's important that we're honest with you about this. The reality is that every single landfill in the country is different, but all of our experts who have worked on similar landfills across England everyone would absolutely agree that the measures that we have instructed the company to undertake so far, expect would have had a greater impact than they have had here. So, what that means is that we are pushing the company to do more and more. Now within that, absolutely we have to follow the law, and we have to follow government guidelines about regulation. But that does not mean that we are not actively looking at and testing every single power we have to resolve this as quickly as possible.

Walleys Quarry Limited is looking at new techniques for different temporary capping materials. We have the Environment Agency's best landfill gas experts nationally working with the local team. And if it is appropriate too, we will absolutely push the company to go beyond the normal best standard for the industry if there's a solution that will help. And that's something that I personally have been really clear with them about. What that means is that I can't give you a date of when I'm certain that we'll see a reduction in the odours. I really wish that I could. All of the team really wishes that we could. But I think it's only fair that I'm honest about that. What I can do is to promise you three things. Firstly, is that this will remain our absolute top operational priority until we're satisfied that the odour's reduced, and that the company has a proper plan in place to keep it that way.

Secondly, I can promise you that we will keep talking to you, so that you know what's happening. Today is the beginning of a conversation. It is not a single event. And, thirdly, I can promise you that we will continue to press the company using all of our powers to work as fast as possible. Right. So, just before I open up for questions, what I want to do is just introduce the team that I've got with me here today who will be helping me to answer your questions. We're joined by Mark Sitton-Kent, who is our director of operations for the whole of West and central England, Carl Moss, who leads on the regulatory and enforcement issues, and Adam Lines, who leads on the engagement with partners, making sure that other authorities, so your councils, your local councils, and, of course, Public Health England are cited and involved in our multi-agency response.

And that bit's really important because different organisations have different risk remits and responsibilities. That's why we're working with those partners so that we make sure that every part of this is joined up. But we won't be able to answer questions that are for those agencies' remits today. We will take them. We will talk to them through the multi-agency groups that we're involved in. And we will look at involving them, including those in our frequently asked questions. But we won't be able to offer advice on those today. Right. That's enough from me. We'll come to questions. I can see there are some in the queue. So, I'll hand back to Molly for the first question, please.

Operator: Thank you. Before we take the first question, please be reminded. If you would like to ask a question, please press star one on your telephone keypad. Please ensure that your line is un-muted locally. We will then connect you directly, retrieve your name and then you'll be advised when to go ahead with your question. So, that's star one. The first question today comes from the line of Richard Fowler. Please go ahead. Your line is un-muted.

Richard Fowler: I'd just like to ask for all the people that are affected in the work place, shouldn't they be contacting or their managers contacting the HSE as stated in the HSE website? The other thing is it was stated on the radio the other day that it's a major incident. Was that a slip of the tongue or is that how it's classified? Thank you.

Clare Dinnis: Thank you, Richard. So, I will ask Adam to come in here in a minute in terms of the multi-agency response, which is where the conversations would be about whether this was classified as a major incident, Richard. I think the important thing for me in terms of the health impacts and your question about HSE is absolutely where there are questions relating to health, they have got to go to those right authorities. We will log one for the health authorities. But the advice has always been, if there are particular concerns, you should go to your GP, or, in this case, be going to line managers and checking that HSE advice. But, Adam, is there something to add to that please?

Adam Lines: Thanks, Clare. And thanks for the question. I guess in terms of declaring a major incident, any one of those partners around that table can declare that. My understanding is that that hasn't been the case yet, and that the situation is reviewed on a monthly basis and by the conversations that we have with those partners. In order to do that, I think it would have to meet various triggers for those authorities around particular health situations or information they've got that makes it relevant to them and their situation. And for us it would be linked to the risk of a very serious pollution incident. And the data that we've got at the moment doesn't direct us as an agency to do that. Of which I can't speak for the other agencies with regards to their remit, but it is something that we keep under review regularly.

Clare Dinnis: I think the other thing I'd add on to that, Richard, is there is nothing that triggering that would change in terms of our response. We are absolutely doing everything we can about this. And there's nothing being held back on that.

Richard Fowler: Has it been declared a major incident.

Clare Dinnis: It has not been classified as a major incident by the local resilience forum. But there is nothing that we are not doing because of that. This is absolutely clearly something we are looking to resolve as quickly as possible.

Richard Fowler: It's classified as a major incident.

Clare Dinnis: Richard, all we can do is give you the facts on this. Okay.

Richard Fowler: That was your representative on the radio. That's a fact.

Clare Dinnis: I understand that, Richard. I'm hearing you. And if there's information that's been given out that's not right, then I apologise for that. But what we've given you today is the facts of where we and partners are. Okay. Molly, if we go to the next question, please.

Operator: Thank you. The next question comes from the line of Christine. Please go ahead, your line is un-muted.

Christine: Hi Clare. Hi everybody. Thank you very much for doing this for us, Clare. I greatly appreciate it. I'm sure we will do. My question is where we live we really got the greatest impact of this from December, January onwards. And the figures for gas emissions and complaints go right shooting up through the air from December onwards through these last four months. And I'm wondering if you can explain why? Do you know anything about what was happening and what happened down there to make this become so much worse for people who are slightly further away? If you don't know, why you don't know?

Clare Dinnis: Thank you, Christine. So, actually what we've seen in terms of the data and the complaints is exactly what you're telling us there. There was a transformational difference which started in January and has been much worse from the weekend that everybody will be well aware of at the end of February. I'll come to the team in a minute to talk about some of the reasons for that. But if there is not a clear, straightforward trigger from any of the detailed analysis that we've done, which is one single answer. And that's why we're taking that step by step approach to be able to get the best and the longest lasting solution to this. But, Adam, perhaps if I come to you and then Carl may want to come in.

Adam Lines: Thanks, Clare. And clearly one of the reasons we've introduced our air quality monitoring is to understand the situation in terms of the odours, to provide that information to yourselves as the community, and to provide that to our professional partners, to provide that guidance around health. And obviously that's linked to our regulatory activities that occur on the site as well. Our officers are using the tests that are available to them to confirm odour off the site and on the site. And as we've said in our previous releases, the operational issues at the site that are linked to the permits that then we are taking action against to get that resolution. So, it's the combination of those things.

I think the other thing, overlaying the issues on the site that we're seeing. We've had a couple of years of heavier rainfall. And this has affected landfills right across the county and, indeed, the country, meaning that sometimes more leachate has been generated, which is the liquid phase within the landfill. This then can create more gas that has to be treated as part of that process. So, we have seen issues related to weather and rainfall across all the landfills, not saying that's the only reason. That's one of the reasons. And I think maybe Carl can allude to some of the other issues that are linked to a combination of situations, which put us to where we are today.

Carl Moss: So, Christine, thanks for your question. In terms of what Adam's just said, that's absolutely correct. Last autumn was quite a dry autumn. We know that from the Environment Agency's activities. We saw high levels of rain over the Christmas period. Moisture does affect how the biomass behaves. The materials that have gone into the site are what we called trammelled waste. So, they've come in from transfer stations where they trammel this material into fines. When the material is fine, it degrades that much quicker. So, a combination of finding the graded materials and moisture leads to a rapid generation of gas. This is something that we're seeing at a number of sites across the country. But Walleys is certainly by far ahead of the game in terms of gas generation.

In terms of other aspects, towards the end of 2020 the site got above surrounding ground levels, the centre of the site is starting to become quite high. It's within its planning limits. However, that does impact on how gases generated from those areas is dispersed across the community.

Clare Dinnis: Thank you. Carl. Okay. Sorry, Christine.

Christine: Yeah, no. I'm not sure if you're expecting me to respond or want me to, or whether you've got time. Thank you for giving me that information, giving us that information. And I'm a little bit stunned that, even given those factors, something which was as - just happened wham on a day, it's how it seemed. It just started. How that was possible without careful monitoring before that. And I think that's possibly where some of us feel frustrated and also deeply concerned. But I do thank you for your answers.

Clare Dinnis: Thank you, Christine. And I want to answer your question. I also want to make sure we're hearing from everybody. But I suppose the other bit in there I would just say is that we did identify some things that were failures of operation on the site that may have been part of the sudden increase that you've seen. But the range of factors that the team have explained are the bigger picture.

Christine: Yeah. And thank you for saying that as well. Thank you for everything. Okay. Thank you.

Clare Dinnis: That's okay. Thank you, Christine. Molly, if we go to the next question, please.

Operator: Thank you. Before we move to the next question, as a reminder, if you would like to ask a question, please press star one on your telephone keypads. The next question comes from the line of Andrea Horton. Please go ahead. Your line is un-muted.

Andrea Horton: Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you for taking my question. I keep hearing and reading statements from the Environment Agency saying that they need time to gather data and check what's happening, monitor and so on. But actually I first reported issues with this site to the Environment Agency via their incident hotline over 10 years ago. I get a reference number. I ask for feedback, nothing comes. I've reported odour. I've reported illegal loads. I've reported dirt, seagulls, the mess that lorries have made on the road, the grass verge, etc. I've continually reported the site for 10 years and I still do now. I only rang up a couple of days ago.

Now, Clare, you said earlier in this call that it's the waste already in the site that's causing the problem. Well, that waste has been there for 10 years. Why on earth have you not listened to the complaints that were raised over that period of time? Because I'm sure if you had have done, let's say I had absolutely no feedback at all for any of my complaints. If you had listened to them then, maybe we wouldn't be in the situation we're in now. And I concur with Christine's earlier comments about the frustration of the community. I, for one, am extremely frustrated because I've been banging on about this for a long time and I feel as if nobody's listening.

Clare Dinnis: Thank you, Andrea. And I want to start with saying I am genuinely sorry that you feel like no one is listening, because that is not what I'm seeing from the work that's been going on over a number of years.

Andrea Horton: Can I just interrupt you there Clare? Can you see though I've been complaining for 10 years, and it's only in the last six months it looks like you've woken up?

Clare Dinnis: So, Andrea, what I need to do, where I am with this, is the mistake that we've made is not letting you see the work that has been going on over that whole time. Because, ordinarily a landfill site typically in this country would be visited infrequently because of the cost; we are given the funding that we are getting through the regulatory system. Ordinarily,

a landfill site would be visited somewhere between two and four times a year. We visit this site, and we have visited this site far more than that for a number of years. We have got that record of complaints. We have been putting in more intense regulation. We have had complaints about putting more intense regulation on this site over that whole period.

Now, I absolutely hear what you're saying is that part of that frustration is that you haven't seen that, and you aren't aware of it. So, I apologise for the fact that that hasn't been there. We put in place the citizen space page, the website page, specifically on this, partly to try and help people understand what we were doing. We put in place two rounds of the air quality monitoring before the ones that were in place now. One of those was incredibly extensive. It was over a period of months. It was much longer than we would ordinarily do. And all of that monitoring told us that the site was operating well within the limits that are set by those health authorities and by other organisations in terms of what we would expect around the nuisance impact that was there.

Also, some of those things that you're reporting are not things that the Environmental Agency has the powers to do anything about. They are things for the local authority. So, over that extended period, we have also worked with the Newcastle Borough Council in particular, but also with the county council to make sure that we're sharing information and we're talking to their officers regularly. I realise, as far as you're concerned, you've not had that feedback. You've not seen that. What I'm telling you now is that we are committed to making sure that that is visible, that you do understand what we're doing. But certainly this is not a problem that we have just come to. And it is not a problem that there has been no action on in the past.

Andrea Horton: If that's the case, then what concerns me is that you said it's the waste already in there that's causing the problem. Why was that not potentially spotted when I was raising these complaints all these years ago, with nobody going in and actually looking and seeing what was happening then to the problems that we're now having further down the line.

Clare Dinnis: So, there is a regular process of inspections, and I'll ask Carl to come in here and give a little bit more detail. But there is a regular process of inspections of waste. And I think one of the things that's worth explaining about the waste stream is that all the way from when waste leaves our houses and our businesses, it goes through a number of different steps in the waste industry. We all know that it either goes to our pits - sorry, to our refuse sites, or it is collected, then goes through something called the transfer station, and then it ends up ultimately at landfills or incinerators, or other places. Every single person along that process has got responsibility in terms of where it goes and in terms of how that waste is treated.

Unfortunately, there is room for people to take decisions about getting around that legislation, taking the cheaper option to dispose of waste. We do regulate that, and we do regulate that heavily. The local authorities, in some cases, also have responsibilities on that regulation. But we do know that there are some unscrupulous operators in there who choose to get around it. So, our regulation of that is something that we have been focusing on and getting the right waste into the right places. And that's why we say that this is an issue which is for Walleys Quarry at the moment, but potentially one that is bigger. And we do unannounced and announced checks at the transfer stations. On site we require information to be given to us about what has gone into the site. And it's not because that hasn't been happening. Carl, do you want to come in on anything else there?

Carl Moss: Yes, Clare. Andrea, thanks for the points that you made there. I'll refer to the answer that I gave to Christine's question. Ten years ago, waste used to come into the sites from individual skip vehicles, individual and small lorries. They now come into the site in bulk containers from transfer stations where the small operators run their waste into. And these transfer stations trammel this waste and make it finer. Ten years ago, eight years ago, seven, six, five years ago, waste took a long time to degrade. The impact of this trammelling is that the waste is much finer. It's got a larger surface area because of all the fine particles. And when moisture gets into that, it decomposes much more quickly. So, that's why we've seen a step change in the way things happen.

And, in addition, it really makes the identification and inspection of those activities much more difficult to spot any materials that shouldn't be in that waste input. In terms of going forward, what's changed in the waste industry is we used to be funded to inspect the sites on a weekly basis, three times a week. We are now an auditing organisation where the responsibility for checking the waste is with the company. And we audit their acceptance criteria. And, as Clare said, a landfill site like this would expect to get no more than six regulatory interventions in a year from the Environment Agency. So, from my point of view, Clare has said we have daily interventions with this company. We're all over their waste acceptance criteria. But the situation was over the last three years we were only expected to audit the site six times a year. We've done more than that. And that's what we've been doing.

Clare Dinnis: Thank you, Carl. And thank you, Andrea, for that. Molly, can we go to the next question, please?

Operator: The next question comes from the line of Steven Murray. Please go ahead.

Steven Murray: Thank you very much for taking my question. With regard to the, as you call it, the odour, but what is in actual fact a toxic gas, hydrogen sulphide, the expectancy to break down and maximum emission of hydrogen sulphide for the landfill site from gypsum would be five to seven years. Based on the fact that you are saying that trammelling speeds up this process, is it not conceivable, particularly based on the fact that in the observation period, was it, seven loads were found to be noncompliant in that one week. It's therefore not perceivable that loads have been dumped over a number of years having been trammelled are also noncompliant?

Clare Dinnis: Thank you, Steven. So, again, I'll come to Carl in a minute on this. I think the challenge here is that we have the audit records and we have the audits that we have done, which tell us what those records say has gone into the landfill. The only way that we can be 100% sure whether there is something that has gone into it that shouldn't have gone in, or rather what it is that has gone in, is to start inspecting what is in there. And the last thing which I want to do at the moment is to start exposing the waste which we have been busy getting the operator to cap and to cap more effectively in order to reduce that odour. So, it is possible absolutely that there is more gypsum, for example, in there than there should have been.

But, at the moment, our focus is absolutely 100% on getting the odours controlled, capturing those gases, and then destroying those gases, so that they're not affecting the community in any way, shape or form. But, Carl, is there anything else to add on that one?

Carl Moss: Thank you, Clare. And thank you for the question. All I'd like to add there is in terms of the seven loads that have been rejected, I prefer to refer to those as seven producers,

seven companies. Clare is absolutely right. I've got a team of officers who are focusing on getting to the root cause of the problem. However, I have other officers that are backtracking and looking at those seven producers, and going back to those companies, not all of which are in the Newcastle under Lyme and Stoke on Trent area, they're all over the country. So, we're liaising with our colleagues in other areas. And we are visiting those producers to check their waste inputs and their waste outputs. And as you refer to gypsum materials, those pieces of work are looking at the inputs of gypsum based waste and their outputs. And we're seeing some surprising information that, at this present time, I can't share more widely with you just yet.

Steven Murray: If I may interject to that point, clearly if there has been seven loads that have been rejected when you do the job properly and monitoring this out, then over the preceding years that that has been running legitimately wanted to say there's probably several hundred loads, if not more, that were non-compliant and should have been rejected. So, to say that the odour is a result of historical dumping is completely disingenuous, is it not? The fact is that until you started monitoring them closely, they were taking any old crap into that site quite happily. One of the comments, do you believe that self-regulation by Red Industries of that site is working?

Clare Dinnis: So, Steven, I think that there's two bits in here. We have to act on evidence, as that's what the law requires us to do. We haven't been absent from that regulation, far from it over, over that period and over a number of years building up to this. So, we are using everything that we can there. I don't think I can comment on self-regulation. I think that is an issue for DEFRA. It is an issue for the broader policy issues. I have to work with, the team have to work with the law that we've got, and the regulations that the government of the day asks us to work to. And we are doing that. And we are pushing -

Steven Murray: I think it was a reasonable question. Sorry to interject, but it was a reasonable question. Do you believe that self-regulation is working at Walleys Quarry at this moment in time? Do you believe that? Yes or no?

Clare Dinnis: Steven, I'm not going to answer government policy. Okay.

Steven Murray: I'm asking you the process that is in place at this moment in time, please stop avoiding the question. Is the process in place at this moment in terms of self-regulation by the operator at Walleys Quarry, is it working? Yes or no? It's a simple question. Could you please have the courage to answer it?

Clare Dinnis: Steven, thank you for your question. My position is that I cannot give you advice on government policy. I can tell you we are doing absolutely everything we can to push that company to be compliant. We are using every single power we have. We have to operate within the law and we will continue to do that, but we will continue to push that as fast as we can. Molly, can we go to the next question, please?

Operator: Thank you. The next question comes from the line of Steven Meakin. Please go ahead.

Steven Meakin: Wonderful. Thank you. And thank you for the time you've given us today. Mine's a two-part question really, in 2019 we gave the Environment Agency a number of photographs that were taken overlooking the site of items that should not have gone into that site. The Environment Agency sent out an inspector to my home, statements were written and

we had assurance that an investigation would have taken place because that stuff shouldn't have gone in. That was the inspector's words. Over time we got disappointed. We had public meetings, and we were told that it was okay. It was solidified plastic. We were told it was solidified plastic one month before you actually investigated. And the investigation took place for approximately six weeks after we produced the photographs to you and statements were made.

That's the first part of our question. We'd like answers onto why the investigation didn't take its proper course of action. And the second part is hydrogen sulphide has been proved to be a dangerous gas. Can you assure us please that the people of Newcastle under Lyme and the surrounding areas, that it isn't going to affect our health in the future?

Clare Dinnis: Thank you, Steven. And for both parts of those, I'll come to them both. And then we'll see whether Carl is able to add anything on the first part in particular. So, I think I'm conscious particularly of the fact we've got lots of questions that are appeared to be asked, and actually there's some quite detailed answers that you need on that one about the investigation, and that we need to give you on that investigation. So, I think we will probably need to have a conversation separately with you about that. What I will say though is that there has been over the years, and certainly over the course of this year, there has been a number of people who have come forward that - some of whom have been reported in the press - the kinds of things you're talking about where people have come to us with information.

We have an environmental crime team who investigate such allegations to us and the information to us. And they do that separate from our regulation, so that they are not being affected by any of the information as part of the legal process there. That team is looking at that information. Now, that's not obviously something that we're talking about in terms of this 2019 team, that you've had an answer from that there. And we need to come back separately on that. So, we will do that, but I'll come to Carl in a second. In terms of hydrogen sulphide and the impact of hydrogen sulphide, this is why it is so important that we have all of the relevant authorities working together. My team and I do not have expertise in health advice. It would be irresponsible of us to give you health advice, because we are not practitioners who can do that.

That's why we've got Public Health England involved in this. And that's why you see the communication to that health coming out from Staffordshire County Council, with other organisations, making them joint statements. We will continue to do that. We will continue to press on that advice, not just for the physical impacts, but also for the mental wellbeing impacts. Because we are absolutely concerned about that, but we need to defer to them for that advice. So, Carl, can I ask you, is there anything you want to say on the investigation, or is that something that we should come back to Steven on?

Carl Moss: All I should say is to concur with you, Clare. Steven, thank you for making us aware of that situation. My responsibility is reinforcement, so I will look into that 2019 investigation. And obviously I don't want to make comment over an open call that might jeopardise any investigation that took place. So, I'm more than welcomed to engage and give you answers to your question.

Steven Meakin: Okay. If I may just come in there quickly, because I understand people wanted to ask questions. I did question from the Environment Agency as to why new investigating was

taking place. And now I have a letter in my possession from the Environment Agency stating that they have no record of investigation taking place.

Clare Dinnis: Steven, let's arrange a separate conversation with you. I think that's something that needs more time. So, we will do that. Thank you. Okay. Right. I am conscious that there's a lot of questions. We're going to keep going through. We are going to take them. But just before I go to Molly to come to the next question, what I'm keen to do is to make sure that we capture those questions. We will take as many of them as we can today. But, and I will repeat this in a minute after the next question just in case you want time to find a piece of paper, if you go to a website which is sli.do, that is sli.do, then it will ask you for a code. And there is a code you can put in, which is six digits. It's 349837. In there you can enter your question. You won't be able to see anybody else's questions. They won't be able to see yours, so they'll be confidential questions.

We won't have any details, so we won't come back to you individually on them, but we will include them for our frequently asked questions. So, if you have a question and you don't think we're going to get to you, we are going to try and get to as many of you as we can, then you can either log it that way. And I'll repeat that in a minute. But, as I said, we will also be running more of these. But, Molly, let's go on to the next question, please.

Operator: Thank you, Clare. The next question comes from the line of Daniel. Please go ahead.

Daniel: Hey Clare. Thank you. How severe is this gas smell, because obviously every time my mum smells it she can't catch her breath. And she's been rushed to hospital ten times now because of this. And every time I pour complaints in, nothing seems to be done about it.

Clare Dinnis: Daniel, I'm really sorry to hear about both those - sorry, had you not finished? Apologies.

Daniel: No. Fine.

Clare Dinnis: Okay. So, Daniel, I'm really sorry to hear about that impact. And I and the team are reading the letters and the emails that we're getting. And the wealth of information that's on social media, as well as the impact statements and other things that have been sent to us. And none of us want this to be carrying on or want this to be happening. What I will say is that the air quality monitoring that we are seeing at the moment, and we're reporting the levels of that every week on our citizen space, our website update to you. And we're sharing that with health partners immediately it comes to us, so that if there's any particular risks there that are different, they are getting that to you as soon as possible.

The advice that they are giving us is that, with the exception of those two days at the beginning of March where the health advisory limit was breached, the numbers have not been anywhere near that level since. So, they are at that annoyance level. Now, annoyance is a really difficult term to use in there, because what you're describing is more than that. And those symptoms are something that Public Health England are recognising. On the Staffordshire County Council website, there is a joint multi-agency health survey that is collecting information on the kinds of impacts that people are experiencing. That will help the health providers to give you better advice. But, first and foremost, if people are experiencing the kinds of symptoms you're talking about, the advice from them is absolutely to go to the GP. And it sounds like you're already doing that.

Daniel: It's coming to a point of just give up ringing and lamenting now because it seems to me like my complaints aren't heard. So, obviously now I just go to my local MP to do it on my behalf.

Clare Dinnis: And, Daniel, your complaints are being heard. Your complaints are absolutely being taken seriously. Please believe me that we are not sitting and not acting on this. What we're saying is that the things that we would ordinarily have expected to make a benefit by now are not having the level of benefit that we would expect. But we're not sitting back and waiting, or not doing anything. We are absolutely pressing ahead with the action as fast as possible. I was on site yesterday. I'd been on site about ten days before and saw some of that progress. And the team and the officers are working with Walleys Quarry Limited every single day. They are pushing this as fast as we can. And I do appreciate how frustrating it is.

Daniel: Thank you, that's all.

Clare Dinnis: Thank you, Daniel. Right. Can we go to the next question, please?

Operator: The next question comes from the line of Shan Rooney. Please go ahead.

Shan Rooney: You say you can't give us a date, Clare. And you'll have to excuse my voice, I've had laryngitis due to the landfill fumes, and I've just got my voice back. You say you can't give it a date, and I appreciate that because it's based on the success of the directions you're giving Red Industries. But I do think we need some kind of ballpark. My health has been so poor since exposure to landfill gas that, due to worsening asthma, we need to decide whether to try and move out, whether to look at going to a different county to ask for housing if we can't sell the house. Because I can't leave the house, I can't even walk to collect my son from nursery, because the gas makes me so wheezy with my asthma. And I've already seen the GP, I don't need instructions about healthcare advice. I'm already doing that. But I do need a ballpark. Are we talking a year? Are we talking five years? Because my family needs to take action.

Clare Dinnis: So, Shan, I'm really genuinely sorry to hear about and what you're living with on a day to day basis. And I'm not going to patronise you by repeating that health advice, I hear that. What I don't want to do is give you a date which then it doesn't come to fruition. I want to be honest with you about this. If we look at what we are requiring the company to do, so we would expect that by the time those extra actions that the company is focusing on now are done at the very beginning of June, that would be all of the issues that the surveys that have been done to date have shown us, and the challenges that are there. There's then an immediate extra survey that will tell us how efficient that has been. So, there's a really important step there during June.

The other thing for us is, and I will ask Adam from the team to come in, this will also partly explain the question about why people are experiencing this more at night. But the other thing is that we have seen a history of, and we know that you as a community, experienced this more in the winter, rather than in the summer. So, as it warms up, we would expect the gases to disperse more, we would expect there to be less of an issue there. But I'm not relying on that. We absolutely need not only to solve the odours, but to make sure that the plan that Walleys Quarry Limited have got in place works through the whole year and for all years, not just now. So, it's not that I'm not giving you information we have Shan. I want to be honest with you. Adam, perhaps you could come in and explain the point about what happens at night, please.

Adam Lines: Yeah. Thanks, Clare. I think to explain why we're starting to see more reports in the evening is literally down to a temperature inversion. And that's linked to partly the location of the site, the valley surrounding the site, and obviously the ability to disperse the gases overnight. That cold air on top of that warm air suppresses the dispersion of the gases. And, therefore, that can lead to higher concentrations being there at night, and obviously what's been experienced and reported to us. And, as Clare has said, the actions that we're trying to ensure the company take quite simply are to keep that gas within the site, get that into that engineered collection system and then treated by the flare or by the engines to nullify the gases. And that's the process that we're pushing them to achieve as quickly as is possible.

And, as we said, the first steps have been trying to seal the areas where they've been identified as those of the fugitive emissions escaping more readily, and also to seal those wells to keep the gas in the site. It's going to be a collection of actions, as well as the summer period which hopefully should alleviate the situation from a weather perspective, allowing more gases to escape. But we'll be pushing that company to take action as quickly as possible to remediate this.

Shan Rooney: Thanks for your answers. I suppose from your answers I'm taking that I have to expect this to be a long term issue in this area then, because nobody can tell me that this issue won't be here in five years' time even. So, I'm taking it from your answer you're telling our community we have to expect potentially to live with this long term because you can't even tell me five years as an endpoint.

Adam Lines: So, I guess in terms of - and you've probably heard this term before, and it's not said lightly, that no landfill will be odour-free.

Shan Rooney: It's not the odour sorry, it's the health harm. So, my concern is reducing the emissions enough to stop health harms. So, I'm specifically interested in asking about - for the rest of the community, I think we're interested in any health harm, whether it's nosebleeds in children, or children vomiting, those kinds of issues. Actually, for me, it's a priority to get the emissions down so that people aren't reporting these really inappropriate health harms that should not be normalised or accepted.

Clare Dinnis: And it's a priority for us as well. Absolutely a priority for us. There's no question about that. We don't want this to be happening at any point for any period. And we are working as fast as we can to resolve this. I don't think this is something that will still be there in years' time. But what I can't do is give you a date or a timescale as to when it is. I think, Shan, the ongoing conversation like this that we are planning to have with you will help you to see what direction that can run in and will mean that you have the information that we do. And I do hear your frustration, and I recognise that I don't want you to be living with this any more than you do. I promise you that we will keep letting you know as soon as we do, what the plan is and what those timescales are.

Shan Rooney: I really appreciate your time. Thank you. I appreciate you saying that you do think that within one year we shouldn't be, if all goes to plan, so at least we know that. And thank you very much for specifying that.

Clare Dinnis: Thank you. Right. I'm conscious that we've got a lot of questions. So, I'm going to repeat that Slido code so that you can go to there. But what I'm going to say from our perspective is that we have got another half a dozen questions or so in the queue. We will stay

on the line and we will take all of those questions. We will do that as quickly as we can, so that we're not taking more of your time. But for any of you who may not have registered a question, who wants to ask a question now, if you put it into the internet sli.do, it will take you to an internet site called Slido, and then you can put in the code 349837. And what we'll do is we will make sure that those questions are added to the frequently asked questions on our website.

But as I say, if you're able to stay on the line, we will take the questions from everybody who is here. So, Molly, can we go to the next one, please?

Operator: The next question comes from the line of Helen. Please go ahead.

Helen: Hi Clare. Thanks for taking questions. I just wanted to ask if you can, or any of your team, offer any advice on how we can go about adhering to Covid guidelines. So, the advice is to keep windows open to let fresh air in. Problem is, firstly, we rarely get any fresh air. And, secondly, we all have to keep windows and doors shut majority of the time because of the smell. And despite the easing of restrictions, a lot of us residents still feel we're locked down and confined indoors and are unable to enjoy being out in our gardens or having friends and family members to visit because of the disgusting and embarrassing smell. So, at a bit of a loss as to what we can do. So, just wondered if you've got any advice.

Clare Dinnis: So, Helen, I think you know that I don't have an answer to you on that. And I think there would never have been a good time for this to happen, absolutely recognise that. But it is compounded by the situation that you've been in, we've all been in, with lockdown. And I recognise that that absolutely has made it more difficult. All I can do is come back to the advice from the health authorities on this. But I do recognise that it is one thing being told that there shouldn't be long-term impacts, but there is another thing in living with this smell. I can do nothing other than say that I don't want you to be in this position any more than you do, and we are doing everything we can to resolve it as quickly as we can. Molly, can we go to the next question please?

Operator: Yes. The next question comes from the line of Walton. Please go ahead. Your line is un-muted.

Walton: Thank you. Good afternoon. You have said that you've got the air monitors at the site until the end of August. What happens then? Will they be taken away? Because I'm concerned because, as you know, Walleys Quarry has permission to carry on for another five and a half years, well, we could be in rather a mess if something isn't done soon.

Clare Dinnis: So, we'll come to Carl in a minute to talk about the quality monitors, but let's be really clear on this one. What we've said is that they will stay in place until, at least, the end of August. This kind of monitoring is not something that we would ordinarily do around a landfill or that we would expect to need to do around a landfill. And Carl will explain how we are working with partners on this. We put those additional two stations in to repeat the monitoring that we had done using one station at a time previously. At the beginning of March, we then went in with partners and identified the additional two sites. Three months is a really important time and timescale scale in terms of getting that data. So, what we have - the reason why the end of August is important is because it is a date by when we will have had all four monitors operating at the same time for that three months.

There will be a review with the local authorities with Public Health England at that stage. And we will make a decision then about whether that's something that we, as authorities, continue to do, or whether potentially that is even something that we require Walleys Quarry to do. That's not something that we've made a decision on yet. But, Carl, can you perhaps just expand a bit on what the monitors are doing and why they're not directly about the regulation of the permit.

Carl Moss: So, the monitors are there collecting data on a continuous basis 24 hours a day to see those variations through the day. In terms of your question, I'm part of the air quality monitoring cell with local resilience partners, PHE, Newcastle Borough Council etc. And we are constantly reviewing that situation with regards to how long the monitors will be there. As Clare has said, they will be there till at least until the end of August. And obviously the partners are discussing, based on the information we have, how long - further they stay on site. And, of course, that will be dependent on the impacts of the work that the company are doing. And that is part of the review.

If we see a downturn in the odour issues, obviously that review will take that into account. But it's always there for us and the partners to consider the leaving monitors there longer. But that that's something that we do with our partners.

Walton: Yeah. But this is a dreadful smell. Rebecca Pow referred to a smell she's had in a chemistry lesson many years ago. As if we're making something out of nothing. That is absolutely ruining and making everybody's lives in Newcastle and the surrounding areas an absolute misery. And I would like Clare or Rebecca Pow to come and spend a few nights at one of those houses immediately adjacent to the landfill and experience for yourselves to see what it's like when you've woken up in the middle of the night, when you want to be sick, or you've got a splitting headache probably as well, or bleeding nose, running nose or running eyes. It's just unbearable. And we're just expected to put up with it. Newcastle lives matter, as well as those in London. They wouldn't put up with this if it was in London, Parliament would soon have it shut.

Clare Dinnis: So, I need to be clear. I can't and I'm not going to make any apology for the words that that Minister Pow chooses to use, that's her description of it. And I absolutely understand that. My team and I absolutely are listening to what you are going through and what you are living with. And none of us want you to have that any longer. We are doing absolutely everything we can to make this go away, to resolve the issue. And nobody is thinking that this isn't a serious issue or that any challenges are - that it's coming from anywhere other than reality. We have team members who live and work in the area. We have team members who have families who live and work in the area. And we are listening and hearing what you have been telling us for a number of months, not just now. So, it is not a case of us sitting back and saying, this is happening in a part of the country that doesn't matter. Not in the slightest. Absolutely not in the slightest. Molly, can we take the next question, please?

Operator: The next question comes from the line of Trevor Miles. Please go ahead.

Trevor Miles: Hello. Yeah. Thank you very much for giving me time to ask this question. My main question is - and sorry about the gargling throat, it's the landfill that gets hold of this. What will happen, if anything, if the smell remains too high and unacceptable? And if it continues, what teeth do the EA have to close the site or make remedies to it?

Clare Dinnis: Okay. So, there's several parts to this. And I think one of the things that I know has been a real frustration for people is that they haven't seen the company being fined. They haven't seen any penalties on the company and are thinking that they're going to get away with this. And they're just being asked to take the actions they are. And that's absolutely not the case. It's important that we focus on getting to a place where that odour is not affecting you at the moment, and we are doing that. And then any other measures and any other impacts or consequences that accompany will come further down the line. In terms of the actions that we are taking now, we will absolutely continue to push the company, as I said in my introduction, to go beyond what we would ordinarily expect for a landfill, to be using new techniques, to be doing things that are different.

And that is not about what is - anything other than what is needed to reduce those odours as fast as we possibly can. In terms of closing the site, it is never going to be something which is off the table. But neither is it a decision that we would take lightly. Because what we don't want to do is to end up with a site which has no owner, which has nobody to put that management in place, nobody with the legal powers to put the management in place to operate what's needed, not just through the lifetime of the site, but beyond for a number of years beyond the site being finished. Because that will be a worst situation for the community. And at the heart of every decision we're making is how do we make this right for the community?

Trevor Miles: So, you don't really have the teeth to close it, or do you?

Clare Dinnis: If it was going to control the odour, we would do it. If it was going to stop the odour, if we thought it was the answer to the problem, we would absolutely do it. But we don't believe it is the solution that's going to make a difference.

Trevor Miles: Yeah. Because somebody has got to monitor it anyhow. Whatever happens, if Red go bankrupt for instance, or whatever they decide to call themselves next week, then do they not have any responsibility over what they've done in the future?

Clare Dinnis: So, they do. And we're getting into complex bits of law around what we would do if a company was dissolved, or what we would do if a company - there's various different bits, but I'm not going to go into the detail of it now. But the point is it is - all of our action is about taking that odour away, getting it back into management, making sure that there is a solution that is going to be sustainable for the longer term, so you're not living with this for years, and keeping the operator absolutely accountable for doing that. And there will be various parts of the legal process that will have to be followed as we go through. But none of that is being held back. And none of this is about us not wanting to make those tough decisions. It's about making the right decisions to get that odour under control as quickly as possible.

Trevor Miles: Yeah. All we want is for this smell to be controlled to some degree that we can live with it. Thank you very much for giving me the time for asking the question. Thank you.

Clare Dinnis: Thank you, Trevor. Let's go to the next question, please, Molly.

Operator: The next question comes from the line of Sophie. Please go ahead.

Sophie: Hey, thank you for your time. I know we've already discussed in regards to the lorries that were turned away previously on the call. Obviously, the community is very worried about these lorries that were turned away and what was in them. And in case they have been previously delivered, and they were accepted then turned away previously. So, as a community,

I think we all want to know what was actually in those to be turned away. Why that specifically goes against landfill policy that they've got in there and about that if it was obviously already in the path of being accepted when it wasn't being reviewed by the Environment Agency, what impact that would have on human health?

Clare Dinnis: Thank you, Sophie. And absolutely I can understand why you want to know that. We ask this question directly to the officers who have been working directly with Walleys Quarry about this. But it was something that I talked directly to the operator about yesterday when we were on site. Carl will come in and explain it a little bit more. But basically the material that was problematic was plasterboard. There were sheets of plasterboard, rather than the crushed up trammelled plasterboard that people have been - that we've talked about on the call. Plasterboard has to be land filled into separate cells because we know that it does cause problems with hydrogen sulphide, and that's why they were rejected. But, Carl, is there anything to add on those specifically, please?

Carl Moss: No, Claire. You've covered that point really well. So, Sophie, thanks for your question.

Sophie: So, was that the only things that were turned away? It was just that, nothing else extra?

Carl Moss: Yeah. Please don't think that because they were turned away, there was hazardous materials in there. It was simply sheets and sheets of plasterboard that have got gypsum in them that contribute to the production of H₂S. Don't think there was dangerous materials there, so please don't be frightened that it was something more sinister. It was just sheets and sheets of plasterboard.

Sophie: Am I okay to ask a second further question at all?

Clare Dinnis: We've got lots in the queue, Sophie, but if it's quick I'll take it. Yeah.

Sophie: Yeah. And it's just off the back off the monitoring. Have you actually seen any improvements obviously in results they did the recent capping off?

Clare Dinnis: So, the monitoring from April was - the middle of April through to the middle of May is something that is with the multi-agency groups. So, with those who have the health responsibility right now, Sophie. It's something that the team discussed with them yesterday, and we should be expecting a multi-agency statement on that in the next couple of days. What we've seen is different for different stations. So, in the update that comes out this week, you will see that the percentage of time where we are over annoyance has reduced from all of the stations, with the exception of the one on the Gallingle. Folks will know that the readings have been higher on the Gallingle state, or above the annoyance level for some time. And they continue to be so.

So, our focus in terms of the actions that Walleys Quarry Limited to doing at the moment, so I talked about those hotspots where they're capping on not the cells that had been captured during April, but the additional cells. The focus has been on those that are primarily on that side of the landfill. And that is absolutely where our area of focus is at the moment. But in terms of the other stations, we have seen a stabilization. And it definitely seems to be under control and is starting to go in the right direction. But that's not the case for Gallingle.

Sophie: And thank you for your answers.

Clare Dinnis: Thank you, Sophie. Molly, let's go to the next question, please. The next question comes from the line of Mark. Please go ahead.

Mark: Hi. Thanks for taking questions. My question is about a report that Red Industries claim to have produced identifying other potential sources of the problem. So, my question is have you seen that report? And, if so, what is your response to it? And, finally, have Red Industries or Walleys Quarry, sorry, excuse me, now accepted that the problem is linked to the site?

Clare Dinnis: Okay. So, Mark I'll let the team who worked directly with the coal authority come in some detail or a little bit more detail on the work that's been done there, but there's a couple of points I want to make on that. Firstly, we haven't seen what we would expect to see from Walleys Quarry Limited to back up the statement that they made to the public. But the conversation that I had with them yesterday was that I did not want that work on the investigation that they're doing around that to slow any of the work they're doing on the capping or any of the work on the gas infrastructure. And those things absolutely have to be their priority. Yes, they've got other - they were reassuring me that they have gotten different consultants, different parts of the team working on the evidence that they say they have to back up those claims.

But that their focus is 100% on the capping, and the gas infrastructure, and the measures that we think will make the biggest difference. But I'll let Carl speak on that in a moment. In terms of - sorry, just remind me of your second question, please?

Mark: Do you believe that the operator has now accepted -

Clare Dinnis: Yes, the odour? Yes. Sorry. Apologies. So, I can't speak for Walleys Quarry. I don't know what they would say to that. What I can tell you is that part of the issue for us has to be that our officers have to be able to trace an odour directly from offsite onto site. And that has not been something in previous years that they have been able to do. And they have - we have done more odour assessments than we ordinarily would do. So, it's not for lack of time or for lack of being out there. We did that for the first time at the end of March, just before we issued that enforcement notice for them. And one of the non-compliances that we issued this week was doing that for the second time. So, we have now got the evidence that we need legally to absolutely be able to trace those odours back to site.

And I'm more interested, frankly, in us having that evidence than whether the - that the operator agrees that it is coming from site or not. But, Carl, is there anything you're -

Mark: Sorry, could I just add a point to that? If they won't accept that it's coming from the site, isn't that an obstacle to solving the problems?

Clare Dinnis: It's not an obstacle to us using our regulatory powers. And I would say that we are getting absolute cooperation from the company in terms of the work that we are asking them to do, and the challenge that we are putting to them in terms of the pace that they are doing that work. So, I don't feel it is something that is stopping them doing what we need them to at the moment.

Mark: Right.

Clare Dinnis: Carl, is there anything you wanted to add on the investigations?

Carl Moss: Thank you, Clare. And thank you, Mark, to the question around other sources. Clare is absolutely right. We haven't seen any data from Walleys Quarry Limited to substantiate their claims of other sources. Since they've made that claim, under the direction of the local resilience forum, I've been working with other regulators, Newcastle under Lyme planners, and we've involved the coal authority in these discussions. I received a letter from the coal authority on the 7th of May that outlines that they have looked at their mine workings, they have looked at the pumping that they do to the mine workings. They make the point that substantial changes would have had to occur to the mine environment around the times that the odours started to appear.

They've got no evidence that there's those major changes to the mine workings. And they concluded their letter in the following way. And no way am I speaking on behalf of the coal authority, but this was a sentence in that letter that was shared with the local resilience forum. And as far as I'm concerned, is there for release. It said, "In summary, based on our evidence in sight visits, the odours and associated nuisance are not coming from coal mine workings." So, as far as we're concerned, since the coal board gave us that information, we have been focusing our attention 100% on the site. We also look at, on a regular basis, because the site is surrounded by groundwater monitoring points, we look at that information that's supplied to it to see if there is any leakage through the ground.

And the information we're seeing no evidence of that. So, the sources are, from my point of view, coming from surface emissions on the site. And we have been emphasizing on the company the evidence we've got. And Claire's explained to you what the company has been saying to us.

Mark: Okay. I'm sorry, I don't want to take up too much time, but are you aware that one of the members of the liaison committee, or Red's liaison committee, asked to see the report that they claim to have published only to be told that it was with the Environment Agency. As soon as you were finished with it, he could have sight of it.

Clare Dinnis: So, no, I'm not aware of that. We have said to them that we need more information from them. So, Mark, we'll update on this as soon as we have something to update on. Thank you for your question.

Mark: Okay. Thank you.

Clare Dinnis: Thank you. Molly, can we go to the next question, please?

Operator: The next question comes from the line of Thomas Kerry. Please go ahead.

Thomas Kerry: Hi. Given the worries that Red are clearly in capable of running a compliant landfill, what punishment are you going to give them for gutting my kids, everyone's kids? And why do you not just revoke the permit and stop all this going in?

Clare Dinnis: Okay. Thank you, Thomas. So, firstly, in terms of penalty for them, as I said, the focus at the moment is on getting the site into compliance and stopping the odours. Building a case and understanding what the right measures are that we take against the company, what the right sanctions or consequences, whatever you want to call it, is something that will take time and we'll need to build evidence. And I'm not prepared to compromise getting to the solutions for the community as fast as we possibly can. So, the fact that you're not seeing anything there does not mean that that won't be part of this. But it needs to come at the right

time. And in terms of not closing the site, what I am absolutely trying to avoid is anything that would - that affects the - our powers.

And that potentially means that it is going to take longer or make things more complicated to get the right answer for you. Because if it's complicated, then that means it will take longer. And that's not the right answer for the community. If we shut the landfill down, then we risk going into either challenge, which starts to suspend the powers that the Environment Agency has to use on the site in terms of management, or we end up with the company going into liquidation. And then there isn't anybody who has responsibility for the management of what is happening in the site, let alone for the restoration at the site. So, that's why we're not pushing ahead with -

Thomas Kerry: So, it's money.

Claire Dinnis: No, it's not money. Absolutely it's not money. It's about being able to have the powers to put the - to do the operations that are needed at the moment. There is an extraordinary amount of work on the site now around the landfill gas, around the capping. And if there is nobody with the authority to do that work on the site, which they would risk.

Thomas Kerry: We don't trust that Red will do that work correctly. Anyway, have you seen what they've been doing? You need to take the permits away from them and close the sites.

Clare Dinnis: Thomas, I can only give you the facts around the law and around what we can do. I understand that that's not what -

Thomas Kerry: The facts are you have the authority to revoke that permit and you are refusing to do so and risking our health. They are the facts.

Clare Dinnis: Thomas, they're not the law, I'm afraid, so I'm sorry. I'm going to go to another question now, if we can move on. Because we are absolutely doing everything we can there. And if I thought for one moment that taking that permit away was the solution, we would have done that previously. But I am absolutely confident it is not the right answer at this stage. Molly, can we go to the next question, please?

Operator: The next question comes from the line of Allie Miles. Please go ahead.

Annie Miles: Hello there. Thank you for having me. The name's Annie Miles, just to be clear. I'm interested to hear my father has actually put a question to this forum as well. It just goes to show the level that it's affecting me and my family. I live 800 metres away, and my parents are just around the corner, so I'm in the area. This has been affecting me for seven years. I've got two and a half questions. First one is what are the emergency evacuation processes and alarm systems that you've got in place to let the residents know if we should be evacuated? I've actually rang the police in the middle of the night because it's been that bad, and they say it's not - has nothing to do with them. So, I'd like to know what your evacuation processes are.

My other point is what do you class as long term exposure and short term exposure? I've been exposed to this seven years now, I class that as long term. And the other point is why can't government take management of it? They put this through, they should be taking responsibility. Over to you.

Clare Dinnis: Thank you, Annie. And I can hear, and I believe you absolutely in terms of how much of an impact this is having on you. So, in terms of evacuation, that would be something that would be a local authority responsibility. As we said, we can't answer questions for partners. So, it is something I know that in terms of the - they've been asked, and we will add that to our questions. We'll make sure that you've got those answers through partners. But it is something that needs to be directed at them, I'm afraid. We are providing all of that evidence, all of that advice, all of the information to them. The same is true in terms of the long-term exposure, that's something that, as I said previously, I and the team don't have health advice expertise. So, it would be very irresponsible of us to advise that - revise you on that.

But we are having conversations with Public Health England not just about the immediacy of what we're seeing here, but also about long-term. However, I also need to be clear that the air quality monitoring that we have done in previous years, and it's not just a one-off, it was done for an extended period and a shorter period in two different years. So, I think it was between 2017 and 2019, did not show levels that were anywhere near what we have seen since the end of February. And they were not levels that were causing Public Health England to have any concerns at all about health impacts. So, we do need to be mindful of that. And that's part of that picture there.

Annie Miles: Yeah. You've got monitoring stations dotted around, but you're very welcome to come to my house at three o'clock in the morning when my eyes are streaming, my throat killing me, I've got severe headache, et cetera. So, there is a problem. You're just gas lighting us again. You're saying everything's okay. The levels aren't that high. You come to my house, it's not got better.

Clare Dinnis: Annie, what I'm giving you is the health advice that we've been given. We don't have powers to look at the impact in your home, but other authorities do. And that's what that health group is about. And that's what that health survey that I talked about is about. So, I'm not telling you that that isn't important. Absolutely not. What I'm telling you is that it is not the Environment Agency that has the expertise to be able to look at that in the way that you're talking about. We'll absolutely make sure that's shared with the health authorities, but it needs to come from them.

Annie Miles: The point about the government taking management of it, why can't they take management of it to stop this?

Clare Dinnis: So, in a similar way to the questions that the caller wanted me to answer earlier, I can't speak for government policy on this. What I can do is tell you that we are doing everything we can within that law. We are having conversations about what those different options might be and what the right answer might be. I've had conversations directly myself with minister Powell and with the secretary of state's office. You've seen, because it's on social media, the level of interest there is on government on this, and the level of scrutiny there is on it. And we are doing everything we can to reach that resolution as fast and as securely as possible.

Annie Miles: Okay. Well, thank you for answering.

Clare Dinnis: Thank you, Annie.

Annie Miles: Thank you.

Clare Dinnis: Thank you. Molly, if we can go to the next question, please?

Operator: Yes. The next question comes from the line of Lucy. Please go ahead.

Lucy: Hi there. I know that you keep going over it briefly at the start of the call, we really, really would like to know is there any specific reason why you can't actually just suspend the permit until the odour has been sorted? Because they're just putting more waste in it now, but that's going to cause more problems for us in the future. They clearly can't be trusted, so why can't you just suspend the waste? Thank you.

Clare Dinnis: Thank you, Lucy. So, the challenge is here about what does suspending the waste do? And if we need to have legal grounds to be able to defend our decision. And I'll talk about why that's important, because it's not about us being told were right or wrong. And in the legal grounds that we would need is we would need to be able to confidently show and have the evidence to show that new waste coming in is causing the problem now. Now, if the company decided that it wanted to put that challenge in place, the bit that makes it difficult is that under some cases that would end up in a place where it would make it difficult and possible we would not be able to carry on with the other parts of the permit. So, with requiring them to making - make the changes that they are with the management of the site, and it would effectively put us in a place where we would be on difficult grounds in being able to do the things that we need the company to do to make a difference.

That's what we don't want to risk. We don't want to end up in a place where we can't do everything on the site to manage the odour. There are other challenges in terms of the viability of the company, but those - that is not what is driving the decision not to take the permit away. It is about getting to the best solution as quickly as we can.

Lucy: You keep saying that there's not enough evidence, but what about the thousands of residents that are complaining? Is that not enough evidence, hearing people's stories of how we're all suffering, is that not enough evidence? Or, do you just sit there and think they're lying, they're not telling the truth? We're fearing for our lives here, our children. It's just not fair at all. Loads have been turned away ever since you've told them to check every single load that's coming onto the site. Some are being rejected. What will be an enough?

Clare Dinnis: So, Lucy, what I'm talking about is evidence specifically related to the new waste coming on site causing problems. That's the evidence we don't have. Because the new waste that's coming on site is not causing problems. I'm not belittling what you guys are going through and what you're telling us. I am absolutely not belittling that in any way, shape or form.

Lucy: New waste is actually being turned away. How do you know? You're not there 24/7 unfortunately, so how do you know that they're just saying, "Oh, we'll reject that one today, but we'll let ten more through tomorrow." Do you trust them that they're doing it correctly? Because us as residents certainly don't trust them.

Clare Dinnis: So, we are doing more inspection on site. Carl, perhaps I'll bring you in to talk a bit more about - more of the inspection we're doing on site, and then Lucy we will move on and take the questions from the others.

Carl Moss: Okay. Thank you, Lucy. Thanks for your question. Yes, we have pressed the company to increase their waste acceptance criteria. The way that we deal with that is we will be making announced and unannounced visits to the site going forward. When we choose to

that to do that, it's something that we've got to organise to make sure that we are checking that they are going through that waste acceptance criteria. So, that that's the way we're pursuing it. And we have plans in place starting in the next few days where we will be doing those unannounced visits.

Clare Dinnis: Thank you, Carl. And thank you for your question, Lucy. Molly, can we go to the next question please?

Operator: Yes. The next question comes from the line of Phil Delaney. Please go ahead.

Phil Delaney: Yes. Thank you. And, Clare, thanks to you and your team. And, Clare, like many people on this call, I've tried so many times to speak with Red direct just to let them know how I feel about things. I'd have no joy. Now, given that you and your team are dealing with them every single day, how much do you assess their attitude and their commitment into solving these problems? So, I've got no doubt if I asked you that question, you and your people on this call clearly 10 out of 10, but where are they? What's your assessment and the assessment of your staff on their attitude and their commitment to solving this problem?

Clare Dinnis: Okay. Phil, so let me be really clear on one thing, first of all. And I know this isn't what you're asking me to do, but I want to be really clear on it. I do not speak for Walleys Quarry Limited. I'm not here to defend Walleys Quarry Limited. And I have absolutely been pressing them since my very, very first conversation with them to do more on their engagement with the community. They have heard that loud and clear from me and from my team repeatedly. In terms of how confident I am that they are doing the right thing, how confident I am that they are in the right place to be able to resolve this, I guess it doesn't really matter how confident I am, because we are not letting them go anywhere with this that is not heavily regulated, is not absolutely scrutinised.

And we are putting all of our efforts onto them to make sure that it's checked. We're meeting with them a mixture of onsite and through virtual means, obviously, because of COVID. We are talking to them pretty much every day, sometimes multiple times through the day. We are doing those announced and unannounced visits. So, frankly, whether - whatever my opinion of them is, we are not giving them any room to do anything else on that one. So, I think we've muted your line because there was echo. I am going to give you a chance, as I have with others, to come back if there's anything else on that?

Phil Delaney: No, you carry on. Please move on.

Clare Dinnis: Okay. Thank you, Phil. Thank you for your question. All right, Molly, if we can go to the next question, please.

Operator: Yes. The final question comes from line of Paul. Please go ahead.

Paul: Hello. Hi. I just want to talk to you, first of all, about distance, and how far it travels. It travels such a long way. It affected me 2.6 miles away when I was working from home, and my relatives 4.6 miles away. And it travels further. Can I have some more information about why it's travelling so far? And why is it that the gas is still so strong so far away to give such terrible symptoms?

Clare Dinnis: Thank you, Paul. And I think what I'll start off by saying, and then I'll come to the team, is that we have not seen landfill gas in this way travelling this farm from - certainly

not from Walleys Quarry or from a landfill before. And it is one of the things that has really concerned us about this. So, Adam, Carl, do you want to come in on that one?

Adam Lines: Yeah. Thanks, Clare. I guess the one reason why the gases is so easily and readily spotted is that the nose picks up hydrogen sulphide in past the billions, so that doesn't have to be a lot of it for you to sense that it's there. So, therefore it can be picked up on the wind a long distance away from the source of the odour. So, that's one of the reasons why it's picked up so readily and you're identifying it's there. I think that as we've picked up on today, I think people are now also expecting that gas to be there and are more attuned and more sensitive to it being that, and that they're picking - and also picking it up more readily. So, I think there's a number of reasons why you're experiencing the odours and picking them up. But in terms of those wider dispersion pieces, that's what we're hoping some of the air quality monitoring will help us to understand, as well as the operations on the site. So, we can explain that to you in more detail in the future.

Paul: Yeah. Go on.

Carl Moss: It's Carl Moss coming in here. It's all part and parcel of the air quality monitoring cell work that we're doing as part of the LRF. The prevailing wind direction goes from site towards the fire station. And the rationale for putting a monitoring point at the fire station is to try and identify the reduction in terms of distance from the site. It is one of the things that -

Paul: This gas travels so far it goes to the hospital, it goes past the hospital. It travels up to eight miles away as strong as it is when it's 0.9, 0.6 miles away. So, I don't really understand. You say about wind direction and whatever, all I know is that symptoms are bad 4.5 miles away. My elderly relatives are getting symptoms with coughing and stuff. Surely there must be more gas produced to - and more problem at the site for it to be that strong so far away. I don't correlate the answer with the actual reality of what's happening, because there's got to be more gas surely to travel that far. Otherwise, it would disperse surely.

Clare Dinnis: Carl, sorry, were you coming in? You want me to come in?

Carl Moss: No, you come in.

Clare Dinnis: So, Paul I think the important bit here is about making sure that we are able, between us all, to track those symptoms. And I get - absolutely get that you've been reporting it. When we sent out our written letter at the end of April, we did that going around all of the places that we have had complaints tracked. And we know that is a very high number of people. So, we're not just focusing on the area around the site. We are focusing on everywhere that we have had complaints from, because that is one of those ways of getting it. We need that to be also registered on Staffordshire county councils symptom tracker. And that's some of the things that the air quality cell are looking at as well. But what we don't have answers for you today about why it is going that far.

Paul: All right. Okay.

Clare Dinnis: Thank you, Paul.

Paul: Thank you.

Clare Dinnis: Thank you, Paul. And then, Molly, I think we're taking one more question that we'll go through and then we'll close the call.

Operator: Yes. The final question comes from the line of James Armstrong. Please go ahead.

James Armstrong: Hello. Thank you for taking the call. My question really follows on from the previous call you've just had around the monitoring stations, really. Well, it's two parts of my question. But the first part is - I've emailed this query in as well. Is there any means to have live data streams off of the results of those monitoring stations transmitted to a website in some way for the community to be able to see in real time?

Clare Dinnis: Okay. So, thank you, James. This is one we've been asked a lot, and there's, there's some good reasons as to why we've chosen to make it available weekly. But, Carl, I think we'll continue to explain this one.

Carl Moss: Yes. The monitoring stations, it's not data that you can live stream. The data has to be downloaded. The data then has to be checked, and that's part and parcel of the problems that we have in terms of doing this on a weekly basis. The raw data that we share with PHE on a weekly basis, or what we call the rag status and the percentages of the time above the annoyance level, we always stress that it's raw data. The monthly reports are what we call rectified or checked data. So, that data that we have the confidence in that it's absolutely correct. And PHE then work on that approved rectified data going forward. These stations cannot be live streamed and the data taken that way. So, that's the advice that I get from my air quality monitoring experts. And that's the advice I can only pass on to you.

Clare Dinnis: But, James, it's also worth saying we absolutely have heard where this ask is coming from and we understand why people want it. So, as and when we get to that review of the air quality, it will be part of the questions that we ask ourselves and something that we'd look at. But, at the moment, that's the reason why not.

James Armstrong: Okay. Well, that's nice. Great. Thank you. The other part of my question, really, you touched on it earlier on about the fact that you didn't want to - I don't know how to phrase it, But how you didn't want to dig up and identify the root cause of the smell. But surely that should be a priority in terms of trying to understand what is generating this odour. Because capping it off is all well and good, and hopefully it will have some kind of positive impact. I haven't seen it yet, but hopefully it will at some point. But surely we've got to understand what is actually causing the problem in the first place.

Clare Dinnis: So, James, the risk is that if we start digging into the site and exposing the waste that has been capped, we end up with an increase in those odours that affect the community even more so than they are at the moment.

James Armstrong: Would that be a short term issue? Would that be a long term issue?

Clare Dinnis: It wouldn't be something that that would be quick to do. So, it is not something that I will say, "Gosh, we will never do that." But what we need to do is to do what we are saying around the capping and around the gas management now, because they are the things that have the best track record. They are the things that are most likely, in terms of all of the expertise that we can throw at this, to have a positive impact. We don't have reason. One of the evidence that we have so far leads us to believe that there is anything in there that is more than hydrogen sulphide causing material. So, what we need to do is we need to work with that. And we will do that as quickly as we can. And if we end up with that not being the benefit that we expect, then we will need to look again.

But, at the moment, the risks of doing that, the risk of exposing the waste, are too high for us to do that.

James Armstrong: Okay.

Clare Dinnis: Thank you, James. Right. Thank you very much, everybody, particularly for staying with us for so much longer. I absolutely appreciate there's a lot of questions out there. And I appreciate that some people won't be happy with the answers we've given today. And we have tried to make sure that we have answered as many questions as we possibly can, which means that some people won't feel we've given them enough time. And I am sorry for that, but I'm trying to balance all of those needs. We have recorded the call. We will also have a transcript of the call, and we will make both of those available as soon as we can to our citizens space page. And we'll tell you through social media or through those of you that have registered for us - with us for updates through the usual routes that we contact you.

We are also committed to doing more of these and to doing them in person. So, we will arrange and we will try and change the day and the time, so that we're not hitting any commitments that you have over and over again. But I will leave it there. I'll say thank you very much for all of your questions. Thank you very much for the way you've been with us, for the team. I really appreciate it. I know this is a difficult circumstance for you all to be in. And I appreciate the way that you've asked the questions. So, Molly, I will hand back to you.

Operator: Thank you for joining today's call. You may now disconnect your lines. Hosts, please stay connected and await further instructions. Thank you.

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]