

## Heledd Fychan

Aelod o'r Senedd dros

Ganol De Cymru

—

Member of the Senedd for

South Wales Central


## Senedd Cymru /Welsh Parliament

Swyddfa Ranbarthol / Regional Office

2 High Street Pontypridd, CF37 1QJ

Heledd.Fychan@senedd.cymru

[senedd.cymru/Heledd Fychan](https://www.senedd.cymru/Heledd_Fychan)

01443 853214 

Dyddiad | Date: 18.3.2025

### **Pwnc | Subject: NDM8687 A bill relating to planning processes for quarry development**

Dear Petitions Committee members

#### **The Legislative Proposal**

This legislative proposal echoes similar proposals brought forward in Westminster by the Labour MP, Matt Western, in 2021, and the Conservative MP, Paul Holmes, in 2023. Both had similar experiences to many of us in this Senedd of supporting residents in their fight against either the opening of, or the extension, of a quarry near residential homes, schools and community facilities. Both also came to realise how inadequate and outdated planning legislation was when deciding on such developments. Communities are left having to fight against large multinationals with plentiful resources at their disposal to quash any local opposition. What's abundantly clear is that it isn't a fair fight.

The proposal aims to legislate a presumption against approving quarry development near settlements and establish a mandatory buffer zone of 1,000 m for all new and existing quarries. This would shift the burden of proof from residents having to make a case for objecting to quarry development to the planning process having different standards that would set new expectations.

These proposals aim to address the inadequacies and outdated nature of planning legislation regarding quarry developments near residential areas, schools, and community facilities.

#### **Case Study: Craig-yr-Hesg Quarry**

Craig-yr-Hesg quarry in Glyncoch has operated since 1885, providing high-quality skid-resistant surfacing aggregates. Despite promises to end operations by December 2022, the company sought to extend both the area and the life of the quarry. Over 400 objections were received, and the local planning authority rejected the applications due to health and well-being concerns. However, a planning appeal resulted in permission being granted by the Welsh Government.

The extraction and working of minerals or depositing mineral waste at the site was due to come to an end on 31 December 2022, followed by a restoration and aftercare programme. This was a commitment made to the local community when that planning application was made. However, that proved to be a broken promise. The company in charge of the quarry

subsequently put forward two planning applications, to extend both the area quarried as well as the life of the quarry.

Over 400 objections were received from local residents, Pontypridd Town Council, and many elected representatives – including myself and Vikki Howells. Indeed, so compelling were the arguments put forward that the local planning authority, Rhondda Cynon Taf Council, rejected both applications on the basis of the impact of blasting on people's health and well-being. The community breathed a sigh of relief. Sadly, this proved to be short-lived as a planning appeal was submitted to PEDW and in October 2022 the Minister for Climate Change Julie James upheld the appeal by Hanson Aggregates. (now Heidelberg Materials). The Minister cited the Future Generations Act in her ruling on the grounds that potential harms had been weighted against the 'likely' need for the minerals in construction, road building and maintenance and the plans wider 'economic benefits'.

### **Proximity of Craig yr Hesg quarry to the local village of Glyncoch**

The quarry dominates the landscape next to the community of Glyncoch, and is in close proximity to a number of homes, a school and playing fields – in fact, a nearby estate is **less than the permitted 200m away from the boundary of the proposed extension area.**

Once a fortnight, the community suffers the impact of blasting on the site. For years, they have reported distress caused by the loud explosions to all members of the community but the children in particular. Recently a resident told me:

*“When the quarry blasts, movement can be felt in properties. It literally feels like an earthquake. Ornaments have been known to fall off shelves immediately during blasting. There is an astronomical amount of dust visible in properties which has resulted in people damp dusting. There are visible cracks internally and externally within the homes throughout the community.*

*Residents in the area have had issues with the drainage system. Pipes have cracked and collapsed. Welsh water is forever in the Glyncoch area carrying out repairs. The main area affected is bottom Garth Avenue the area in the vicinity of the Chinese Golden Dragon. Our major concern now is that there is every possibility a gas pipe could crack and cause an explosion and cause serious harm to members of the community”*

One resident, speaking at the appeal hearing stated the following:

*“My family has lived in the area for over 50 years. We have spent time and money on our home for it now to be damaged by blasting activities from the quarry. This includes damage to our boundary wall, the external walls of our house and internal walls. The floor in the lounge has also dropped leaving a large hole”.*

Many other residents provided similar testimony, accompanied by images. Yet, this was dismissed by PEDW as it had not been verified by experts.

### **Silica dust in the air - danger to health**

Dust is a major concern. Following blasting, huge clouds of dust can be seen travelling over the nearby community. This leaves a residue on homes and cars, and residents are concerned that the particles within the dust pose a risk to their health.

Aggregate quarrying, particularly when involving pendant stone, can produce silica dust. Silica is naturally present in rocks, sands, and clays. When these materials are drilled, cut, or chipped during quarrying operations, fine dust containing respirable crystalline silica (RCS) is generated. Inhalation of RCS can lead to silicosis, a serious and irreversible occupational lung disease.

According to the local councillor for the Glyncoch Ward, there are higher levels of cancers and poor health in the ward, which is one of the most deprived in Wales. He argues that this can only be explained by the dust from the quarry. The dust is seen on windows, solar panels and inside properties across worktops.

The current planning regime enabled barristers for the planning inspectorates to dismiss all evidence presented by local residents and elected representatives as 'unsubstantiated', overriding the overwhelming evidence presented by all who lived in this community.

*"Somewhat late in the day, it is now agreed that there is no risk to physical health. The assertion of mental health effects has not only been unsubstantiated, there has been no effort to substantiate it with evidence".*

The community has been priced out of providing evidence by a planning system weighted in favour of the multi-national developer.

The publication, the planner, covered this in an interesting article following the decision to allow the quarry to expand. They asked Estelle Dehon KC, a public law barrister at Cornerstone Chambers for her view on the issue of communities being priced out of providing evidence.

She stated: "It is the great difficulty in residents having to bring evidence to planning inquiry that a greater and greater standard is being required."

Glyncoch is in one of the 5% most deprived areas in the country and is made up of predominantly social housing. How is a community like Glyncoch able to compete with a multi-million-pound company?

### **Proximity of the quarry to children**

Cefn Primary School is only going to be **134 meters from the boundary line of the quarry**. The quarry will also be blasting **109 meters from Glyncoch Rugby field**.

This school has an additional learning needs unit contained within it. The staff at the school adhere to all the guidance and regulations of their profession to enable all children to access education. However, the disruption caused by the blasting at the quarry is significant. It is reported that the children are terrified when they hear the blasts and the earth shaking. The confusion is felt more by the children with greater additional needs and it takes a lot longer to calm them down after a blast has occurred.

One child asked a teacher if the dinosaurs had landed. Other children are distressed that the school is going to collapse or that it will fall into the big hole. Whilst the Cwriwclwm i Gymru states that 'learning is for everyone, and that the 'learning environment should be well lit, comfortable, quiet and suitable for all the pupils learning needs'. The proximity of this school to the quarry and the impact of the explosions makes this impossible.

### **Transportation of the aggregates**

Large lorries travel off the A470 and over the old bridge in Pontypridd and down Berw Road. The impact on traffic is considerable, as the road is unsuitable for such heavy traffic. Residents must live with endless stream of large lorries passing within a few feet of the homes leaving a residue of dust in their wake and vibrating their homes and windows.

A survey conducted by local residents last in October 2024 found **70 HGVs**, used the road - 34 of them between 7 and 9 am, causing significant pressure on the roads during peak hours. The quarry itself acknowledged this danger, as outlined in their High Court injunction. The agreed limit is supposed to be **5 HGVs per hour**.

I have seen for myself the cracks in windows and walls, which residents insist is linked to the lorries. Given that the traffic has impacted the flood defence wall nearby, it is a likely explanation.

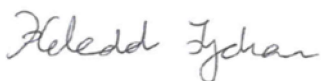
### **Nature and Biodiversity loss**

Possibly the most detrimental aspect of the development for the residents of Glyncoch has been the loss of their community green space, treasured by the whole community. Paths, trees, hide and seek dens, pet gravestones and childhood memories have been destroyed, fenced off and replaced with a black barren soil subjected to fortnightly explosions. This land had been used by the community for centuries. The trauma that this has caused the local community is unmeasurable. The loss of biodiversity habitats has also been upsetting, and the destruction of slow worms, bats, nesting birds and century old trees was not seen as a significant impediment to the quarry expansion by PEDW inspectors.

Glyncoch is not the only community in this position in Wales, and there are other communities fighting similar battles, all desperate to know if they are safe living in their homes. They should be supported in their efforts, and the Welsh Government should revise legislation and regulations to ensure that companies extracting minerals in Wales are held to the highest possible standards to ensure that people and nature cannot be harmed by the extraction of minerals in close proximity to homes.

It is time to prioritise future generations and protect people's rights to a safe home free from pollutants, as well as protect the vicinity of human habitation from the damaging effects of industrial extraction of minerals on their doorsteps.

Yours sincerely,



Heledd Fychan AS/ MS