



William Powell AM
Chair – Petitions Committee
Ty Hywel
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff CF99 1NA

Dear Mr Powell,

I am writing in response to the letter from the Minister for Communities dated 9th July 2015.

The petition was created to highlight an issue close to where I live (literally across the road) but also one affecting the wider communities of Abercynon and Mountain Ash where the sites of the former Ynysmeurig Hotel and Abercynon Workmen's Hall have also fallen into disrepair. My local councillors are in touch with the owners of the above sites as well as myself for the old AB Metals site in Ynysboeth. All sites have planning consent and there are considerable anti-social behaviour and health concerns around the sites due to drug paraphernalia and regular refuse fires.

I appreciate that this is an area where the question over who has responsibility can be interpreted a number of ways, as was explained to me when I set the petition up. I accept that the Minister sees the issue as a land registry one. However I also see the issue as one affecting local authorities and the environment.

The idea behind the petition is to make the commercial owners of the sites more publicly visible by way of a sign so that communities can contact them directly in addition to the avenues that have been tried, tested and not worked in the past. It is much easier to find out who owns a site that is being rebuilt and actively developed because companies proudly display their logos. When a site has fallen into disrepair the public have to pay the land registry and often carry out more research in addition to that initial search. Companies benefit from the convoluted way we have to use to find out who they are. In what other area of complaint would the public have to pay in order to register a complaint with someone?

Whilst the owners of the land clearly cannot be held responsible for the actions carried out there by others, they should feel some sense of corporate responsibility to ensure the land they own is as secure as possible to stop illegal and disruptive activities from happening. Companies and communities benefit from development and regeneration but it is communities who suffer when land falls into disrepair.

For example, the former AB Metals site in Ynysboeth opposite my house has a fence that has fallen into disrepair, with several large gaps. In the two years since I have lived here residents and companies use the land to dump furniture and

rubbish. Drug paraphernalia was found by a community group near the land and it is a regular spot for rubbish fires.

Last November a fridge was dumped on the land, knowing that it would soon be set on fire I contacted RCT Council, Natural Resources Wales and the owners of the land, Newbridge Construction Ltd telling them that the fridge and its hazardous contents would probably be set on fire unless it was collected.

The local authority and Natural Resources Wales told me that as it's privately owned they could not enter the land to remove the fridge. The owners did nothing until after the fridge had been set on fire, resulting in the fire brigade having to come out on one of their busiest nights of the year and costing the public money.

After six months of complaints between the council and the owners an knew height earth barrier was placed in the largest gap, rather than a fence (presumably the cheaper option). This means that would-be fly tippers and fire starters now have to climb a small incline before carrying out their actions and the fire brigade can no longer get an engine directly on site.

It has taken considerable time and correspondence to compel the company to act even in this ham-fisted way. The company clearly has no motivation to secure the site. Imagine if someone was to spray paint, in large letters the name of this company and how they could be contacted on the land, they may be embarrassed or shamed into action. That is the idea behind my petition, a sign facing the public that contains the company who owns that land's name and contact information.

It is simple, cheap option that may make the owners consider the security of such land as the public can clearly see their name.

I appreciate that the land registry is available for anyone to use but should the public have to pay to find out the owners of land that costs the public money and affects their communities? Even though the land registry gave me the name of the company who owned the former AB metals site it took considerable effort to then find an email address and the name of a person to contact. Even when I did make contact with one of the listed directors they claimed that the company was one of his 'clients' abdicating responsibility for the site. Put simply many companies don't want to be easily found by the public because it could affect their planning permission.

Companies are proud to share their name when the land is turned into housing, shops or involved in large-scale projects because they benefit. But with undeveloped or forgotten land it is the public who pays the cost, either through policing, fire services, council clean up crews or in by having to live with regular refuse fires. This petition suggests a simple step that may encourage companies to take responsibility and save public funds by making their name more publicly visible.

Kind Regards

Paul Hunt