



MARK GARNIER MP

Member of Parliament for Wyre Forest

Good afternoon and thank you for allowing me the opportunity to speak.

I must apologise for not being here in person. Due to matters relating to my work in Parliament and as a trade envoy, I am unable to attend this meeting in person. However, I am pleased to be given the opportunity to speak virtually.

My assistant will circulate hard copies to those that are in attendance today, and I will publish this on my website and Facebook pages.

As your local Member of Parliament, I am deeply troubled by the proposed Lea Castle Farm Quarry, which threatens the environment, the local community and the health of our local school children and communities.

I know that the local community opposes this application. By dismissing the appeal and upholding the democratic decision already taken by Councillors on Worcestershire County Council to refuse planning permission, we can make sure that our local environment is kept at in its current state.

There are a number of arguments that I have already put forward in a debate I held on this issue in Parliament in 2020. For today, these are worth repeating and an important place to start is the location of the quarry.

This proposal is at the heart of a number of communities—Wolverley to the west, Cookley to the north; and to the south is Sion Hill, a suburb of Kidderminster.

These communities are not sparsely populated: Cookley has 2,034 people on the electoral roll, with 1,114 homes; Wolverley has 1,820 people on the electoral roll and Sion Hill has 760. Of course the electoral role does not include non voters, and does not include amenities that attract visitors.

That sets the background and context for which all of the key issues follow.

Firstly, let me address the environmental impact of the Lea Castle Farm Quarry.

The construction and operation of the quarry will cause significant damage to the natural environment, leading to the potential loss of native plant and animal species.

The proposed site would see 3,000,000 tonnes of minerals extracted over the 9 year life of the project. The result would be a flat man-made crater, devoid of habitats.

The noise and air pollution generated by the quarry will threaten the area's vital ecosystem. Wildlife will undoubtedly be driven away due to the extraction process itself. This involves



the use of heavy machinery and potentially explosives, all of which can generate vibrations that could further harm the surrounding environment.

Importantly, The quarry will have a detrimental impact on air quality, with the emission of harmful particles into the atmosphere. As I have already stated, thousands of nearby residents will be impacted due to the dust and debris that will be generated by the quarry's operation and blown around by the wind. Whilst I recognise that the operators will be required to meet particulate emissions standards, given the close proximity of communities and schools, it takes just one slip up to potentially affect thousands of people

There are four schools within a mile's distance of the centre of the site: Wolverley Church of England Secondary School is 0.9 of a mile away, Cookley Sebright Primary School is five eighths of a mile away, St Oswald's CE Primary School in Kidderminster is just over half a mile away and Heathfield Knoll School's nursery is on the other side of the road from the edge of the second phase of the site. Wolverley Sebright Primary School is just over a mile away, but, as I say, that is measuring from the centre of the site; the full extent of the 105 acres means that the site it is much closer to some of those schools.

Placing a quarry so close to these schools is wholly unsuitable. Reports have shown that exposure to dust can heighten the symptoms of asthma and can cause lung and heart problems in later life. A study from Asthma UK Centre has found that asthma costs the NHS £1.1 billion per year. Is this the kind of risk we want to expose our children to?

The proposed quarry site is also located near to several footpaths and bridleways, which are popular with local residents for walking and cycling. The construction and operation of the quarry would disrupt these pathways and hamper the recreational opportunities of our community. Our region has a rich natural beauty and we must protect and preserve this for future generations to enjoy.

I would also point you towards previous decisions made by the Planning Inspector that should be taken into consideration. At Benego Quarry in Hertford, there was a campaign to stop the quarry expanding to extract an additional 1.25 million tonnes of sand and gravel. The Planning Inspector dismissed the appeal by the developer agreeing that the quarry had the potential to disrupt local amenities and the dust had the potential to harm local people.

As I have stressed in Parliament, I am not against quarrying.

Sustainable quarrying to support the construction sector is sensible.

But I am against quarrying in people's backyards in semi-urban areas. When I spoke on this during a Westminster Hall debate in 2020, I referred to Canada having a rule forbidding quarrying within 600 metres of schools and residences.



No part of this quarry is not within a 600-metre radius of a school or property adjacent to this site.

Whilst I know that this is not in the purview of the Planning Appeal, nevertheless the point is still important. Other well-developed Commonwealth countries have sensible rules that limit how close quarries are to homes and businesses. They recognise that quarrying close to communities is just plain dumb.

In Westminster I am trying to change this anomaly in our system.

I have already launched an All Party Parliamentary Group on Clean Quarrying that seeks to highlight our lack of hard rules that govern quarrying. We need sustainable quarrying rules to ensure that we are not relying so heavily on an outdated planning system.

There is widespread support among colleagues in Parliament on this matter and it is our intention to seek changes to the permissible particulate distribution as well as proximity to communities.

In conclusion, the Lea Castle Farm Quarry is a threat to our environment, our community, and our health. The proposed site is located in a region of great natural beauty, close to historic landmarks, and popular recreational areas. The negative impact of this quarry on our community will be significant, including noise and air pollution, damage to local roads and schools, and potential job losses in the immediate vicinity. The quarry will also harm the natural environment, disrupting the habitat of local wildlife and causing air pollution that could lead to health problems for our residents.

From the very moment that this project was first proposed I have supported the local campaign group to stop the proposal. At every stage, submitting my own thoughts on why it should be blocked, suggesting reasons why the Lea Castle Quarry is a bad idea.

Therefore, I urge all of you not to overturn a very well-reasoned decision taken by Councillors at Worcestershire County Council.