

Community News

Liaison Committee Meetings

The Liaison Committee Meetings, held in Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council, continues to be a useful and productive forum where views are aired and members are advised of Ffos-y-fran issues that may impact on the community.

The committee is composed of a number of Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Councillors, full-time officials from MTCBC's Environmental Health and Planning Departments, representatives from the Environment Agency and a group of local residents who live near the site. Councillor David Hardacre represents Caerphilly County Borough Council on the committee. Miller Argent remains highly committed to working with the committee to resolve any

matters that are causing local concern.

The meeting is chaired by Councillor Julian Amos, of the Dowlais ward, and Miller Argent is normally represented by Robert Jones, Miller Argent's Operations Manager. Robert feels the views and work of this committee are hugely important in building and maintaining excellent community relationships. At the committee meeting in November 2008, it was heard that there had been six complaints about noise from the site. These were all recorded and dealt with.

Councillor Amos said: "The Liaison Committee is proving to be an excellent forum for the exchange of information and concerns. I have been struck by the highly

constructive manner in which all members conduct themselves.

"It is quite obvious that Miller Argent is making every effort to address the concerns of residents and be good neighbours not only through its speedy response to the concerns of the residents who contact them either directly or via one of the regulatory bodies, but also by its readiness to note, act on and report back on concerns raised at the Liaison Committee itself."

He continued: "Local authority elected members are able to articulate the concerns of their constituents and the regulatory bodies are able to raise any concerns they have or provide advice to residents."

Point of View: Resident Member, Ron Yandle of Mount View

Mr Ron Yandle has been a resident's member of the Liaison Committee since its inception in 2007. Speaking after the Liaison Committee Meeting in November 2008, Mr Yandle, who lives in the cul-de-sac at 3 Mount View, which is within 40 metres of the edge of the site, was asked for his personal experiences living close by.

"It's actually not been as bad as I expected. But I think one of the main reasons for that is in the last 18 months

we've had a heavy predominance of rain. April 2008 was a reasonably dry month and there was at least four or five days of easterly wind, when we had black dust everywhere. This was recorded and admitted."

So weather conditions do have a definite impact on local conditions.

"My fear would be that if next spring and summer [2009] was exceptionally dry, combined with easterly wind, then we could have a lot of dust problems. And

there is not a lot, I understand, that we can do about it. Dust is dust and it blows with the wind."

He said the worst of the noise was when the box cut began, although inside his double glazed sitting room with the television on, the noise was not discernible. Mr Yandle is waiting to see what happens over a prolonged period of dry weather, with easterly winds. He said he was happy with Miller Argent's responses to enquiries so far.

Mystery unmasked?

This newsletter tries to be scrupulously honest about what is going on at Ffos-y-fran. So it is galling to discover that a newspaper of The Guardian's stature doesn't bother to check its facts, which then fuels misinformation. It reported on 16 April 2008, that Friends of the Earth Swansea were "rather shocked" to find out that Argent is wholly owned by BT's pension scheme. This was then repeated in a local protest group's website with the headline "Argent Unmasked!" This is astonishing. Miller Argent has nothing to hide. This fact has been consistently declared by Miller Argent at every public meeting and presentation and if any of the protesters had taken the time to read James Poyner's statement of evidence to the Welsh Assembly's public inquiry, the relationship was clearly stated on Page 9 on 2 August 2004. This is publicly available information and there is nothing secret or sinister about it.

Education and Training Centre open for local groups

The Education and Training Centre at the Cwmbargoed Disposal Point is already a welcoming gathering place – and a handy resource for those wishing to use the latest digital facilities. A number of local groups, including school projects, have taken up the opportunity to come and use the building.

The Education and Training Centre is equipped with computer connections for laptops, and a large-screen projector. The Centre also offers a starting point for a visit to the nearby ancient wooded valley at Cym Golau, a natural area being maintained and preserved by volunteers and ecological programmes supported by Miller Argent. Anyone interested in using the Education Centre should contact Miller Argent on 0870 111 5600.

Minibuses are a popular winner

The new minibuses for the community are also proving a hit. More than 40 local groups in Merthyr have applied to use the minibuses, including youth and church groups, disability charities, and boys and girls football teams. A booking system has been set up for the 17-seater bus and the 15-seat vehicle with wheelchair access for two wheelchairs. For information contact Miller Argent on 0870 111 5600.



Job Profile



Operations Manager for Miller Argent at Ffos-y-fran

Profile: Robert Jones

Welshman Robert (Rob) Jones started as a junior engineer in 1976, at a site outside Cross Hands in west Wales. Over the last 30 years, he has worked his way up to become a fully qualified mining engineer and a site manager, working then with Wimpey Mining. The Miller Group took over Wimpey in August 1996 but Rob was headhunted to Celtic Energy for 10 years before rejoining Miller Argent in October 2006, first as a consultant and then as the operations manager of the Ffos-y-fran Land Reclamation Scheme. He has been involved in the various phases of Merthyr Tydfil's land reclamation for many years. Today Rob is involved with the health and safety of over 220 people on this vast and ever-changing site.

"It is very satisfying to see the real work being done. From a production point of view it's a big morale boost for everyone, particularly with a lot of difficulties in the first 12 months of operations such as the weather and flooding."

One of Rob's jobs is to see that

everyone is fully apprised of how to work safely and efficiently on a site which involves the constant movement of massive trucks, large-scale excavation, coal extraction and blasting. He faces challenges on an hourly basis and communication is the key.

"One of the biggest challenges starting up the operation has been to find a competent workforce. There has been a dramatic decline in the industry in the last 15 years and a lot of the industry's experienced workforce has either retired or found work elsewhere."

He said that training people on the much larger 100-ton dump trucks has been more difficult although there is much more competence on the smaller 40-50 tonne dump trucks. Rob said, "what is of paramount importance is a high level of competence and the ability to operate in a harsh environment where conditions such as the weather, the temporary roadways and the coal seams, are changing all the time."

Authorised Hours of Operation

Excavation	
Mon to Fri	07.00-23.00 hrs
Saturday	07.00-17.00 hrs
Coaling	
Mon to Fri	07.00-19.00 hrs
Sat	07.00-13.00 hrs
Blasting	
Mon to Fri	10.00-13.00 hrs
	14.00-16.00 hrs
Sat	10.00-13.00 hrs

General Information

Miller Argent (South Wales) Limited
Cwmbargoed Disposal Point
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Mid Glamorgan
CF48 4AE

Tel: 0870 111 5600
Fax: 01685 845 029
Email: maadmin@millerargent.co.uk

If you have any queries or would like further details of the Scheme and company information please visit our website:

www.millerargent.co.uk

Emergency Contact

As a precaution we have created a hotline telephone number for the community to call if they have any urgent enquiries, complaints or suggestions for the activities that are progressing on-site.

The number is:

0800 988 8444

We hope this will be a fast and more reactive way to deal with your enquiries as and when they occur. It is important that you let us know, if ever concerns arise. Each enquiry will be recorded, investigated and dealt with.

The Ffos-y-fran Newsletter

The Newsletter for the Ffos-y-fran Land Reclamation Scheme Issue 003 Spring 2009



Tips cleared successfully

The Ffos-y-fran Land Reclamation Scheme has now been in successful operation for over a year with significant landmarks reached. Progress is being made on many fronts – and much hard work is being done to balance the civic, environmental and commercial interests for the benefit of all.

The clearance of three potentially dangerous rubbish tips – which once loomed over the town of Merthyr Tydfil – is now finished. The remedial excavation work was completed in early January 2009 and represents a tremendous boost to the local community, with a saving of approximately £30 million to council

taxpayers of Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council.

The three tips, Hoover, Merthyr landfill and Tip 13, were not only a financial liability but had become potentially hazardous, especially due to soil contamination, landfill gas and toxic seepage into the water table. A prime condition of Miller Argent's work at Ffos-y-fran was that remedial work must first be started on the landfill sites before any coal extraction from these sites could be undertaken.

More than 350,000 tonnes of waste – including domestic, commercial and industrial waste – has

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Welcome to the third edition of the Miller Argent Newsletter. Thank you for your feedback and comments.

The Newsletter is intended to help inform the residents of both Merthyr Tydfil and Caerphilly about the Ffos-y-fran Land Reclamation Scheme. We welcome your comments, suggestions and questions. Please email us at: admin@millerargent.co.uk

The Scheme

Continued from front page

been safely processed and treated. More than 50,000 tonnes has been segregated and removed from site with dangerous and toxic elements being taken elsewhere for treatment and disposal. Other non-hazardous materials have been disposed of at the nearby Trecatti site, which is a registered landfill. The work has all been carried out within the controls and approval of both the local authority and the Environment Agency.

James Poyner, a Director of Miller Argent, said: "This is a significant achievement. In many respects it is a victory for local civic leaders working hand in hand with the private sector. I think it is a model that could be made to work elsewhere in the UK.

"The clearance work on the tips has been painstaking and arduous at times. We had to call in the bomb disposal team when a live World War II mortar bomb was found in Tip 13 – this was destroyed by a controlled explosion.

"I think the people of Merthyr can feel some sense of pride – that these

dangerous liabilities have been removed and neutralised, without incident or cost to the community. This has been possible because of the joint work with Miller Argent, the contractors, the Council and the Environment Agency."

Stephen Tillman, a Director of Miller Argent, said: "There will be a number of stepping stones in this project. But the removal and disposal of toxic materials that might have endangered the health of local people for many generations to come is something that should bring a sense of satisfaction to everyone in Merthyr."

Councillor Jeff Edwards, Leader of Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council, said: "The Council is pleased that the three long-term refuse tips located at Ffos-y-fran have been removed in a controlled, prompt and professional manner.

"The Council and citizens of the County Borough were advised in 2003 of the liabilities that could fall upon the council taxpayer were the land reclamation scheme not to have proceeded. It was estimated at that time that removal of the tips would cost

between £6.5 and £11.5 million and, as can be seen, this upper figure has increased almost threefold from the original estimate. Were the £30 million for remediation of the tips to have been required from Council resources then this may have resulted in an average cost to every council taxpayer in excess of £1,000."

Councillor Edwards said the removal of the tips is not the only benefit that has accrued to the Council. He pointed out that the realignment of the Bogey Road, and the continued re-payment of the unsuccessful Compulsory Purchase Order, amounting to £1.1 million, which were to have been paid by the Council, and receipt of monies into the Community Benefit fund. "All of these have already benefited the local people and will continue to do so."

He added that the Council looks forward to continuing the good working relationship with Miller Argent and "to securing future benefits to be seen and appreciated by existing and future generations".

The Scheme

Welsh coal for heating Welsh homes



Another landmark on 9 January 2009 was the first anniversary of coal delivered to the Aberthaw Power Station from the Ffos-y-fran site. The power station produces 42% of South Wales' energy needs.

The power station, operated by RWE Npower, situated on the coast at Barry, was originally built to burn Welsh dry steam coal, but has subsequently become reliant on bulk imports from Russia, Poland and even Australia. So the consignments from Ffos-y-fran – which totalled approximately 400,000 tonnes in the first year – have made a significant contribution to the energy requirements of the region. This means that local Welsh coal is heating and lighting Welsh homes, schools and hospitals. The power station is 38 miles from Ffos-y-fran by rail and this journey, compared to the 3,000 miles from Russia, helps create less of a carbon footprint.

Once extracted at Ffos-y-fran, the coal is taken by lorry to the immediately adjacent Cwmbargoed Disposal Point, which has its own rail spur. All coal vehicles pass through the wheel wash

prior to crossing the Bogey Road, the only contact with a public highway.

The coal is then tested, graded and blended at the Disposal Point – which is also run by Miller Argent – before being loaded onto a freight train and taken directly to Aberthaw Power Station. This efficient system is saving approximately 41 million lorry miles over the life of the project.

Despite the views of anti-coal protesters, the UK still needs coal in the short to medium term to supply the nation's energy requirements. With the nation's oil and gas now running short, and new nuclear power stations some years away, coal will still make up a high percentage of our national power consumption.

It is this coal which will allow the restoration work to be completed above Merthyr Tydfil. The whole site will be returned to common use with a safe upland landscape that complements Wales' natural environment. This will allow local people to enjoy living in the valley for generations to come.

Keeping a check on blasting

As the Ffos-y-fran excavation work moves further away from residential homes, some stratum will require blasting. Throughout this process, the environmental impact will be monitored on a daily basis. Miller Argent is using one of the most advanced monitoring and reporting systems in the world.

Independent analysis on vibration and air over pressure will be conducted by the Blasting and Environmental Research Group at the University of Leeds. Blasting is expected to commence in May.

Panorama complaint

Miller Argent, the operators at Ffos-y-fran Land Reclamation Scheme, wrote to the BBC complaints department over a Panorama television programme on surface coal mining which went out on Monday, 1 December 2008.

The heart of the complaint was that the BBC programme did not allow Miller Argent directors any time to explain the importance of the work in Wales, or allow them to respond to allegations that the approval of the scheme was "undemocratic".

Miller Argent was unhappy that it was offered only 15 seconds of a 27-minute programme on surface mining to reply to allegations made by protesters, including one who sits on the local liaison committee. The programme then offered a 25-second statement. This was viewed as completely unsatisfactory.

Miller Argent was willing to have its senior directors interviewed for the programme, but this offer was declined by the programme makers. The company felt that the programme was "unfair" and the editorial viewpoint was "deliberately tainted" when a proper debate on all the facts was needed. As some of the statements made in the programme were factually incorrect and misleading, Miller Argent felt it had no alternative but to complain about the programme. The BBC's response was that they were sticking to their point of view, but they apologised to Miller Argent for a mistake in using the wrong caption.

Environmental Works

Historic gems uncovered

New chapters in the history of Merthyr Tydfil's industrial past are being written at Ffos-y-fran. During the clearance of millions of tonnes of pit spoil, a gem for the industrial archaeologist was uncovered. Under 12 million cubic metres of extraneous material, the work teams found a three-storey building that was remarkably intact. Part of the building dated back to the early 18th century and a team of 24 archaeologists took it down stone by stone, photographing all the artefacts.

Miller Argent's own on-site archaeologist Elizabeth Verrinder co-ordinated the four-month project with contractors, the Glamorgan-Gwent Archaeological Trust and the University of Wales. It was only then they discovered that the house was sitting on the top of Dowlais Pit Number One, which was one of the first ironstone shafts sunk in Merthyr. This information has given historians a much clearer picture of how the valley grew up during the Industrial Revolution.



Our local monitoring expert



One familiar face to Merthyr residents who have any issues with the site is Kylie Jones. Originally from Llandovery in West Wales, Kylie is the Environmental Liaison Officer at Ffos-y-fran. As a graduate scientist, her work involves monitoring of water treatment of the site lagoons, noise levels – including from blasting when it begins – and air quality and dust. She is also responsible for looking after the TEOM (Tapered Element Oscillating Microbalance) monitoring system which analyses micro-particles of dust. This is done on behalf of Merthyr Tydfil Council, for the Welsh Air Quality Forum, and one of the sites is at Twynrodyn Community School, which also houses a weather

station. Around the area there are also numerous Stickypad dust scan machines to gather particles from 360 degrees which indicate density and direction. Additionally Kylie is responsible for monitoring and advising on all ecological issues pertinent to the site. Kylie is committed to her work and is keen to ensure that scientific evidence is properly gathered so local people can be properly informed about the work at Ffos-y-fran.

