

From William Garfit, resident of Harlton, to the Environmental Services Portfolio Holder:

“As the owner of the old gravel pit site opposite the former Bayer site at Hauxton, I have serious concern for those who work here. They are exposed all day to the obnoxious smells and volatile chemicals in the air since remediation commenced in March.

“My daughter, Jackie Williams, proprietor of the Organic Health shop on our site, has had to be rushed to hospital on three occasions with severe breathing difficulties. She has never suffered breathing difficulties in her life before but occupational asthma has now been diagnosed and I am very concerned about her future health. She has had to close her shop as she is advised by the hospital doctors to keep away from the area.

“Mr and Mrs Noble run Cambridge Farm Machinery Company. They and their employees suffer symptoms such as sore throats and dry coughs, headaches, tingling lips and numb tongues. Much work on modern agricultural machinery needs to be done outside. However they are driven to operate in the workshop with the roller doors shut.

“At home in the village they, like so many residents of Hauxton, have to keep windows closed and are unable to sit in the garden.

“They are expected to exist like this for another 15 months.

“Would members of the South Cambridgeshire District Council tolerate these living and working conditions for themselves and their families?”

I acknowledge that residents appear to be affected by the remediation process and the Council continues to work with all organisations involved to do everything possible to reduce the odours from the site.

The issue of asthma isn't a straightforward one and the HPA cannot comment on individual cases. However, in general it remains the HPA's opinion that there is no reason to suspect emissions from the remediation works at Hauxton are sufficient to cause asthma. In individuals with pre-existing asthma, episodes can be triggered by contaminants in the air. Such contaminants might include volatile organic substances or odours but any effect would depend upon their chemical composition, the levels and duration of exposure and an individual's sensitivity to odour. The main substances of concern for asthma triggers are allergens and irritant gases, which are present in the air from a variety of sources including natural and human activities. It is unlikely that emissions from the remedial works at Hauxton would trigger asthma. It is likely that other potential sources of asthma triggers (e.g. plant pollen, traffic) are more important factors.

Supplementary question, asked at the Council meeting:

“Open remediation is not appropriate. I invite the Leader and Deputy Leader to visit Hauxton and the homes of those affected. If SCDC officers lived there, would you tolerate these conditions? I repeat my invitation: would you and the Council be happy to live and work in these conditions?”

The Portfolio Holder replied that many individuals had said that they would be happy to visit, noting that the work had to be done and the site had to be remediated.