

# The long shadow of restoration failure



## Frontline voices on the former Margam opencast coal mine

### Background

At the time of writing, coal operator Merthyr (South Wales) Ltd is intent on evading its contractual obligation to fully restore its sprawling Ffos-y-fran opencast coal mine, South Wales, after 16 years of operation, including over a year of illegal coal mining 2022-2024. For the longterm wellbeing of residents living in Merthyr Tydfil, it is vital that Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council obtain the best possible restoration and don't cave in to corporate profiteering and bullying.

History repeats, with similar stories still visible as scars and coal tips littering the South Wales landscape. Those who reside closest to abandoned or under-restored coal mines and associated coal tips are often unable to move on, even years or decades later. This is the cost of Local Planning Authorities' failure to honour promises made to local communities about how, and when, nearby opencast coal mines would be restored.

Our [2022 report](#) found that mining companies operating in South Wales have consistently evaded restoration costs, and continue to hold Local Planning Authorities to ransom in funding even the bare minimum restoration which would otherwise bankrupt County Councils who would be lumbered with a financial liability amounting to tens of millions.

Field research indicates that even those sites which Local Planning Authorities have confirmed by email to be fully restored on a fraction of the original budget contains uncovered and leaking storage tanks of industrial chemicals, abandoned warehouses, concrete platforms, and no-go zones sectioned off with barbed wire. One of those sites is the former Margam (Parc Slip) opencast coal mine, where **local residents agreed to share their experience with us in the hope that it will help avoid the same travesty recurring, not least at Ffos-y-fran in Merthyr Tydfil.**

### Margam Parc Slip budget restoration

Restoration of the former Margam (Parc Slip) opencast coal mine was due to be complete by 2011, but after Celtic Energy Ltd renegaded on its promised restoration, Neath Port Talbot Council were forced to accept the company's 'alternative' restoration proposal. This budget restoration proposal was based on just 10% of the estimated cost of the original restoration plan that it promised to deliver. **Celtic Energy Ltd eventually turned the water-pumps off, allowing the void it had created to fill with water, forcing the local Council to accept its proposal to cut over £51 million in restoration costs.** The minimal restoration works were eventually completed in August 2018, over 7 years after the deadline.

## Six years on...

Six years on, the remaining “moonscape” still deeply affects nearby communities. In March 2024, we spoke with four local residents who campaigned against the former Margam (Parc Slip) opencast coal mine—and, later, for the promised restoration after the coal mine eventually closed. What follows are quotes from those residents in conversation.

You just feel you're on a moonscape now. They never thought twice about the communities... 31 dwellings were knocked down. It's a dead valley now. And the lies we were told [by the coal company and Council] continually was dreadful - Jan

They've changed the nature was woodland and marsh. Cuckoos, barn owls, marsh fritillary (butterflies) were all on the site prior to this. Now it's lake and open land. Nature is returning, but it's not the same - Gaynor

They just sprayed it with seed and manure, cow shit or whatever it is. Sprayed it and walked away. And now you can see all the water, the coal. And every time it rains, it washes out gullies - David

Just the cheapest possible thing. It is, isn't it? Non-restoration - Gaynor

It's just muddy, ugly, and barren - Suzanne

It's like the moon, like Mars... All we're asking for is to restore it to some sort of resemblance of what it was prior - David

I can't get my head around that It's nothing in historical terms, no sense of place or community - Suzanne

# Land

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My grandsons when they're up... I will not let them come here because I'm scared stiff of that void. So I don't encourage them to even know how to get here because I've seen kids their age on bloomin' inflatables - Suzanne

What concerns me is the depth of the water... it's dangerous - Gaynor

It's not only cold, it's steep and it's hard to get out of if you're in trouble - Suzanne

These fields here, were prime agricultural fields. There was a farm there, just there... and they demolished that - Gaynor

These 'legitimate' companies weren't legitimate companies, they just profited like the 19th century mines, where they dug the coal out of the ground and put the spoil on the side of the mountain and they killed 256 children and about 7 adults in Aberfan. The same company, the same mindset, the same people. And this is what you're going to have, a memorial—unless the government builds laws into it - David

Well, this was a nice view - there were walkways. It linked the villages. And the children in those days had somewhere to go. On their bikes, walking - Suzanne

You can see the life vests down by the shore. They cover themselves by putting signs saying 'Dangerous' - Gaynor

Safety



I didn't know I was suddenly an opencast protestor - we were suddenly labelled - Suzanne

There should be a law in place that someone who's given the planning to do it, has to carry it through to restoration. They cannot sell until it's restored because that's where it all went to hell - Suzanne

Nobody was accountable when it was at crisis point; when they [Celtic Energy Ltd] turned the pumps off and walked away. And I asked the Councils, why don't you do it, and they obviously didn't want to know - Suzanne

I voted for more laws, you're the Welsh Government, why are you letting this happen? They should be restoring, why are you letting them not restore? - Suzanne

[The Welsh Government] are sitting on the fence, simple as that... it's about time the Government grew some and sort it out - David

The people working together can succeed. We did it here at Margam Parc Slip...but the restoration was a disgusting, evasive, and corrupt travesty - Suzanne

We don't want it happening again do we? It's happened here, it's terrible, and there's no money - David

When I write letters or so on, it's usually to warn people what's happened here, so to expect the worse - Suzanne

We thought, do we really have to give all the reasons they should restore when it was in the planning and why they got permission in the first place? - Suzanne

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Politics

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We don't want it happening again do we? It's happened here, it's terrible, and there's no money

- David

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Stop history repeating at Ffos-y-fran opencast coal mine, Merthyr Tydfil



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NETWORK**

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