

The long shadow of restoration failure



Frontline voices on the former Eastpit 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

A time-extension was granted to Celtic Energy Ltd in 2004 by Welsh Ministers in order for a restoration scheme valued at £115 million to be delivered at the end of coal mining in 2012. Instead, Celtic Energy Ltd transferred land ownership to a shell company so the shell company was responsible for restoration without any means to carry it out. Celtic Energy Ltd then continued to mine coal beyond its 2012 planning permission. **A cheaper restoration was negotiated with Port Talbot County Council at around £22 million which left a void to fill with water.**

Two years on...

Two years on, the remaining “disaster waiting to happen” still deeply affects nearby households. In March 2024, we spoke with two local residents who campaigned against the former Eastpit opencast coal mine—and, later, for the promised restoration after the coal mine eventually closed. What follows are quotes from those residents in conversation.

How do we get them to behave like honest people. It's happening all around the world. Opencast coal mining, lithium mining...

The water laps up to the base of the cliff and that's 300 feet of vertical cliff in the water – if you fall in that you won't get out of it.

[How often do you think about the unrestored site?] Several times a day. You have to park these things or you can't live.

I go to chapel as my insurance policy

We know we've lost money on the houses. We know we're living with risk

It's a disaster waiting to happen

We're dealing with people who don't think they're evil but are doing evil things.

“ ”



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With thanks to local residents

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

