

Margaret Mullane MP

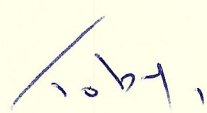


HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Toby Perkins MP
Chair of the Environmental Audit Committee
House of Commons
Westminster
London SW1A 0AA

Thursday 29 January 2026

Dear 

I am writing to you today urging the Environmental Audit Committee to consider the recent POSTnote I commissioned on "*Management of legacy landfill*" and look at the effectiveness of current legislation pertaining to landfill.

The final research document explores the impact of legacy landfill sites on communities and the environment, focusing on case studies which include Zane's Law, Corby, and the 'Rainham Volcano' at Launders Lane in my constituency of Dagenham and Rainham.

Here I will provide some context to both the report and my reason for writing to the EAC. In short, I am seeking a national solution to a local problem with the hopes of also improving the management and remediation of legacy landfill sites across the country. There are over 20,000 historic landfill sites in Britain today, with around 500 currently in operation, landfill is likely to affect both human health and the environment in every constituency to varying degrees.

In Rainham, Arnolds Field on Launders Lane is a pre-legislation landfill which, during many periods of its history, has operated illegally. It is privately owned, but the current owner is not responsible for the historic use of the site.

Rainham residents have suffered years of distress and damage to health from the smoke pollution emanating from the ongoing underground fires at Launders Lane. The frequency of the fires has increased in recent years; in a twelve-month period from 2024 to 2025 the London Fire Brigade (LFB) were called to attend 65 fires on the site.

People from across the area have had to endure repeated periods of having to close all windows, not use their gardens and stay indoors when smoke covers the area. I am told by many residents that the pollution has induced and also exacerbated respiratory diseases.

I have been active in seeking solutions to the long running problem, working alongside the London Borough of Havering, LFB and the Environment Agency. I am also engaged with leading academics from Queen Mary University London on long term health impacts from the pollution and their plans to undertake research in the local community on health impacts and wellbeing.

Margaret Mullane MP

Member of Parliament for Dagenham and Rainham, incorporating South Hornchurch, Beam Park and Elm Park
Tel: 0208 984 7854 Email: margaret.mullane.mp@parliament.uk Web: margaretmullane.co.uk



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In response to my calls, Havering Council has now set up alerts to local schools, sports clubs and residents as soon as fires occur to minimize risk to health from the smoke pollution.

Recently, Havering has decided on an invest to save basis to apply an innovative 'hydro mulching' polymer to cover the surface of areas of the site with a high incidence of underground fires. This, however, will only provide temporary respite as it is reported that this treatment will only be effective for approximately three years. This means we have three years to find a permanent solution.

Section 3.5 of the POSTnote highlights the policy options proposed by roundtable participants, which are set out in Table 7 and cover nine possible national level solutions. Of the nine options, I am advocating for three which would significantly improve the situation in my seat and areas with similar legacy landfill related problems. The policies are outlined below.

Policy area 1

- *National coordinated programme*

Proposed option

- *Local authority representatives suggest a centralised legislative legacy landfill programme needs to be established, similar to the Air Quality Management Framework.*

Rationale/expected outcome

- *Provision of national leadership and a consistent policy framework for managing risks and guiding local authority decision making and data gathering.*

Policy area 2

- *Funding Mechanisms*

Proposed option

- *Local authorities and industry suggest public funding is needed to realise the value of legacy landfill sites that do not have a sufficiently high development value. Options include reintroducing or replacing the former Contaminated Land Capital Grants/Special Sites Fund or creating a 'superfund' mechanism similar to the US policy. The US superfund includes payments from 'potentially responsible parties' (insurers of companies that caused pollution) in exchange for the US Environment Protection Agency bearing the future remediation and financial risks of sites.*

Rationale/expected outcome

- *This proposal could provide funds to support remediation of high-risk sites that are of lower value for development. The post-development of these sites is unlikely to be sufficient for developers to bear the costs of remediation or because the contents of the landfill increases the remediation costs.*

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Policy area 3

- *Research and innovation*

Proposed option

- *The remediation industry suggests there is a need publicly fund pilot projects on new approaches to remediation to reduce the risks of adoption.*

Rationale/expected outcome

- *This proposal would seek to develop scalable, low-cost remediation technologies applicable in a range of risk management contexts.*

All the policy options set out in the report hold merit and would serve to properly regulate legacy landfill, which is currently covered by fragmented legislation dating back to the early 1970's with many loopholes – which is where the management of the 'Rainham Volcano' sits. This is an area of legislation which desperately requires a review.

I would be very much obliged if your committee would consider discussing POSTnote 759 at an upcoming meeting, with a wider look at whether existing legislation is fit for purpose.

Please don't hesitate to contact me should you wish to discuss this proposal further.

Kind regards

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Margaret +".

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