



Dr Susie Davies
Chair of the Governing Body
Godre'rgraig Primary School
Ffordd Parc Ynysderw
Pontardawe
Swansea
SA8 4EG

Dear Dr Davies

I am writing in response to your email received on the 24th May 2023 regarding the monitoring and evaluation work undertaken on the land above the Godre'rgraig Primary School. I apologise in the first instance for the delay in responding, but you will appreciate that the circumstances leading up to the evacuation of the school building and the subsequent monitoring reports were matters handled by the previous political administration. We have needed to understand the chronology of events and also, given the specialist technical nature of the work undertaken by ESP on the Council's behalf, we required further advice from ESP to include in this response to you.

Before dealing with the specific technical points raised in your email, I think it is also helpful to make you aware that the circumstances leading up to the evacuation of the school building have already been externally and independently reviewed. Because of the level of public interest in these matters, the review and its finding were shared openly with the Auditor General for Wales and the Public Services Ombudsman and reported formally to the Council's Governance and Audit Committee which, at the time was chaired by a member of the Plaid Cymru Group.

The review concluded that the decision to investigate the stability of the quarry tip arose legitimately from work that had been taking place at Pantteg where a significant landslide had occurred. The review noted that the timing of the work behind Godre'rgraig Primary School allowed a negative perception of this to form in the minds of some people in the community given that this coincided with the emerging proposals to reorganise some primary schools in the Swansea Valley.

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Croesewir gohebiaeth yn y Gymraeg a byddwn yn ymdrin â gohebiaeth Gymraeg a Saesneg i'r un safonau ac amserlenni.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh and will deal with Welsh and English correspondence to the same standards and timescales.

As I am sure you will know, the preliminary report from Earth Sciences Partnership was delivered to the Council on 4th July 2019 and following review, a meeting was sought with the governing body of Godre'rgraig Primary School on 11th July where strong advice was provided to close the building to staff and pupils with immediate effect. In the absence of the Chair of the Governing Body, the Vice Chair took the decision to close the school building immediately and the building has remained closed since that time. The review noted that the Leader and Chief Executive at the time were not prepared to take any risk in terms of a potential landslip at Godre'rgraig Primary School and this was a legitimate judgement for them to have made.

The review concluded that the Council could take an assurance about the systems and processes followed.

I now turn to your detailed questions and refer you to the advice received from ESP which is attached for your information.

You will note that ESP expressed their concerns at the beginning of the report with regard to the author of the submitted report and as a consequence the qualifications of the author were not identified upon receipt of your correspondence. I appreciate that you subsequently identified the author however, you will also appreciate that the Council cannot spend valuable resources addressing the opinions of interested parties who are not willing to sign their name to a technical document they have written. You will also appreciate that the work undertaken on the Council's behalf by ESP was based on a significant amount of data collection from visual inspections, lidar surveys and from data collected from other instrumentation, including borehole inclinometers. The advice also had regard to their detailed knowledge of the geology within the wider surrounding area which they have also been modelling on the Council's behalf. ESP have also discussed the scenario, context and findings with peers and remarks echo the cautious approach considering the site setting. This also aligns with recent Welsh Government consultation guidance. This gives the Council further assurance regarding the advice given to the Governing Body to vacate the school buildings in July 2019, and more recently in December 2022, the decision to demolish the school and construct a structural bund to protect the properties immediately opposite the school site.

You will note in the technical response from ESP, in response to the question asking 'why more data hasn't been required?', that ESP refer to the Council making a decision to limit the investigations on site. It is important that this statement is understood in the wider context. Both before and after the school building was vacated back in July 2019, the Council has spent a considerable amount of time and financial resources to establish the potential risk associated with the quarry tip and the associated impact upon the school building and grounds, together with the surrounding residential properties. To date, we have spent £244,737 with ESP and in house costs of circa £50,000. Some of this was funded from the Council's capital budget with contributions from Welsh Government.

The reports provided by ESP, which are all published on our website, initially indicated that the Quarry Spoil Tip was marginally stable, i.e., that it was likely to fail at some time in response to destabilising forces reaching a certain level of activity. A marginally stable tip is below what would be expected for modern engineering standards given the high risk to life if failure were

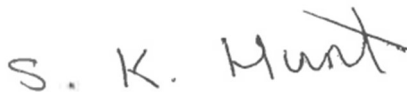
to occur. ESP continued to undertake monitoring of the tip utilising inclinometers within a number of boreholes within the tip area. The inclinometers clearly identified movement in at least two of the boreholes within the tip and based on this data, ESP amended their advice to the Council to indicate that the Quarry Spoil Tip may be Actively Unstable i.e. destabilising forces are producing continuous or intermittent movements.

The Council is satisfied that this level of investigation was sufficient to enable us to make an informed decision with regard to the Godre'rgraig site. The Council could continue using scarce financial resources to further monitor the tip, however this is unlikely to change the outcome of the initial investigations and the Council must draw a line somewhere. It is also important to note that the Council is not prepared to allow the occupation of one of its buildings below a quarry tip. We are, however, continuing to fund the mitigation work for the drainage scheme, which involves water management on the hillside including drainage ditches. We are also paying for the demolition of the building and the design and construction of the structural bund which will protect the houses opposite, the costs of which are not included in the aforementioned figures.

I trust that the technical response attached and the context provided above, clearly addresses the questions posed by Tegwch. I would also confirm that the Council has already made a decision to demolish the school and I am satisfied with both the quality and quantity of data and specialist advice which informed that decision.

I have asked officers to prepare advice on options to secure a permanent replacement site for your school, including options for any transitional period. I hope to have that advice available this autumn and would welcome a meeting once that advice is to hand to discuss the future of your school.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'S. K. Hunt', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Leader of Neath Port Talbot Council

c.c. Miss P Argyle, Headteacher