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Our ref: TO2026/19758

9 September 2026

Dear Bryn,

Thank you for your email of 20 August about the reported illegal waste site at Ranskill and the concerns of local residents about the potential impacts on the environment and public health. We have been asked to reply.

The government recognises the distress and uncertainty that illegal waste sites can cause for local communities. Waste crime is not a victimless offence. It can blight communities, damage the environment and undermine legitimate businesses. We understand the strength of feeling locally about the situation you have described and appreciate the concerns raised regarding the reported presence of hazardous materials and the potential impacts on nearby watercourses and wildlife sites.

The government recently announced a strengthened programme of action through the Waste Crime Action Plan, which is our toughest crackdown on illegal waste activity. The Plan is designed to prevent harm, disrupt offending and accelerate action against the most serious illegal waste sites. Measures include increased investment in the EA frontline enforcement, stronger multi-agency working through the Joint Unit for Waste Crime, tighter controls on waste operators and the rollout of digital waste tracking.

You specifically ask why Ranskill has not been included among the sites announced for government-funded remediation. The sites selected for direct remediation have been identified using published operational, environmental and community criteria and represent those assessed as posing the most serious ongoing harm and where government intervention has been judged to be justified. The majority of illegal waste sites continue to be addressed through enforcement action rather than direct government-funded clearance, to ensure that the polluter pays principle is upheld wherever possible.

Government policy remains that landowners are generally responsible for securing their land and clearing illegally deposited waste. This is important to avoid creating incentives for criminals to target land in the expectation that public funds will routinely be used for clearance. Direct government clearance is therefore considered a measure of last resort.

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The EA and local authorities have a range of powers available to investigate waste offences and pursue those responsible. The government is also strengthening enforcement powers. As part of our wider crackdown on waste crime, councils can now issue fixed penalty notices of up to £5,000 for fly-tipping offences, and we are investing significantly in enforcement capability to support earlier intervention against illegal waste activity.

While we are unable to comment on any ongoing regulatory or enforcement activity at a specific site, we can assure you that the concerns raised in your correspondence have been shared with the relevant policy officials and EA colleagues. They are best placed to consider the issues you have highlighted, including the potential environmental risks associated with the site.

Thank you again for taking the time to write. The government is committed to tackling waste crime, protecting communities and ensuring that those responsible for illegal waste activity face robust enforcement action.

Yours sincerely,

Ministerial Contact Unit

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