

P-05-801 Save the trees and ground in Roath Mill and Roath Brook Gardens before it's too late – Correspondence from the Petitioner to the Minister for Environment

Dear Ms Blythyn

We refer to previous discussions which we have had in relation to the flood prevention works being undertaken by Natural Resources Wales at Roath Brook and Roath Mill Gardens.

We are writing to make you aware of a number of important issues which we believe you should be aware (if you have not been informed directly by NRW):

1. You will be aware that in letters to residents and also in your open letter in the South Wales Echo of 22nd December you assured residents that much thought had gone into the scheme which protected 65 homes. This figure of 65 homes was first provided to us by NRW in November. In a letter from the acting chief executive this figure then changed to 60. By the January workshops run by NRW this figure had changed once more to 62 (see the attached slide from their workshop). However, when NRW agreed to survey the houses at risk they surveyed 70 properties. After this figure was questioned by us NRW confirmed that 70 is the correct figure, and that the original figure of 65 (given almost a year ago had been subject to “double checking”, which they obviously had not done in that time). In relation to a scheme with a history of inaccurate figures being given to the public it is evidently troubling that, even now, we cannot be assured of getting the correct information. We assume that you are similarly concerned that you have given incorrect information to the public about the scheme.

2. You will also recall that in the same letter in the South Wales Echo you referred to the “122 new, established” trees being planted. We believe that at present NRW have, at best, planted between 80 and 90 of these trees, the reality could be a lot less. Sadly NRW have so far not responded to our request to confirm the number of trees planted. Many residents had raised issues with us, and NRW, over the quality of the trees planted by NRW. We raised them over a number of weeks with NRW but were assured that there was no issue with the trees planted. We therefore engaged the services of an independent arboriculturalist to inspect the trees. We have previously forwarded his letter to you (although a further copy is attached) and we are sure you will agree that his view of the trees planted was scathing. Following that letter, and in light of their previous assurances that there were no issues, NRW have now confirmed that they are replacing 23 of the trees planted and monitoring another 20. Overall this represents issues with approximately 50% of those planted.

It is disappointing that, rather than investigate the issue when first raised, residents were forced to spend their own money to hold NRW to account. We have unsurprisingly written to NRW requesting them to reimburse the money spent, although they have refused to do so.

These latest errors of NRW, and their inability to accept such errors, need to be read in the context of the ongoing governance issues which NRW are facing, and appear to further evidence systemic failures within the organisation (and a failure to accept even the most obvious of those errors).

Our discussions with NRW have now reached a stage where we are about to engage the services of a specialist flood engineer. This will be at substantial expense to residents (several thousands of pounds), well in excess of funds already raised. We are confident, given the depth of feeling in the community, that these funds will be raised.

We also trust that you have now been made aware of the results from the survey of the 70 homes undertaken by NRW. It is clear from these that there is, amongst these homes, a very low level of support, or perceived need, for the scheme. Only 26 questionnaires were returned to NRW and only 9 of those responding felt that the scheme in its current form was proportionate and had adequately taken account of the value of the Parks (as opposed to 14 who felt it was not – 3 were unsure or did not answer).

The fact remains that all we have ever wanted is for NRW to review the need for the Phase 3 works afresh and alternative options available. More recently we have been asking that such a review is undertaken in line with your revised Woodland for Wales strategy, something which NRW refuses to take into consideration. We would urge you now to intervene to simply ensure that a fresh “untainted” review is undertaken to look at the need for, and if appropriate, provide flood protection in accordance with best practice and Welsh government policy. Such a review should be undertaken at public expense and not at further expense to the community.

Regards,

Friends of Roath Brook