

Bonnington Mains Quarry's bid to remove blast limit refused

An attempt by owners of an Edinburgh quarry to remove limits on how strong their blasts can be has been knocked back by the council.

Locals complained operations at Bonnington Mains Quarry, near Ratho, already cause their homes to shake and have left some living nearby distressed.

The local authority approved the pit's opening in 1990 and said levels of air overpressure – shockwaves that travels through the air when explosives are detonated – should not exceed 120 decibels when measured at nearby properties.

Owners Breedon argued the planning condition was “unenforceable and unreasonable” due to difficulties obtaining accurate measurements, and said unpredictable weather conditions can significantly increase air overpressure levels.

However an application to have it lifted attracted 140 objections and left councillors feeling “extremely uncomfortable,” and was refused.

Last year Breedon was granted permission to further develop the north of the site with a new asphalt plant, offices and car park. More extensive plans to nearly double the size of the quarry in future and build a large recycling plant, which are yet to be formally submitted, have sparked fears over the

further noise, dust and traffic this would bring, and potential damage to nearby homes.

Tests by Vibrock, which measures air overpressure levels for the quarry, show that of the six blasts monitored in the last year, all exceeded the 120 dB limit.

Valarie Thrush-Denning from the local Stop the Quarry campaign opposing the expansion plans, said it was vital to stop the owners "breaking all the rules and making people's lives miserable".

She said: "Taking away any protection of the local people and leaving it up to the quarry to make vital decision of when to blast without any possible redress, the environmental problems that would be caused by allowing potential reckless blasting would be in direct contrast to the attempts to clean up air quality."

She said a 93-year-old neighbour in Bonnington Village had recently been "taken aback as my whole house shook violently and loose items on the bathroom shelf rattled, accompanied by a loud noise" when operations were underway.

Ms Thrush-Denning also told the Local Democracy Reporting Service: "For the last year or so the air overpressure limits have been exceeded and we have noticed the difference."

Representing Breedon at the meeting on Wednesday, September 4 Donald Wilkins argued the limit imposed was "unenforceable and unreasonable" due to weather impact and difficulty get accurate measurements.

He told councillors a 120 dB blast was similar to a "gentle breeze" but the impact was often exacerbated by wind.

"Within Scotland this is the only planning permission that we have an air overpressure limit on, it doesn't exist anywhere else, it's never been imposed by another local authority," he

added.

“If a blast is detonated in a motionless atmosphere where there is absolutely no wind and a constant temperature then the air overpressure should reduce as a function of distance. However as we all know the weather in Scotland is highly changeable with regular periods of high winds, low clouds and very rarely do we get appropriate measurement conditions.”

But Paul Fisher, a local civil engineer and environmental manager urged the committee not to “fall for the smoke and mirrors,” adding that removing the limit would “set a very dangerous precedent”

He said: “Research over many years has determined that 120 decibels is the threshold above which human beings can hear and feel such blasts and it can distress them greatly – more so if they are indoors.”

Judy Wightman, chair of Ratho and District Community Council, added: “This, in layman’s terms, is not only a request to remove all the upper limits for air overpressure, but any monitoring of the air overpressure arising, or: no upper limits, no monitoring.

“Blasting occurs on a regular basis. The impact of blasting from air overpressure perspective is not only a loud noise but also a shaking of properties.

“At present it would appear that the planning department is not monitoring the levels of the air overpressure despite the information being supplied by Vibroc, nor is any action taken.

“Even at lower levels there is an impact on the local residents, and the continuing frequent occurrences has accumulative effect reducing the amenity levels for the area. The community believe the 120dB air overpressure limit should be retained and monitored in the future.”

Members of the development management-sub committee refused the application, with the Conservatives' Jo Mowat noting her dissent.

Convener Cllr Hal Osler said: "I am extremely uncomfortable with removing this condition.

"As a committee to actually remove this because we were basically acknowledging the fact there's an issue and the way we're resolving it is by removing the condition. And I am very uncomfortable about that because residents' amenity is important and there are issues with that".

It is understood Breedon plans to appeal the decision.

By Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter