

# WELWYN GARDEN CITY SOCIETY

## What Lies Beneath?

### “Birchall Garden Suburb”



Cole Green refuse tip c.1980

*Cole Green c.1980. Photo supplied under the terms of the public sector information license, under the Open Government Licence v3.0.*

**Questions to be posed to Tarmac about their proposed development of the former landfill site known locally as Cole Green dump.**

**The tragedy of Grenfell Tower has focused minds on planning and buildings regulations and the need to ensure that these matters are properly managed and explained to all people, especially residents.**

**There are many issues about this proposed development that have not been addressed. The Society has highlighted a number that need to be answered by both the developer and the two local authorities who are pushing for the site to be developed.**

1) The Environment Agency (EA) area map shows that almost all the Welwyn Hatfield portion of the proposed development sits on a historic landfill site that took in waste from 1920-1990. A County Council document once stated that the site 'is probably the most important refuse site in Hertfordshire'. Why is this not made clear in Tarmac publicity?

2) EA data appears to show that waste of every category is present on the site including the 'Special' category which according to the EA includes waste that is “flammable, toxic, irritant, harmful, carcinogenic or corrosive”. This is not mentioned in Tarmac’s proposals. Does Tarmac not think that prospective purchasers of properties on this development have the right to full knowledge of these facts, to assess the risks they might be running?

3) When the dump was closed a series of ground gas shafts and vents were installed in the area closest to existing houses (Thistle Grove) to vent methane and other harmful gases to the atmosphere rather than allow them to seep underground into the nearby houses. Will any new development also be protected with large gas vents for similar reasons?

4) One survey commissioned by Lafarge Tarmac states “The asbestos in the shallow soils at the site is considered to represent a potential unacceptable risk, albeit one that can be mitigated through design/remedial measures” and “In the context of the proposed

development the potential risk to end uses is likely to be greatly influenced by the extent of the asbestos and activities undertaken across the public open space.” What will Tarmac be doing to remove all the asbestos from the entirety of the site in order to make it safe for the range of uses proposed in its plans for BGS?

5) The Welwyn Garden City paper ‘What Lies Beneath?’ (to be found on our website at <http://wgcsoc.org.uk>) probes into the history of landfill on this site, something which Tarmac’s own surveys have not done, neither has WHBC as far as we know. The concerns raised in this paper have still not been addressed. What is Tarmac’s and the local authorities’ response to this paper and the many questions it raises?

6) Many residents will remember the landfill operation and the largely unregulated nature of it with lorries and trains coming up from London and dumping whatever they wished. Some residents have contacted us with recollections of chemical and marked hazardous waste containers being deposited in the ground. What has Tarmac done to establish what is under the ground of a toxic nature?

7) Will Tarmac be the actual developer of BGS or do they intend to sell on the site if planning consent is granted? How does Tarmac expect any housebuilder to take on the potential risks associated with this entire development? Does Tarmac believe that mortgages for houses built on this site will be obtainable?

8) Tarmac claims to be a “long-term land steward in Hertfordshire, and we have used our sites for the benefit of the community for generations.” Their neighbouring site at Panshanger Park is about 20 years overdue in delivering a fully accessible Country Park for the community, which it is bound to do so under planning approvals previously granted. Today a large tract of it remains closed off and even their management plan showing the schedule for opening it all remains overdue by several years. Why should the local community believe their new promise of a “park” surrounded by beautiful houses in light of the lengthy and ongoing delays at Panshanger Park next door?

10) What is Tarmac’s view of the recent documentary on Radio 4 (*What Lies beneath? The Legacy of Landfill* – currently to be found on BBC i-Player here: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b08v09y2> ). It highlights major contamination issues with former landfill sites being brought forward for housing developments by developers. What sorts of guarantees are they prepared to offer prospective purchasers against the hazards experienced by other communities close to historic landfill sites, particularly against claims made for ill health as highlighted in the Radio 4 documentary?

Welwyn Garden City Society, June 2017.