

National Mining Disaster Memorial Garden of Wales: Media Briefing

Interviewee	Redacted – Section 40 , ITV Wales
Date & Time	Thursday 7 March 2023
Location	National Mining Disaster Memorial Garden of Wales, CF83 4GY
Press Officer	Redacted – Section 40
Brief Summary	<p>Media have been invited to see you formally endorse the National Mining Disaster Memorial Garden of Wales and welcome its inclusion on the statutory Register of Historic Parks and Gardens in Wales.</p> <p>All content gathered will be held until the Welsh Government announcement on Tuesday 12 March and therefore, we don't expect any off-topic questions. We have, however, included some hot issues at the bottom of this document as a precaution.</p>
Key Points	<p>I am delighted to be here today to endorse the Welsh National and Universal Mining Disaster Memorial Garden at Senghenydd as the National Mining Disaster Memorial Garden of Wales.</p> <p>Whilst today is a day to celebrate the hard work of all the volunteers of the Aber Valley Heritage Group whose dedication has led to this endorsement, it is also a time for reflection.</p> <p>This memorial garden at Senghenydd, the site of the worst colliery disaster to befall Wales is a fitting tribute to all those who lost their lives, and the gardens endorsement along with its inclusion on the statutory Register of Historic Parks and Gardens in Wales will support its protection for future generations.</p>

What is the significance of this announcement?

- Today's announcement endorses the Welsh National and Universal Mining Disaster Memorial Garden at Senghenydd as the National Mining Disaster Memorial Garden of Wales, a fitting tribute to all of those who lost their lives in mining disasters in our country.
- The mining industry in Wales was a significant economic resource, but the loss of life to achieve this must never be forgotten.
- This endorsement and the registration of the garden on the statutory register of Historic Parks and Gardens will help protect the garden for current and future generations and allow us all to recognise the sacrifice of those lost in the mining industry.

Why did you feel it necessary to give your endorsement?

- The First Minister and I were asked by the Aber Valley Heritage Group and the local community more generally to endorse the memorial as the national mining disaster memorial.
- There is no formal mechanism for doing this, but it seems appropriate for this to be the national memorial as it not only represents the two mining disasters at Senghenydd in 1901 and 1913 it also includes the 'Pathway of Memory' documenting all Welsh Mining Disasters of 5 or more victims.
- It is calculated that over 10,000 people in Wales alone have died during mining disasters in the quest for Coal.
- The memorial garden not only pays tribute to those who lost their lives in two mining disasters in Senghenydd – with the 1913 disaster being the biggest in British Mining History – but also documents all Welsh Mining Disasters of 5 or more victims therefore, I feel it is correct to endorse the garden as the National Mining Disaster Memorial Garden of Wales.

How will it affect/improve the future of the garden?

- The endorsement of this memorial garden and its registration as a Historic Park and Garden will raise awareness of the garden and its significance in the local community and Wales.
- It is important the garden is placed on the statutory register of historic parks and gardens – this recognises that the garden is of special historic interest to Wales. There are over 400 historic parks and gardens on the register.
- The registration of the memorial garden and its endorsement as the national memorial will assist in securing the future of the garden by giving it recognition.

Does it mean the potential of WG support for the upkeep of the garden?

- No funding will automatically be allocated for the upkeep of the garden.
- The volunteers and local authority will continue to be responsible for the upkeep of the garden, however, Cadw officials are available to provide support and advice to the heritage group with regards to its ongoing conservation and maintenance.

When will any changes take effect?

- The garden will be placed on the statutory register of historic parks and gardens on today (12 March) – after consultation with the Aber Valley heritage Trust, local authority, and the community.

- I wrote to local authorities earlier this year explaining our intention of endorsing the garden as the National Mining Disaster Memorial Garden of Wales.

Defensive: Why hasn't this been done sooner?

- The Aber Valley Heritage Trust worked hard last year to restore the memorial and garden to mark ten years after it was created in 2013.
- Cadw's stonemasons kindly agreed to work with the trust on repairing the sculpture – normally the stonemasons only work on monuments which are in the care of Cadw.
- It seemed the appropriate time therefore to formally endorse the garden as the National Mining Disaster Memorial Garden of Wales.

HOT ISSUES

Covid Inquiry

(We continue to remind media that Ministers are unable to answer questions about the inquiry while it is underway)

Why are you refusing to hold a Wales specific covid inquiry? Why are you avoiding scrutiny?

- Our thoughts and sympathies are with everyone who lost loved ones during the pandemic.
- Full scrutiny of the decisions made by Welsh Ministers and Welsh public services, together with their interconnected nature with those taken by other UK governments, can only be achieved by a comprehensive UK-wide inquiry.
- The inquiry is underway. Welsh Ministers and government officials are giving detailed evidence to the UK Covid Inquiry in Cardiff over the coming weeks.

During the inquiry, we have heard X, Y, Z – what is your response?

- It is not right for me to comment on matters relating to the inquiry while the hearings are underway.
- Ministers and government officials are giving detailed evidence in the coming weeks. It is really important this evidence is heard fully, in the proper context of the inquiry, with the space for the level of scrutiny it deserves.
- We are continuing to engage fully with the inquiry to ensure all actions and decisions are fully and properly scrutinised.

Will you be taking part in the inquiry?

- I have provided detailed evidence to the inquiry team. Whether or not I am called to give evidence in the coming weeks is a decision for the inquiry team.

Did you delete or allow your texts and WhatsApp messages to disappear during the pandemic?

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- We are continuing to engage fully with the inquiry to ensure all actions and decisions are fully and properly scrutinised.

When pushed on WhatsApp use

- Welsh Government has disclosed thousands of pieces of evidence to the inquiry, including WhatsApp messages. As our opening statement to the inquiry made clear - neither Ministers nor officials used WhatsApp (or any other form of informal communication) as a substitute for formal decision-making.
- Cabinet, chaired by the FM, was the central decision-making body for Ministers to decide significant issues and to inform colleagues about important matters.

Budget Cuts at Culture Arm's Length Bodies

- Our arm's length bodies have worked at pace to assess the impact of their budget allocation. We are grateful to them for the important work they do and the benefits that work provides to the people of Wales.
- We were clear going into our draft budget preparations that, because our budget is now worth £1.3bn less in real terms than when it was set in 2021, incredibly difficult decisions had to be taken.
- The final budget includes an additional £1.4m for Cadw and the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales providing parity to these bodies in terms of reductions across other culture arm's length bodies of 10.5%.