# Havering designates contaminated site after legal battle over recurrent fires and health risks



Following a protracted legal and environmental battle, Havering Council has formally designated Arnolds Field in Launders Lane, Rainham, a former rubbish dump site, as contaminated land. This landmark decision, announced on October 21, comes after a High Court ruling earlier this year found that the council had previously erred in its assessment by relying on incomplete data and by misunderstanding the legal threshold for contamination relating to toxic smoke emissions. The persistent fires and resultant acrid smoke have caused significant distress in the surrounding community, with residents reporting symptoms such as stinging eyes and coughing, particularly affecting those with pre-existing respiratory conditions.

The land in question has a troubling history; it has been used not only as an illegal cannabis grow site and weapons storage but has also been the locus of over 160 fires since 2022. These recurrent blazes release harmful particulates, notably PM2.5, recognized for their adverse health effects. The council’s investigations found a correlation between smoke exposure and increased general practitioner visits for respiratory issues, exacerbating local anxiety and health concerns. Such findings underscore the significant public health implications, further legitimised by residents’ accounts of debilitating symptoms, including breathing difficulties and repeated infections, as highlighted by campaigners from groups such as Clean the Air Havering and Rainham Against Pollution.

The designation formally obliges Havering Council to take remedial action, marking a turning point in a long-standing problem. The council has committed to consulting with the landowners to explore remediation strategies and, if necessary, to serve remediation notices to enforce clean-up measures. Soil tests conducted in late 2023 revealed alarming contaminants including asbestos, plastic debris, and construction waste, compounds that compound the fire hazard and environmental degradation. Councillor Ray Morgon, Havering Council leader, emphasised the council's commitment to protecting residents' health and quality of life, acknowledging the complexity of the situation and affirming that legal precedents stemming from the judicial review mandate cautious, methodical action.

Despite this progress, local opposition councillors have expressed disappointment over the pace of change, reflecting ongoing community frustrations. The council’s recent transparency efforts include a sub-committee review recommending proactive long-term health monitoring, enhanced communication strategies about health risks, and improved resident engagement backed by defined timelines. They have also urged lobbying for tighter national legislation to better manage such contamination cases. Committee chair Councillor David Taylor indicated that the council recognises the significant risk posed by the site and that continued scrutiny will ensure accountability and effective action.

Campaigners from Clean the Air Havering have welcomed the designation but remain vocal about the need for urgent and sustained efforts. Speaking at the council meeting, Ruth Kettle-Frisby characterised the previous council response as a "Kafkaesque" ordeal for residents, capturing their sense of bureaucratic frustration and powerlessness. She called for swift justice to safeguard children and stressed that clean air is a fundamental human right. The London Fire Brigade has also drawn attention to the dangers, describing the recurrent fires as distressing and a risk to firefighting personnel.

As the council navigates the remediation process with landowners and other stakeholders, this case illuminates the broader challenges local authorities face when addressing legacy contamination sites amid complex legal frameworks and community health imperatives. The commitment from both community advocates and the council signals a critical, though still unfolding, step toward resolving a deeply entrenched environmental and health crisis in Rainham.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.yellowad.co.uk/havering-council-formally-designates-burning-former-rubbish-dump-in-rainham-as-contaminated/) (Yellow Advertiser), [[3]](https://www.itv.com/news/london/2025-06-18/mums-win-legal-victory-against-council-over-landfill-fires) (ITV News)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.yellowad.co.uk/havering-council-formally-designates-burning-former-rubbish-dump-in-rainham-as-contaminated/) (Yellow Advertiser), [[3]](https://www.itv.com/news/london/2025-06-18/mums-win-legal-victory-against-council-over-landfill-fires) (ITV News), [[5]](https://feeds.bbci.co.uk/news/articles/cm2ly783d5eo) (BBC News)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.yellowad.co.uk/havering-council-formally-designates-burning-former-rubbish-dump-in-rainham-as-contaminated/) (Yellow Advertiser), [[2]](https://www.havering.gov.uk/news/article/1625/havering-council-declares-launders-lane-arnold-s-field-as-contaminated-land-to-protect-residents-and-end-persistent-fires) (Havering Council), [[5]](https://feeds.bbci.co.uk/news/articles/cm2ly783d5eo) (BBC News)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.yellowad.co.uk/havering-council-formally-designates-burning-former-rubbish-dump-in-rainham-as-contaminated/) (Yellow Advertiser), [[2]](https://www.havering.gov.uk/news/article/1625/havering-council-declares-launders-lane-arnold-s-field-as-contaminated-land-to-protect-residents-and-end-persistent-fires) (Havering Council), [[4]](https://www.havering.gov.uk/launderslane) (Havering Council), [[5]](https://feeds.bbci.co.uk/news/articles/cm2ly783d5eo) (BBC News)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.yellowad.co.uk/havering-council-formally-designates-burning-former-rubbish-dump-in-rainham-as-contaminated/) (Yellow Advertiser), [[2]](https://www.havering.gov.uk/news/article/1625/havering-council-declares-launders-lane-arnold-s-field-as-contaminated-land-to-protect-residents-and-end-persistent-fires) (Havering Council)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.yellowad.co.uk/havering-council-formally-designates-burning-former-rubbish-dump-in-rainham-as-contaminated/) (Yellow Advertiser), [[3]](https://www.itv.com/news/london/2025-06-18/mums-win-legal-victory-against-council-over-landfill-fires) (ITV News), [[7]](https://www.mishcon.com/news/community-group-launches-legal-action-against-havering-council-over-toxic-illegal-landfill-site-at-launders-lane-rainham) (Mishcon de Reya)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.yellowad.co.uk/havering-council-formally-designates-burning-former-rubbish-dump-in-rainham-as-contaminated/) (Yellow Advertiser), [[5]](https://feeds.bbci.co.uk/news/articles/cm2ly783d5eo) (BBC News), [[3]](https://www.itv.com/news/london/2025-06-18/mums-win-legal-victory-against-council-over-landfill-fires) (ITV News)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.yellowad.co.uk/havering-council-formally-designates-burning-former-rubbish-dump-in-rainham-as-contaminated/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.havering.gov.uk/news/article/1625/havering-council-declares-launders-lane-arnold-s-field-as-contaminated-land-to-protect-residents-and-end-persistent-fires> - Havering Council has officially designated Arnold's Field, Launders Lane, Rainham, as 'contaminated land' under Part 2A of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. This decision follows extensive investigations and a High Court ruling that overturned the council's previous stance. The move aims to address the persistent fires and pollution affecting local residents. The council plans to consult with landowners on remediation efforts and, if necessary, issue a remediation notice. Councillor Ray Morgon emphasized the commitment to protecting residents' health and quality of life.
3. <https://www.itv.com/news/london/2025-06-18/mums-win-legal-victory-against-council-over-landfill-fires> - A group of residents in Havering has won a legal battle against the local council over continuous fires at a landfill site in Launders Lane. The campaigners, known as Clean the Air for Havering, challenged the council's decision not to designate the land as contaminated. The High Court ruling now requires the council to reassess the site, potentially leading to cleanup actions by the landowners or legal proceedings to recover costs. The residents have been advocating for action due to health concerns caused by the toxic smoke.
4. <https://www.havering.gov.uk/launderslane> - This page provides key information and updates regarding the land at Arnolds Field, Launders Lane, Rainham. It includes background on the issues, public statements, and documents related to the council's work with partners and stakeholders. The page details the council's decision to declare the site as contaminated land and outlines the next steps in the remediation process, including consultation with landowners and potential enforcement actions.
5. <https://feeds.bbci.co.uk/news/articles/cm2ly783d5eo> - Havering Council has officially declared the former landfill site at Launders Lane, Rainham, as contaminated land following a judicial review. The decision comes after years of campaigning by local residents and a legal challenge against the council's previous refusal to designate the site as contaminated. The declaration imposes legal obligations on the council and the Environment Agency to ensure the site is cleaned up, addressing health concerns from ongoing pollution and fires.
6. <https://thehaveringdaily.co.uk/2024/10/24/clean-air-in-havering-group-formally-issue-a-legal-claim-against-havering-council-over-launders-lane/> - The Clean Air in Havering group has initiated legal action against Havering Council over the Launders Lane landfill site. The group, comprising local residents, is seeking a judicial review of the council's decision not to designate the land as contaminated. The residents have been advocating for action due to health concerns caused by the toxic smoke from the site, which has caught fire multiple times in recent years.
7. <https://www.mishcon.com/news/community-group-launches-legal-action-against-havering-council-over-toxic-illegal-landfill-site-at-launders-lane-rainham> - The community group Clean The Air in Havering has launched legal action against Havering Council over the Launders Lane landfill site. The group is challenging the council's decision not to designate the site as contaminated land, arguing that the council failed to properly assess the health risks from the fires. The legal action aims to compel the council to take responsibility and address the environmental and health issues caused by the site.