

A Message from Rt. Hon. George Howarth MP

I am deeply concerned about Sonae and the risk that it poses to its staff and local residents.

Many people have talked to me about the factory in the past and since the latest fire, it is clear that many people want Sonae to close for good.

Since the latest fire, your Labour councillors for Kirkby and I have been very active trying to find out what happened and if measures can be put in place to stop risks of fire in the future.

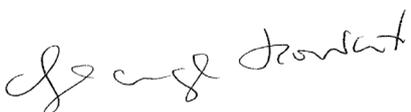
As an MP, I am not part of the decision making process about Sonae, and I can therefore say now, that I believe the factory should close. This is the first time I have ever actively campaigned for a closure in the constituency that will lead to job losses. But the risk to residents and staff is too great and, sadly, Sonae's past record does not give enough confidence that the situation can be turned around.

I have already tabled a motion in Parliament which says:

'That this House notes with grave concern the recent fire at the Sonae Factory in Kirkby; further notes that the factory has been the site of numerous fires and accidents over recent years, including the tragic death of two workers in December 2010; further notes that there have been long-standing complaints about dust and air quality from residents and businesses and four enquiries by the Health and Safety Executive over the past decade; further notes that the plant poses a considerable risk to residents, employees and the local fire service, as well as a disproportionate financial burden on Knowsley Council, the fire service and the Health and Safety Executive; and calls on the relevant regulatory bodies to give urgent consideration to closing the plant down permanently.'

And on Monday 13 June, in Parliament, I raised the issue with the Government Minister responsible for the Health and Safety Executive. I asked, if ***'he will take into account the problems that the Health and Safety Executive has had at Sonae in my constituency. A major fire incident over the last few days has covered much of the industrial area as well as residential areas in acrid black smoke. Will he assure me that the HSE will work with the local authority, Knowsley Council, the fire service and everybody else in the town, because we have reached the conclusion that this place should be closed down?'*** The Minister, Chris Grayling, replied 'I am aware of the very unfortunate incident in the right hon. Gentleman's constituency. I cannot comment specifically on that investigation, but I can assure him that the HSE is investigating carefully what happened. Clearly, lessons must be learned. However, that underlines my view that the HSE should concentrate its resources on dealing with genuinely serious incidents and problems, and not on trivial matters.'

Please be assured that I continue to stand up for what the people of this town want.



Rt. Hon **George Howarth** MP

Working for you all year round

A Message from your Labour Councillors

Dear Residents

As Councillors for Kirkby, we have strong concerns both about the recent fire at Sonae and also in relation to a number of other incidents at the site in recent months and over the last several years. The recent fire is part of a long catalogue of occurrences since the plant opened, including many fires, breaches of health and safety regulations, and environmental health problems as a result of emissions. The last major incident, prior to the fire on 9th June, resulted in the tragic deaths of two contractors working at the site.

Given the close proximity of Sonae to residential areas and businesses and the ongoing issues mentioned above, we are acutely aware that many of our town's residents and businesses have now lost patience with Sonae and want to see the plant closed down.

We support the actions of our MP George Howarth in calling for the Health and Safety Executive to take appropriate action in view of this latest incident.

As responsible elected representatives for the area, we also have to take into account the fact that Sonae provides around 250 jobs. We recognise the importance of these jobs to our local economy, and we appreciate that Sonae have made some improvements to the site in recent years alongside their employees and trade unions. However, in view of this most recent serious incident, we are concerned that it may not be possible to reduce the risks associated with the site to an acceptable level.

The Council itself has also worked closely with Sonae to act on previous concerns, but it is no longer sustainable for the Council's Environmental Health team to spend such a significant amount of time on only one of Knowsley's many businesses. The fact that we have to concentrate so closely on Sonae means that other businesses and our residents may not receive the support they need, and this is not fair.

We therefore call upon the Council to meet urgently with the Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service and the Health and Safety Executive to discuss whether the clear risks to health and safety presented by Sonae now outweigh the benefits brought by the business to the town of Kirkby.

Cllr E. Connor, Cllr M. Murphy, Cllr T. Garland –
Northwood Ward

Cllr J. Harris, Cllr M. Stuart, Cllr B. Brennan –
Kirkby Central Ward

Cllr T. Grannell, Cllr D. Lonergan, Cllr J. Aston –
Cherryfield Ward

Cllr N Keats, Cllr J. Keats, Cllr R. Smith –
Whitefield Ward

Cllr M. Sharp, Cllr R. Halpin, Cllr T. Grierson –
Shevington Ward

Cllr J. Greer, Cllr D. Dobbie, Cllr D. Arnall –
Park Ward



Labour

Helping people everyday