

Rt Hon Damian Green MP
Secretary of State for Work and Pensions
Caxton House
Tothill Street
London
SW1H 9NA

28th April 2017

Dear Secretary of State

Proposed closure of Phoenix House DWP Office, Barrow-in-Furness

We are writing to express our grave concerns about the Department for Work and Pensions' proposal to close Phoenix House in Barrow-in-Furness. The signatories to this letter consist of clinicians, charities and campaign groups working directly with sufferers of mesothelioma, as well as people living with mesothelioma themselves. We believe the closure of this specialist DWP office would have a detrimental effect on the well-being of mesothelioma patients and their families and would urge your department to reconsider.

The number of people newly diagnosed with mesothelioma in the UK is increasing. We have not seen the peak of this epidemic yet and may not do so for 5-10 years. Over 2,500 new diagnoses have been made in each of the last three years.

Mesothelioma is a devastating terminal illness with a very poor prognosis. Most sufferers develop this disease through exposure to asbestos at work. This illness leads to appalling pain, breathlessness and an early death. It can rapidly overwhelm the patient. It devastates whole families.

Most mesothelioma patients are entitled to claim Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit, and other linked benefits such as Constant Attendance Allowance and lump sum payments under the Pneumoconiosis (Workers' Compensation) Act 1979. For many years these benefits have been administered by specialist staff at Phoenix House. A huge well of expertise has been developed over this time.

Our experience of dealing with staff at Phoenix House has been overwhelmingly positive. They have a deep understanding of not only the complex benefits they administer, but also the needs of, and the difficulties faced by mesothelioma sufferers and their families, who should not have to risk being exposed to administrative or other delay or complexity at such a desperate time. The specialist service Phoenix House staff provide to terminally ill and dying claimants is unique, and risks being undermined and diluted by such a closure.

We are concerned that closing Phoenix House would lead to a permanent loss of valuable expertise and that the service to mesothelioma patients would inevitably suffer. The geographical location of Barrow-in-Furness means it is extremely unlikely that any experienced staff would be able or willing to relocate to an alternative office. This could lead to years of upheaval and uncertainty. It could impact heavily on the health and well-being of people living with mesothelioma.

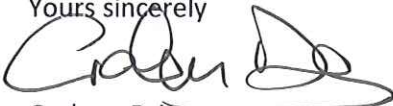
This situation is both unacceptable and unnecessary. Any administrative or financial gains the DWP achieved by closing this small office of 70 or so staff would be heavily outweighed by the loss of this huge well of expertise. There must be alternative options that would secure and maintain this excellent service in Barrow-in-Furness that has served mesothelioma sufferers, and victims of other asbestos-related diseases, so well for so many

Asbestos Victims Support Groups' Forum UK

Asbestos Action Tayside; Asbestos Support West Midlands; Cheshire Asbestos Victims Support Group; Clydebank Asbestos Group; Derbyshire Asbestos Support Team; Greater Manchester Asbestos Victims Support Group; HASAG Asbestos Disease Support; Merseyside Asbestos Victims Support Group; South Yorkshire Asbestos Victims Support Group

years. We strongly urge you to do all in your power to secure the future of this service and keep Phoenix House open.

Yours sincerely



Graham Dring

Chair, Asbestos Victims Support Groups' Forum UK, and the following supporters of this letter (addresses and contact details available on request).

Asbestos Victims Support Groups

Bob Pointer, CARDS (Cumbria)
John Flanagan, MAVS (Merseyside)
Jeff Eaman, GMAVSG (Greater Manchester)
Lynne Squibb, HASAG (Southern England)
Paula Walker, SARAG (South Yorkshire)
Joanne Gordon, DAST (East Midlands)
Doug Jewell, ACE (West Midlands)
Alison Davenport, CAVSG (Cheshire)
Val Evens, Northern TUC Group (North East)
Samantha Cox, PRASAG (North East)
Dianne Foster and John Fearn, Asbestos Action Tayside (Scotland)
Hope Robertson, Clydebank Action on Asbestos (Scotland)
Joanne Barnes-Manning, AASC (Wales)

People living with Mesothelioma, partners, carers, people who have lost loved ones to Mesothelioma and victims of other asbestos diseases

Ian and Mary Davies	Colin Buet
Roger and Jean Grimes	Malcolm and Janice Fox
Trevor and Dani Barlow	David and Alison Staley
Hannah and Joseph Hicks	Stuart Anderson
Rachel Barlow	Eric Pearce
Anthony and Gwynneth Hellewell	Albert and Pat Brennan
Tony and Sheila Eccles	Marlene Holmes
Ian and Julie McLean	Douglas Darby
Vivienne Swain and Ian Johnston	Allen and (Cllr) Patricia Jones
Sandra Holten and Ron Schora	Jim Bennett
Peter and Christine Ashton	Mavis and Ray Nye
Christine and Andy Boyd	Chris Bingham
Edna Broadbent	Reg and Carol Harvey
Ric and Hazel Knight	David Clements
Steve Duncan and Catriona Shaddick	James Sullivan
John and Debbie Gough	Doreen and Ian Sadler
Peter Petrovic	John Chapman
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John Robert Smith	David Rudge
Lynn Jenkins	James Lawler
Lynette and Richard Johnson	
Vera Rigby	Jean Doyle
Margaret Poole	Ann Hollowood
Christine Alderson	Dean Hollowood Walsh

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Julian Evitts
Paul Hughes
Iain Fraser
Ovais Khan
Tim Parker
Tina Jones
Caroline Smith
Tony Britlin
Martyna Czerwinska
Keri Howarth

Clinicians and charities involved with asbestos diseases

Liz Darlinson, Director of Services, Mesothelioma UK
Lorraine Creech, Mesothelioma UK
Mairead Dixon, Mesothelioma UK
Chris Knighton MBE, Founder, Mick Knighton Mesothelioma Research Fund
Professor Michael Peake, Chair, Board of Trustees, Mesothelioma UK
Dr Penny Woods, Chief Executive, British Lung Foundation
Adrian Budgen, Chair, Board of Trustees, June Hancock Mesothelioma Research Fund

Campaigners, Trade Unionists and lawyers concerned with asbestos diseases

Laurie Kazan-Allen, International Ban Asbestos Secretariat, Editor British Asbestos Newsletter
Hilda Palmer, Janet Newsham, John and Eileen Bamford and Caroline Bedale, Hazards Campaign
Ian Hodson, President, Baker's Union
Dan Shears, National Health and Safety Officer, GMB Union
John McLean, Asbestos in Schools
Ian Toone, Joint Union Asbestos Committee
Susan Murray, National Health & Safety Officer, UNITE the Union
Pete Farrell, Construction Safety Campaign and Vice Chair London Hazards Centre
Jenny Cooper, Brent NUT
Janet Cooper, Health & Safety Adviser, Hounslow NUT
Philip Lewis, Chair, London Hazards Trust

Kim Harrison
Alison Barnard
Steve Dickens
Joanne Candlish
Lisa Gormley
Helen Templeton
Paula Wrigley
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Bruce Cousins
Natasha Moyeed
Ryan Peers

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