

Compost cost me my health'

By Adam Civico

A RETIRED council worker had half a lung removed after developing a disease caused by fungal spores which are released by rotting vegetation.

Robert Stendall still gets tired easily and struggles to do physical tasks which previously were easy.

Now he is supporting a campaign to block the creation of an industrial-scale compost heap near Hood Green — fearing the development would leave more people vulnerable to the same disease.

Robert, 59, needed emergency surgery after a fist-sized ball was discovered in his left lung.

It was feared to be cancer but it was only after surgeons removed half the organ they discovered the growth was aspergilloma — a fungal 'ball' caused when spores germinate inside the lung and grow.

Until last year former social services officer Robert, of Cumberland Drive, Ardsley, was in good health.

He said: "In February or March last year I started to cough up a bit of blood, which, being asthmatic, had happened before when I had coughing spells. What was strange was I hadn't had a cough so the GP sent me for an x-ray."

Within two weeks he was told he had malignant lung cancer.

"That was a dreadful shock. I have never smoked and could not under-

stand it but three weeks after I was having the upper-left lobe of my lung removed."

The growth was in fact aspergilloma caused by aspergillus fumigatus spores, produced by decaying organic material.

The spores do not harm most people but anyone who has suffered lung damage is vulnerable to aspergilloma — which is treatable if identified early.

A consultant from Barnsley hospital said aspergilloma is so rare that he had only seen one or two cases.

Robert, who lives with wife Denise, was susceptible because of his asthma and believes the spores may have come from the Grange Lane depot. Compostable waste from green bins is dumped there before being moved to compost sites.

He said: "I don't know but it does make you wonder. Generally the wind direction comes in this direction from Grange Lane."

Now a year after his surgery Robert fears scores of people, including retired miners, would be at risk if a large compost heap is created near Hood Green. Spores from such a site could be blown across the village or into the nearby former mining communities of Dodworth and Gilroyd.

He said: "There are a lot of people in Barnsley who have lung damage.

If they start breathing the spores who knows what will happen. We need to dispose of our waste economically but not at the cost of our health."

A campaign opposing the Hood Green site is underway and backed by MP Michael Clapham.

He said: "We know we have a high incidence of asthma and lung disease in Barnsley. The aspergillus spores are a threat to people in that vulnerable position. It is a great concern."

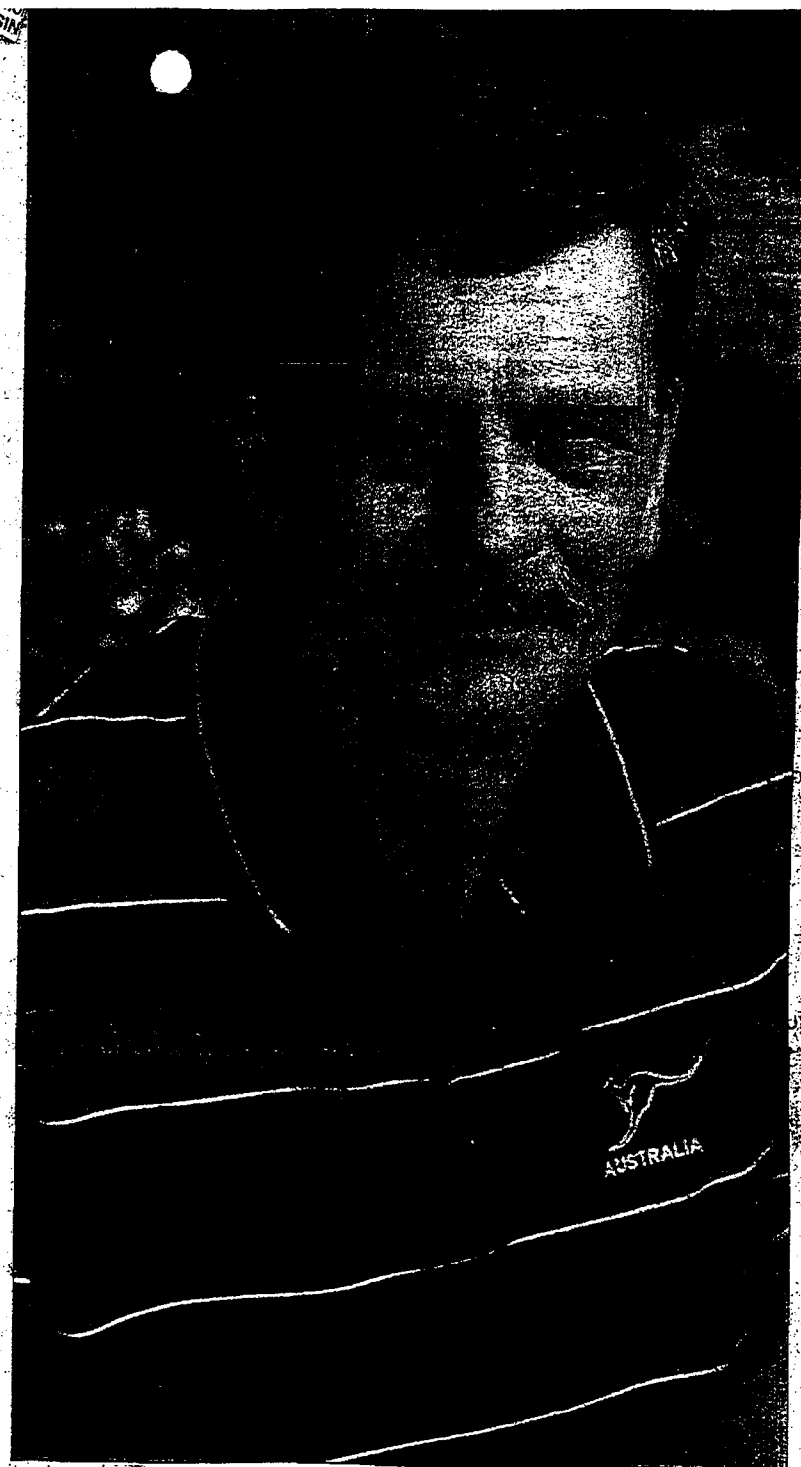
Coun William Newman, development spokesman, was aware of concerns but said there was no reported evidence of significant increases in ill health near composting sites. He said a new site for organic waste was needed or the council would face hefty fines.

He added: "Wherever decaying organic matter is present certain microbes occur naturally, including aspergillus fumigatus."

Coun Newman said people are routinely exposed to low levels and occasionally high levels of the spores without consequence.

He said no composting takes place at Grange Lane but garden waste is stored indoors there and transferred within 72 hours.

"At facilities where composting does occur, there are safe systems of work, and environmental monitoring."



Terrible ordeal: Robert Stendall at his home in Ardsley. Picture: Scott Birstow

01226 734567

Barnsley Council