

Annex to Council Minutes - Full Statement to Council June 18th 2007

From Cllr. J. Abbott

The development of the waste strategy and the waste plan for Essex has been a long and involved process. Many of us believed that the County Council had taken on board the results of 2 very extensive public consultations which massively rejected waste incineration and which supported moving towards the highest levels of recycling and composting.

However, it has recently emerged that as part of Essex County Council's outline business case (OBC) for its PFI bid to the Government, waste incineration is being considered, and furthermore, that Rivenhall Airfield has been modelled in the OBC as a site for waste burning. The County Council have already approached the site owners and secured their agreement in principle to a plant being built there.

BDC, along with the other districts and boroughs, is involved in joint working with the county council, yet as far as I am aware has not objected to these developments, nor has either ECC or BDC consulted with local communities that could be affected.

As time has gone on, the waste strategy has evolved into an ever more industry friendly entity. The proposed waste sites have got larger and more centralised. We now know they will take industrial, as well as municipal, waste. Their catchments have got larger. The proposed Rivenhall site at capacity will generate over 400 HGV movements a day with lorries coming in over large distances, breaking the proximity principle – and that's without the extra traffic from an incinerator.

I am sure will be told that its all too early to get flustered about this and that planning applications will have to be submitted.

Well forgive us for having little faith in this planning process. On March 30th, Essex CC awarded consent for a 60 acre waste development on Rivenhall Airfield, ignoring the views of many local parishes. This is a development some 4 times larger than that allocated in the Waste Local Plan, which was arrived at following a democratic public local inquiry. What a waste of time for all of us that were involved in that inquiry to have its conclusions on this site just disregarded when it suited the County Council.

To add to our cynicism, we find that at the 30th March meeting, county officers told members making the decision that no incineration of waste would take place, yet the OBC clearly indicates that the opposite is being considered.

I am also sure that we will be told that the process being considered for Essex isn't incineration. The PR machine is working away to find another name and so we have a "green energy plant" being quoted by a Cabinet Member of this Council.

Modern incinerators are less polluting than those of decades ago. But they still pollute.

The plant(s) being proposed for Essex are being modelled to burn hundreds of thousands of tonnes of waste per year which will likely include paper, cardboard and plastics. This process, a form of Refuse Derived Fuel (RDF) burning, is defined as incineration in law and covered by the European Waste Incineration Directive. These plants can also co-burn with other materials, such as fossil fuels.

BDC has recently extended the range of materials it collects for recycling to include more plastics. That great news. But where in the "fantastic plastic" campaign have the council told people that they are discussing with ECC burning plastic? Did BDC, at the recent World Environment day events tell the public that their discussions with ECC could lead to hundreds of thousands of tonnes of CO₂ going directly into the atmosphere, adding to climate change?

This is no green technology. It is unsustainable, burning non renewable resources such as plastics. It could lock us into burning waste for decades to come, irrespective of the reductions in packaging, electrical component recycling and other welcome developments that are starting to reduce waste at source.

This is why truly green organisations and waste experts reject waste burning. This is what some of them say:

GREENPEACE INTERNATIONAL

Incinerators are dioxin sources. PVC plastic is probably the most significant source of dioxin in incinerators.

The environmental concerns of incineration also apply to RDF combustion facilities.

Incineration relies upon the continued generation of waste to support the high operating costs.

It inhibits the development of more sustainable waste minimisation practices, as well as the development of products and processes that do not use toxic chemicals in the first place.

Dispersing persistent, bioaccumulative pollutants into the air from incinerator emissions creates more pollution problems.

FRIENDS OF THE EARTH

Incinerators need a minimum of rubbish to operate. To meet demand, local authorities may abandon reduction plans.

Incinerators that generate electricity produce more greenhouse gases than gas fired power stations. Recycling saves far more energy than is generated by burning waste because it means making less new things from raw materials.

Smoke, gases and ash from incinerators can contain harmful dioxins which are a cause of cancer.

ZERO WASTE ALLIANCE

The imperative of climate change has at last been unequivocally recognised by scientists, by the media and now by all major political parties. But it is not reflected in waste policy. In spite of the evidence that recycling and composting lead to major CO₂ savings relative to incineration and landfill, the Government is still promoting incineration as a source of energy.

WRAP [Waste & Resources Action Programme] – who are a partner organisation to Essex CC - released a report in 2006 that show how recycling can make a positive contribution not just to the economy but also to tackling climate change.

Their 2006 report, *Environmental Benefits of Recycling*, produced with the help of leading researchers from Denmark shows that current UK recycling saves 10-15 million tonnes of CO₂-equivalent greenhouse gases a year compared to incineration and landfill. This is equivalent to taking 3.5 million cars off the road. The report was an international review of life cycle comparisons for key materials in the UK recycling sector, the most comprehensive assessment ever undertaken, using studies from all around the world evaluating the environmental impacts of recycling compared to incineration or landfill for seven of the most commonly recycled materials.

The study demonstrated that recycling our waste is better for the environment than burning or burying it.

The US Environmental Protection Agency has also carried out a study of nine recyclable materials producing estimates for CO₂ savings relative to landfilling and burning, for each material and waste management option.

The study showed that reduction strategies and recycling each produced less CO₂ per tonne of material compared to combustion for all 9 materials. Incinerating newspaper had no benefit over landfilling and incinerating any of the three defined plastics types produced significantly more CO₂ compared to landfilling. Plastics are relatively inert in landfills.

Turning now to one of the suggested sites for an incinerator in Essex: Rivenhall Airfield, which if I can remind Members, is in the middle of the countryside with no direct access on to a major road.

The Leader of the Council has said that the waste issue affects the wider district, not just Rivenhall. I would agree with that. An incinerator on Rivenhall Airfield, burning hundreds of thousands of tonnes of waste per year will produce an emissions plume which will be blown by wind strength and direction.

The plume from a waste burning plant at Rivenhall Airfield could affect:

Coggeshall if the wind is in the south west (prevailing)
Kelvedon and Feering if the wind is in the north west
Rivenhall and Witham if the wind is in the north
Silver End and White Notley if the wind is in the north east
Cressing and Notley if the wind is in the east
and Braintree and Bradwell if the wind is in the south east

Not only would there be gaseous emissions and particulate fallout, incinerators produce a lot of ash, which can be toxic, and includes new chemicals formed during the burning process. This ash may have to be landfilled, which produces its own environmental problems, so the idea that burning waste eliminates the landfill issue is not sound.

A current BDC Cabinet Member once described these new county waste plants as “not much bigger than a supermarket”. Well I invite him to show us a supermarket that covers 60 acres, generates hundreds of HGV movements every day, gets planning permission in the middle of the countryside and when it expands, may seek to burn hundreds of thousands of tonnes of waste every year during its operation – probably on a 24/7 basis.

The Conservative Leader of Chelmsford Borough Council has publicly expressed major concerns about the way the County Council's waste strategy is developing, and in particular, the prospect of waste burning. We share his concerns. Will BDC in considering this issue, also share those concerns ?

The proposal to site a few huge waste plants, and now we learn potentially including incinerators, in Essex, is a very long way from the district based Reduce - Reuse - Recycle approach that emerged strongly from public consultations.

If the County Council does intend burning waste, at the very least it should have the decency to fully consult the people of Essex - as this is potentially a major U-turn.

In the meantime, I would urge BDC not to sign the Memorandum of Understanding with the County Council. Other authorities in Essex are also rightly being cautious about signing.

To sign on the terms on offer would have significant negative consequences. By tacitly, or overtly agreeing to incineration, this council could be torpedoing its own credibility on green issues. It would feel to some like a betrayal of the loyalty shown to the Essex waste policies to date, given on the basis that they were supporting sustainable policies that would not lead to what we are now potentially faced with.

The Cabinet Member for Environment and Sustainability recently said, regarding the World Environment day, and in support of the recycling roadshows:

“The most important message to get across is the three Rs – Reduce Reuse Recycle – and in that order. We want recycling to be the last stage with reduction and re-use the targets”.

We agree with that – but if that is this council's policy, should he not be pulling out an agreement with Essex CC that does not follow those principles, and which could lead to the burning of hundreds of thousands of tonnes of waste a year in this district?