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Thursday, 14 April 2011

Dear Mrs Penaluna

Planning application DCC/2975/2010 : New England Quarry. Consultation Response Received from Friends of the Earth.

I am writing to you in respect of the consultation response that you have received from the South Hams Friends of the Earth (FoE) that you kindly copied to me.

There are a number of points within this letter upon which I would wish to make my own observations on behalf of Viridor. I deal with these below.

I would note that FoE are a pressure group who adopt an anti-waste incineration stance.

My specific comments are as follows (using their section headings):

1. Need for the Development

Recycling rates in Devon are impressive and amongst the best in England. However, with the best will in the world there will always be waste that requires disposal for all manner of reasons. There are very real and clear drivers to minimise landfill which is presently the means of disposing of residual (ie post-recycling) municipal, commercial and industrial waste in Devon and indeed the South West peninsula.

Whilst there are expected to be planning applications submitted by both MVV Umwelt (North Yard, Plymouth) and Aerothermal (Lee Moor), neither of these have yet received approval nor will they provide significant treatment capacity for commercial and industrial waste by comparison to the quantities produced. Viridor remain convinced that there is a real need for waste treatment facilities in this part of the world.

2. Market for the Excess Heat

FoE assert that the Sherford development is too far away to benefit from heat energy derived from the New England facility although they do not back this statement up with any facts. The Energy-from-Waste facility in Sheffield provides heat energy via 43 km of pipe-work, the furthest user being located 9 km from the EfW facility. This is completely at odds with FoE's suggestion. It should also be noted that the export of electricity is a perfectly valid method of energy generation.

Furthermore, FoE have been disingenuous in interpreting the waste hierarchy. The presence or otherwise of CHP does not improve or reduce any facility's standing in the waste hierarchy. Furthermore, any alternative type of technology (see below) does not impact on the waste hierarchy.

3. Consideration of Alternatives

FoE state that the application does not consider alternative technologies. I would note the recent Planning Inspector's decision in respect of Viridor's proposed development at Avonmouth where the inspector made it quite plain that consideration of the merits or otherwise of different technologies was not relevant in the consideration of a planning application for a specific technology.

FoE suggest the use of Anaerobic Digestion as a preferred strategy. However, this technology is not suitable for processing all wastes, being suitable only for a narrow range of organic wastes such as foodstuffs.

4. Climate Change

FoE conclude that comparison of the CO₂ emissions from an EfW plant to that of a landfill is irrelevant. I would make two points: firstly, all other practical waste treatment processes consume energy on a net basis and so must have a worse carbon footprint than EfW; and secondly, within the south west of England the only existing alternative means of disposal is landfill.

I conclude that FoE's assertion is ill-founded.

5. Access road and flood risk

FoE's views on flood risk appear to lack any significant conclusion. I would note that the consequences of flooding to the access road are solely that the facility would be unable to accept waste deliveries until such time as any flood waters have receded. The assessment that has been produced with the application documents shows that there is no risk of flooding on land outside the applicant's control.

6. Habitat Destruction

FoE contend that the development "*will destroy 70% of the existing woodland*". This is simply incorrect, and has no justification. Some 13 hectares of woodland

planting is proposed (against a loss of some 3.6 hectares of woodland), with further extensive tracts of woodland brought under a new management and restoration scheme.

I remain fascinated that FoE wish to retain quarry voids when in my experience they oppose their creation in every respect. The fact that quarried land naturally regenerates to become ecologically valuable suggests to the author that nature is somewhat more robust than is sometimes supposed.

7. Incinerator Bottom Ash

FoE suggest that the method of processing IBA is not clearly described in the application documents. The documents state that there will be maturation and aggregate processing. The former consists of natural weathering for a few weeks, whilst the latter consists of screening of various sized fractions to produce aggregate to match customer requirements. This latter process is exactly the same as in any other aggregate processing facility.

FoE further suggest a lack of demand for aggregates from IBA as they state that construction waste is the biggest single source of waste arisings in England. Presently secondary aggregates (i.e. produced from waste as opposed to extracted from primary resources in the ground) represent c 30% of the total quantity of aggregates used in the UK. Primary aggregates account for c 145 million tonnes. The total quantity of construction and demolition waste produced in the UK is c 70 million tonnes, including much that cannot be recycled into secondary aggregates. It is plain to see that FoE's figures are incorrect.

The use of IBA as secondary aggregates and the viability of a market is well-understood and this is reflected in the Inspector's report in respect of the Avonmouth appeal decision referred to earlier. The Inspector stated

“While I note the general claim by objectors to this proposal that there is no demand for secondary aggregates in the Bristol area, that claim is not supported by the specific evidence. More importantly, that claim runs counter to experience elsewhere in the country where treated IBA is being used as a secondary aggregate”.

8. Landfill

FoE state *“the incinerator is being promoted as an alternative to landfill, but this is not the case”* without explaining that statement. The application makes it clear that not all of the waste that arises at the site will be suitable for combustion, some of it will be waste that does not burn. This is the material that will be landfilled as it will not be reprocessible in any other way. It is estimated that between 5 and 10% of the waste that arrives at the site will be handled in this manner, consuming the available void in the landfill over a 30 year period, which will match the life of the EfW facility.

Waste that cannot be burnt is also unlikely to have any significant biological activity (otherwise it would be combustible). FoE point out that there are no

specific landfill gas control measures proposed in the application. The reason for this is simple. If the landfilled waste does not have any significant biological activity it will not degrade and so will not produce landfill gas. This will be in accordance with DCC policy WPP 39. In any case, should there be landfill gas produced the applicant would expect to have to manage it to the satisfaction of the Environment Agency.

9. Conclusions

The points raised in the conclusions are dealt with elsewhere in this letter with the exception of 10.6. In this point FoE suggest that waste will be imported from other countries to feed this facility. This is completely absurd since the transportation of waste across national boundaries is specifically forbidden by the Trans-Frontier Shipment of Waste Regulations 2007, of which I am surprised FoE are not aware.

I have taken the trouble to respond to the comments made by FoE because they contain many inaccuracies which it might be contended would mislead the reader. I hope that my comments are considered in this context.

Yours sincerely



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