

Is Veolia's Sherwood Forest "done deal" coming undone?

The list of objectors to Veolia's planning application for a 180-210,000 tonne per annum waste incinerator for Sherwood Forest's Rainworth (near Mansfield), Nottinghamshire is growing all the time!

In addition to David Bellamy, Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust, West Nottinghamshire Friends of the Earth, People Against Incineration (PAIN), many local residents, and fans of the Robin Hood television series from around the world, Natural England has joined the club. And according to Nottinghamshire County Council (NCC) Planning Officers, so has the Environment Agency (although they do not explicitly call for refusal).

PAIN sees the Officer's letter as a vindication of the claims we have been making all along - incineration is clearly the wrong technology for dealing with food waste and many other discarded materials that should instead be composted or recycled (in accordance with the waste hierarchy), and the site, part of Sherwood Forest, is simply the wrong place to build a waste incinerator! As PAIN said in our planning objection document - it is the wrong site and the wrong technology. PAIN hopes that this letter is the next step towards securing what we believed to be the most appropriate technology all along - anaerobic digestion. This will test just how 'flexible' the £850 million - £1 billion Waste PFI contracts truly are.

Consultees will be given more time to comment on Veolia's answers, and this could easily push any decision well into 2009 - by which time we will be better able to judge if waste quantities have increased in accordance with Veolia's wild and unjustified predictions. If, as we expect, the waste simply is not there - Veolia's Sherwood Forest incinerator proposal will be well and truly dead. Time is on our side, and this letter has greatly increased the time it will take before a planning decision will be made.

NCC Planning Officers have now sent a 9-page list of initial questions for Veolia and their consultants RPS. NCC's letter draws on the many objections, and these are just the highlights:

- "Objections have been received from a number of parties including the Environment Agency and local community groups in relation to the level of energy recovery at the site and the potential to increase the amount of energy recovered..."
- Veolia are asked to "Review of the conclusions of the sustainability appraisal to assess whether the increased importance of climate change emissions set out within PPS 1 Supplement affects overall conclusion regarding the choice of waste management technology."
- Veolia are asked: "Since anaerobic digestion is the only waste management technique the Government expresses a preference for within the Waste Strategy why has anaerobic digestion not been provided as part of Veolia's Integrated Waste Management scheme for Nottinghamshire?"
- And: "In the event that the incinerator has spare capacity to burn waste over and above Nottinghamshire BMW, what reassurances can the applicant provide that this additional waste will be sourced in line with the proximity principal and the waste hierarchy?"
- "Please can you clarify what form of appropriate assessment

under Regulation 48 of the Conservation (Natural Habitats & c.) Regulations 1994 (as amended) is being undertaken."

· The Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust "...consider various impacts have not been fully assessed and identify a need for further survey work to be undertaken. In light of these comments please review the ecological assessment work undertaken, provide additional surveys where appropriate and review any potential impacts arising that have not already been addressed."

· "Natural England also consider the Environment Statement contains insufficient information to allow a full and accurate assessment of the likely air pollution impacts from the facility itself and from increased traffic on the haul road on Rainworth Heath SSSI. Please review the comments of Natural England and address the issues raised as appropriate."

· "Natural England raise concerns about the accuracy of the landscape and visual assessment undertaken as part of the Environmental Statement. They consider the assessment undervalues a number of impacts and does not place sufficient emphasis on the wider landscape and visual character of the area which is an integral part of Sherwood Forest. The size of the building, particularly its height is considered to be too large to sit well in the local topography, and they advise that the development should therefore not be contemplated in such a rural area.

In Natural England's opinion, contrary to the findings and assessment of the Environmental Impact Statement, there would be significant adverse effects on the landscape character of Sherwood Forest and particularly Rainworth Heath Water."

· "The application is supported by a BREEAM assessment which provides an understanding and assessment of the environmental impacts of the proposed office building. No such assessment has been undertaken of the main ERF building. What design measures do Veolia propose to put into place to ensure that this part of the development is as sustainable as practicable."

· "Consultation responses have raised concerns that the facility will operate at a greater efficiency therefore resulting in additional waste being incinerated and potential increased additional environmental impacts (traffic, noise, associated ecological impacts etc). Using data for similar installations, can Veolia provide operating figures for similar ERF facilities within the UK to demonstrate that an 85% operating capacity (15% downtime) is an accurate assessment for the operation of this facility? In the event that the operating capacity is significantly higher than 180,000 tpa NCC would request the applicant to re-assess the direct and in-direct environmental impacts of this additional traffic."