

28 November 2007

Statement to the Physical Environment Scrutiny Commission meeting 29/11/07

The Scrutiny Commission is considering the formalising of another Scrutiny group – the West of England Waste Management and Planning Overview and Scrutiny Reference Group – that will oversee the work of the West of England Joint Waste Board.

Bristol Friends of the Earth urges the Physical Environment Scrutiny Commission *not* to support the West of England Waste Management and Planning Overview and Scrutiny Reference Group. The Joint Waste Board that it will scrutinise does *not* offer the best route forward for dealing with Bristol's residual waste. Instead, we suggest that it's time for a rethink.

The three plans currently on the table all include a strong reliance on incinerator-based 'energy from waste' (EfW) for disposing of our residual municipal waste. The plans include:

Plan A: a 200,000 tonne incinerator + later another 160,000 tonne facility that could be an incinerator, a pyrolysis plant, or Biological Mechanical Treatment (BMT)

Plan A2: a 160,000 tonne incinerator or BMT/MBT + later another 200,000 tonne incinerator

Plan B: a 360,000 tonne incinerator or the option to have many incinerators across the region

These proposed 'solutions' are completely at odds with the conclusions of the Rubbish or Resource consultation, that found a strong consensus amongst respondents that:

- We should reduce, reuse and recycle much more
- Any waste disposal technology should be selected with an aim to reduce our carbon footprint
- We should reduce our 'waste miles' (the distance that waste is transported to disposal site)
- We should have small, local facilities, close to where waste is produced
- We should have relatively short-term, flexible contracts with waste contractors, so we can adapt to decreasing waste streams, and take advantage of new technologies

In the light of this consensus, how could the WoE conclude that what we really need is a 25-year contract to burn all of the WoE residual waste at one site in the region?

The analysis of the technology options rankings as part of the consultation does not seem to be very transparent. Bristol Friends of the Earth have requested access to some of the base data from the consultation. This has not yet been forthcoming, but even without this data, we would draw Councillors' attention to the following:

- The four Friends of the Earth groups in the WoE – Bath, Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire – put forward an alternative technology option to those given within the Rubbish or Resource consultation – MBT followed by disposal to landfill (to be used alongside measures to drive down the total volume of waste). All responses ranking this alternative have been dropped from the consultation analysis.
- The rankings of the remaining technologies produced, after a 'cost and quality' weighting of the data had been applied, a preference for:
 1. Pyrolysis
 2. EfW
 3. BMT

There was no statistical difference between the rankings of 2 & 3.

This does not constitute a strong vote for incineration, as is being claimed by BCC.

- The WoE then subjected these technologies to a value-for-money assessment. They discounted pyrolysis as an untried and unproven technology, which left us with EfW and BMT. There seems to be very little documented explanation as to why this choice was then whittled down further to leave us with incineration-based EfW.

Incineration-based EfW plants:

- Institutionalize waste, by making waste a 'commodity' feedstock for the energy production industry – more waste = more fuel
- Require large energy inputs to capture only fractions of the embodied energy in wasted material
- Are capital intensive, and typically require local authorities to guarantee delivery of established volumes of waste, or pay for volume deficits
- Have proved to be operationally unreliable

While modern incinerators are probably cleaner than they once were, they still discharge hazardous emissions to the air, and leave 30–40% of the waste volume as toxic ash residue. This needs to be disposed of to hazardous landfill. The nearest site that can take this waste is in Gloucestershire, and only has a licence to operate until 2009. The site has not applied for an extension to this licence, and any such extension is likely to be fiercely contested by local residents.

It is said that incineration is the only waste disposal process that takes harmless waste and turns it into something toxic. Should we really be considering a 'solution' to our waste disposal problems that relies upon making toxic waste another authority's problem? This seems to be an even worse option than our current export of non-hazardous waste to Buckinghamshire landfill.

What would be a better solution?

Waste reduction, traditional recycling and composting are producing known, current, quantifiable net energy savings and reduction in greenhouse gases through existing infrastructure, at significantly lower cost, and with greater local job creation.

Waste processing facilities should be sited, where possible, relatively near the source of waste production. By keeping facilities close, transport pollution can be reduced and the return cycle of useful product (compost) will also be more accessible.

This would mean that the WoE might have 8 or 10 small, in-vessel composting facilities, with additional prior sorting. It may prove that for some portions of the waste stream that anaerobic digestion or some other process is required, for a variety of technical reasons. In all cases the system must be flexible (hence local and modest in size) and under no circumstances can the facilities dictate volumes of waste required for more than 5 or 10 years into the future.

Councillors in B&NES are so concerned that the WoE plans are incompatible with Bath's zero waste policy, that they may withdraw from the Joint Waste Board. If Bristol is serious about becoming a 'Green Capital', we suggest that it's time for a rethink – before we commit to a 25-year-long mistake.



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on behalf of Bristol Friends of the Earth