

County Council – 20 March 2012

**STATEMENT BY MEMBERS
Ecopark application**

After the Planning Committee approved the Ecopark application on the 9 March 2012, Surrey County Council - as the Waste Authority – acted with remarkable speed and immediately emailed designated stakeholders to announce the project was going ahead.

Now, I would urge all Members **not** to be prematurely optimistic - but to treat the progress of this project with caution. This application may still be taken to judicial review.

By its nature, it is in any case likely to continue to receive bad press: The project has, as residents predicted, shrunk to little more than a waste disposal plant. The technology is presented in an untested combination. Previous gasifier schemes upon which this is based have been beset with problems and by SITA's own admission they have had difficulty designing the plant to fit a site that is necessarily constrained by boundaries as specified in the Waste Plan.

At 9 March meeting, residents were troubled to witness the extent to which Members of the Planning Committee found themselves discussing who had the responsibility for this project to ensure that it did not go wrong. The Members would not have had such a lengthy discussion if this project really was a one way bet. They did however reassure themselves that the Health and Safety Executive would be there to prevent incident. (Of course, while it is the Health and Safety Executive's function to set stringent operating standards, and it can close plants down, it cannot guarantee compliance or the prevention of accidents.)

So my final caution to the Council is this – please recognise that the decision to build this deeply controversial plant rests with Surrey County Council and Surrey alone. No one forced the Council to adopt this project. It is not the responsibility of DEFRA; it is not the responsibility of the Secretary of State; nor of the Health and Safety Executive. In approving this project, ultimate responsibility lies with Surrey.

**Caroline Nichols
Local Member for Lower Sunbury and Halliford**