

CABINET – 29 MARCH 2022**PROCEDURAL MATTERS****Item 4(b): Public Questions****Question (1): Malcolm Robertson**

The consultation on the Mineral and Waste Local Plan recently ended with only 12 responses to the Waste Management section of it. Apart from the lack of publicity and difficult to find website, what is of real concern is that of the three options, one was indefinite and lacked detail, and the other two included 'thermal treatment' - incineration - a process which I assumed had been abandoned.

Although this County Council has been pushing incineration for decades, thousands of campaigners and millions of words of objection make it clear that your residents are opposed to the idea. There is no point to incineration in the long term. It flies in the face of net zero targets. It is unsustainable and will destroy precious resources which could be recycled, inevitably producing pollution which will affect all of us. No filters are 100% perfect, nor are they designed to capture the ultrafine particles which can reach deep into the bloodstream and brain. Forever chemicals are produced which cannot be recaptured.

I happen to live near to the incinerator at the misleadingly named 'eco park' at Charlton Lane, Shepperton. I have been told, as I expect you have, that only steam is emitted from the chimney. Not true. I have twice been trapped in the plume when it dropped over Charlton Lane, and I have never experienced a nastier, more nauseating smell. It is vile and unforgettable. Furthermore, the plant is a gas guzzler with the incinerator and A/D plant between them managing to burn 339,000 litres of gasoil (supposedly a starter fuel) to destroy just under 7,000 tonnes of waste (1/6 of the incinerators capacity). There is also the matter of £42.3 Million which may be written off because of the incinerator is defective.

Nobody wants an incinerator anywhere near them, nor does it enhance their quality of life in any way - in fact just the opposite. I would like to ask you therefore if you will today provide an assurance to all the residents of this County, that the Council will no longer pursue a policy of incineration but will instead take all necessary measures to phase it out.

Reply:

The recent 16-week Issues and Options public consultation marked the first formal stage of preparing the minerals and waste local plan. The purpose of this consultation was to notify stakeholders that Surrey County Council intends preparing a new local plan and to find out what is important to them about future minerals and waste management development in the county. Consequently, the consultation proposed a

vision and 13 strategic objectives, and a range of policy options relating to a broad spectrum of associated challenges including how to plan for the management of waste that cannot otherwise be reused or recycled. The Issues and Options public consultation was widely publicised including by direct written notification of over 650 stakeholder organisations, adverts in the local press, and on and through Surrey County Council's website and social media. To date the consultation's digital hub has attracted over 2200 visits and 200 contributions, and the minerals and waste policy team have received about 140 written representations and some 20 site nominations. This feedback will inform the next stage of the plan-making process which will include a Preferred Options (Draft Plan) public consultation

Surrey continues to follow the waste management hierarchy set by Government policy when managing its waste. No local authority area comparable to Surrey reuses or recycles all of its waste. Waste minimisation, reuse and recycling will remain the preferred approach before waste is sent for incineration and wherever possible landfill is avoided. Many contaminated materials and plastics are currently not recyclable, and incineration is preferable to landfill. Surrey will continue to make all efforts to reduce contamination of recyclable materials and encourage residents to recycle more to increase recycling rates.

All thermal treatment processes, including the gasifier at the Eco Park and mass burn energy from waste incineration plant are regulated by the Environment Agency under the terms of an Environmental Permit. Emissions from the plant are tightly controlled to ensure that they do not pose a risk of pollution or harm to human health. All plants including the Eco Park gasification plant are equipped with extensive air pollution control equipment and continuous emissions monitoring systems with all data reported to the Environment Agency. If the plant were in breach of its emission limits, then it could and would be shut down by the Environment Agency.

Gas oil is used at the ECO Park but only as a fuel in the back-up boiler for the anaerobic digestion plant and on start-up of the gasification plant. Both the gasifier and anaerobic digestion plant generate electricity which is fed into the National Grid.

Natalie Bramhall
Cabinet Member for Property and Waste
29 March 2022

Question (2): Sally Blake

The UK has lost 50% of its biodiversity and is now, globally, in the bottom 10%. In September 2020, the Prime Minister committed to protecting 30% of UK land by 2030, including Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) and other protected areas. He said action must be immediate.

The Council owns or manages a number of sites which are important to nature. For example, Norbury Park is in an AONB, a European Special Area of Conservation

(SAC), a UK Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), and a Surrey Biodiversity Opportunity Area (BOA), is one of the most important ancient yew woodlands in the UK and Western Europe and has protected species threatened with extinction.

Would you please set out the main objectives, in priority order, of the Council's land management policy and what it has determined will be its strategy for the future use of Norbury Park and its other sites of important nature? In doing so, would you please explain what assessment has been made of:

- the potential contribution of Norbury Park, in particular, and the other sites to biodiversity and mitigation of climate change;
- how the condition of habitats and the type and abundance of species on the sites will be monitored, protected and improved;
- how the sites can be protected from damage by an unsustainable increase in visitors, over-use for sports recreation, and commercial exploitation;
- what needs to be done to achieve the 'trusted' status the Council aspires to, particularly in terms of,
 - consultation with Surrey residents and residents' groups on major works which permanently alter the character and use of the site and communicating the consultation results, decisions made and reasons before works start,
 - consulting on significant land management works with residents' groups specific to the site, and communicating decisions made and reasons before works start;
- the Council's record of,
 - complying with countryside legislation and applying for necessary permissions and licenses, from bodies such as Natural England (protected species), the Environment Agency (toxic surface materials near waterways) and the Planning Inspectorate (works on common land),
 - carrying out the necessary ecological surveys before work starts,
 and what it can do to improve that record.

Reply:

Thank you for your question in which you ask for clarity on the objectives for the Councils' management of Norbury Park. The site is a very important site for nature and access and was purchased in the early 1930s by the Council. It was purchased for both the protection of the area from building, but also for the enjoyment of its residents.

Last Autumn, the Council consulted on a Vision for Norbury Park which proposed a series of principles for the management of the site. Over 500 responses were received, and I attach a summary presentation given to the Norbury Park Community Forum on the 17th March. Feedback has been incorporated into Council's plans for: Young Street car park; the location of car parks; the rejuvenation of the sawmill and integrating the sites' woodland management within its activities; the use of the Bothy as an

operational base; installation of two trails and the actions undertaken by officers with local representatives to preclude off road mountain biking on site. An amended version of the Vision which incorporates all these points, will be produced in April.

The Conservation Management plan drafted by Surrey Wildlife Trust remains and can be provided upon request and has been provided to all Forum members (it is a substantial document). This already provides a substantial amount of information on the status and importance of Norbury Park's habitats and species.

Under the Council's Climate Change Delivery Plan, and a specific transformational project being carried out by the Natural Capital teams, a new land management policy will be drafted to set out the Council's approach to all the issues it balances in making decisions about all its land assets. In adopting this approach, management plans for all Countryside Estate sites will be revised to include a multiple outcome approach to site management. They are expected to include detail on nature conservation and recovery, climate change, visitor access management, agriculture, woodland management, flood alleviation, volunteering opportunities and other natural process driven outcomes. New management plans will require research on areas the Council has less information about, such as the predicted impact of climate change on nature, trees and water on site, and how best this can be managed. We can certainly share this with you once it is available. The land management policy will be consulted upon this autumn.

Each site is managed in accordance with the protections afforded through respective designations for both nature and access. Any licences or permissions required are sought before work is carried out and where information is held by our conservation partners, Surrey Wildlife Trust, this will continue to be used to guide and inform plans to support access for those who could benefit from access to the countryside. The Council also works closely with Natural England, the Forestry Commission and local interest groups.

At the Norbury Park Community Forum on the 17th March last week, it was agreed Surrey County Council will publish information on any new works being carried out, including considerations made in the design, details of any permissions required and licences necessary.

The Council have been in liaising with the Environment Agency (EA) regarding work undertaken at Young Street car park and particularly the section of public footpath running close to the River Mole. They have suggested additional measures to safeguard the river bank from possible erosion and works are underway to meet those requirements. No licence has been applied for or requested by EA.

Marisa Heath
Cabinet Member for Environment
29 March 2022

Question (3): John Oliver

In the last few months, the Council has embarked upon a policy of laying thousands of tonnes of toxic road scalplings in Surrey's natural countryside to extend car parking and cover and widen semi-natural countryside tracks, whilst hacking back trees and undergrowth in ecologically sensitive areas to achieve this (alarmingly, during the hibernation period). This policy is designed to encourage a significant increase in visitors, whilst boosting economic development. The Council is promoting its policies on the basis that improved access will increase the physical and mental health benefits derived from being in the countryside. A quote from 'Surrey Matters' on 8 March illustrates the point – "Whether it's a walk, stroll, cycling route or the perfect location for a day out with friends or family, get some fresh spring air and boost your physical and mental health".

Before these measures were undertaken, and to inform current policies, what assessment was carried out of their adverse mental health effects:

- on Surrey residents who are negatively affected by
 - the urbanisation of the countryside, increased footfall, vehicle movements, additional visitor facilities/attractions and littering,
 - a plethora of mass events, and 'sports' exploitation for speed and thrills, which rob walkers, riders and casual cyclists of their "quiet enjoyment" of the countryside, threatening their safety, and
 - having to avoid their own village centres because of the overwhelming numbers of visitors;
- on Surrey residents who are concerned about the countryside but are left feeling frustrated, angry, unheard and helpless as the Council causes/allows more of the Surrey countryside to be covered in hard surfaces and retail outlets, work which often follows consultations which many members of the public lack confidence in and which lack feedback on the outcomes;
- on other people, in the whole nation and world in general, as the Council's policies of encouraging and catering for a significant increase in visitors, and urbanising the countryside to do that, contribute to the national and global loss of more and more countryside and biodiversity, further pollution of our land, air and waterways, and of course climate change;

and, if an assessment was undertaken, who carried out this work and what were the main findings?

Reply:

The Council has a number of responsibilities, both statutory and landowner, with regard to managing the sites it owns, alongside its duties to support the well-being of its residents. Policies and decisions take a balanced approach across all Council responsibilities.

All works have been carried out in accordance with the bird nesting season parameters recommended by Natural England. If works are necessary within the bird nesting season due to safety reasons, all necessary precautions are taken to avoid disturbance. Unfortunately, the non-bird nesting season coincides with the dormice hibernation period and as many precautions as possible are engaged to protect dormice and minimise any potential disturbance.

Paths have also not been widened beyond the width of the right of way, as established in recent correspondence directly between yourself and officers.

The Council has a statutory duty to maintain rights of way for access across the County's footpaths, bridleways and byways. These are a vital resource for all residents to enjoy the countryside and benefit from ancient rights to access the great outdoors. Research carried out by the Council last year via focus groups of young families and people with disabilities indicated the need to broaden the accessibility of Countryside sites to these groups who are significantly underrepresented at the sites. Recent plans support this, whilst balancing both the sensitivity and character of the site and the need to support equal access. The Council's intention is certainly not to 'urbanise the countryside' and works undertaken have not covered more of Surrey's countryside, they have only maintained or resurfaced existing hard surfaces.

I am pleased to say the Council's recent consultation on the Vision for Norbury Park attracted over 500 responses, showing there is a keen desire for local users and residents to express their views. They included a mix of responses and the attached presentation provides an overview of the Council's considered response to achieving a balance across all interested parties.

There are a number of considerations the Council takes account of when specifying materials and works on its countryside sites:

- Materials need to strike a balance between being capable of meeting engineering requirements and have suitable characteristics to provide the necessary durability and safety for public use.
- Materials need to provide good value for money to ensure the overall scheme is affordable and good use of public money, as well as providing a surface for many different types of users, including wheelchairs and buggies in locations where this is requested
- The wider environmental impacts of using alternative materials needs to be considered, particularly aggregates. Road planings are currently the only available recycled materials suitable for the uses recently specified by the Council at Newlands Corner and Norbury Park. Alternative, quarried materials are likely to have a much greater carbon footprint due to the quarrying activities themselves and road haulage required. Recent use of road planings by the Council at Norbury Park used road planings that were already on site with no 'road miles'.
- Road planings with bitumen are the predominant material used, which are considered to be an 'Exempt', non-hazardous material by the Environment Agency (see Waste EA code: 170302) and specified as suitable for this type of

use. If and when new materials become available these will be assessed for suitability.

The Council is aware those living in its rural villages, especially those close to honey pot sites, were impacted by the larger number of visitors during the covid pandemic lockdowns. However, it has not directly received complaints from villagers outside this period. If you are able to provide details of the impacts you describe, we would be happy to look into this further.

Marisa Heath
Cabinet Member for Environment
29 March 2022

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