

South West Wiltshire Green Party Questions to Environment Select Committee Council Responses

Introduction

It is clear that we are entering a new era concerning resource management, carbon management and waste recycling. Our waste, waste awareness and re-use and recycling innovation will change at a faster pace than ever before.

South West Wiltshire Green Party recently submitted a response to Wiltshire Council's Waste and Recycling Survey 2017. During the consideration of our response a number of questions arose which South West Wiltshire Green Party are submitting now.

Question 1 Waste Management Contracts

As of now, the plans for waste management over at least the next 8 years are cast in contracts already let.

For collections, the new 8 year contract is with Hills. As of July 2018, they will be collecting more plastics, but not all, in our blue bins. They will also be collecting glass separately. This contract is until 2025.

For disposal, even more onerous contract periods have been set until 2036 (Lakeside, 50,000 tonnes per year) and 2038 (Hills, 60,000 tonnes per year). Each of these is a minimum tonnage. However good we become as recyclers, 110,000 tonnes will HAVE to be provided to these contracts every year or the Council will suffer penalties.

According to the Council's End Use Register 2016/17 waste figures, Wiltshire are already suffering penalties. In 2016/17 Lakeside only received c45kte; Hills only received 59kte, of which (after moisture losses) a mere 1.3% was recycled.

Hill's MBT plant sent 18.7kte to landfill which must have cost Council tax payers over £1.5m in landfill tax (£84.40 per tonne) paid to central government.

Council Tax payers are unable to see if they are getting good value for money from these contracts because the gate fees and income from recyclates are hidden by a veil of 'commercial confidentiality'. Neither is it known if the Lakeside contract requires a minimum calorific value per tonne or if there are minimum contractual tonnages for landfill.

When the new collection contract starts in 2018, the amount of recycling should improve, with all plastics (except 2D) being recycled and glass collected separately. Good quality recovery could make modest improvements to recycling rates.

Question 1: In light of the above can the Committee explain what was the purpose of the Waste Survey and Consultation and what improvement can the people of Wiltshire expect to see in waste management because of it?

Before responding to the question immediately above please see the comments below on some of the points made.

The new waste and recycling collection contract is for a period of eight years as this is the expected life of a waste or recycling collection vehicle. This enables the council to pay for the vehicles over a period of time which ensures that the service is affordable. The contracts contain options to extend the contract period by up to a further eight years.

The contract periods of 25 years for the energy from waste and mechanical biological treatment plant contracts again reflect the expected life of the facilities and the high level of

capital investment required. Entering into a 25 year contract ensures that the gate fee the council pays is again affordable.

The council is required to meet minimum tonnage targets under the contracts. Should we fail to do so there is a requirement for the council to pay compensation to Hills in respect of any losses Hills have incurred. In respect of the Lakeside contract, Hills have supplemented the deliveries of the council's household waste with commercial waste in order to avoid any losses being incurred. In respect of the mechanical biological treatment plant the council and hills have agreed to combine two contract years to avoid the council incurring compensation payments during the current year. This provides a longer period of time over which the council and Hills will work together to ensure the required tonnage is delivered.

The MBT plant is designed to treat non-recyclable waste and it was never anticipated that a significant amount of recyclable material would be separated. The plant is equipped to extract aluminium and metal cans. These represent a small proportion of the waste delivered as much of the recyclable material will have been separated by each household into the black box and collected for delivery to the materials recovery facility at Lower Compton.

Once moisture has been lost from the waste and the solid recovered fuel produced from the treated material, there remains a significant proportion of waste remaining which, at present, is delivered to landfill. Landfill Tax is currently £86.10 per tonne and this will rise to £88.95 per tonne from 1 April 2018. There is a financial imperative to find an alternative, more sustainable, way for this material to be treated. In the meantime the landfill tax bill is considerably smaller than it would have been if 60,000 tonnes per annum continued to be delivered to landfill.

Under the Lakeside contract the council has to deliver waste which has a calorific value that falls within a range of values which would easily encompass that of the household waste collected at the kerbside from the grey lidded bins. There are no minimum contractual tonnages for waste to be landfilled.

The new waste and recycling collection contract commences on 30 July 2018. Glass will be collected separately from the black box. Paper, cardboard, food and drink cans, plastic bottles, pots, tubs, and trays (but not black plastic and plastic film), textiles and food and drink cartons will all be collected from the blue lidded bin.

It should be noted that the council expects a further 20,000 homes to be built in the county over the next period to 2026. Each household typically generates a tonne of waste per year. Even at 50% recycling this growth will be likely to require the current levels of landfill diversion contract capacity (110,000 t). This takes into consideration the expectation that the new kerbside recycling services commencing on 30 July 2018 will achieve an increase in materials recovered for recycling.

Last year nationally we exported almost four million tonnes of refuse derived fuel and solid recovered fuel so there is a significant infrastructure gap for the country should overseas markets reduce in capacity or increase in cost. The council is endeavouring to protect its position to ensure there is sufficient capacity for the foreseeable future. We will work with our contractor to ensure that we continue to manage waste in accordance with the hierarchy while meeting our contractual commitments. When the existing landfill diversion contracts were procured waste was continuing to grow year on year and we anticipated a third landfill diversion contract would be required to enable us to meet the 2020 target. We managed this risk by deferring the procurement of a third contract to avoid contractual commitments that we could not meet.

The consultation has been designed to capture the views of Wiltshire residents and organisations on a range of waste-related topics, including household recycling centre provision, adequacy of current container sizes and frequency of collection, and to attempt to assess gaps in service-users knowledge of the current system as well as establishing preferences for how the council communicates service information to users.

The time required to procure new services, mobilise them and communicate to the public is significant. The new strategy will inform the way decisions are made on the delivery of savings over the next period and the specifying of services for future contracts which could commence as early as 2025.

Question 2 Food Waste Management

- 110 local authorities in England are now operating successful food waste collections.
- With 'smart' collections, food waste can be collected efficiently.
- Gate fees for food waste into Anaerobic Digesters are at an all-time low and plants are already operating in Wiltshire.
- Output from Anaerobic digestion plant can benefit the local community through heat and power, including the gas availability for transport use.
- Keeping food waste out of residual waste collected delivers a significant improvement in potential recycle quality and subsequent resale value.

Question 2: There is strong evidence that food waste collections and processing through AD plant can deliver significant economies and improvements in the waste management process. Why are Wiltshire Council not introducing this process?

Where food waste collections have been introduced successfully this has normally coincided with the move from weekly to fortnightly collections of residual waste. The savings made from reducing residual waste collections are diverted to the introduction of food waste collections. The gate fees for anaerobic digestion plants may be reducing but there is still a gate fee to pay in addition to the collection costs.

Offering a food waste collection service does not guarantee that all food waste would be captured. As a consequence it would not be feasible to sort dry recyclables from residual waste. The best way to improve the quality of recyclable materials collected is to encourage residents to separate them at source.

A reassessment of the cost benefits of a food waste collection in 2009 continued to show that collection costs would remain unaffordably high given the requirement for a weekly collection across a large rural area such as Wiltshire. Significant amounts of food waste, including almost all food waste arising from households, are currently diverted from landfill via the two landfill diversion contracts. The impact of residents reducing the amount of food waste they produce once they store it separately presents a risk that redundant capacity would be built into the collection system. This could have a significant environmental and cost impact in a large county with disparate population centres.

Whilst we are aware that commercial Anaerobic Digestion plants operate in the county, food waste collections do not currently feature as part of our current waste strategy. However, we recognise there may be moves to ban certain wastes from landfill in the future, so wish to assess whether residents feel that they would wish to receive a food waste collection, despite the additional service costs this may entail.

Q3 Open and transparent approach to waste management

More ambitious waste management with targets plus a transparent and flexible forward approach to all waste management needs is essential if the County is to engage with the community to minimise costs and environmental impacts.

Question 3: How do the council see the consultation process that has recently taken place building into an awareness campaign to improve recycling rates?

The council will consider evidence that should enable it to set challenging but achievable targets for the period to be covered by the new strategy.

The survey contains questions directly aimed at assessing residents' awareness of the benefits of recycling, as well as their current behaviours in respect of recycling. It also aims to collate information on preferences expressed in respect of receiving information about the services. We anticipate that this will allow the council to better target future communications campaigns, with a view to increasing recycling rates and also help reduce the risk of contamination of loads collected for recycling.

Q4 Waste Management Contracts (2)

With the pace of change in waste type passing through the waste management system, all contracts to manage that need to be both flexible and easily terminated if they are no longer delivering best value or environmental benefit to the County.

Question 4: can the Council confirm that all waste collection and management contracts let have such flexibility clauses and that future contracts will also have these?

All of the current and new contracts contain provisions for the contracts and specifications to be varied over the life of the contracts, in order to allow for the benefits of technological advances to be realised when available and appropriate. The providers will also be required to propose innovations as opportunities become available, for the council to consider in the context of improving recycling performance against affordability. The council has previously taken the opportunity to work with its providers to extend the range of kerbside recycling, as well as the materials collected for recycling at its household recycling centres, and will continue to consider these opportunities into the future, and alongside further opportunities to divert waste from landfill.

The council recognises the benefit of flexibility in all of its contractual arrangements. However, in order to manage the risk for contractors entering into contracts with the council, the contracts contain provisions to reimburse the contractors' reasonable losses where these arise in the event of significant changes or early termination.

Q5 Local economy

With the changes in global positioning on waste, including Brexit and china's decision to stop import of recyclates from January 2018 there is a real opportunity for the County to push reprocessing locally.

At present the UK exports around 60% of all materials that could be reprocessed into new materials and goods. There is a dearth of such facilities in UK which has been created by the 'easy' option of cheap export.

Question 5: Will Wiltshire Council set up a countywide forum which will support and promote the development of such industry?

At present these materials are exported as this provides the most cost effective way of managing these materials. The lack of processing capacity in the UK reflects the fact that these services could not be provided competitively in this country. Any issues arising from a reduction in overseas markets, either as a consequence of leaving the EU or decisions made by China on environmental grounds, need to be considered at a national level. The key to development of such capacity is to ensure it is financially viable.

Question 6 Best Available Technology (BAT)

There is planning permission for an Advanced Thermal treatment plant to process waste in Westbury that would otherwise go to landfill or energy from waste plant.

The proposed ATT plant does not use Best Available technology in its design. The proposal is outdated and was designed for managing materials other than municipal waste. The emissions management system for this plant does not use the Best Available Technology to control the small particulate emissions in order to avoid harm to human health. It is generally agreed that the impact of these emissions has been underestimated in the past. The plant's proposed location is inappropriate as it has not taken into account the potential impact of the inevitable emissions on the local community.

Question 6: Will Wiltshire Council revisit the approval given to the ATT plant to ensure the company applies Best Available Technology to the facility and will the Council also confirm that they are not preparing to enter into long term minimum tonnage contracts with the company for supply to this plant?

It is Hills' responsibility to demonstrate that Best Available Techniques have been employed in the design of its facility. Planning permission has been granted and the next step would be for the operators to apply for an Environmental Permit from the Environment Agency, the regulator and enforcement authority in respect of waste facilities and emission control. The issuing of the permit would be subject to a public consultation, and if granted, would obligate the operator to meet appropriate emissions standards taking into account the design and location of the facility. These would be regularly monitored and assessed by both the operator and the EA. The EA would take enforcement action where the permit was subject to a breach of condition, provided this was reasonable and proportionate in the circumstances.

The council would not object to HWS proposing the ATT plant for processing SRF provided HWS demonstrate that delivering SRF to the ATT plant would enable them to comply with the requirements of the MBT contract.