

STEWKLEY PARISH COUNCIL

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29th December 2010 (as amended)

Bucks CC Waste Procurement Decision

Call-in by Overview and Scrutiny Commissioning Committee January 2011

Evidence prepared by Stewkley Parish Council

Stewkley Parish Council wishes that their name be disclosed and included within the evidence.

Stewkley Parish is situated approximately nine miles east-north-east from the proposed MBI site and thus likely to be impacted by incinerator emissions. There are, approximately, 1900 residents in 680 homes, and our combined school caters for 200 children. We also boast a healthy population of dairy and beef cattle, sheep, hens, and horses. Our Parish Plan, published in 2010, revealed a significant desire and need for improved recycling opportunities. Given the availability of less toxic technologies and previous breaches of waste management permits by WRG, including at Calvert, Stewkley Parish Council is concerned that the procurement decision is not the right one for Stewkley, or for many other communities, and therefore it is the wrong decision for Buckinghamshire.

The consequences of such a wrong decision are critical, if not irreversible, in terms of business and finance, the environment, and the insidious creep of ill health from long-term exposure to tainted air and agricultural products. This procurement decision is therefore too important for a small number of people to assume that everything in the garden will be rosy. The full County Council must step in and, with fresh and impartial eyes, critically examine the evidence, ask more questions, weigh the positive, the negative, the unexamined, and the unavoidable unintended consequences, and decide collectively what is right for Buckinghamshire.

What is right for Buckinghamshire must be, in the first instance, supported by the County's policy framework. Quite simply, if the procurement decision is contrary to the policy framework, it is not right and must, as directed by the Council's Constitution, be reconsidered by full Council.

With reference to Councillor Cartwright's ten reasons to call in the decision, Stewkley Parish Council maintains that the procurement decision is indeed contrary to the policy framework, as follows:

Reason 1: The policy framework incorporates the saved Waste and Mineral Core Strategy, not the emerging plan. Any decision not in line with the saved Strategy is therefore contrary to the policy framework. Incineration is barely mentioned in the saved Strategy. The purported consultation by the County Council of Parish Councils did not refer to the word 'incineration' at all, yet has been claimed by the County as demonstrating support for incineration as a means of dealing with residual household waste.

Reason 3: The policy framework incorporates the Getting Closer to Communities Strategy, Local Area Forums (LAFs), and public consultations. So when the local County member, Edgcott's LAF, 23 parish and town councils, plus e and paper petitions (adult and children) representing over 26,000 residents in 2009, with Buckingham and Waddesdon LAFs and additional representations in 2010/11, resolve and petition against the procurement decision in favour of WRG, something about that decision must be wrong. We – the petitioning individuals and communities – cannot all be wrong: we cannot all be ignored and dismissed as Nimbys. The policy framework affords us more respect than that.

Reason 4: Bucks CC resolved in full Council to object to route 3 of the proposed High Speed rail line (HS2), because of the weak business case and anticipated environmental damage. The waste procurement decision is directly contrary to this policy in that it strengthens the business case for, and logistics of, route 3 and is itself damaging to the environment.

Reason 5: The policy framework relies on proper democratic public scrutiny of the financial rationale for, and consequences of, County decisions. The Cabinet claim that in this instance democracy should play second fiddle to commercial confidentiality. To protect the democratic integrity of the policy framework, full Council must examine the Cabinet's decision to keep pivotal information secret and must gain access to all confidential issues to allow proper scrutiny of such a financially risky project.

Reason 9: The key component of the policy framework is the Corporate Plan. This plan clearly states that the County will "encourage people to ... reduce waste and find the best way to deal with the remaining waste, make it easier to recycle waste, [and] campaign for reduced packaging, [etc]." But the proposed Mass Burn Incinerator craves huge volumes of waste for it to be viable and to reduce the potential financial burden on Bucks' taxpayers, so there is less incentive for us to reduce packaging and waste, which is contrary to the Corporate Plan and the policy framework.

Further, forecasts for county waste production and imports from other authorities, which informed the procurement decision, were based on the South East Plan and housing and business growth mandated by the Government. The South East Plan is being rescinded, Aylesbury Vale's Core Strategy has been revoked, so the waste forecasts are no longer applicable, and the procurement decision is therefore unsound and contrary to the policy framework.

Reason 10: Another component of the policy framework is the Green Infrastructure Strategy that explicitly identifies Buckinghamshire County Council as the Proposing Agency and a key Delivery Agency for Bernwood Forest's promotion, protection and enhancement, including habitat management, restoration, and creation, and nature conservation. The Green Infrastructure Strategy, i.e. the County's policy framework, does not allow for the appalling environmental impact, especially damage to protected species and the environmentally sensitive rural landscape that would be caused by the MBI.

Cited above are six compelling examples of where the procurement decision is contrary to the County's policy framework. The decision must therefore be subject to scrutiny by the full Council as mandated in the Council's Constitution to protect the integrity of the Council and Councillors, the quality of life of many thousands of residents who would be directly disadvantaged by the procurement decision, and the interests of every tax payer, voter and resident of Buckinghamshire.

Yours sincerely,

Alison Cooper

Mrs A M Cooper, Stewkley Parish Clerk.