

Minutes – New Food Waste and Expanded Recycling Services

Context

- The Veolia Hollingdean site opened in 2009 and borders the north-west of the Round Hill conservation area. It consists of a Waste Transfer Station (WTS) and a Materials Recovery Facility (MRF).
- The smell of rotting food waste from the site has been an ongoing problem for residents, particularly in warmer months. Efforts by Veolia to reduce odours over the years have not resolved the issue.
- Residents who live nearby have also suffered from noise pollution and impact of fires at the site.
- Although residents welcome the council's introduction of a new food waste collection service and the expansion of the recycling service, there is concern these will exacerbate existing problems.

Concerns

- **Odour from Food Waste Transfer**
 - Plans are that food waste will be collected and transferred into sealed contained at the Hollingdean WTS before being taken at the end of the day to Veolia's composting facility near Uckfield. The council can facilitate the distribution of compost to local farmers and community groups. Cllr Rowkins has agreed to approach Veolia to source compost for Round Hill's soon-to-be installed bus stop pocket park.
 - An investigation by the Environment Agency in 2014 concluded the WTS was unfit to handle odorous waste as the facility has no entrance airlock system as specified in the planning application -- and odour also escapes through the vents designed to let air into the building. Won't the greater volume of food waste at the site worsen this problem? Even if the process will involve transfer into sealed containers, it still has to be tipped out of collection vehicles?
 - Cllr Rowkins said that the new service is not expected to lead to an increase in the volume of food waste collected: it's still the same amount separated out from general waste. If anything, the odour problems should lessen as food waste will be immediately transferred to sealed containers (currently it's not). It is hoped people will become more conscious of food waste when the new service starts and this will lead to a reduction in overall food waste from households.
 - Transferring food waste into sealed containers has worked well at the Energy Recovery Facility in Newhaven. But unlike the ERF in Newhaven, the Veolia site at Hollingdean is set in a densely-populated, inland, residential area. The Hollingdean site is also smaller and there has more limited scope for building re-design.
 - What about using establishing an alternative waste transfer site, e.g. Hangleton Bottom, which was previously considered by the council, already has a waste permit and is in a non-residential area? This would also be in line with the conclusion of the 2014 investigation by the Environment Agency that ideally food waste at Hollingdean should be separated from general waste and processed at another site. Cllr Rowkins thinks Hangleton Bottom has different type of waste permit which is only for building waste and aggregate, etc. He's going to check. With the expansion of food waste services, a third site might be required anyway. Especially in the context of the future impact on services of devolution.

- Can food waste not be directly taken to the composting facility near Uckfield? Cllr Rowkins thinks it would be inefficient for trucks to have to make several trips to Uckfield each day.
 - The food waste scheme will be rolled out towards the end of this year to 15,000 houses at a time, starting with the easiest, i.e. the suburbs and detached houses.
- **Recycling & Waste Management**
 - Residents are frustrated over the loss of Magpie's recycling service and feel the city's recycling system is ineffective. Cllr Rowkins confirmed the council's expanded recycling service -- set to go live in May -- will cover everything previously collected by Magpie (plastic pots, tubs, trays, cartons and aluminium foil) in mixed recycling.
 - There are concerns around how much of the city's recycling is actually incinerated in Newhaven. How does the city perform against targets? Where is this data available? Cllr Rowkins said the city is not doing well in terms of national statistics but comparisons are difficult since recycling rates are measured using weight (which favours some areas over others). The medium-term target is to improve from current rate of around 27% to reach 35%. Recycling goes to incinerator when people contaminate it. The council's new services will be accompanied by extensive communication campaigns in an effort to improve recycling uptake and lower contamination rates (including colour coding across the city, signage on communal recycling bins, etc.).
 - Will all hard plastic go to general waste now that the tip has recently stopped recycling it? Hard plastic at the tip was undertaken by an outside sub-contractor which folded without warning. The council is currently in discussions with Veolia to take up the provision of a hard plastic recycling service.
 - Residents have concerns about the impact of new plastic recycling requirements, including whether the Materials Recovery Facility (MRF) can handle the increased volume of expanded recycling efforts? More buildings at the MRF? Longer operating hours? More traffic? More noise? As plastic is bulky, what changes will be made to household and kerbside infrastructure? Cllr Rowkins said that processing at the MRF is very efficient and can handle the increase in volume of recyclable materials – they are just squashed into units. No new buildings will be required. It is not anticipated the expansion of the recycling service will lead to other changes at the MRF or kerbside but will have to see what works.
- **Fire Hazard and Site Suitability**
 - Following a series of fires at the WTS, and in response to a deputation from Round Hill residents, in November 2019 the council's Environment Transport and Sustainability Committee called for a report into its general suitability. At the time, the ETS Chair noted no such evaluation had been conducted since it became operational in 2009. This report has never materialised. Repeated attempts to chase it up in the years since have been met with silence from both councillors and council officers.
 - Last month a response was received from a council monitoring officer via Cllr Raphael Hill. The officer wrote "the report will not be made based on a historic decision and that it was up to the then chair to action this report. Cabinet would have to agree to write a report." Advice from a public lawyer has suggested making a formal complaint to the council on the grounds of maladministration which has undermined the local democratic process. A second stage would be to take this complaint to the Local Authority Ombudsmen.

- Before we action a complaint, Cllr Rowkins has agreed to follow this up and investigate whether a report was ever produced but not circulated. He is open to calling for a fresh report into the suitability of the Veolia site at Hollingdean, especially given the introduction of new services this year and changes in the nature of waste (e.g. increases in batteries and vapes). This issue may be well be looked at again under devolution but suggests we frame the request around current concerns and context.