



Minutes of the Northacre Resource Recovery Centre extraordinary liaison committee meeting held on Microsoft Teams on 18 November 2021

Present

Wiltshire Council

Martin Litherland (ML)

Gary Tomsett – Environmental Control and Protection Team Manager (GT)

John Carter (JC)

Cllr Gordon King – Westbury East (GK)

Cllr Carole King – Westbury North (CK)

Cllr Suzanne Wickham – Ethandune (SW)

Westbury Town Council

Jane Russ (JR)

Janet Parker (JP)

Arla Foods

George Nicholls (GN)

Leigh Marshall (LM)

Environment Agency

Tom Fowler (TF)

Craig Fisher (CF)

Hills Waste Solutions

Paul Scriven (PS)

Simon Allen (SA)

The Hills Group

Monique Hayes (MH)

Alex Henderson (AH)

	ACTION
1. Apologies	
Francis Morland	
2. Purpose of the extraordinary meeting	
The purpose of the meeting is to provide feedback on the operations, what Hills has been doing and intends to do in relation to managing odour issues and answer questions from committee members.	
3. Site manager update	
PS provided the following update: As you are aware the biofilter material exchange was completed at the end of August. Unfortunately, the bio-filter material has not reached optimal efficiency as quickly as hoped and is due to the bio-filter material not establishing a high enough bacterial composition or “seeding” as expected, We are undertaking onsite monitoring of the bio-filter efficiency and recording the air flow passing through from the bio-hall. An initial report from the environmental analyst shows that there is a significant and positive difference between the air entering the bio-filter when compared to the air once it has passed through the bio-filter. To help ‘colonise’ the bio-filter material we are adding additional seeding material to the filter material, and we will continue to top this up over the next 2-3 weeks in accordance with the	

manufacturer's instruction. The bio-filter efficiency is improving and working more efficiently than it did a few weeks ago.

We intend to continue with monitoring the bio-filter efficiency as well as monitoring odour on and off site. Following the further planned annual maintenance shutdown this week, we are intending to increase waste volumes back to 100% in the coming weeks.

Questions from committee members:

GK: Why did the bio-filter not have sufficient organisms in it when it was delivered? What lessons have been learnt?

SA: In hindsight we would have done a number of things differently when undertaking the replacement of the bio-filter material. When replacing the bio-filter this time we changed the bio-filter material to a woodchip material manufactured specifically for use in bio-filters. Once it was installed and moisture added it did not seed as anticipated. It is because of this that we have sourced an additional seeding solution, Odorcap. This was first applied on Monday (15 Nov) and will be applied weekly over the next 2-3 weeks in accordance with manufactures guidance. Your comment about lessons learnt is valid and we have learnt many, for example we will look to ensure the material has better seeding next time around. Unfortunately, it does not change what happened but what we are doing now is and will continue to deliver significant improvement.

GK: In hindsight, did the unusual summer of moist and damp weather impact things, how much did the climate have an impact on the bio-filter?

SA: I do not believe that metrological factors affected the working of the bio-filter, or the time taken for it to seed, but the timing of the replacement during summer meant that conditions may have influenced the odours experienced.

JR: Will you confirm that you have taken on board not to do this type of work in the summer again in the future?

SA: Yes

JC: You mentioned a timescale of weeks for applying the seeding solution, can you explain

PS: It took a number of weeks for the solution to be manufactured and imported from Europe. We are applying the solution weekly for the next three weeks reducing the volumes of solution week on week as per the manufacturer's instructions.

4. Odour complaints

SA provided the following update:

We have seen an improvement in odours both on and off the site. Complaint numbers have reduced significantly in the past 3-4 weeks. We continue to respond to direct complaints and we are not receiving these at the same level as before. Whilst due to the complexity of odour it is difficult to substantiate complaints from the MBT plant, when we have been in the community to check areas outside of the site boundary, we have experienced other odours in the area which are not related to the MBT plant such as burning or solvent smells

We have carried out a lot of monitoring of the complaints received and have noticed increased complaints on Tuesdays when residents put out waste bins for collection and Wednesdays when they are collected. We want to highlight that there are other sources of odour in the community and that our facility is not responsible or necessarily the source of these odours. In line with our odour monitoring and effectiveness of the bio-filter we are confident that we will shortly be in a position to return to full inputs into the plant.

The plant has been running since 2013 and handles 60,000 tonnes of Wiltshire residents' residual waste with limited odour complaints during this time. We are sorry for what happened earlier this year and we have apologised for this, and I will do so again. The measures we are taking will deliver continuing improvements and ensure the MBT plant returns to normal operation and any potential odour from the site will be short-lived, low level and transient in nature and in line with the conditions pre-existing to the recent bio-filter replacement.

<p>Questions from committee members:</p> <p>GK: One thing you could have improved on would have been a well-constructed communications plan. You should own your own messaging. Are you looking at your communications in future so that the community feel more at ease with your operations?</p> <p>SA: We have been criticised for our communication policy and our strategy has not changed. It is not correct to say we don't talk to residents. If we are contacted directly by residents, then we will investigate and respond directly to the complainant. In addition, we use the platform of the liaison committee to provide the members with information so you can respond direct to enquiries. If you are unable to answer you may contact us or refer the individual to us to directly respond. We also invite committee members to call extraordinary liaison meetings to raise concerns. At no point since this odour issue has been reported has any member from the committee asked for a meeting. Hills called the first extraordinary meeting on 29 September and agreed to hold this meeting to provide a further update ahead of the next scheduled meeting on 7 December.</p> <p>SW: I am chair of the Area Board and I have been discussing this with other members on the Area Board. I asked Monique to include communications on the agenda and was told that it should be raised in 'any other business'. Residents contact us and we don't have the answers, and it takes up a lot of time to deal with these concerns. People want to be contacted. When I put a post out on Facebook or hand out leaflets on this matter, I get questions back from residents and I am unable to provide the answers.</p> <p>SA: You can refer these questions to us. I am not sure how for example an advert in the White Horse News is better than speaking directly to residents that contact us? I do not think a White Horse News advert would sort the problem you raise, there would still be further questions. We can put this item on the agenda for the scheduled committee meeting on 7 December.</p> <p>SW: You don't understand the scale of this – you are dealing with people's emotions. Let's put it on the agenda as you suggest, we all want the same thing, residents want to be reassured and know what you are doing.</p> <p>SA: If people contact us we do respond directly back to them.</p>	
5. Environment Agency	
<p>TF reported that:</p> <p>We know there were a significant number of odour complaints in the summer period totalling 350. The Environment Agency had people out in the area a lot to substantiate these complaints and were able to establish at times that the odour issue was sufficient to be a "reasonable cause for annoyance".</p> <p>In the last few weeks there has been less odour and a reduction in complaints. Whilst the public may no longer be reporting odours, the EA still have people going out into the community and whilst there is some odour at the site boundary, we are not experiencing odours beyond the boundary attributable to the site, or at any levels above what would be expected.</p> <p>The EA is to increase monitoring in the community in the coming weeks and in conjunction with Hills increasing waste inputs to normal levels.</p>	
6. Meeting close	
<p>GK thanked SA for the update.</p> <p>There were no further questions and the meeting closed.</p> <p>The next scheduled liaison meeting is due to be held on 7 December at 16.00</p>	ALL