



Minutes of the Northacre Resource Recovery Centre liaison committee meeting held on 21 January 2026 at 4pm

Present

Arla Foods

George Nicholls (GN)

Wiltshire Council

Councillor Boaz Barry (BB)
Sarah Valdus (SV)
Steve Bryant (SB)
Adrian Hampton (AH)

Westbury Town Council

Heywood Parish Council

Councillor Francis Morland

Environment Agency

Tom Fowler

Hills Waste Solutions

Paul Scriven (PS)
Simon Allen (SA)
Dion Francis (DF)

The Hills Group

Chris Waddell (CW)

	ACTION
1. Apologies	
Michaela Lane (Environment Agency) requested minutes to be sent Also invited: Councillor Gordon King Councillor Mike Phillips Councillor Robert Smith Dean Thomas NOT invited due to clerical error Councillor Carole King	CW to email minutes to Michaela once SA approved
2. Minutes of the previous meeting	
FM queried minutes regarding initial CWs from last meeting. Was agreed that these initials should be SW. Accepted with that correction.	CW to correct previous minutes and republish
3. Update on site operations and environmental compliance	
PS reported that over the last few months the MBT has had quite a few smaller breakdowns leading to lost time. Most of the breakdowns have been of a short duration for example a conveyor belt torn by the inclusion of sharp objects from Household collections, and motors that need repair.	

More significant breakdowns include the separator which needed rebuilding over a number of weeks but now back in service.

One of the cranes has had a significant electrical problem which will require new cabling costing around £90,000. Contractor has been engaged for this repair but no start date confirmed.

During the crane repair no waste will be taken into the facility.

Because the plant only has one crane in operation there is reduced intake at the moment.

A planned preventative maintenance shutdown is planned for last week of February and first week of March. All equipment checked and repaired as necessary. During those two weeks no waste will be taken in.

Therefore, three of the next six weeks the plant will not be taking waste.

Last year the biofilter was successfully renewed and the work completed more quickly than hoped and since April last year it has shown very good results and high percentage of attenuation of odour.

10 anonymous complaints about odour logged over the last four months via the Environment Agency (EA). Unfortunately, due to reporting mechanism it is not always possible to check odours in a timely manner.

No fires to report. The risk of fires remains high from batteries but no fires in last five years.

Since last meeting planning was granted to increase stack height from 15m to 27m. Quotations have been received but no contractor appointed. Submissions made to EA.

Because this work interrelates with other measure the EA, Hills won't be able to make a firm decision on this work and other actions until overall feedback received from EA.

TF confirmed the EA has received the information and recognises cost implications not only for Hills but also for Wiltshire Council. Cost versus odour reduction being considered. Low levels of odour still occur around the site.

FM asked what the ten complaints were about.

PS confirmed that all complaints about odour and that none were about previous issues relating to flies as that problem was under control.

FM asked about EA briefing noted point number 8 which give an odour reduction feasibility study deadline of 22 December 2025. It also says that EA considers Hills to be in breach of permit.

PS confirmed those submissions had been made to the EA and that the feasibility study would be in the public domain at some point.

FM expressed concern on apparent lack of transparency.

TF stated it is up to Hills whether they want to discuss costs and other proposals.

SV confirmed that FM wanted the proposed actions rather than costs

PS explained actions linked to stack height include other odour management equipment that may need installing and the cost of all of these put together needs to be considered in fulfilling Hills obligations to the EA. The objective is to have processes and procedures in place to provide an update on the odour management plan to the EA that they are satisfied with in terms of outcome and cost.

TF advised the conditions are that there should be no pollution unless all appropriate measures are taken to minimise pollution. The EA cannot regulate to a point where there is zero odour from a site like Northacre. Any recommended actions are unlikely to achieve zero odour.

Hills needs to demonstrate they are implementing appropriate measures as per the feasibility study. Hills is meeting that requirement and some of the measures discussed include raising the stack height and additional odour treatment and containment in the building.

FM expressed concern that Westbury Town Council should be taking the lead on this while they discuss Hills and criticise odour management publicly. All that can be said is that the deadline has passed. The feasibility study has been submitted, but not publicly and the Environment Agency are not saying what conclusion and timeline they're talking about.

TF The EA will make a clear decision in the local and national context with expertise considered at those levels. A response is expected in the next four weeks.

FM David Jenkins (Haywood Parish Council) said he made a complaint about odour in December.

TF explained that complaint would have been one of the ten. A small number of people reporting the issue. It is recognised that this doesn't mean there is no problem. Officers attending reports of odour are finding it mostly at the site boundary and only occasionally in residential areas.

PS expressed sympathy with the idea that Westbury Town Council should be at the liaison committees. Regarding specific complaints they are received anonymously although some geographic location may be indicated in the complaint.

BB asked who makes final decision on the cost of the new stack. Will Wiltshire Council be liable to pick up those costs?

PS explained Hills will obtain quotes in the first instance if the company is obliged to make changes. Hills will pay for the work but may under terms of the contract claim that cost back from the council. Example given that changes in legislation may make those claims possible.

FM asked if the contract is public, so these arrangements are visible.

AH clarified that there was nothing unusual in the contract and that all similar contracts allowed for variations when unforeseeable operational or legislative changes occurred. If the work has to be done by Hills, then there may be an allowance within the contract for Hills to reclaim the cost of that work from the council depending on circumstances.

SA added that this is standard especially as this is a 25-year contract. If Hills is obligated to make changes because of new requirements or law changes then there has to be a mechanism to recover those potential costs. This is a discussion between Wiltshire Council and Hills.

BB asked if the cost of the stack was worth it given that variations in the contract may be applied soon making that stack potentially redundant? Could the potential changes be clarified?

SA responded that the MBT was established to take 60,000 tons of black bag municipal waste and divert it from landfill. This is the contract in place. Wiltshire Council officers proposed on 09 December to vary that contract. This is for Wiltshire Council and Hills to agree. SA agreed that it was right to question investment in the stack if it proved not to be required depending on how the contract may be varied.

BB asked if the cost of the stack was in the millions.

SA reassured that the cost would not be anywhere near that and that currently Hills has a permit to run the facility to appropriate measures. However, what's appropriate changes over time. Hills is responsible for compliance, and the EA requires proof that we are meeting their requirements.

The EA does take cost into account regarding what's appropriate. These discussions happen regularly between Hills, the EA and Wiltshire Council and none of us wants to put an additional burden on the taxpayer.

BB had more questions regarding the contract.

PS responded by saying that those contractual arrangements could not be discussed at this meeting.

FM queried where waste was diverted

SV confirmed that if waste couldn't be processed at Northacre it would be diverted to another of Hills processing facilities and that if they weren't available a third party could be used. This is a decision for Hills. There is an agreement that if a certain tonnage of waste is not sent to Northacre MBT then Hills can claim compensation. The council is discussing separately with Hills where the compensation level is when the MBT is closed down for any reason.

PS explained there are two sides of the contract - one is compensation the other is relief.

SV commented that this is discussed on a monthly basis between Hills and the council.

4. Planning applications

5. Any other business

FM expressed concern at the figure of £19.9M quoted at cabinet regarding the cost of cancelling waste contracts with Hills but recognised the news of this was not very clear or well explained.

SV explained that this figure related specifically to the MBT contract which runs to 2038 and that the amount which is index linked would be payable if the council wanted to break the contract.

FM sought clarification that this didn't apply to any other waste contracts.

SV assured FM that this did not relate to other contracts.

FM asked if this related to diversion of Solid Recovered Fuel (SRF) outputs being diverted to the continent or to a proposed incinerator nearby.

SV explained that the SRF output from the MBT belonged to Hills and that while the council will review destinations as appropriate but that it is up to Hills where that material is sent. The council cannot prevent Hills sending materials to compliant facilities. This can only change if the council terminates the contract and then that contract would have to go to procurement.

FM asked if material sent to Germany

PS confirmed Germany and Netherlands

SV emphasised that as long as compliant that Hills could send SRF where it wanted.

SA made clear that Hills had no interest in non-compliant destinations. Destinations must be environmentally and economically sound. If a facility that could take SRF was built close to the MBT then yes, Hills would look to place it there because it's likely to be cheaper and a better carbon footprint.

FM asked if incinerator not built then can Hills redirect to another EFW in the UK?

PS answered that yes, if suitable that could happen.

FM expressed that he would communicate a better understanding of the situation.

BB asked about the MBT remaining even if there was a variation to the contract.

SA stated there are too many hypotheticals to come to any conclusions.

BB expressed concern about rumours that materials were being sent to third world countries for processing

PS emphasised that nothing goes to third world countries – every bit of output goes to approved outlet in UK, Germany and Netherlands

SV and **SA** explained that quarterly returns on destinations are sent to the council and the EA

PS explained that every journey has EA approved documentation and is accountable to receiving countries and each country of transit. Every journey follows a prescribed route and no variation from specified border crossings and, exit and entry ports is allowed.

BB queried lack of meetings in 2025.

SA explained that local elections and other issues prevented meetings but recognised that meetings were overdue hence being keen to implement them promptly and regularly and that no nefarious reasons for lack of meetings last year.

BB enquired about whether an email went to everyone at Westbury Town Council or just the chair?

SA said that usual councillors were invited.

CW assured it would be looked into and that the mailing list would be reviewed and updated if appropriate.

PS emphasised that Hills would welcome more Westbury Town Council involvement

6. Next meeting

Within six months TBC

Hills