Minutes of the Northacre Resource Recovery Centre liaison committee meeting held in-person at Northacre 29 September 2026 at 4pm

Present

Wiltshire/Westbury Councillors
Councillor Boaz Barry (BB) – Wiltshire – Westbury North
Councillor Gordon King (GK) – Wiltshire - Westbury East
Councillor Robert Smith (RS) – Wiltshire – Westbury West

Westbury Town Council
Councillor Mike Sutton (MS) – Deputy Mayor
Councillor Matthew Dean (MD) – Westbury West
Councillor Mark Harper (MH)

Heywood Parish Council
Councillor Francis Morland (FM)

Hills Waste Solutions
Paul Scriven (PS)
Simon Allen (SA)
Dion Francis (DF)
Neil Pollard (NP

The Hills Group
Chris Waddell (CW)

Wiltshire Council
Sarah Valdus (SV)
Dean Thomas (DT)
Adrian Hampton (AH)

Environment Agency
Tom Fowler (TF)
Craig Fisher (CF)

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	ACTION
1. Apologies	
One apology from George Nicholls, Arla Foods Also invited: Councillor Mike Phillips, Wiltshire Council Deborah Urch, Town Clerk, Westbury Town Council Martin Litherland, Wiltshire Council Michaela Lane, EA **CW** asked that attendees confirm attendance in future as only one RSVP received. **Introductions made for the benefit of new attendees.**	All to RSVP meeting invites, please.
2. Comms issues	
PS asked CW for an update on previous comms issues. **CW** reported that improvements had been made as evidenced by attendance at the meeting and that Delivery and Read receipts were tracked on all emails.	

MD and RS indicated that they felt not all emails got through to them. **CW** assured that Hills was doing its utmost to make sure emails were delivered and suggested that remaining issues may be local to recipients. RSVPs would help Hills monitor the situation.	CW to monitor
3. Previous minutes	
After initial queries from **MD** suggesting missing content, the content was flagged and the minutes were accepted.	
4. Update on site operations and environmental compliance	
PS recapped on crane maintenance issues with wiring and a 12 working days shut down in the summer with no waste imported on those days. • on 10 August waste imports were reduced from an average of 300 tonnes per day to 215 tonnes per day. • As a result of the shutdown there would be no planned shutdown in November. • November works postponed until February 2027. • Ongoing odour abatement works due for completion first week of October. **PS** explained that since the last meeting in June there had been 1325 complaints via the EA with the majority related to odour with a few complaints about flies. **MD** said he'd had more odour complaints from residents than ever this summer and despite reassurances about previous issues with water metering in the biofilter things being fixed, the situation had got worse. **MD** asked why things had got worse even allowing for reduced tonnages and why was there no apparent solution. **SA** said that before the start of the current meeting it had been commented on that the smell at the plant itself had improved. **SA** reminded everyone about the voluntarily reduced tonnages and explained further that current odour abatement works were happening within the facility itself. **SA** explained that Hills was doing all it could to improve matters. **SA** explained that since the last liaison meeting Wiltshire Council had asked Hills to look at the facility becoming a Waste Transfer Station. This along with the introduction of food waste collections by WC from May 2027, which would reduce the amount of food waste accepted and would lead to further improvements in odour at the site. **SA** said Hills accepted there had been an odour issue at the facility and that Hills was also doing extensive odour monitoring and found issues to be not as much as reported. **MD** said residents were not making vexatious complaints and weren't imagining odour issues. **MD** did accept that issues were transient but emphasised the serious nature of the problem. **SA** said that tonnages were reduced because Hills recognised the seriousness. **MD** asked about capital improvements at the plant.	

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SA explained short term odour controls were being added within the building on top of established, visible odour controls outside the building.

SA said that in the longer term a contract variation was in discussion with Wiltshire Council with the aim of turning the facility from an MBT to a Waste Transfer Station. SA said that consultants would be needed to look at infrastructure for such a change including vehicle access to the plant and floor replacement or strengthening the plenum floor within the plant. SA added that this was all subject to negotiations.

MD said that forthcoming by-elections in Salisbury could lead to a possible change of Wiltshire Council leadership and a battle to convince people on the contract variation.

MD suggested that Westbury Council would make planning consent easy for Hills to close the Northacre facility and use the site and neighbouring land for housing development.

SA said that this wasn't for this meeting as Hills had a standing contract with Wiltshire Council until 2038.

NP added that existing planning permission and environmental permits in relation to NRE could not simply be relinquished in favour of an alternative project.

PS suggested moving on from hypothetical political discussions.

MD insisted his enquiries were not political and said Hills had no community support, but that Westbury Council wanted Hills to put in a new planning application for housing.

MD added that changing to a Waste Transfer would face opposition.

RS asked that given the contract ran to 2038 could the plant itself last that long with its technical issues and breakdowns.

SA agreed that Hills was mindful of this and that more maintenance would be required.

RS explained that he had a business on the same business estate as the MBT and that at times the smell was 'abhorrent'. RS also said he and BB had 20-30 complaints from residents daily regarding the odours with no real answers.

SA agreed it was challenging but emphasised again the change to a transfer station and reduction in food waste would help. SA also said the negativity around positive changes was hard to understand.

RS said public trust in Hills had completely eroded.

SA said he understood lack of trust, but Hills was making positive changes and couldn't necessarily change public opinion.

BB asked whether food being taken out of the MBT and other mitigation would improve matters.

SA agreed in combination it would.

MD asked why despite reduction in tonnages the smell was worse than ever

SA said the situation had improved since 10 August with further improvements being made.

BB asked if in an ideal world Hills would rather keep the MBT.

NP said Hills position was neutral either way and the company would be no worse or better off financially.

BB asked if Hills had been approached about the variation since the last liaison in July.

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NP said a high value change notice commenced in July with several stages being worked through to vary the contract.

BB asked if any discussions took place before June

SV confirmed that only informal discussions took place before July and that formal dialogue had commenced in July.

BB asked about £854,000 overspend mentioned in the press in relation to the crane failure and facility shut down.

NP asked for clarity on the question as there was no bill levied by Hills for its crane failure.

BB said that at his first meeting two years ago there had also been a failure of one of two cranes.

PS explained that depending on the fault, if one crane needed repair the other crane could not operate with maintenance staff in the biohall for reasons of health and safety. PS said minor repairs could be made without shutdown in certain circumstances.

MD asked about odour suppression during shutdowns.

PS said odour control was 24-7 including during shutdowns.

MD asked again why odours have been so bad this year.

NP said extreme weather had been a factor with temperatures above 36° heating up waste for a two-week period after being stored in domestic bins for two weeks previously.

MH suggested that the biofilter would expand and therefore be more efficient in greater heat.

SA explained that in high temperatures the odour units were higher to begin with and that even though the biofilter reduced odours units by 97%, higher input figures led to higher outputs even at the verified efficiency rating of the filter.

TF confirmed that this explanation was correct.

RS asked if there had been a change in waste inputs eg more food waste.

SA said there had been no legislative changes that would have impacted inputs but that food waste would be reduced next summer.

BB asked again about the cost of the crane breakdown to Wiltshire Council.

SA said this wasn't directly relevant as Hills had no mechanism to charge the council for the breakdown.

BB clarified that he was concerned about the knock-on effect eg landfills taxes because of the breakdown.

PS said Hills had no idea where the press got the £854,000 figure from.

MD asked who bore the cost of moving waste to landfill when the plant is shut.

SA explained that different clauses within the contract were relevant to where the costs are borne and this depended on the reasons and durations of shutdowns, or periods of restricted inputs

MD asked if the risk was shared between Hills and Wiltshire Council.

SA confirmed that in some cases it would be.

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MD said it reflected on councillors that the site still caused odour issues during shutdowns and that the costs of shutdowns were passed on. **NP** asked if Wiltshire Council paid more landfill tax. **SV** said the press had only partly delivered the facts and that there is a reporting line that outlines the increased council tax and also a reporting line which outlines compensation from Hills for the plant shutdown. SV said the waste budget was, in fact, balanced. **NP** confirmed that no double charging in relation to landfill tax was happening. **BB** asked whether the 85 tonnes a day shortfall since reducing inputs from 300 tonnes to 215 tonnes created a contractual liability for the Council. **SA** said this was part of ongoing negotiations. **FM** said that the contracted 60,000 tonnes input hadn't been achieved for a number of years and asked if contracted payments were due in those scenarios. **SA** confirmed that they could be but that the current situation was unusual and that the council could be due relief following Hills decision to reduce inputs. **RS** asked if penalty clauses were payable with the reduction. **NP** emphasised that liaison committees were not commercial negotiations. **MD** said that they were entitled to explanations of figures in the public domain especially given that Hills was unpopular in Westbury. **NP** said that the published figures were not Hills own figures and as established already only one side of the ledger has been reported by the press. **SA** said WC published figures were not for Hills to answer. **PS** agreed that this was not a matter for Hills to explain and that SV confirmed that the reported facts were incomplete. **RS** asked how many working days were in an average year at the plant in relation to tonnages. **PS** confirmed approximately 250 working days per year at the plant.	
5. Planning applications	
PS confirmed no new planning applications since the last meeting and that no site changes other than the change from MBT to Waste Transfer Station were in the pipeline. **MD** asked whether the planning application for the taller chimney stack would go ahead. **SA** said this was now less likely given discussion on contract variation.	
6. Review of Annual Environmental Report up to November 2025	
PS said a new edition of the Annual Review was imminent and that last issue was published on the website in January. **FM** queried mention in the report of SRF outputs to SubCoal in Stockton-on-Tees. **PS** explained that SubCoal provided ongoing waste processing for fuel and that this high-grade pelletised fuel was used for overseas cement kilns in place of fossil fuels. **MS** asked why landfill figures were more in Year 12 than Year 1 of the contract give the move away from landfill.	

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PS and SA confirmed that the figures only had a small variance over that period and that landfill inputs were dependent on the types of waste being disposed of. **NP** reminded the committee that changes in Wiltshire's food waste collections would alleviate these figures as demonstrated by councils who had already adopted separate food waste streams. **SA** expanded on the subject of types waste going into landfill and added that high-profile fires at other MRFs (eg Avonmouth) were adding pressure on landfill and recycling facilities due to a national lack of capacity. **FM** said that water vapour was missing from the table on page 4 and that he didn't understand the tax implications on vapour going up the chimney. Was there taxation on SRF? **SA** explained that there was some import tax in Germany for example on SRF and that despite those taxes it was still cheaper to send SRF abroad in some cases. **NP** confirmed there was no domestic tax on SRF although some carbon taxes might apply in the future. **MD** said that the purpose of the old-technology plant was to remove water and therefore weight, and was a tax-avoidance ruse of the MBT to reduce tonnages going to landfill. **SA** said there was no 'ruse' but agreed an MBT plant is old technology giving another reason for the proposed change in use. **BB** said he didn't understand previous statements during the meeting about no changes in Hills' financial situation if the site became a Transfer Station given the council's figure that it would save £34M over 12 years **NP** said it was possible that council savings could happen and that Hills could maintain profits. NP also reminded the committee that negotiations and financial modelling were not fully underway and no conclusion could be reached at the moment. **NP** said there was a possibility that the council could have terminated the contract, but it was agreed at February's full council meeting that they, Wiltshire Council couldn't afford to do that. **SV** said that indicative numbers had been mentioned but that detailed numbers were in discussion. **BB** asked when this would come back to cabinet or full council to discuss. **SV** said that it would come back via the Waste Task Group when ready for scrutiny by the Environment Select Committee.	
7. Review of Terms of Reference (TOR)	
FM asked why Heywood Parish Council had been removed from TOR on version dated February 2026. **CW** confirmed he would check if that was the case and that FM in his role with Heywood, was still an invitee, as indicated by his presence. **MD** asked about inviting Andrew Murrison (AM) MP or his researcher. MD also asked about Mike Hill attending from a higher level. **SV** indicated that NP was invited as part of higher-level strategic discussions. **SV** proposed everyone should review the TOR in detail and communicate back with suggestions.	CW has since reviewed TOR and confirmed only one variation on V2 to the liaison email address and Heywood Parish

CW asked for proposals to be emailed to **liaison@hills-group.co.uk** **MD** asked that the future of the site became an agenda item and that meetings could be more frequent. **PS** said that the future of the site was already on the agenda under site changes and planning applications.	Council has only ever been an invitee.
8. Any other business	
FM asked about August MBT update and asked how much of this update was about immediate changes or proposed changes eg reduction in inputs on 10 August and future food waste removal. **SV** said removal of food waste was a legal obligation. **FM** asked if council had a 12-month derogation on food waste. **SV** confirmed this. **FM** asked how much of the August document was subject to negotiation. **SA** confirmed food waste changes in May 2027 and that most matters had already been dealt with in the meeting. **FM** wanted to know if the change in daily inputs from 300 tonnes to 215 tonnes was a unilateral decision from Hills. **SA** confirmed it was solely Hills' decision. **FM** asked about any daily increases on the 215 tonnes and that he didn't understand the figures. **SA** explained that the figure was an average and that some waste transferred from Lower Compton was going to Lakeside in Slough, and that if third parties couldn't take any excess waste then the waste would go to landfill. **FM** asked about relief on shortfalls on the 60,000-tonne contract. **PS** said that relief for the Council would be adjusted at the end-of year calculations. **BB** asked TF about the odour management plan. **TF** confirmed there was a plan, but the recently submitted plan had not been approved. **PS** announced his retirement from managing the Northacre facility and was thanked by attendees. Meeting closed.	
9. Next meeting	
TBC but to take place within four months approximately.	Hills to confirm asap

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