

Planning Application ref. no. 33619/007 for a proposed Alton Advanced Energy Recovery Facility at land off A31, Alton.

At a meeting held on 12 August 2020, **Selborne Parish Council** voted unanimously to **OBJECT** to the above planning application. The Parish Council submits:

- that any public benefit of the proposal is outweighed by the significant harm to the landscape, and that the regional and national need for the facility is not sufficient to justify the development of this particular site;
- that the reliance of the Transport Assessment upon the use of the B3006 as a route to/from the site is flawed because there is a 7.5 tonne weight limit on the road; and
- that other matters relating to the environment and its wellbeing demonstrate that the proposed development is the wrong kind of development in the wrong place.

The detailed grounds for Selborne Parish Council's objection are as follows:

1. Landscape

The proposal is contrary to policy:

- a) **HWMP Policy 4: Protection of the designated landscape.** The proposal conflicts with sub-text paragraph **4.35**, with regard to the landscape outside the designated areas;
- b) **HWMP Policy 5: Protection of the countryside outside designated protected areas;**
- c) **HWMP Policy 7: Conserving the historic environment and heritage assets;**
- d) **HWMP Policy 29: Locations and sites for waste management** which requires waste management sites to avoid visual, amenity and environmental impacts. A rural location is only justified if it is close to the source of waste being treated. That is not the case here.

- e) **EHDC JCS Policy CP20** which protects **the setting** of the National Park.

The building will be in the foreground of the protected landscape of the South Downs National Park, greatly affecting its setting.

- f) **The Assessment of Sites and Areas for Waste Management Facilities in Hampshire (v5) (2012)** finds part of the site to be suitable for **Categories 1 and 2**, the other part of the site for **Categories 1-4**. The Assessment rules out this particular site for development in **Category 5** and **Category 6** (enclosed buildings with stack) unless the suitability of the site for buildings with a stack can be demonstrated.

The proposed building is in **Category 6**: it has two large stacks in a location where the suitability of the site for buildings with a stack has not been demonstrated.

- g) **The Defra Circular (2010)**, guidance for National Parks, states at paragraph 31: “Major development in or adjacent to the boundary of a Park can have a significant impact on the qualities for which they were designated.” (*our emphasis*)
- h) **NPPF Paragraphs 109 and 170**, identify that ‘valued landscapes’ should be protected and enhanced, as is acknowledged in paragraph 5.3.83 of the applicant’s Planning Statement.

Since the 2012 NPPF first introduced the concept of ‘valued landscapes’, there has been a growing amount of case law starting with *Stroud DC v SSCLG and Gladman (2)*, *Ouseley J.*, and *CEG Land Promotions v SSCLG (2018)*, amongst many others.

Mr Justice Ouseley’s Judgment in the *Stroud (2014)* case stated that:

“The NPPF is clear: that designation is used when designation is meant and valued is used when valued is meant and the two words are not the same.”

He further explained in his *CEG Land Promotions (2018)* Judgment:

“(1) A site’s role in the wider landscape does not depend on “demonstrable physical attributes” of a particular site – “It would be bizarre if the way in which the red line was drawn, defining the site on whatever basis was appropriate, and

which need have nothing to do with landscape issues, crucially affected landscape evaluation. It would be equally bizarre to adopt a wholly artificial approach to landscape evaluation where, in most cases, a development site is but part of a wider landscape”.

“(2) Stroud decided that the concept of "valued landscapes" in [109] of the Framework is not confined to landscapes which have a particular designation.”

1.1 In support of the above, the evidence indicates that the proposed AAERF development would have a significant and detrimental impact upon a greatly valued landscape for the following reasons:

- i) The Wey Valley borders the National Park and is considered by many to be a ‘valued landscape’ in terms of paragraphs 109 and 170 of the NPPF.

In 1830, William Cobbett wrote about the Wey landscape in his ‘Rural Rides’. The landscape now forms the foreground to the South Downs National Park.

- ii) Natural England states that “the development site is within the impact risk zone of the following designated nature conservation sites: Upper Greensand Hangers: Whyte to Wheatley SSSI and Bentley Station Meadow SSSI.”

- iii) The views from numerous footpaths would also be significantly adversely affected, including the Long Distance paths St Swithun’s Way and The Writers’ Way.

- iv) The Planning Statement at paragraph 5.3.19 acknowledges that: ‘A number of designated heritage features are located in the surrounding landscape, including conservation areas, Grade I, II* and II listed buildings and scheduled monuments’. There are ‘some adverse effects to the heritage setting of a number of heritage assets within the study area’ but the applicants consider ‘the magnitude of the effect to be ‘low’.

We disagree. Grade II* listed Bonhams Farm, for example, is less than 500m from the site: the proximity of the proposed development would have a detrimental and lasting impact on its setting.

- v) Para. 5.3.29: The LVIA concludes that ‘there would be some localised significant adverse effects upon landscape character and nearby viewpoints.’ We agree.
- vi) Para. 5.3.40: ‘The proposed process building and the stacks would be clearly visible from a number of locations.’
- vii) Para. 5.3.68: ‘... the building would be clearly evident in the landscape from many viewpoints...
- viii) The claim that ‘adverse impacts of the development are at worst localised’ fails to recognise that the very attractive local area is characterised by the close proximity of the South Downs National Park. The proposal would not contribute to the landscape of the area nor to the visual setting of the National Park, quite the reverse.
- ix) The imposing immensity of the physical bulk and mass of the proposed building would be wholly incongruous in this rural river valley. The building would resemble a colossal ocean liner beached in the Hampshire countryside. It would not be disguised by green walls. The two 80m chimneys would be seen from miles around, intruding upon the horizon, breaking the skyline and causing a devastating visual impact upon this pastoral landscape.

2. Traffic and transport

- a) The application states that the B3006 through the village of Selborne will be used as the access route from the A3 to the A31 and vice versa. Such an assumed concept must be fiercely challenged. **There is a 7.5 tonne limit on the B3006 for very good reasons:**

The 7.5 tonne weight limit was imposed some 25 or 30 years ago because it became necessary to protect the historic village of Selborne from the harm caused by HGV traffic. The natural beauty of Selborne, immortalised by Gilbert White in 1789, has rightly earned the village and its environs the titles of “The jewel in the crown of Hampshire” and “The jewel in the crown of the South Downs National Park”. The narrow bends in the road, e.g. near the junction with Honey Lane and near the

junction with Gracious Street, are wholly unsuitable for negotiation by HGVs, including articulated HGVs. The many listed buildings, Grade I, II* and II, that front the road would be damaged by the vibration of HGV traffic. There is a primary school in a dip, and there are very narrow pavements throughout the village. HGV traffic would compromise the safety of school children, of residents and of the over 20,000 tourists who come to the village every year.

The **Traffic Assessment** states that an estimated 18 HGVs would come through Selborne on every day of the year except for Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Year's Day.

The TA continues:

para. 7.5.9: - 'In terms of HGV trips, the location which could experience the greatest impact is the B3006 **through the village of Selbourne** (*sic*), however this comprises 4 two-way trips per hour ...'

para 7.5.10: - 'When the AM and PM peak hours are considered, the largest increase in flows is again **through the village of Selbourne** (*sic*); and, throughout the Assessment, 'this level of impact would not be perceptible to the casual observer.' There are no 'casual observers' in Selborne: there are residents and there are visitors whose experience of Selborne's natural beauty would be diminished by HGVs associated with the AAERF.

The TA makes no mention of the 7.5t limit on the Selborne road, suggesting either that the proposal to use the B3006 was inadequately researched, or that the applicant believes that the Highway Authority would lift the weight limit that is necessary to protect the village.

Table 7.6 of the TA indicates that the B road in Selborne would bear more HGV traffic than would the A31 south, the A339 Basingstoke road or the A32 south. The reality, as a matter of fact, is that the 7.5 tonne limit on the B3006 means that HGV traffic cannot travel along the road through Selborne at all. Therefore, the TA's reliance upon the use of the B3006 is fundamentally flawed.

In effect, the planning application would necessarily require that the properly imposed 7.5 tonne weight limit on the B3006 should be formally lifted. The character of

Selborne would be demonstrably harmed, to the detriment of the quality of life of its residents and to the clear detriment of the experience of the thousands of national and international visitors who visit the village every year.

The 7.5 tonne limit is of positive assistance to the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of Selborne, and helps to provide the public with a better opportunity to understand and enjoy its special qualities. Sweep away that 7.5t limit, and a severe gash would be inflicted upon the delivery of the National Park's statutory purposes in the area.

There can be no public benefit in lifting the 7.5 tonne weight restriction.

Should the application be permitted, Selborne Parish Council would request that a s.106 Legal Agreement be imposed to preclude in perpetuity the use of the B3006 by all HGV traffic associated with the AAERF to ensure compliance with the 7.5t weight limit.

- b) The Planning Statement's assertion, at paragraph 5.3.34, that a Transport Assessment has demonstrated that 'the AAERF would not have an unacceptable effect on the local or strategic highways network' is risible. On the evidence, that assertion demonstrates that the applicant does not understand the local highways network, and does not understand Selborne and the needs of its residents, its businesses and its tourists.

3. Other Matters

- a) The Planning Statement states (4.3.2.) that the development is for the purpose of meeting the wider need for energy recovery capacity within the Hampshire and the surrounding waste planning authorities as a whole. Energy produced is to go into the National Grid and the development is to serve the whole of the South East. So, there will be tremendous pressure on the road network serving the site. The A31 is inadequate for this: it simply isn't big enough to cope with the amount of HGV traffic coming and going from the whole of the South East. The road is congested already at rush hour times and Farnham and Alton are bottlenecks. There is a history of accidents, particularly near the 'Hen and Chicken' pub, close to the site.

- b) The proposal would mean the loss of the MRF and WTS, both of which are greatly needed facilities in the local area.
- c) Whilst the Environmental Statement states that 'groundwater within the Principal Aquifer lies some 10m below the Site surface', and 'Contamination of the local groundwater and surface waters may occur through any spills or leaks of oils, fuels, chemicals and liquids stored on site during the construction phase in the absence of adequate mitigation', there seems little information about the potential for contamination of the Principal Aquifer once the facility becomes operational. The waste bunker is shown as being 14m deep and so, with groundwater within the Aquifer lying 10m below the site surface, there must be a risk that the Aquifer itself could become polluted.

Pollution from the site could also contaminate the River Wey which is only a few yards away. It appears that this risk has been given no consideration.

- d) There is no indication that any alternative sites have been considered or assessed for their suitability for an AERF to serve the whole of the South East.

In summary:

- A local and national need for the facility does not justify its proposed construction at this particular site. Alternative suitable sites appear not to have been considered.
- The demonstrable harm of the proposed development to the local landscape and to the setting of the South Downs National Park would outweigh any public benefit.
- The proposal to use the B3006 for HGV access to the site would conflict with the 7.5t weight limit on the road and cause demonstrable harm to a historic village, its buildings, its residents and its visiting tourists. As a proposal, it is unviable.

Selborne Parish Council therefore recommends that the application be refused.

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