

Incinerator Binned! What did we do? (March 2020)

The proposal for an extremely large waste to energy incinerator sited in the countryside near Barton Stacey has been withdrawn. The company, Wheelabrator (a US firm owned by the Australian hedge fund manager Macquarie) stated that they had decided to pursue their existing UK enterprises and not proceed with an application for this one.

CPRE Hampshire Campaigns group had decided to oppose this proposal as being in the wrong place. While we prefer incineration to landfill and value the electricity produced, its size and its siting in a lovely landscape would be intrusive and damaging. We joined forces with the very well organised and strong local group Keep Test Valley Beautiful (KTVB) to support them with their very public and well-funded Bin the Incinerator campaign. MP Caroline Nokes also actively supported local opposition. Test Valley Borough Council opposed the plan.

CPRE Hampshire is becoming experienced with so called Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs). We know that these applications by-pass local decision makers and are referred directly to the Secretary of State for a Development Consent Order. The process is organised by the Planning Inspectorate (PINS). We immediately registered our interest with them.

We attended all six local Consultation events organised by Wheelabrator in the villages last year and found the consultants at that time had a worrying lack of local knowledge. Test Valley District Group and Campaigns group members challenged this face to face and subsequently drew on this in our written response to PINS.

Water was one prime consideration for this landscape and Dr Nick Walton for the CPRE Water Focus Group wrote an expert paper setting out the dangers in this very valuable water environment where so many draw their livelihood, and which is globally so rare. This was reflected in the expert opinion of the KTVB consultants.

CPRE's strength though is its sympathy to landscape. The proposal was in a beautiful but undesignated rural landscape and within 3 km of the southern edge of the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Christopher Napier drew up a landscape survey and members of the Campaigns group spent a day criss-crossing the area evaluating the value of the landscape. It was invariably high and therefore qualified as a valued landscape. This finding was added to our response to PINS. This enhanced the environmental, social and economic factors which we could see mitigated against the proposal. The view of Richard Wills of KTVB was that it had added another unique layer to the opposition faced by Wheelabrator.

Hampshire may face other similar proposals. The Landscape Value analysis technique could well be a significant tool in our armoury. We don't oppose everything of course but we do stand up for the countryside when necessary. We have been thanked for our contribution by KTVB. Working with like-minded groups and adding our unique perspective is a strategy we can repeat.