



Bexhill Against Landfill/Incineration

Minutes of Public Meeting Friday 6th November 2009

Held at Bexhill High School – Gunters Lane

(345 people present and approximately 60 people weren't allowed in because the hall was full to capacity)

Chairman's Remarks

Mr Gregory Barker MP

Mr Barker opened the meeting at 7.00pm. He welcomed everyone and said he was pleased to see so many people on such a wet and windy night.

Mr Barker spoke passionately about the Ashdown Brickworks stating landfill should not be allowed under any circumstances. He reminded the audience that BALI was formed in 2002 and waste was averted from being sent to Bexhill then because of the strong action group. BALI has been working hard in the background since then to prevent the Ashdown site from becoming the next designated landfill site.

He emphasised that if we are united and become a broad based coalition we can win the battle against landfill in Bexhill.

Opening Speech

Mr Nick Hollington, Chairman of BALI

Mr Hollington, welcomed the speakers and everyone present. He said that a public meeting was held in 2002 and 2005 in this hall and now in 2009 we are here again with the view to removing the dark spectre of landfill in Bexhill, which is still hanging over us. He continued by saying that 'if we do nothing landfill will certainly happen and this just is not an option or we will suffer the same fate as Pebsham has for the past 25 years'.

In 2006 the Ashdown Brickworks was identified as a landfill site in the East Sussex Waste Local Plan. A 'Core Strategy' of the 'Waste and Minerals Development

Framework' is now replacing this plan. Mr Hollington went on to explain because the void is here in Bexhill and because the Inspector in 2006 agreed the brickworks was a suitable site (with certain restrictions) for landfill, the councillors in the rest of East Sussex, Brighton and Hove will expect the waste to go to Bexhill, otherwise it might end up going to the areas they represent. 2 million tonnes of waste is produced in East Sussex, Brighton and Hove every year.

However, the Government has produced a spatial policy – CS6 – that gives guidelines on where landfill can and cannot be placed. Mr Hollington explained some of the issues in this policy and why the Ashdown brickworks would not be acceptable as a landfill site. He informed everyone present at the meeting of the action they could take. A doubled sided sheet of A4 paper explaining the main points of ' policy CS6' and the relevance of why the Ashdown brickworks should not be included in the Primary Area of Search (Plan 4) was given to everyone present at the meeting.

ESCC Waste and Minerals core Strategy

(which lists Ashdown brickworks as a Preferred Option for landfill)

Mr Ian Blake, Team Manager, Waste and Mineral Planning Policy - ESCC

Mr Blake explained his role in preparing a planning policy for ESCC with regard to waste management in East Sussex, Brighton and Hove. The council has to look at waste applications when they come in and decide if the application fits in with the Council's policy.

The Council have to engage with the local community and all residents have until 2nd December 2009 to write in with their views on landfill at the Ashdown brickworks. The Council will try to form a robust and sound evidence and consider all the issues, which have been raised.

The technical work will continue beyond 2nd December. There are a number of other areas of search, which potentially may be identified as land disposal sites. Mr Blake continued with figures regarding 'waste'. ESCC estimate 4 million tonnes of waste a year and as Pebsham only has space for ½ million tonnes additional sites need to be found.

Questions were raised from the floor particularly regarding London waste and the impact it would have on our roads with the extra lorries needed to transport the waste. Mr Blake struggled with the figures involved but went on to say the Inspector had kept the brickworks in the plan in 2006 but he had concluded that it couldn't take place without road improvements.

One member of the public held up the ESCC magazine, which states "landfill is not an option". Several members of the public disputed Mr Blake's figures in particular the number of trucks transporting the waste and that 1000 tonnes of waste is actually going to Pebsham on a daily basis.

Mr Blake said that the ESCC plan is "that we should not plan for the disposal of residual waste from London in East Sussex".

Mr Geoff Smith, DMH Stallard,

Legal-planning Consultant for BALI

Mr Smith explained to the audience that landfill at the brickworks is by no means a done deal and that letters written by the public will make all the difference. He said now is the time for action and there is a big chance to take the Ashdown brickworks out of the plan once and for all.

The public must communicate with ESCC and make their feelings known. Information given to the Council at this stage will make a big difference.

The council will be looking at strategic sites, Ashdown brickworks as the only site specifically named as well as 6 on the short list and 17 other sites, which are not, coded red.

Mr Smith explained with great clarity the 'preferred option selection' (section 12) and the bullet points regarding 'Policy CS6' and why the Ashdown brickwork site fails to meet the criteria.

- ◆ 500 metres from valued environments – Highwoods much closer
- ◆ 1 km from built up areas – Local communities much closer
- ◆ Effect on roads, local schools
- ◆ Highwood golf club – loss of membership would put the club in jeopardy
- ◆ Timing issues – brickworks still operational

Mr Smith implored the public to write in to the council or email on the website with their own representation, evidence based within 'Policy CS6, Section 12', as the Ashdown brickworks should without doubt be coded red.

A question was asked from the floor as to the need for more than one site based on the quantities of waste. Mr Smith said the council would have to without doubt investigate other sites. Questions regarding Health and Safety and compensation were also raised.

Environmental Concerns (and alternative uses for the Ashdown Quarries)

Dr Edward Echlin (Dr of Theology)

Dr Echlin spoke on the effect a landfill site would have on the Highwoods and the cemetery, mentioning scavengers, rats, noise, pollution and methane gas. He felt the void should not be filled with non-inert waste but could be filled with inert 'construction' waste.

Mr Alan Malpass, President Highwoods Preservation Society

Mr Malpass informed us that the Highwoods is not a site of Nature Conservation Interest as stated in the paper attached to tonight's agenda, but it is a SSSI, which has a much greater value.

The Highwoods is only separated from the Ashdown brickworks by the width of Peartree Lane and the effect of landfill that close to the Highwoods would be devastating.

The direct effect would be an explosion in the population of rats, which would have an impact on wrens and other near-ground summer nesting birds. Nightingales have been visiting the Highwoods and there was hope they might nest. There has been an increase in buzzard activity and it would be the first time since Victorian times if they were to nest. However, no nesting would take place if landfill were to happen. The indirect effect would be on the ambience, the noise and increase in gulls.

'Forest of England' experts say the Highwoods is a special place. 'Bexhill in Bloom' judges were ecstatic about the Highwoods and even came back for their own visit. Mr Malpass said the void could be turned into a recreational area that the rest of the South of England would be proud of.

Dominic Manning, Rother Environmental Group

Mr Manning informed us that Britain still produces 22 million tonnes of waste a year, which is the same amount as 18 European countries produce. DEFRA requires us to divert 80% of our waste from landfill by 2026. At present we are 25 years behind Denmark.

Mr Manning spoke briefly on the effect landfill would have on the environment. He went on to say we must all do more recycling. However, the Ashdown site wouldn't even be considered for landfill if there wasn't a large hole there.

Effect on Commerce and Tourism

Mr Stuart Earl,

Little Common Business Association

Mr Earl said the quality of life for people living in and the areas around the wonderful village of Little Common is first class. Huge trucks that would carry waste would spoil our environment. The value of our properties would be wrecked. Business life in Little Common and Bexhill would be diverted. At present all the shops in Little Common are occupied, but if landfill were to come here, people wouldn't want to live here, wouldn't shop here, shops wouldn't be viable.

We must send a loud and clear message to the councillors that we don't want landfill here. He suggested waste could be sent to Dungeness as there was a dedicated railway line and the waste would generate power for the area.

Mr Brian Storkey,

Bexhill Chamber of Commerce and Tourism

Mr Storkey said the tourist industry is a fickle animal and depends on the weather, new trends, advertising, history of the area and recommendation. Bexhill depends on tourism and needs to attract visitors to the area. We already have some of the worst roads in the area and waste lorries would only make it worse. Many of our visitors come with a view to buying property, retiring to a rural atmosphere, playing golf at Highwoods golf course, visiting the Highwoods.

This is a peaceful and beautiful rural setting and would be enhanced if the void at Ashdown was turned into a reservoir (possible as a back up for Bewl which has had problems in recent dry summers) and a water sports facility. The ultimate decision as to whether we have a landfill here or not will be made by people who don't live in this area.

Councillors

Councillor Brian Gadd,

County Councillor for Bexhill West

Mr Gadd sent his apologies, as he was unwell.

Councillor Michael Ensor, County Councillor for King Offa

Mr Ensor said he wasn't in a position to say whether he was for or against landfill at the brickworks. He has to remain neutral, as he is on the panel responsible for making a decision once all the evidence has been presented. He urged everyone to write in by 2nd December as no decision has been taken yet on the placements for landfill.

He explained that ESCC are achieving the Government set targets for recycling and that 37% of domestic waste is recycled. However, the residual waste has to go somewhere and it is estimated that 4 million tonnes of waste will be produced in the next 4 years.

Pebsham is closed at the moment but will reopen shortly although it will finally close in a year or two. The other site at Beddingham is now closed. Consequently, we are sending waste to West Sussex, Surrey and Kent at this present time.

The Newhaven energy recovery unit is being built and it is intended to take all black bin waste. The incinerator will create energy for the Newhaven area. However 5% ash at the bottom of the incinerator and building works (inert) material must go somewhere. The only suitable hole in the ground in East Sussex is at the Ashdown brickworks. There is a very small hole at Chailey, which is in an area of outstanding beauty.

Mr Ensor continued to say that he agrees the roads as they currently stand are unsuitable but maybe the road access could be solved. He also considered the timetable was bad as clay could be extracted on the site for the next 30 years.

There are other options in the reports, land-raise being one of them. A decision must be taken by East Sussex on what to do with our waste, but if the obstacles were sufficiently great, landfill at the brickworks would be unlikely to happen.

As Mr Ensor had just told the audience that Newhaven would be able to cope with all East Sussex black bin waste, BALI asked the question why the council weren't arguing our case in the same way Hampshire has done as they have been given exemption from taking any London waste and without London waste there wouldn't be a necessity for a new large landfill site.

Councillor Martyn Forster, RDC Councillor for St Michaels

Mr Forster spoke of his full support for BALI. Although the meeting wasn't a political evening, Mr Forster pointed out that politicians made the decisions as to how waste was dealt with and where it was dumped. He urged us all to vote wisely and safeguard the future of Bexhill. Bexhill and Pebsham have had enough waste coming this way for the past 25 years.

Councillor Robert Elliston

Rother District Councillor

Mr Elliston said that although he wasn't from this area he felt strongly that we should be spared the pain of landfill and there definitely should not be landfill at the brickworks. He felt it should be turned into a reservoir.

Retired Councillor Mr Ronald Lendon MBE

Mr Lendon senior spoke with great passion about a meeting he attended as a councillor 50 years ago. An emergency motion was put forward at the end of that meeting requesting the immediate closure of the landfill site in St. Mary's Lane, as it was a danger to the health and a source of much aggravation to local residents. There was an army of rats the size of small cats that ran freely over the site and surrounding area. There was also an increase in the maggot population and the noxious smell caused bouts of sickness to many people in the area.

The Town clerk immediately appointed a sub committee and the members (including Mr Lendon) visited the site, which was then closed immediately. It was landscaped and turned into the recreational area that is still there today. He said we will be told methods have moved on and improved, but we should have none of it, stating that we've been there, done it and have no intention of replicating the past.

Councillor Paul Lendon RDC for St Stephens

Mr Lendon reminded us that Bexhill's motto, which greets us as we enter Bexhill, is 'Sun and Health'. Mr Lendon is totally against landfill and will fight it all the way. Bexhill must be taken out of the 'preferred strategy for waste'. We must fight it tooth and nail.

Youth Council

Mr Shaun O'Brien Chairman Youth Council

Mr O'Brien informed the audience that young people in the youth council and the young people not in it all oppose the idea of a landfill at the Ashdown brickworks. He said they are all aware that one day the town will be theirs and they want to live here. Mr O'Brien said ESCC should be consulting with the young people of this town, particularly as the new high school being built is only 850 metres down the road from the brickworks.

BALI told Mr O'Brien that it has been impossible to get into schools to talk about landfill; schools have state they cannot stand against landfill in this area because it is too 'political'. MR O'Brien was asked if he, through the Youth Council, could be the Trojan horse.

Closing Remarks

Mr Michael Rosner, Chairman Fund-raising BALI

Mr Rosner told the audience 'we must win the fight against landfill in Bexhill'. He reminded the audience of why they were so passionate about not having a landfill site in Bexhill. They were not voting for cycle paths, dog walks or putting greens on the seafront, they were voting for their homes, their environments and even the very air they breathe. He went on to say that County Councillors must be reminded that Bexhill cannot be regenerated if landfill is still in their plans.

Mr Rosner then said the bad news is that BALI needs money and it needs it NOW. He promised that the only time BALI would stop fighting against landfill on behalf of the people of Bexhill was if the money ran out. He pleaded with everyone to approach neighbours, colleagues, friends and family, as we do need money.

Mr Gregory Barker MP

Mr Barker brought the evening to a close emphasizing the need for money and for active support. On behalf of the audience he thanked the BALI committee for all their hard work over the years. He reminded everyone they must write or email their objections to ESCC before 2nd December and said it is a big battle and will require a huge amount of effort, but this battle must be won.

The meeting closed at 9.20pm

Collection buckets were used at the end of the meeting and a total of £1.169 was raised, with promises of further donations.