

Warwickshire County Council Liberal Democrats

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The Billion Pound Bonfire **Liberal Democrats call for fundamental review of giant incinerator plan**

Liberal Democrats in Warwickshire are urging the ruling Conservative administration on the County Council to downscale drastically its project to work with Coventry and Solihull councils to build a massive replacement for the Coventry incinerator by 2015.

The same clear message of opposition to the current project is being voiced by Liberal Democrats in Coventry and Solihull.

The joint project, known as Project Transform, is to build a giant 305,000 tonne capacity facility to process the residual municipal waste of the three councils. PFI (Private Finance Initiative) funding of £129 million was granted by DEFRA in June 2009, based on a reference case of an Energy from Waste plant (i.e. incinerator) to be built on a site adjacent to the current Coventry incinerator.

The total cost of the project, over the planned lifetime of the new plant until 2040, is over £1 billion.

Cllr John Whitehouse Liberal Democrat county spokesman for the Environment, said:

“This project could turn into the biggest and most expensive white elephant of all time.

The assumptions on which Project Transform are based, which we challenged a year ago, are now clearly shown to have been overtaken by events.

Recycling rates already being achieved by residents in three of Warwickshire’s five districts/boroughs – Rugby, Stratford and Warwick – are topping 60%, and the county as a whole is on track to hit 47% this year, ahead of its target for 2015. Yet the project is based on recycling rates of only 51% by 2020, with no improvements after then. We reject the lack of ambition in these assumptions.”

Liberal Democrat national policy is to oppose the building of any new incinerators for municipal waste, unless they can be shown to be the best environmental option after considering all alternatives including new technologies, where waste reduction and reuse are not possible.

We believe that sustained action on waste minimisation and recycling across the three authorities would drastically reduce the levels of residual waste compared with the project forecasts.

The re-constituted Members Advisory Panel for Project Transform, made up of elected members from the three authorities, held its first meeting in Solihull last Friday. John Whitehouse, a member of the Panel, continued:

“It seems clear that some other elected members also doubt whether the current project is the right one. Very clear undertakings were given in the meeting that the waste growth assumptions will be re-assessed rigorously before any final decisions are taken, and that there really will be a ‘level playing field’ in the assessment of bids for alternative technologies to incineration.

With so much uncertainty about waste growth projections over the next thirty years, we strongly favour a step-by-step ‘modular’ approach rather than the ‘big bang’ option of a giant incinerator, which we may never need to fill to capacity.

“The current project could end up as a billion pound bonfire of local council taxpayers’ money. It’s not too late to change course. We hope that the three authorities will do so.”

ENDS

NOTES FOR EDITORS:

The latest recycling figures for Warwickshire were reported to a meeting of its Environment & Economy Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 24 Sep 2009. See the papers at:

<http://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/corporate/committe.nsf/471ece76d69bff9780256a140057d7f8/83d5547fc791fcf1802576320050eca8?OpenDocument>

Details of Project Transform can be found at:

<http://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/Web/corporate/pages.nsf/Links/88F07573684B3BAC80257487003AB5FC>